III. THE HEALING OF THE PARALYTIKS

(a) Introduction

The Gospels contain a number of references to the healing of paralytics. Elsewhere, too, we find stories about such healings. The Old Testament speaks several times about paralysed limbs, and it is worthy of note that both men and animals were regarded as unsuitable for the cult if they were paralysed. \(^1\) Otherwise paralytics were treated with kindness. \(^2\) Like the blind and the deaf, the lame were also to share in the joy of the aeon of salvation. \(^3\)

In the literature of Antiquity we find many a story about the healing of paralytics. The god Aesculapius healed paralysed fingers; \(^4\) the whole body; \(^5\) knees; \(^6\) and legs. \(^7\) HERZOG believes that we must regard these chiefly as functional disturbances. \(^8\) Emperor Vespasian

1 One of the provisions of the sanctification laws for the priests was that a blind man, ἐπίλος, or a paralytic, θώπος, could not hold priestly office, any more than other physically defective persons, Lev. 21:18. A lame, θώπος, or blind animal could not be sacrificed, Deu. 15:21; cf. Mal. 1:8, 13. The offering had to be without “blemish,” θώπος, cf. Lev. 22:17-25. The lame were therefore in a difficult position in this respect, too; cf. also 2 Sa. 5:8.

2 Mephibosheth, who was lame in both feet, was allowed to eat at “the king’s table,” 2 Sa. 9:13. Cf. 2 Sa. 19:28.

3 Isa. 35:6: “then shall the lame man leap as an hart.” Cf. also Jer. 31:8... Preuss, Bibl.-Talmud. Medizin, gives a detailed survey of “Der Lahme” (pp. 266-270). The pisheach is called “chigger” in the Talmud. “Auch der chigger ist also ein Gelähmter; der Wortbedeutung nach ein Gebunden, dem Sinne nach ein Gelöster, παραλυτικός” (p. 267)... On pp. 351-355 Preuss discusses the “Lähmunen.”

4 HERZOG, Die Wunderheilungen von Epidauros, p. 9, miracle 3: a man could use only one of his fingers; they were “powerless” (ἀκρατεῖς), but were healed. \(^5\) HERZOG, op. cit., p. 15, miracle 15: the man was powerless of body; ἀκρατεῖς τοῦ σώματος ... Miracle 16: Nicanor was lame, χωλός, and recovered when a boy stole his stick: he ran after him... Cf. also p. 23, miracle 35; p. 24 ff., miracle 37; p. 31, miracle 57.

5 HERZOG, op. cit., p. 25, miracle 38.

6 HERZOG, op. cit., p. 33, miracle 64. Demosthenes of X, whose legs were paralysed, had to stay four months in the temple to recover... Propertius, Elegiae, II, 1, 59: “Machaon healed the lame feet of Philoctetes” (Tarda Philoc­tetae sanavit crura Machaon). See EDELSTEIN, Asclepius, I, p. 85... Machaon and Podalirius, “sons” of Aesculapius, were good physicians; see Homer, Iliad.

is credited with the healing of a paralytic in Alexandria. 1 Wise men of India, whom Apollonius of Tyana met on his travels, were capable of healing cripples and paralytics. 2

In the New Testament the healing of paralytics is reported both in the lists of various diseases which were healed by Jesus and in a number of special cases. 3

(b) The man with the withered hand

The Synoptists refer to the healing of the man with the withered hand. 4 The healing took place on a Sabbath, and the conflict about the admissibility of the healing dominates the story. 5 In all probability the healing was performed in the synagogue at Capernaum. 6 The presence of the unfortunate man gave the opponents of Jesus

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1 Tacitus, Hist., IV, 81; Suetonius, Vespasianus, VII. See the translation of the passage concerned in the chapter: Type and Style of the Miracle Stories in the Gospels.
2 Vita Apoll., III, 39: "Then came forward a cripple about thirty years old, who had been a very bold lion-hunter, but by the charge of a lion his hip had been dislocated so that one leg was shorter than the other. By stroking the hip with their hands the Sages restored to the young man the ability to walk naturally. Another, whose eyes had flowed out, went away with the sight fully recovered: and another who had a paralysed hand left their presence cured" (transl. Eells).
3 The word χωλός, claudus, lame, paralysed, halt, occurs in Mt. 11:5; 15:30, 31; 21:14; Lk. 7:22; 14:13; 21; Jn. 5:3; Ac. 3:2; 8:7; 14:8. Cf. the imagery in Mt. 18:8; Mk. 9:45; He. 12:13. The word παραλυτικός, paralytic, sick of the palsy, etc., is used in Mt. 4:24; 8:6; 9:2, 6; Mk. 2:3 ff. Lk. 5:18 ff. speaks of a παραλυτικός, paralyticus. Cf. Ac. 8:7; He. 12:12. The word κυλλός, claudus, maimed, occurs in Mt. 15:30, 31, and metaphorically in Mt. 18:8; Mk. 9:43.
4 Mt. 12:9-14; Mk. 3:1-6; Lk. 6:6-11. Dibelius, Die Formgeschichte, p. 40, classifies the story among the paradigmata; Bultmann, Die Geschichte der synopt. Tradition, p. 9, among the apophthegms (Streit- und Schulgespräche)... Smith, Ecce Deus, p. 34: "Einer der klarsten Fälle von Symbolik findet sich in der Heilung der vertrockneten Hand am Sabbath in der Synagoge. Offenbar ist der Mann das jüdische Volk, das vom Buchstaben des jüdischen Gesetzes und der Überlieferung gelähmt ist, aber zu Kraft und Macht zum Guten wieder hergestellt wird durch den befreienden Jesuskult."
5 See the section on Healing and the Sabbath. It could be derived from Mt. 12:9 that there is a close link with the preceding account. Mk. 3:1 inserts πάλιν, again, a favourite word of Mark’s, which he uses 26 times, whilst Lk. 6:6 speaks of "another sabbath."
6 Dalman, Orte u. Wege, p. 162 ff.: "Es wird ... berechtigt sein, wenn wir die Synagoge von tell-hüm, deren Wiederaufbau hoffentlich nicht versucht wird, für den Neubau derjenigen halten, in welcher Jesus einen Besessenen heilte (Markus 1, 21 ff.; Luk. 4, 31 ff.) und den kraftlosen Arm eines anderen zurechtbrachte (Matth. 12, 9 ff.; Mark. 3, 1 ff.; Luk. 6, 6 ff.)."