

## MEDICINE IN THE BIBLE

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The Bible is the word of God who describes himself, according to the Hebrew text of Exodus 15:26, as our rophe, doctor. It is no wonder then that such a wide scope of medicine is represented in the Bible. It covers the full cycle of life, from birth to death.

It all started with God creating Adam from dust. Then in Genesis 2:21-22 God performed the first operation ever. He took a rib from Adam, filled the space up with flesh and formed Eve from the rib. During the procedure Adam was in a deep sleep, *tardema* in Hebrew. Today the word *hardema* is being used in modern Hebrew for anesthesia. Then Adam had sexual intercourse with his wife and man began to multiply (Genesis 4:1). God the Creator is the embryologist who forms human beings in the womb. Psalm 139:13-16 says that He sees our unformed lump and wonderfully knits and weaves us together.

The Bible has a lot to say about obstetrics and gynecology. Children are a blessing from the Lord (Psalm 127:3). However, there are quite a few examples of barrenness in the Bible, temporary or permanent. According to Solomon a barren womb is never satisfied (Proverbs 30:15-16). However, it is God who decides to open or close the womb, as seen in the example of Leah and Rachel in Genesis 29:31 and 30:22. Sarah, the wife of Abraham, gave birth only at the age of 90 (Genesis 17:17 and 21:1-2). Isaac had to pray for his wife Rebecca to be able to conceive (Genesis 25:21, 24). Rachel, the wife of Jacob, was barren for a long time. She even resolved to using an aphrodisiac (Genesis 30:14-15)! Barren Hannah had to pray for Samuel to be born (1 Samuel 1:2,20). Samson's mother was sterile until an angel brought her a promise from God (Judges 13: 2,3,24). Elizabeth was barren, but again God sent a messenger and she bore John the Baptist (Luke 1:7).

The act of giving birth is described in Jeremiah 4:31: A woman crying and groaning, gasping for breath and stretching out her hands in pain, because her time has come. However, when the baby has been born, she forgets her anguish because of her joy that a child has been born into the world (John 16:21).

The first professional midwives mentioned were Shiphrah and Puah, who worked in Egypt (Exodus 1:15). Later midwives assisted Rachel (Genesis 35:17), Tamar (Genesis 38:28) and Phinehas's wife (1 Samuel 4:20). After the cord was cut, the baby was washed with water, rubbed with salt and wrapped in cloth (Numbers 16:4), just like Jesus was (Lucas 2:12).

A Jewish male child is circumcised on the eighth day of life (Genesis 17:12). Jesus was too (Luke 2:21) and also Paul (Philippians 3:5). On the eighth day the clotting factors in the baby's blood are at their highest level, preventing bleeding to death when being cut. Zipporah, Moses's wife, circumcised her sons with a flint knife (Exodus 4:25). Joshua circumcised the male Israelites of all ages with flint knives before entering the Promised Land (Joshua 5:2-3), because they had not been circumcised during their wanderings through the desert.

It is very interesting what the Bible has to say about obstetric and gynecological problems. In Hosea 13:13 an undescended fetus is described, who when the time arrives, refuses to come to the opening of the womb. Maternal fatigue is also noted, where children come to the point of birth and then there is no strength to deliver them (2 Kings 19:3). Eli's daughter in law went into preterm labor because of the news of her husband's death. She delivered, was overcome by labor pains and died (1

Samuel 4:19-20). Even a still birth is mentioned, where a fetus comes from his mother's womb with its flesh half eaten away (Numbers 12:12).

Poor Rebecca was very uncomfortable with her twins jostling each other in her womb (Genesis 25:22). To crown it all, the birth was a limb presentation with Jacob holding Esau's heel (Genesis 25:26). This dangerous presentation repeated itself in the case of Tamar's twins. One twin put out his hand and the midwife tied a scarlet cord around his wrist. Fortunately, he took his hand back and his brother was born before him (Genesis 38:27-30).

God forbids coitus with a menstruating woman for 7 days (Leviticus 15:19-24). As retrograde menstrual flow is the most likely cause for developing endometriosis, all-wise God may have had this in mind, when He gave this law.

In Leviticus 15:25 menometrorrhagia is mentioned. A woman suffering from this condition is described in Mark 5:25 and Luke 8:43. She suffered a great deal under many doctors, spending all her money, but instead of getting better got only worse. Fortunately, another kind of doctor is also found in the Scriptures: Luke the beloved physician (Colossians 4:14).

The Good Book continues to describe quite a number of conditions in the different specialties. The following are endocrinology cases. David slung his slingshot, the pebble hit the giant Goliath in the forehead and killed him (1 Samuel 17:49-50). Could it be that Goliath was suffering from acromegaly? Maybe King Solomon had a sweet tooth. According to him it is good to eat honey (Proverbs 24:13), but if you eat too much of it, you will vomit (Proverbs 25:16). He writes that he who is full loathes honey (Proverbs 27:7) and that too much of it is not good (Proverbs 25:27).

Some cases of hypoglycemia have been charted. A blacksmith who works with a tool in the coals gets hungry and loses his strength (Isaiah 44:12). Esau came in famished from the open country, feeling he was going to die. He was willing to sell his birthright for a red stew (Genesis 25:29-32). Jonathan, exhausted from fighting, dipped the tip of his staff into a honeycomb. After eating the honey, his eyes could see clearly again (1 Samuel 14:27). King David and his men found an Egyptian in the field. He had not eaten or drunk for 3 days and nights. They gave him a cake of figs, two cakes of raisins and water and he revived (1 Samuel 30:11-12). Gideon and his men pursued the enemy and were exhausted. They arrived at Succoth where he requested bread for his tired troops (Judges 8:5). King Saul collapsed on the floor of the house of the medium not just because of fear. His strength was gone because he had not eaten that day and night (1 Samuel 28:20). Jesus multiplied bread to feed the crowd that had been with him for three days and had nothing to eat. He did not want to send them away hungry, lest they collapse on the way (Matthew 15:32). When Jesus raised Talitha from the dead, he told her parents to give her something to eat (Mark 5:43). Paul and his fellow seafarers were caught in a storm. For 14 days they did not eat. Before the ship ran ashore, he urged them to eat in order to have the strength to survive (Acts 27:33-34).

In the same way the Bible notes cases of dehydration. Samson, after achieving a great victory over the enemy, was so thirsty he thought he would die. God opened a fountain for him. He drank and revived (Judges 15:18-19). Hagar and Ishmael were sent away into the desert. When the water in the waterskin was finished, Hagar put her son under a bush and went off a little so as not to watch him die. God opened her eyes, she saw a well and gave the boy to drink (Genesis 21:15-16,19). The blacksmith in Isaiah 44:12 drank no water and grew faint. In another case, a man drank from a brook by the way and could lift up his head again (Psalm 110:7). Jonah became faint when the sun blazed on his head and a scorching east wind was blowing (Jonah 4:8) He would have enjoyed the cold water of Proverbs 25:25 for his weary soul. Jesus must have been terribly dehydrated on the cross

because of blood loss. He said: "I am thirsty" (John 19:28). Psalm 22:15 describes his thirst: My strength is dried up like a potsherd and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth.

Some gastroenterological cases made it into the Bible. King Jehoram had an incurable disease of the bowels, which ultimately caused rectal prolapse and a very painful death (2 Chronicles 21:15,18-19). The father of the chief official of Malta had dysentery (Acts 28:8). Job's comforters spoke of an evil man who had heartburn (Job 20:14). Job himself complained of halitosis and bad body odor (Job 19:17). Paul advised Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach and frequent illnesses (1 Timothy 5:23).

Not just modern dieticians warn against cholesterol. Leviticus 3:17 strictly forbids eating any fat. But dieticians may raise their eyebrows at Deuteronomy 12:15,20-21,27, where eating as much meat as desired is allowed. There is something for vegetarians also: Daniel and his friends did very well on vegetables and water only (Daniel 1:12,15).

A poisonous plant is found in 2 Kings 4:39-41. A man gathered herbs and found a wild vine. He cut the gourds up into a stew. When his friends tasted it, they cried out that there was death in the pot. Elisha added flour to the stew and it became edible. The water of Jericho was bad, causing death. Elisha threw salt into the spring and the water was healed (2 Kings 2:19-22).

An interesting case of snake bite occurred on Malta (Acts 28:3-6). After Paul was bitten by a snake, the islanders watched him, expecting either sudden collapse or swelling up of his body. The ancients knew about snake poison either causing nervous system involvement or tissue damage.

What about orthopedics in the Bible? It seems that orthopedics was already practiced in ancient Egypt. In Ezekiel 30:21 God says that he broke Pharaoh's arm, but that no one dressed it or put it into a splint. One Sabbath Jesus healed a woman in the synagogue. She had been bent over for 18 years. It sounds like ankylosing spondylitis, but in this case from a spiritual origin (Luke 13:11-13).

Next is ophthalmology. According to Ecclesiastes 1:8 the eye never has enough of seeing. Luke 6:41-42 speaks of a speck of sawdust in an eye. Joshua 23:13 goes further and says that being in a forbidden relationship, could become as bothersome as a thorn in the eye. Nobody is sure what Paul's thorn in the flesh was, except that it had a spiritual origin. It may have been an ophthalmologic problem, because in Galatians 4:15 he is sure that if the Galatians could, they would have torn out their eyes and would have given them to him. Jesus healed a blind man's eyes by spitting on the ground, making mud with the saliva and putting it on his eyes. He then sent the man to wash. The man came back seeing (John 9:6-7). Revelation 3:18 counsels to buy salve to put on eyes so that they can see. Even a bit of veterinary science is found in the Bible. Wild donkeys' eyesight can fail for lack of pasture (Jeremiah 14:6).

Then there is also otorhinolaryngology. Ecclesiastes 1:8 also states that the ear never has its fill of hearing. Jesus healed a deaf and dumb man by putting his fingers in the man's ears. (Did he have impacted cerumen?). He then spat and touched the man's tongue and prayed (Mark 7:33-35).

Some cases of neurology are being presented. In Matthew 17:15, Mark 9:17-18 and Luke 9:39 an attack of grand mal epilepsy is precisely described. In this boy's case it had a demonic origin. Another boy visited his father in the field. Suddenly he said: "My head, my head!" A few hours later he was dead (2 Kings 4:18-20). Did he have meningitis? A nerve injury is described in 2 Samuel 4:4. Mephibosheth became crippled after he fell from his nurses' hands, when she fled with him. Then there was the man with a shriveled hand (Matthew 12:9-13). Could he have suffered from a brachial

plexus injury or a stroke? And what about a good old writer's cramp? Eleazar stood his ground during a battle. He fought on until his hand froze to his sword (2 Samuel 23:10).

Cardiology finds a place among the other specialties. Second Chronicles 16:12-13 describes a king with a severe disease of the feet. He died of his condition, so it could not have been an orthopedic problem. Could it have been a severe case of ascites resulting from, for instance, a cardiovascular condition? Luke 14:2 indeed speaks of a man with ascites. Amazing that during the Israelites' wandering in the desert their feet did not swell up at all (Deuteronomy 8:4). When the soldier drove the spear into Jesus's heart, it led to a flow of blood and water (John 19:32-34). This proved that He was already dead because stasis of the blood had set in.

Unbelievably, some instances of cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) took place in the Bible! The son of the widow, who took care of Elijah, died. Elijah stretched himself out on the boy three times and prayed. The boy's life returned to him (1 Kings 17:21). Elisha also resuscitated a dead child. He prayed and then lay upon the boy mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes and hands to hands. The child's body grew warm, he sneezed seven times and opened his eyes (2 Kings 4 :34-35). Even Paul in Acts 20:10 seems to have done some CPR. A young man fell down three stories and was picked up dead. Paul threw himself on him and put his arms around him. The young man came to life.

Psychiatrists and psychologists will be able to diagnose cases from the following verses. Fleeing from God's calling on his life, Jonah took a ship to Tarshish. God sent a terrific storm on the sea. Jonah reacted by laying down and falling into a deep sleep (Jonah 1:5). King Hezekiah became ill with a boil which seemingly was a cancerous growth. The prophet Isaiah told him he was going to die from it. On receiving the news, the king turned his face to the wall and wept bitterly (2 Kings 20:2-3). After Elijah heroically acted against idolatry, Jezebel issued a death warrant for him. He fled into the desert and went and sit under a broom tree. He told God that he had enough and prayed that he may die. Then he fell asleep (1 Kings 19:3-5). Hannah, the wife of Elkanah, reacted to her barrenness by weeping and refusing to eat. However, after praying and receiving the promise from God that she would bear Samuel, she ate something and her face was no longer downcast (1 Samuel 1:7,18). In Deuteronomy 28:20 and 28 confusion of mind and madness are listed as part of the curses for disobedience.

The Bible also deals with psychosomatic disease. Proverbs 16:24 speaks of words which are like a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones. In John 3 verse 2 John wishes his friend that he may enjoy good health, even as his soul is getting along well. The disciples knew that sleep brings healing. They told Jesus that if Lazarus sleeps, he will get better (John 11:12). Proverbs 18:21 states that life and death are in the power of the tongue. Never call your child Mahlon or Kilion like in Ruth 1:2,5. Mahlon means sickly and Kilion wasting away. They both died young and left no offspring.

Some treatments, which will be of interest to doctors and pharmacists, are listed in the Bible. In 2 Kings 20:7 an apparently cancerous boil was treated with a poultice of figs. Isaiah 1:6 mentions a case where open wounds and welts were neither cleansed nor bandaged or soothed with oil. In Luke 10:34 the Good Samaritan treated an assaulted man. He disinfected his wounds with wine, poured oil on them to soothe them and then bandaged them. But the most wonderful treatment will be that of Revelation 22:2, where the leaves of the trees will be used for the healing of the nations.

Epidemiologists will find the following interesting. According to Ezekiel 33:27 those who live in caves and fortresses will die of a plague. Probably Rickettsia illness was meant. Leviticus 26:25 speaks of a plague that will develop when people withdraw into their cities. King David ordered a census and caused a plague to spread through Israel (1 Chronicles 21:12). Could it be that those who conducted

the census were carriers of the plague? After the ark of God was captured by the Philistines, a plague broke out in their cities. The people developed tumors and died. They then decided to send the ark back to Israel with a guilt offering of golden tumors and golden rats (1 Samuel 5:6,9,11-12 and 1 Samuel 6:3-5,11,17-18). This is probably a classic example of Bubonic plague, spread by rats or mice, with the people developing swollen lymph glands.

Preventative medicine is one of God's prerogatives. Job 9:30 mentions washing of hands with snow or soda. Mark 7:3-4 observes that Jews coming from the market place, do not eat unless they wash their hands. Some Pharisees were surprised that Jesus and his disciples did not wash before a meal (Mark 7:2,5 and Luke 11:38). (Jesus allowed this in order to teach a spiritual lesson). Food that had been prepared could be eaten the same day and the day after, but on the third day it had to be burned (Leviticus 7:16-18). The Bible teaches what to do when dead animals, insects or reptiles came into contact with food, water or cooking utensils (Leviticus 11:29-35).

After wars when women were taken captive, their captors could marry them, but they had to follow certain rules. Such a woman's head had to be shaved and her nails trimmed. The clothes she was wearing when captured had to be thrown away. She had to be allowed one month of mourning and then she could be married (Deuteronomy 21:11-13) These rules clearly served to prevent disease from entering the camp.

The Bible forbids touching a corpse or a carcass, a bone or a grave (Numbers 19:16 and Leviticus 5:2). It gives explicit instructions how to be purified after one touched the above. Numbers 5:1-2 commands that anyone with an infectious skin disease or a discharge of any kind or who was in contact with the dead, had to be sent outside the Israelite camp. Leviticus 15:1-33 gives instructions how someone who was in contact with such a person, had to bathe himself and wash his clothes.

A person with leprosy had to stay outside the camp. The lower part of his face, his beard in Hebrew, had to be covered (Leviticus 13:35). This translates into modern day terms to the wearing a facial mask, in order to prevent droplet contamination. It appears that a bereaved person also had to wear a mask, ostensibly to curb the spread of disease. God ordered the bereaved Ezekiel not to cover the lower part of his face (Ezekiel 24:17).

Leviticus 13:1-46 is a good quiz for a dermatologist. The collective term used in these verses is leprosy, zaraat in Hebrew. The word comes from an Arabic root which means to strike down, hence a scourge or to be smitten. In Hebrew a wasp is called zirah, denoting a piercing. On close inspection, apart from modern day leprosy, a number of other skin diseases are also being described in this chapter. It speaks of bright spots, swellings, rashes, boils and burns. Some of the lesions are skin deep and others deeper than the skin. Some have black hair and others white or yellow hair. Some itch and some not. Some spread and others not. One can discern leprosy, fungal disease, vitiligo and post inflammatory hyper- or hypopigmentation. The lesions of modern day leprosy are never deeper than the skin (except when injured due to nerve damage). The hair in it does not change color. In the Old Testament Miriam temporarily had leprosy (Numbers 12:10). In the New Testament Jesus healed a number of leprosy sufferers (Matthew 8:1-4, Mark 1:40-42, Luke 5:12-13 and Luke 17:12-14).

In Luke 16:20-21 a man called Lazarus had sores which the dogs came to lick. Revelation 16:8 speaks of extreme sun damage as part of God's wrath.

Finally, food for thought for the geriatric specialists. The most beautiful description of aging is found in Ecclesiastes 12:1-7. These are the days of trouble, when man says: "I find no pleasure in them". The verses speak of deteriorating eyesight. Sunlight, moonlight and stars grow dark and clouds return after the rain. Looking through the window grows dim. It also speaks of loss of hearing. The

doors to the street are closed, the sound of grinding fades and bird song grows faint. Insomnia causes one to rise up early. The keepers of the house tremble as the arms grow weak. The strong men stoop as the legs lose their strength. Man drags himself along like a grasshopper. Loss of teeth causes grinding to seize because they are so few. Man becomes afraid of heights and dangers on the street. Desire is no longer stirred. The almond tree blossoms as hair turns grey. Then man returns to the dust from whence he came and his spirit returns to God who gave it. When Jacob and Joseph died in Egypt, they were embalmed by the physicians. The process took 40 days (Genesis 50:2-3,26)

Jesus died a martyr's death of crucifixion (Mark 15:24). It entailed horrible physical suffering. He was nailed to a cross. The nails were driven through his carpal bones so as not to tear out. According to an example in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, a nail was driven through his calcaneal bones. The crucified usually died due to suffocation. As long as he still had strength to push himself up, he could breathe. But when his strength was gone, he died.

Jesus was offered crude pain relief on the cross. It consisted of wine or wine vinegar mixed with gall and myrrh (Mathew 27:34,48, Mark 15:23, Luke 23:3,6 and John 19:29-30). At first, he refused to drink it, but later he received it.

Jesus was buried in a tomb carved into a rock. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus wrapped him in strips of linen with a burial cloth around his head. They added 34 kilogram of spices consisting of a mixture of myrrh and aloes (Luke 23:53,56, John 19 :39-40). The next day some women brought more spice to Jesus's tomb (Luke 23:56 and 24:1). However, they found the tomb empty, because He had risen from the dead! HALLELUJAH!

#### BIBLIOGRAHY

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