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HELLENISTIC COMMENTARY TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

but documentation for this view was lacking from the historical environment. From the Plutarch text it becomes clear that ritually unclean persons could not pass over the threshold without suffering harm themselves or causing it to others. Should this idea be in the background of the New Testament story, then it would have a Greco-Roman milieu. On the introduction of the motif of the man being carried on a litter, cf. Lucian, "Lover of Lies" 11 (120-185 CE).

66. Matthew 9:1-8 / Mark 2:1-12 / Luke 5:17-26

Lucian, *Demonax* 7 (120-185 CE)

He [Demonax] never was known to make an uproar or excite himself or get angry, even if he had to rebuke someone; though he assailed sins, he forgave sinners, thinking that one should pattern after doctors, who heal sicknesses but feel no anger at the sick. He considered that it is human to err, divine or all but divine to set right what has gone amiss. (LCL)

As in the Gospel story, the healing of sickness is associated with conduct with regard to sins, both in the relation between the people concerned (the sick, sinners) and the helper (physician, teacher). In Lucian, however, both are located on another plane than in the New Testament. In Lucian it is a matter of the technique of the physician and the pedagogical conduct of the teacher, while in the Gospel story it is a matter of the divinely given "effortless" exercise of authority. But also in Lucian the dealing with sins is related to God and the godlike man (cf. Mark 2:7 par.).

67. Matthew 9:2 / Mark 2:5 / Luke 5:20

*Jubilees* 41:23-24 (2 cent. BCE)

And he [namely, Judah] began to mourn and make supplication before the LORD on account of his sin. And we [namely, the angels] told him in a dream that it was forgiven him because he made great supplication and because he mourned and did not do it again. (OTP 2:131)

Also elsewhere angels give an authoritative communication that prayers have been heard, including prayers of repentance. In *Jubilees* the angel announces to Judah the forgiveness of sins. Thus the objection of Mark 2:7 par. becomes understandable: only God can forgive sins, and whoever on earth speaks of the forgiveness of sins would have to at least be God's messenger and announce God's word.

68. Matthew 9:2 / Mark 2:5 / Luke 5:20

*Targum of Isaiah* 53 (possibly as late as 1 cent. CE, or as early as 2 cent. BCE)

53.4 Then he will beseech concerning our sins and our iniquities for his sake will be forgiven; yet we were esteemed wounded, smitten before the LORD and afflicted. 53.5 And he will build the sanctuary which was profaned for our sins, handed over for our iniquities;

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and by his teaching his peace will increase upon us, and in that we attach ourselves to his words our sins will be forgiven us. 53.6 All we like sheep have been scattered; we have gone into exile, every one his own way; and before the LORD it was a pleasure to forgive the sins of us all for his sake. 53.11 . . . by his wisdom shall he make innocents to be accounted innocent, to subject many to the law; and he shall beseech concerning their sins.

53.12 . . . yet he will beseech concerning the sins of many, and to the rebels it shall be forgiven for him. (Chilton)

The figure of the Servant of Yahweh is here interpreted messianically, as also elsewhere in the Targum of the prophets. The Messiah is here related to the forgiveness of sins. Specifically, forgiveness occurs (1) through his intercession and (2) by the obeying of his word. (3) God forgives entirely "for his sake." (4) According to v. 11 there may even be intercession for those already counted righteous, so it is assumed that even their sins are charged even after they have been justified. In distinction to this Jewish text, in Mark Jesus himself pronounces the word of forgiveness, of course as God's spokesperson, and so functions as Messiah in a different role than the figure in the *Targum of Isaiah*.

### 69. Matthew 9:5-6/ Mark 2:9-10/ Luke 5:23-24

Josephus, *Antiquities* 10.28 (37-100 CE)

[Concerning King Hezekiah and Isaiah:] . . . and so Hezekiah asked Isaiah to perform some sign or miracle in order that he might believe in him when he said these things, as in one who came from God. For, he said, things that are beyond belief and surpass our hopes are made credible by acts of a like nature. (That is, incredible statements can be accepted only when supported by equally incredible acts.) (LCL)

Forgiveness of sins and healing stand in a similar relation to each other as the two phases of the miracle: at first only announced, but now already accomplished and visible. Cf. also b. Nedarim 41a:

"R. Alexandri said in the name of R. Hiyya b. Abba: A sick man does not recover from his sickness until all his sins are forgiven him, as it is written, Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases (Ps. CIII, 3)." (Soncino)

### 70. Matthew 9:12/ Mark 2:17/ Luke 5:31

Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, "Antisthenes" 6.6 (3 cent. CE)

One day when he (namely, Antisthenes) was censured for keeping company with evil men, the reply he made was, "Well, physicians are in attendance on their patients without getting the fever themselves." (LCL)

The story is of a similar genre to that in Mark: those who criticize the conduct of a teacher are met with a striking retort. But the thrust is different, even though both responses have to do with physicians. Antisthenes, however, emphasizes the distance and nonparticipation in sin, while Jesus points to the neediness of the sick. (Cf. also Diogenes Laertius, *Lives*, "Aristippos" 2.70, no. 66 above; and Berger, *Formgeschichte*, §§25-29.)

