

Healing Ministry in the New Testament

This paper reviews all the events in the Synoptic Gospels, John's Gospel and Acts that involve the healing ministry or refer to it. The paper also draws some General Principles about healing, particularly the role of faith.

Synoptic Gospels

This section is a complete list of the healing miracles and events relating to the healing ministry in Matthew, Mark and Luke's gospels. There is a brief description of each with some comments. The events are roughly in chronological order, but the three gospels do not always agree what this is. Where one gospel adds or modifies what is in the other(s) this is marked 'Matt', 'Mk' or 'Lk' respectively.

Matthew's summary (Matt 4:23-25, see also Mark 1:39)

This with Matt 9:35-38 forms a parenthesis around the sermon on the mount and a group of healing miracles in chapters 8 and 9. Jesus went throughout Galilee teaching in Synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom and healing every disease and sickness. Because his fame spread through Syria (bordering Galilee to N and W) people brought all who were ill with various diseases and he healed them. Specific things are mentioned: those suffering severe pain, demon-possessed (demonised), those having seizures and the paralysed.

Matt 9:35 essentially repeats Matt 4:23 but continues with Jesus' compassion for the crowds because they were harassed and helpless. He commands his disciples to pray for more workers because the harvest is plentiful - a prayer to which they themselves are the answer as the sending out of the 12 with Jesus' authority follows immediately afterwards (Matt 10:1 f)

Jesus manifesto (Lk 4:14-30) and rejection in Nazareth (Matt 13:55-58, Mk 6:2-6)

Immediately after being baptised in the Spirit and having defeated the devil's attempts to subvert his mission by tempting him in the desert, Jesus returned to Galilee 'in the power of the Spirit' and taught in the synagogues. He went to Nazareth on the Sabbath and, in the synagogue, was given the scroll of Isaiah to read out. He found Isaiah 61:1-2 and read:

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

He sat down and said, 'Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing'. They were amazed saying, 'Isn't this Joseph's son?'. He answered that no prophet is accepted in his home town since he perceived they were wondering why he didn't do miracles here as he had in Capernaum. Luke doesn't record any healings prior to this in Capernaum or anywhere else. Matthew 13 and Mark 6 put this incident somewhat later in his ministry than Luke does. Luke puts it near the beginning of the gospel because of its theological significance. Matthew and Mark put the incident after Jairus' daughter. Mk 6:5,6 says he could not do many miracles there except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them because of their lack of faith, which amazed him. He referred to Elijah and Elisha healing non-Jews and the people became furious and tried to throw him off a cliff.

A demonised man in the synagogue on the Sabbath (Mk 1:23-26, Lk 4:31-35)

Jesus was teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum on the Sabbath and people were amazed by the authority of his teaching. A demonised man who was in the synagogue cried out, 'What do you want with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are - the Holy One of God'. Jesus commanded the spirit to be quiet (ie not proclaim who Jesus was - he didn't want that sort of endorsement!) and to come out. The demon threw the man to the floor in front of the all (Lk), shook him violently (Mk) and came out, without injuring the man (Lk). This added to the people's amazement with Jesus' authority - now it was extended to control over demons - 'he even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him'.

Simon's mother-in-law and many others at sunset (Matt 8:14-17, Mk 1:29-34, Lk 4:38-41)

After leaving the synagogue, Jesus went with James and John to Simon (Peter) and Andrew's house. Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever. Jesus rebuked the fever (Lk), took her by the hand and helped her up (Mk) and the fever left her. She then began to wait on the assembled company.

In the evening, at sunset, people brought all the sick and demon-possessed (demonised). The whole town gathered at the door (Mk). Jesus laid his hands on each one (Lk) and healed them all. He drove out the spirits with a word (Matt). Many of the demonised shouted 'You are the Son of God' (Lk) but he would not let them speak because they knew he was the Christ.

Matthew adds that this was to fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah 53:4: He took up our infirmities and carried our diseases.

A leper (Matt 8:1-4, Mk 1:40-45, Lk 5:12-14)

In Matthew: as he came down the mountain after the sermon on the mount, in Luke: while he was in one of the towns. A man came 'covered in leprosy' (Lk 5:12). When he saw Jesus he knelt before him, fell with his face to the ground (Lk) and begged him 'Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean'. Jesus was filled with compassion (Mk), reached out his hand and touched the man. As a Jew he should not have done this as the man was unclean - he acted from compassion, reaching out to touch one who had probably been shunned, not allowed to enter the town, for a long time. Jesus said, 'I am willing, be clean' Immediately he was cured.

Jesus then sent him off with a strong warning (Mk) not to tell anyone but to go and show himself to the priest (Lev 13:49) and offer the sacrifices that Moses commands for your cleansing (Lev 14:1-32) as a testimony. Luke records that despite this warning, the news spread about Jesus. Mark says that the man ignored Jesus' warning and spoke freely about what had happened. As a result Jesus could not enter a town openly. Both record that many then came to Jesus to listen to him and be healed. Jesus often then withdrew to lonely places to pray.

Man with a shrivelled hand (Matt 12:9-14, Mk 3:1-6, Lk 6:6-11)

On a Sabbath, Jesus went into the synagogue and met a man with a shrivelled hand. The Pharisees were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched closely to see what he would do, in particular to see if he would heal on the Sabbath. Jesus knew this so he called the man out to the front and asked the Pharisees which was lawful; to do good or evil on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill. He looked at them, deeply distressed by their stubborn hearts, their lack of compassion. He said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand'. The man obeyed and immediately his hand was restored. The Pharisees went off to plot how they could kill Jesus.

The centurion's servant (Matt 8:5-13, Lk 7:1-10)

In Luke's account the centurion sends some Jewish elders (In Matthew's account he comes himself) to Jesus to beg for the life of one of his servants whom he valued highly, and who was suffering terribly (Matt). The Jewish elders pleaded earnestly because of their respect for the centurion who was obviously a god-fearing man. He loved the Jewish nation and had built the synagogue in Capernaum. Jesus agreed to go. When he was near the house, the centurion sent friends telling Jesus not to bother coming. The centurion understood and believed that Jesus only had to give the command for the servant to be healed, just as he gave commands to his troops to go or come and they obeyed. Jesus didn't actually need to go there, especially as the centurion felt unworthy to receive him or have him under his roof.

Jesus was amazed by his faith, he had not seen anything like it in Israel. In Matthew's account, Jesus uses this as an example, saying that Israel will lose its inheritance to the gentiles. He said to the centurion, 'Go. It will be done just as you believed it would'. When he (they) returned to the house he (they) found the servant well.

Man let down through the roof (Matt 9:1-8, Mk 2:1-12, Lk 5:17-26)

Matthew's version is very sketchy and doesn't mention being let down through the roof. Again in Capernaum, some men bring their paralysed friend on a mat carried by four of them. The house was absolutely packed; there was no room left even outside the door. Luke says the audience were Pharisees and teachers of the law from every village of Galilee and

from Judea and Jerusalem. Luke says the 'power of the Lord was present for him to heal the sick' which seems to indicate some special presence of the Spirit.

The men could not get their friend to lay him before Jesus through the house because of the crowd. They took him onto the roof and made a hole through the tiles (Lk). They then lowered the man on his mat into the middle of the crowd right in front of Jesus. When Jesus saw their faith (not the paralysed man's faith) demonstrated by their refusal to be put off from getting to Jesus and by taking a big risk. He said to the man, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven'.

This caused consternation among his audience and they said (quite rightly - Is 43:25), 'Only God can forgive sins'. However, they then concluded 'Who does he think he is? He is blaspheming' instead of the opposite conclusion that Jesus was indeed God.

Jesus accused them of entertaining evil thoughts in their hearts, even if the basic premise was correct (Matt). He asked them which was easier to say, 'Your sins are forgiven' or 'Get up and walk'. Of course the first is actually easier since no-one can tell if it has happened or not. Because of their theology, both were equally impossible for the Pharisees! To prove that he had authority to forgive sins (and therefore was God), Jesus commanded the man to take up his mat and go home. Immediately he got stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God. Everyone was amazed.

Widow of Nain's son (Lk 7:11-15)

Jesus went into Nain and met a large funeral procession coming out by the town gate. The body was of the only son of a widow. He would have been her only means of support which made his loss the greater. Jesus' heart went out to her, he was filled with compassion. He told her not to cry and touched the coffin. The pall bearers stood still. Jesus commanded the dead man to get up. He sat up and began to talk and Jesus gave him back to his mother. The crowd were filled with awe and praised God - 'God has come to help his people'.

Gadarene demoniac (Matt 8:28-34, Mk 5:1-20, Lk 8:26-39)

As they got out of the boat in the region of the Gerasenes (Gadarenes) they were met by a demon-possessed man (in Matthew's account, 2 men) who had lived naked among the tombs for a long time. He had great strength and could not be bound, even with a chain. He kept on breaking loose. The demon drove him into solitary places (Lk) and night and day among the tomb and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones (Mk).

Jesus commanded the demon to come out but it shouted 'What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God' and it begged him not to torture it before its time (Matt). Jesus asked it its name. 'Legion - for we are many' (See Matt 12:43 f about multiple demon possession after having a demon cast out and not being replaced by the Holy Spirit) He begged Jesus not to send them out of the area (This implies a possible association of demons with locality), not to send them into the Abyss (Lk), but to let them go into a large heard of pigs nearby. Jesus gave them permission and the pigs all rushed into the lake and were drowned.

This caused great fear in those tending the pigs and in the town. When the people came out to see they found the man dressed and in his right mind sitting at Jesus feet. They begged Jesus to leave the locality and the man asked to go with him. Jesus said he should return home and tell how much God had done for him. So the man went and told all over the town how much *Jesus* had done for him.

Jairus' Daughter (Matt 9:18-19,23-26, Mk 5:21-24,35-43, Lk 8:40-42,49-56)

When Jesus returned from the land of the Gerasenes a great crowd welcomed him. Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, came and fell at Jesus feet because his only daughter, aged 12, was dying (Matt - already dead) and pleaded earnestly that Jesus would come and put his hands on her so that she would be healed and live. Jesus went with him but was delayed on the way by a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years (cf daughter's 12 years).

When Jesus and the disciples approached Jairus' house some men came out to say that the daughter was dead. Jesus ignored this and told Jairus not to be afraid, only to believe. He went on but only let Peter, James and John go with him. When they arrived at the house they found professional mourners and flute players making a great commotion. Jesus told them to stop because the girl was not dead, only asleep - a statement which they greeted with derision because they

knew she was dead. He therefore turned them all out of the house and went to the girl's room with the disciples and the girl's parents only.

He took the girl by the hand and said, 'my child, get up'. Her spirit returned and she stood up at once. Jesus told the parents to give her something to eat (a practical thing, partly to convince them she was indeed alive) and ordered them not to tell anyone what had happened. (A bit odd since there was a large crowd there to witness what had happened). Compare this event with the raising of Dorcas by Peter in Acts 9:36-41.

A sick woman (Matt 9:20-22, Mk 5:25-34, Lk 8:43-48)

On his way to Jairus' house a woman who had been subject to bleeding for 12 years pressed through the crowd to touch him. She had spent all of her money on doctors trying to get well but to no avail. Because of her illness, she was considered unclean (like a leper) and would have been shunned during those 12 years. This humiliation, hurt and shame would have compounded the illness. Because of her desperation, she ignored the rejection and the shame and pressed through the crowd thinking that if she could just touch Jesus' cloak she would be healed (unnoticed). She touched Jesus cloak and the bleeding stopped immediately.

Even though he was being jostled on all sides, Jesus knew power had gone out from him. He stopped and insisted on knowing who had touched him. His disciples wanted him to hurry on because of Jairus, and in any case couldn't believe that Jesus could distinguish one touch in the jostling crowd. Jesus knew that the woman had to go public for her deeper healing, healing of 12 years' rejection, humiliation and shame.

The woman saw that she could not go unnoticed and came and fell trembling at his feet, presumably fearing further reprimand and rejection. In front of them all she told why she had touched him and owned up in front of the crowd to her humiliating condition. However, Jesus said, 'Daughter, your faith (here demonstrated by her pushing through the crowd, her shameful condition notwithstanding) has healed you. Go in peace (ie without fear) and be freed from your suffering (physical and mental).

2 blind men (Matt 9:27-31)

As he left Jairus' house, two blind men called out 'Have mercy on us, Son of David' (reference to kingdom - God's kingdom expected to be a renaissance of David's). They followed him indoors. He asked them whether they believed he could heal them. They replied that they did. He touched their eyes and said, 'According to your faith it will be done to you' and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly not to tell anyone but they ignored him and spread news about him all over the region.

Mute demoniac (Matt 9:32-34, Lk 11:14-16)

While they were leaving and demonised man who could not talk was brought to Jesus. Jesus drove the demon out and the man spoke. The Pharisees said that he drove out demons by the power of the prince of demons (Beelzebub).

Sending out of the 12 (Matt 10:1-16, Mk 6:6-13, Lk 9:1-6)

This was the start of a new phase of the healing ministry. The disciples had watched now they were to participate (though not always successfully - Matt 17:14-21) In Matthew 9:36-38 Jesus had told the disciples to pray for more workers and, as often happens, the answer to that prayer was them!

He told them only to go to Israelite towns for now and told them to preach 'The kingdom of heaven is near' and to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers and drive out demons - all things they had seen him do. He told them to freely give what they had been given and not to take provisions for the work. He gave them authority to drive out all demons and cure diseases (Lk) - he sent them to preach the kingdom of God and heal the sick.

They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and *anointed many sick people with oil* and healed them (Mk).

Luke 9:10 - when they returned they reported what they had done but the debrief was interrupted by the arrival of a large crowd.

They also reported that they had seen another man casting out demons in Jesus' name (Luke 9:49-50). Jesus said they should not stop him for 'whoever is not against you is for you'. On the other hand, Matthew 7:22-23 says that some who drive out demons and perform miracles in Jesus name will be told, 'I never knew you' and not allowed to enter the kingdom. Only those who do the will of the Father will enter the kingdom.

John the Baptist's question (Matt 11:4-6, Lk 7:20-22)

About this time John was in prison and began to question whether Jesus really was the Messiah. Perhaps he was expecting a military coup like many others. He sent his disciples to ask Jesus, 'Are you the one who was to come or should we expect someone else?'. Jesus answered 'The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised and the good news is preached to the poor', referring to the Isaiah passage quoted in Luke 4. Jesus healing ministry proved who he was - the Messiah.

Blind and mute demoniac and a warning (Matt 12:22-29,43, Lk 11:24-26)

A demonised man who was blind and mute was brought to Jesus. Jesus healed him so that he could both see and speak. The Pharisees again accused him of using Satan's (Beelzebub's) power to cast out demons but Jesus pointed out that a kingdom divided against itself cannot survive. However, if Jesus casts demons out by the Spirit of God then the kingdom is upon them - that is, nearer than they thought!

Jesus said that when a demon is cast out it wanders in 'arid places' seeking rest but doesn't find it and so goes back from whence it came. Finding the person 'swept clean and put in order' it goes and finds 7 other spirits more wicked than itself (Not all evil spirits the same?) and they all go and live there. The final state is worse than the first. It doesn't say so here, but the implication is that the vacancy needs to be filled with the Holy Spirit to prevent this happening.

Gennesaret (Matt 14:34-36, Mk 6:53-56, Lk 6:17-19)

When Jesus and the disciples landed by boat at Gennesaret people recognised him and sent word all around the country. People carried all their sick to him on mats and begged that they should be allowed to touch the edge of his cloak. All who touched it were healed.

The Luke passage is slightly different and may refer to a different occasion. It is very similar and adds that the people all tried to touch him because power was coming from him and healing them all.

Syro-Phoenician (Canaanite) woman (Matt 15:21-28, Mk 7:24-30)

Jesus was near Tyre, in the region of Tyre and Sidon and went into a house but could not keep his presence secret. A Greek woman, born in Syrian Phoenicia, came and fell at his feet as soon as she heard he was there. Her little daughter was suffering terribly from demon possession. She cried out, begging Jesus to drive the demon out, but Jesus ignored her and the disciples wanted to send her away. She carried on begging but Jesus said he had only been sent to 'the lost sheep of Israel'. 'Is it right to give the children's bread to the dogs?' She replied that even the dogs can eat the crumbs dropped under the table by the children' Jesus commended her faith (here demonstrated by her persistence and refusal to be put off) and granted her request. Her daughter was healed 'that very hour'.

A deaf and mute man (Matt 15:29-31, Mk 7:31-37)

As he left Tyre and Sidon, Matthew reports that great crowds came bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others and laid them at his feet; and he healed them. Mark takes up the story of one such, a man who was deaf and could hardly talk. Jesus took him aside, away from the crowd, put his fingers in the man's ears and spat and touched his tongue. He 'looked up to heaven with a deep sigh' and said, 'be opened!'. At this the man's ears were opened and he began to speak. Again Jesus commanded them not to tell anyone but was ignored. 'He has done everything well! He even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak'

Blind man at Bethsaida (Mk 8:22-26)

Some people brought a man to Jesus after he arrived at Bethsaida and begged Jesus to touch him. Jesus took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village, away from his friends/family (perhaps they had too much emotional involvement). He spat in the man's eyes and asked him whether he could see anything. 'I see people, they look like trees walking around'. Jesus touched him on the eyes a second time and he saw clearly.

This miracle is significant in various ways: Jesus taking the man aside in private, the use of spittle and the fact that he took two goes to heal him.

A boy with a demon (Matt 17:14-21, Mk 9:14-27, Lk 9:37-43)

Jesus came down from the mount of transfiguration with Peter, James and John to find that the other disciples had tried to cast a demon out of a boy but had not been able to. The father brought the boy to Jesus. The boy suffered greatly from seizures, the demon threw him to the ground, foaming at the mouth and becoming rigid. He often fell into the fire or into water as the demon tried to destroy him. He was also dumb.

Jesus castigated the disciples for their lack of faith. When the spirit saw Jesus it threw the boy into convulsions and he fell to the ground and rolled around foaming at the mouth. Jesus asked the father how long the child had been like this. He told Jesus that he had been like this since childhood. 'If you can do anything, take pity on us and help us' - the father's faith had been damaged by the disciples' lack of success. Jesus answered 'If you can? Anything is possible for him who believes'. The boy's father exclaimed, 'I do believe, help my unbelief!'

Jesus saw a crowd was rapidly approaching so he rebuked the spirit, 'deaf and dumb spirit, I command you to come out of him and never enter him again' (cf Matt 12:43). The spirit shrieked, convulsed him violently and came out.

Privately the disciples asked why they couldn't cast the demon out. 'Because you have so little faith - faith the size of a mustard seed will move a mountain - nothing will be impossible for you' (Matt) 'This type only comes out with prayer and fasting' (Mk).

Sending out of the 72 (Lk 10:1-20)

The third phase of the healing ministry starts here. Jesus appointed 72 (or perhaps 70) others and sent them out two by two ahead of him to every town he was about to visit. Again it is linked to the need for more workers and is an extension of Jesus' training programme.

Their instructions were similar to those of the 12 when they were sent out. When they were welcomed to a town they were to heal the sick who were there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you'.

When they returned they were filled with joy because even demons were subject to them in Jesus' name. Jesus warned them that this should not be the basis of their joy (after all Satan's days are numbered) but that their names were written in the book of life (which is for ever).

A crippled woman (Lk 13:10-16)

Jesus was teaching in a synagogue on the Sabbath and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for 18 years. She was bent over double and could not straighten up. When Jesus saw her he called her forward and said, 'You are set free from your infirmity' and put his hand on her. Immediately she straightened up and praised God.

The synagogue ruler was indignant because Jesus had healed on a Sabbath and castigated the people for coming on the Sabbath to be healed - there was in fact no suggestion that the woman had come to be healed - Jesus had called her out. Jesus castigated his hypocrisy. After all, even the synagogue ruler took his farm animals out to be watered on the Sabbath. How much more should a daughter of Abraham be set free from 18 years' bondage. His opponents were humiliated but the people were delighted.

A man with dropsy (Lk 14:1-6)

A similar story to the one above. Jesus was eating at a Pharisee's house (why?) on the Sabbath. A man was there suffering from dropsy. Jesus asked, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath or not?' He took hold of him, healed him and sent him away. Again he pointed out that any one of them would not hesitate to rescue a son (or even an ox!) who had fallen in a well on the Sabbath.

Ten Lepers (Lk 17:11-19)

Jesus was travelling along the border of Samaria and Galilee on his way to Jerusalem for the last time. As he was entering a village, 10 lepers stood at a distance (because they were unclean) and called out to him to have pity on them. He called back to them to go and show themselves to the priest (Lev 14:2) and, as they went, they were healed. Their faith was evidenced by obedience.

One of them (a Samaritan) saw that he was healed and came running back praising God and threw himself at Jesus' feet and thanked him. 'Where are the other 9? Why has only the foreigner come back to give thanks and praise God?' 'Get up, your faith has made you well'. (Of course, the others' faith had made them well too)

Bartimaeus (Matt 20:29-34, Mk 10:46-52, Lk 18:35-43)

As Jesus was leaving Jericho on his way to Jerusalem, a blind man called Bartimaeus (in Matthew - 2 men) who was sitting at the side of the road begging, heard that Jesus was passing. He began to shout, 'Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!'. Many people told him to be quiet but he shouted all the more.

Jesus stopped and told the disciples to call him. When he had been brought to Jesus, Jesus asked him, 'What do you want me to do for you?', 'I want to see', 'Receive your sight, your faith has healed you' (His faith was evidenced by his persistence and refusal to be quiet). Immediately he was healed and followed Jesus praising God (noisily presumably!)

Mary Magdalene (Mk 16:9, Lk 8:2)

Both gospels note that Jesus cast 7 demons out of Mary.

The high priest's servant (Lk 22:50-51)

During Jesus' arrest in the garden of Gethsemane, one of his followers (Peter - Jn) struck out with a sword and cut off the right ear of the high priest's servant. Jesus said, 'No more of this!' (that is, no more violent resistance) and touched the man's ear and healed him.

Jesus final words (Matt 28:18-20, Mk 16:15-18)

Before he was taken up to heaven, Jesus gave the disciples some final commands. They were to go to all the nations of the world and make disciples, baptising them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Mark reports that these signs will follow those who believe: they will drive out demons in Jesus' name, they will speak in new tongues, they will pick up snakes and drink poison and neither will hurt them, they will place their hands on sick people and they will get well.

Jesus said that they should teach the new disciples to do everything that he had told them.

Jesus - the 12 - the 72 -

Gospel of John

John only records four healing miracles. He also adds that 'Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down..... the world would not have room for all the books.....' (Jn 21:25)

The official's son (Jn 4:46-53)

At Cana there was a royal official, presumably from the court of Philip the Tetrarch, who had a son who was lying sick at Capernaum, Jesus adopted home town, about 18 miles away. He begged Jesus to come because his son was near to death.

Jesus responded in an apparently condemnatory way, implying that the official had the same attitude as the Pharisees in only being willing to believe if he saw signs and wonders (compare Mark 8:11-13). The official brushed this aside, saying in effect, 'just come before my son dies!'

Jesus responds to this demonstration of faith by telling him his son will live. The official took Jesus at his word and went home. Arriving home next day he discovers his son well, the fever having left him at the exact time when Jesus had said, 'Your son will live'.

The man at the pool of Bethesda (Jn 5:1-14)

In Jerusalem there was a pool called Bethesda near the Sheep Gate. Every so often the water in the pool was disturbed and legend had it that this was done by an angel and, furthermore, that the first person who got into the water when this happened would be healed from whatever was wrong with them. Of course, when the waters were disturbed, large numbers of people would jump in and most (all?) would not be healed. This didn't destroy faith because, of course, they could always tell themselves they were not the first and try again another time. It would also always be possible for someone to claim healing, if only from the emotionalism of the occasion. This is typical of superstition.

Around the pool were five covered colonnades and these were always filled with hopefuls. One crippled man had been there for 38 years and because of his condition was never able to get into the water before all of the others and he had no-one to help him. However, he lived in hope, or maybe desperation.

Jesus seems to have singled him out although it was only when he learnt he had been there 38 years that he asked whether he wanted to be healed. The man doesn't answer the question and doesn't seem able to see beyond the superstition. Nevertheless, Jesus commands him to get up, pick up his mat and walk. Immediately he is cured and picks up his mat and walks.

Probably knowing that there would be trouble because it is the Sabbath, Jesus melts into the crowd. Sure enough the man is stopped by the Jews as he is walking along with his mat. It is against the law to carry a mat on the Sabbath. The man explains that the man who healed him told him to carry his mat. The Jews want to know who it was that told him to carry his mat (NOT, you notice, who it was that healed him!). The man doesn't know who it was.

Later, Jesus went and found him in the temple (thanking God for his healing?) and tells him not to sin any more in case something worse befalls him. This indicates that, in this man's case, sin was at the root of his illness.

The man born blind (Jn 9:1-12)

This next miracle is included by John to show that illness is not always caused by a person's sin. As they were going along he saw a man who had been blind from birth. This prompted the disciples to ask a question that had obviously been bothering them, perhaps since Jesus' remarks to the cripple in John 5. They wanted to know if the man was blind because of his own sin (committed before birth or in anticipation of sins that he would commit later?) or because of his parent's sin (blindness can be caused, for example, by some sexually transmitted diseases).

Jesus said that this man's blindness was not caused by sin. (compare Job 2:3-10) but so that God would be glorified, so that God's works could be displayed. (Matthew might have put it that the kingdom might be demonstrated). He then goes on to teach about his own (short) ministry. He must continue while he is able and we get one of the famous 'I am's': 'I am the light of the world'

He then heals the man by making mud from soil and spit and putting it on the man's eyes with instructions to go and wash in the pool of Shiloam, which the man does. His obedience is rewarded by him receiving his sight.

Again there was trouble because it was the Sabbath. The Pharisees held an inquiry when the man was brought before them. He told them it was Jesus who had healed him and the method he had used. This caused a division amongst the Pharisees. On one hand Jesus could not be from God because he didn't obey the law (or at least their narrow interpretation of it). On the other hand, if he was not from God, how could he perform such miracles?

In the end they turned to the man who had been healed to adjudicate! 'He is a prophet', he said.

The Pharisees decided that someone wasn't telling the truth so they had the man's parents found and brought to them. They were cross-examined but in the end declined to answer for fear of being put out of the synagogue. 'Ask him, he is of age', they said.

Once more the man had to tell his story since Jesus was obviously the sinner. 'All I know is that once I was blind but now I can see'. 'Why are you asking all these questions', he asked them, 'do you want to become disciples too?' This did not go down too well and when he added that Jesus must be from God because how else could he heal someone who was blind, they threw him out, 'You were steeped in sin from birth', they said.

The deep irony in this story is inescapable. The Pharisees couldn't square the fact that Jesus could heal, indicating he was from God, with the fact that he ignored their rules. Of course, the rule that you shouldn't heal on the Sabbath had only just been made up since this hadn't been a common occurrence before! In the end they just had to pretend that no miracle had in fact happened since all the alternatives were too inconvenient.

Lazarus (Jn 11:1-44)

When Jesus went to Jerusalem, he often stayed with friends in Bethany, just outside Jerusalem. These friends were two sisters, Martha and Mary (who had poured ointment on Jesus' feet and wiped them her hair), and their brother Lazarus. Jesus was in Jericho on his way to Jerusalem when news came that Lazarus was very ill. When he heard the news, Jesus stayed where he was for two more days!

He loved this family and yet he waited until it was certain that Lazarus was dead. Probably he was waiting for instructions from the Father since he often said that he only did what the Father told him to do (Jn 14:31, Jn 12:49).

Eventually they set off for Bethany. They discovered that Lazarus has been buried for four days and were met on the way by distraught Martha. Martha said, with some justification, that Lazarus would not have died if Jesus had been there.

This gave Jesus an opportunity to tell her about the resurrection - 'I am the resurrection and the life'. She didn't seem to have been very convinced and went home to call her sister, who also went out to meet Jesus with the same basic message. The mourners followed her, thinking she was going to the tomb to mourn. When Jesus saw her weeping he too wept with compassion, even though he knew what he was going to do. The crowd asked the same question, 'Why had Jesus not done anything. Why had he not come when he knew Lazarus was ill?'

Jesus went to the tomb, still deeply moved and commanded the stone to be rolled away. Understandably, the sisters objected to this since Lazarus had been buried for four days and, by this time, there would be quite a smell! Jesus told them to believe and called Lazarus out.

Lazarus staggered out, his arms and legs still bound with grave clothes. The people were so astounded they had to be told to undo him so that he could walk!

Many believed because of this miracle but some who had been there went off and told tales to the Pharisees, who called a meeting of the Sanhedrin to discuss what to do about him. (The Sanhedrin also had Sadduces as members. They would have been particularly upset by this miracle since they didn't believe in the resurrection) Because many people were trying to see Jesus because of this miracle, the Pharisees plotted to kill him and Lazarus! (Jn 12:10-11).

Acts of the Apostles

Beggar at the Beautiful Gate (Acts 3:1-10)

The man was being taken to the spot where he begged every day. Peter and John may very well have seen him there before as they were regular visitors to the temple. He asked them for money. Both looked 'straight at him' and Peter told him to look at them, leading the man to expect something from them. Peter gave his well known response, 'silver and gold I have not...' and then gave the man something way beyond his expectations - the ability to walk, in Jesus' name. Peter took him by the hand to help him up - a sign of Peter's faith. As he was raised his feet and ankles (weakened by years on non-use) became strong and he was able to walk. The result was great joy and eventually trouble (Acts 4:1f) just as when Jesus healed people. The witness, however, was amazing (Acts 3:9-10) and Peter and John had great opportunity to preach the gospel.

Various miracles (Acts 4:33, 5:12-16)

The day-to-day life of the church led to many (unspecified) miracles which caused many onlookers to be in awe of the disciples, although many joined them too. The reputation of the apostles was such that people brought their sick relatives and friends into the street so that at least Peter's shadow would fall across some of them as he passed and presumably heal them. Crowds came in from surrounding towns bringing sick and demonised people and all of them were healed.

Stephen and Philip (Acts 6:8, 8:6,7)

Stephen and Philip were chosen by gentile believers to distribute alms to the widows in the church. The apostles laid hands on them and commissioned them for this task. Almost immediately we see Stephen 'full of grace and power' performing 'great wonders and miracles among the people' - presumably including healing. With Stephen's martyrdom, Philip left Jerusalem because of the persecution that sprang up (Acts 8:1) and went to Samaria (In this the church began the second phase of the great commission - Acts 1:8). As Philip preached in Samaria 'evil spirits came out of many, and many paralytics and cripples were healed' (Acts 8:7)

Ananias and Saul (Acts 9:17-18)

Paul had been struck blind by his vision of Jesus on the road to Damascus. Ananias, in response to a direct word from God through an angel, went and laid hands on Saul. Immediately he was healed.

Aeneas and Dorcas (Acts 9:32-43)

Peter went to Lydda and found Aeneas who had been bed-ridden for 8 years. Presumably, Peter knew this from God since, if he was bed-ridden, Aeneas was indoors. Peter said, 'Jesus Christ heals you. Get up...' Immediately Aeneas got up and 'all those in Lydda and Sharon saw him and turned to the Lord'.

Meanwhile, in Joppa, a godly woman called Dorcas (Tabitha) fell ill and died. The believers heard that Peter was nearby in Lydda, so they sent two men for him. When Peter arrived, all the widows (all believers?) were weeping and showed him the clothes Dorcas had made for them. Peter sent them out of the room, fell on his knees and prayed and commanded the dead woman to get up. Again, he took her by the hand and helped her up. He then presented her alive to the disciples in Joppa. All of this was exactly as he had seen Jesus do it with Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:35-43).

Crippled man in Lystra (Acts 14:8-10)

The man had been lame from birth and had never walked. He sat listening to Paul's preaching and Paul, looking at him, 'saw that he had faith to be healed' - a word of knowledge. Paul called out, 'Stand up on your feet!' because he had faith to be healed, that was all he needed to jump up and begin to walk. The crowd were amazed and thought that gods must have come to visit them.....

Slave girl in Philippi (Acts 16:16-18)

Paul went to the river often because there was a Jewish prayer meeting there. Presumably there were not the necessary 10 Jewish males in Philippi to form a synagogue. For several days, Paul and his companions were accosted by a demonised slave girl who shouted out, 'these men are servants of the Most High God'. Apparently this title was used in the Old Testament but was not used by Christians. After several days, Paul got fed up with this and eventually rebuked the spirit and cast it out in the name of Christ. The spirit left her. However, not everyone was pleased by this since the spirit had enabled her to tell fortunes (an interesting effect!) and that had led to her owners making lots of money. Once the 'gift' had been taken away they were angry at her loss of earning potential, caring nothing for her, of course. They therefore incited a riot which led to Paul and Silas being put in prison and the conversion of the Philippian jailer.

Extraordinary miracles in Ephesus - handkerchiefs sent to the sick (Acts 19:11-16)

During the two years Paul was in Ephesus before the riot, God did extraordinary miracles. Details are not recorded except that handkerchiefs and aprons that had been touched by Paul were taken to the sick and their illnesses were cured and demons driven out.

At the same time, some Jews were casting out demons 'in the name of Jesus whom Paul preaches', ie they probably had no personal knowledge of Jesus. The 7 sons of the Jewish chief priest, Sceva, were doing this. One day, an evil spirit answered them back saying, 'I know who Jesus and Paul are, but who are you!?!' The man then attacked them and beat them up so that they ran out of the house bleeding and naked! This bizarre event led to Jesus' name being even more held in honour.

Paul's long sermon - Eutichus (Acts 20:7-11)

We know from his letters that Paul had a tendency to go on a bit! One night in Troas, Paul was speaking to the disciples after they had all had a long day at work. He was leaving the next day so didn't want to finish so he carried on teaching past midnight. It was hot because of lamps lit in the house and a young man, Eutichus, was sitting in a third storeys window (it was cooler there). Eutichus fell asleep as Paul continued to speak and he fell out of the window and was killed (he fell 3 floors).

Paul rushed down and threw himself on top of the boy (like Elisha) and raised him from the dead - the people were 'greatly comforted'.

Paul bitten by a snake (Acts 28:3-6)

After being shipwrecked on Malta on the way to Rome, Paul was bitten by a poisonous viper as he put wood on the fire on the beach. The onlookers assumed that this was punishment for some heinous crime - even though he had escaped from the shipwreck, fate had 'got him'. Paul just shook the snake off into the fire. The people expected him to swell up and die but 'after waiting a long time (without actually trying to help him!) and seeing nothing unusual happen to him, they changed their minds and said he was a god'. This is in fulfilment of Mark 16:17-18, 'And these signs will accompany those who believe.....they will pick up snakes with their hands.....it will not hurt them at all'.

Some General Principles

Firstly it is quite obvious that Jesus intended for his disciples to carry on his healing ministry. He showed them how to do it, taught them about it, sent them out on a training missions (Matt 10:1-10, Lk 10:1-16) and reviewed how they were doing (Lk 10:17-24, Matt 17:19-21). His last words to them were that they should teach their disciples to obey everything he had commanded them, to do everything he had taught them (Matt 28:20). In John 14:12-13, Jesus says that anyone who has faith in him will do the things he did and, in fact, will do even greater things because he has gone to the Father, from whose presence he has sent the Holy Spirit (Jn 14:15-21). He also makes a promise to do anything we ask in his name, that is, as his representatives.

After Jesus baptism and temptation in the desert, Matthew says that 'from that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near"' (Matt 4:17). When he sent out the 12 (Matt 10:1-16) and the 72 (Lk 10:1-20) he linked the healing and deliverance ministry they were to exercise to a proclamation of the kingdom of heaven. (Martyn Smith said at a celebration on Stockport that the kingdom 'brings the possibility of healing'). When the Pharisees accused him of casting out demons by the prince of demons, Jesus responded that this was not possible since a kingdom

divided against itself will fall. However, if he cast out demons by the Holy Spirit then the kingdom had come upon them, that is, was nearer than they thought. In Mark 16:15-18 Jesus said that healing and other miracles were natural outcome of people believing; of the kingdom being established in a group of people.

Jesus only did what the Father told him to do (Jn 14:31, Jn 12:49). He said that he could do nothing by himself but only what he saw the Father doing (Jn 5:19). The implication is that the same should be true of us - we do not have the authority to heal 'willy-nilly' but only as the Holy Spirit directs. Sometimes it was easier for him to heal than others because of God's presence, the presence of faith or the absence of faith - Luke 5:17, Acts 14:9, Mark 6:4-6)

It is interesting, particularly in the first three gospels, how often sick people were brought to Jesus (the man let down through the roof, the mute demoniac, the blind and mute demoniac, many at Gennesaret, the blind man at Bethsaida, the demonised boy) rather than coming by themselves, and how often people came asking Jesus to heal someone else (centurion's servant, Jairus' daughter, the Syro-Phoenician woman, the official's son). People also brought the sick to the apostles in Jerusalem (Acts 5) and they were all healed. This is obviously for different reasons: the person was not able to get to Jesus on his/her own, or because illness sometimes saps faith. It is easier to have faith for someone else than for yourself to be healed.

No-one who came to Jesus or who was brought was turned away unhealed even though, in one case at least (Jn 5:1-14, see also Acts 5:16), Jesus did not heal everyone who was sick in a particular place.

Healing was often explicitly linked with the demonstration of faith, either by the individual being healed or by the people bringing them to Jesus. Faith is demonstrated in different ways:

1. By persistence or by overcoming physical or psychological barriers -
 - The woman with bleeding (Matt 9:20-22) who overcame shame to push through the crowd
 - Bartimeus (Matt 20:29-34) who kept shouting out even though the crowd told him to be quiet
 - The friends who let the crippled man through the roof (Mk 2:1-12) who were not put off the possible consequences of vandalising someone else's house
 - The Syro-Phoenician woman (Matt 15:21-28) who was not put off by Jesus' apparent rudeness and off-handedness
 - The official (Jn 4:46-53) who was not put off by Jesus' apparent condemnation
2. By action or obedience -
 - The 10 lepers (Lk 17:11-19) were healed as they *went to show themselves to the priest*
 - The man let down through the roof (Mk 2:1-12) was healed as he *stood*
 - The man born blind (Jn 5:1-14) received his sight when he *went and washed in the pool at Shiloam*.
 - The man with the shrivelled hand (Matt 12:9-14) was healed as he *stretched out his hand*
3. By simple trust -
 - The centurion (Matt 5:5) who just understood what authority meant and recognised it in Jesus

Sick people are not always completely healed the first time they are prayed for. In Mark 8:22-26 Jesus prayed for a blind man after having spat in his eyes. He asked him if he could see, to which he answered that he could see people walking but they looked like trees. Jesus touched the man's eyes again and he saw clearly.

In different circumstances the disciples prayed to cast out a demon (Matt 17:14-21) but did not have enough faith to do it. Jesus cast it out and said that they needed to fast and pray to cast this type out. He also told them the parable of the unjust judge (Lk 18:1-8) 'to show them that they should always pray and not give up'