



Shining a light on the weekly Bible Lessons published in the *Christian Science Quarterly*®

Ancient and Modern Necromancy, alias Mesmerism and Hypnotism, Denounced

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from the **Golden Text**

[Exodus 15:26](#)

I am the Lord that healeth thee.

God's promise of healing comes during the Exodus, following His victory at the Red Sea—and immediately after bitter waters at Marah are made sweet through divine power (see [vv. 23–25](#)). This provision is immediately followed by another one—12 wells and 70 palm trees at the Elim oasis (see [v. 27](#)).

One source notes, “This God as ‘healer’ is the one who liberates, redeems, ransoms, restores to the true intention of creation. . . . Those who trust the decree of Yahweh . . . will find themselves at the oasis with an abundance of sweet water.”

from the **Responsive Reading**

[Joshua 24:2, 14–17, 24](#)

Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods. . . . Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. And the people answered and said, God forbid that we should forsake the Lord, to serve other gods; for the Lord our God, he it is that brought us up and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed: . . . The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey.

Joshua was Moses' servant, a strong military commander and humble worshiper of Yahweh. As successor to Moses, he

oversees the crossing of the Jordan River, the fall of Jericho, and the conquest of Canaan.

At this point, as he nears the end of his life, Joshua exhorts a great assembly of Israelites in Canaan to honor the one God. The people's assertion, "The Lord our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey," is considered a binding covenant (see [v. 25](#)).

"The other side of the flood" doesn't refer to the flood of Noah's time but to the Euphrates River in Mesopotamia, the region of Israel's ancestors. There, as in Egypt and the Promised Land, idolatry was the norm. In this account, Canaan is called the land of the Amorites after one of its principal tribes (see [v. 15](#)).

from **Section 1**

1 | [Exodus 15:6, 7](#)

Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power: . . . And in the greatness of thine excellency thou hast overthrown them that rose up against thee.

Translation

*"Your right hand, O LORD,
is glorious in power. . . .
In the greatness of your majesty,
you overthrow those who rise against you."*

—New Living Translation

Yahweh's might is often portrayed as His hand or arm in the Hebrew Bible. In another instance, [Psalms 89:13](#) proclaims, "Thou hast a mighty arm: strong is thy hand, and high is thy right hand." Defeat was sometimes ascribed to His withdrawal of might: "He hath drawn back his right hand from before the enemy" ([Lamentations 2:3](#)).

Comparable imagery occurs in the New Testament as well. [Luke 1:66](#) reports witnesses' response at the birth of John the Baptist: "The hand of the Lord was with him"—an affirmation that was also applied to some early Christians (see [Acts 11:21](#)). Quoting [Isaiah 53:1](#), Gospel writer John asks, "To whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" ([John 12:38](#)).

A scholar comments on God's overthrowing activity this way: ". . . the solid, compact masses of the foe are represented as broken to pieces, and thrown in ruins on the earth."

2 | [Luke 4:14, 15, 17–19](#)

Jesus returned in the power of the Spirit into Galilee: and there went out a fame of him through all the region round about. And he taught in their synagogues, being glorified of all. . . . And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And

when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, the Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

Just as today, synagogues were local houses of worship that provided regular reading of Hebrew law and talks on theological points. Any man with knowledge of the law could read or speak there, a practice that furnished Christ Jesus with opportunities for public preaching. In Nazareth’s synagogue, he reads the opening verses of Isaiah 61—and identifies himself as the fulfillment of that prophecy (see [v. 21](#)).

Mention of “the acceptable year of the Lord” is an allusion to the Jewish jubilee year. During this period every fifty years, debts were forgiven and enslaved people released (see [Leviticus 25:8–55](#)). Here the Master reveals “acceptable year” to mean not an infrequent ritual event for one nation but God’s present salvation for all humanity.

from **Section 2**

4 | [Romans 8:7](#)

The carnal mind is enmity against God.

Translation

. . . the sinful nature is always hostile to God.

—New Living Translation

Carnal is translated from the Greek noun *sarx*, referring to physicality or the flesh. Usage expanded its sense to whatever is weak, sinful, and mortal. One scriptural authority explains, “Paul wishes to expose the flesh . . . as totally alien to God and his holy purposes.”

7 | [Nahum 1:7, 9](#)

The Lord is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him. . . . What do ye imagine against the Lord? he will make an utter end: affliction shall not rise up the second time.

Translation

The LORD is good,

a refuge in times of trouble.

He cares for those who trust in him,

.

*Whatever they plot against the LORD
he will bring to an end;
trouble will not come a second time.*

—NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®

8 | [Jeremiah 8:9, 11, 22](#)

The wise men are ashamed, they are dismayed and taken: lo, they have rejected the word of the Lord; and what wisdom is in them? . . . For they have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace. . . . Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there? why then is not the health of the daughter of my people recovered?

Translation

*The wise will be shamed and shocked
when they are caught.
Look, they have rejected the LORD's word;
what kind of wisdom is that?
.
They treat the wound of my people
as if it were nothing:
"All is well, all is well," they insist,
when in fact nothing is well.
.
Is there no balm in Gilead?
Is there no physician there?
Why then have my people
not been restored to health?*

—Common English Bible

Balm was a resinous secretion, likely from the balsam tree, used for treating wounds and making perfume. Gilead, a mountainous area east of the Jordan River, was famous for this product. (The Ishmeelites who bought Joseph from his brothers were carrying this balm to Egypt for sale; see [Genesis 37:25](#).)

The Hebrew noun rendered *health* (^a*rûkâ*) describes restoration to soundness. It is also found in the prophetic promise "Thine health [^a*rûkâ*] shall spring forth speedily" ([Isaiah 58:8](#)).

Jeremiah employs the metaphor of a physician to highlight the failure of religious leaders to bring the balm of repentance to Israel—to restore them physically, morally, and spiritually.

from **Section 3**

9 | [Deuteronomy 11:16](#)

Take heed to yourselves, that your heart be not deceived, and ye turn aside, and serve other gods, and worship them.

Translation

Be careful that you are not enticed to turn aside, serve, and bow in worship to other gods.

—Christian Standard Bible

11 | [Matthew 12:22–26, 28](#)

Then was brought unto him one possessed with a devil, blind, and dumb: and he healed him, insomuch that the blind and dumb both spake and saw. And all the people were amazed, and said, Is not this the son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This fellow doth not cast out devils, but by Beelzebub the prince of the devils. And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand: and if Satan cast out Satan, he is divided against himself; how shall then his kingdom stand? . . . But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you.

Because Hebrew law imposed the death penalty for prophets who misled God’s children (see [Deuteronomy 13:1–5](#); [18:20](#)), the Pharisees’ accusation is a serious one. Employing the twin images of kingdom and household, Jesus emphatically denies his cooperation with evil and announces his ability to exercise divine dominion over it. This dominion, he declares, signals that God’s kingdom is no longer a future dream but a present reality.

from **Section 4**

12 | [Ephesians 5:1, 11](#)

Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; . . . And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.

Translation

Do as God does. After all, you are his dear children. . . . Don’t take part in doing those worthless things that are done in the dark. Instead, show how wrong they are.

Here the author embraces familiar New Testament metaphors. Christian acts are likened to light and fruitfulness, worldly acts to darkness and fruitlessness (see examples in [Romans 13:12](#); [Matthew 7:17–20](#)). Believers are not only to avoid sinful acts but to expose and denounce them. A commentary suggests, “A negative attitude of abstention from evil is not sufficient; the Christian must bring the light of his own nature (v. 8) to bear upon them.”

13 | [Acts 8:5–8](#)

Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city.

In this story, Philip the Evangelist carries his ministry into Samaria. Given the long-standing hostility between Jews and Samaritans, this move is significant, introducing the gospel in what had been deemed enemy territory.

Hearing of the Samaritan believers, apostles at Jerusalem dispatch Peter and John to the area (see [vv. 14, 15](#)). A Bible authority observes: “With such a background it was appropriate for the Jerusalem leaders to have a big part in blessing the new Samaritan Christians. It helped them begin their life as Christians with an attitude of warm love toward their traditional enemies. . . . Accepting Samaritans to their fold also involved some major attitude shifts on their part. Therefore, clear evidence that God was in these events was necessary.”

13 | [Acts 8:9–12, 14, 15, 18–22, 24](#)

There was a certain man, called Simon, which beforetime in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. . . . Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John: who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost. . . . And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. . . . Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.

In ancient times, magic wasn't the practice of illusion and artifice for entertainment. It was viewed as a means of communicating with the spirit world and controlling supernatural forces. People looked to wizards for healing, exorcism,

and other miraculous works.

Simon the sorcerer was widely recognized and celebrated. He probably charged for his services—the model he assumes in seeking to purchase the power demonstrated by Philip, Peter, and John. Although Simon willingly undergoes baptism, Peter perceives his insincere motive and condemns it. Simon’s response, however, is not a humble request for regeneration but a plea that he avoid punishment.

Nothing further is known about this magician, called Simon Magus, but later Christian tradition identifies him as one of the first gnostics (philosophers who taught that a secret body of knowledge rather than faith in and understanding of Christ was the way to salvation).

from **Section 5**

14 | [Psalms 80:3](#)

Turn us again, O God, and cause thy face to shine; and we shall be saved.

Translation

God, make us new again.

May you be pleased with us.

Then we will be saved.

—New International Reader’s Version™

15 | [Acts 3:1, 2, 4, 6–8](#)

Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother’s womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; . . . And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us. . . . Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

“The hour of prayer” was one of two times set aside each day for both prayer and sacrifice. The disciples’ offering was spiritual, raising the lame man’s sense of charity from temporary monetary assistance to the lasting gift of healing.

“Ninth hour” indicates a period between 3:00 and 4:30 in the afternoon, depending on the length of days at various times of the year.

from **Section 6**

18 | [I Chronicles 29:11](#)

Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all.

Translation

You are great and powerful, glorious, splendid, and majestic. Everything in heaven and earth is yours, and you are king, supreme ruler over all.

—Good News Translation

19 | [Philippians 4:19](#)

God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Translation

. . . God will meet all your needs. He will meet them in keeping with his wonderful riches. These riches come to you because you belong to Christ Jesus.

—New International Reader’s Version™

Though Paul worked as a tentmaker, he is clear about reliance on God for supply, and accordingly refuses financial gifts from the churches (see, for instance, [vv. 15, 18](#); [I Corinthians 9:13–18](#)). A scholar remarks: “. . . Paul reminds his friends that he is free. He is able to live with abundance, but it is not necessary that he have it. He is able to live in hunger and want, but it is not necessary that he be poor. He is defined neither by wealth nor poverty but by a contentment that transcends both and by a power in Christ which enables him to live in any circumstance.”

Read a related poem, “[The only power](#)” by Barbara Dix Henderson, at cssentinel.com/only-power.

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