

# OpenTheo

## Syrophenician Woman, 4,000 Fed (Part 2)



### **The Life and Teachings of Christ** - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg unpacks the biblical story of the Syrophenician woman who Jesus healed and fed a multitude of people. Gregg examines the use of the term "healed" and discusses the possibility of the woman being demonized, rather than physically ill. He also delves into the theological implications of suffering and illness, asserting that there is no biblical reason to assume that every sickness is caused by God. Additionally, he explores the possibility that the woman in the story met Mary Magdalene.

### **Transcript**

It can never be God's will for someone to be sick. It's always God's will to heal, because Peter, after all, said that the people that Jesus healed were oppressed by the devil. The assumption is, since the word healed is there, Jesus healed all who were oppressed by the devil, that it must be referring to the sicknesses that he healed.

And since it says they were oppressed by the devil, this would teach us that sickness is an oppression from the devil. Do you understand that logic? I do. I don't agree with it, but I understand it.

If Jesus healed, and that means from sicknesses in their thinking, those who were oppressed by the devil, that means that the sick people that Jesus healed, their sickness was an oppression not, it was not God-imposed, and nor was it simply natural. It wasn't just, you know, they got the wrong virus, you know, something wrong, physiologically wrong, but it was an affliction, oppression from the devil. And therefore, they say, when you're sick, you can see that sickness in every case as the devil's work.

And what you need to do is rebuke the devil, and fight the devil, and resist the devil, and basically that amounts to claiming your healing and not accepting sickness as God's will for your life, ever. And they base it all, almost entirely all, on this statement of Peter, where it says Jesus healed all who were oppressed by the devil. Now, what I'm pointing out to you is that the word healed is used in the Gospels of Jesus casting demons out of people, as well as times when he healed the sick.

And therefore, it's very possible, if not likely, that when Peter speaks of those who were oppressed by the devil, he's really talking about these people that were demonized. And saying that Jesus healed them is just, it's a manner of speaking. He delivered them.

It's a synonym for deliverance. It is, at least, in Matthew 15, a synonym for deliverance, and there's no reason to deny that it would be in Acts 10. Now, I don't know that Peter is meaning to restrict his reference to the cases where Jesus cast out demons.

He might also be including cases where people were healed of sicknesses. But I would say this. You cannot argue, reasonably, that Peter was necessarily talking about all sickness being caused by the devil.

There's a great number of cases where Jesus healed or delivered people who were oppressed by the devil, who were not so much sick as demonized. And that might be what Peter is referring to, and therefore, one could not reasonably, exegetically prove from Acts 10, 38, that all sickness is, in fact, a demonic oppression. As a matter of fact, there are cases where God is said to have afflicted with sickness.

In 1 Corinthians 11, when Paul said that those who eat and drink of the cup of the Lord and the bread at the communion table, he says, when those who do so in an unworthy manner, they eat and drink judgment upon themselves. And he said, for this reason, many are weak and sick among you, and some have died. That is 1 Corinthians 11, verses 29 and 30.

He says, when you eat and drink at the Lord's table unworthily or in an unworthy manner, you eat and drink judgment on yourself. Well, where does this judgment come from? It's the judgment of God. And he says, for this reason, many are sick among you, obviously, as a judgment from God.

And he makes it clear in verse 31, for if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged, but when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord. Now, the judgment of which he speaks is in verse 29. A man drinks judgment to himself by an unworthy and inappropriate behavior at the Lord's table.

And that person being judged is being chastened by the Lord, he says in verse 32. But what form did this chastening take? It took the form of many being weak and sick and some even dying. So we can see that Paul recognized some sickness, even in the church, as being put on people by God as a judgment or as a chastisement.

Therefore, God can use sickness as a means of perfecting or chastising his children. Would he always use the devil or demons? I think not always, but certainly in some cases. We have at least two cases we know of for sure.

One is that of Job, where God allowed Job to be afflicted. In fact, God said that he afflicted Job, and Job said the same thing. Although we know that the devil had a hand in

it, and nothing could be more obvious in the first two chapters of Job.

But after the first wave of trials came on Job, which did not affect his body. They were the loss of his property and his sons and so forth. The first wave of trials in Job chapter 1, they did not actually touch his body.

But then Satan re-approached God and said, now let me touch his body. Let me make him sick. And God said, well, okay, up to this point.

But these afflictions that came on Job, we know Job chapters 1 and 2 say the devil is the one who brought them. But notice how God speaks about it. For example, in Job 2 and verse 3, it says, Then the Lord said to Satan, Have you considered my servant Job? This is after the first wave of trials have come.

That there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil. And still he holds fast to his integrity, although you incited me against him to destroy him without cause. God says that he was personally incited to destroy Job, or at least his property in this case, his estate, but without cause.

That means, of course, there was no cause in Job. It wasn't because Job greatly feared it. It wasn't because Job had a lack of faith.

It was without cause. This was just a test. And Job did nothing to bring it upon himself.

God says so himself. Furthermore, it says in Job chapter 1, verse 21, When all these things first befell Job, in Job 1, verse 21, he said, Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.

The Lord gave and who took away? He didn't say the Lord gave and the devil took away. He said the Lord gave and the Lord took away. Blessed be the name of the Lord.

Now some say, well, there's where he made his mistake. He didn't realize it was the devil who did it. He's blaming God for what the devil did.

But look at verse 22. In all this, Job did not sin or charge God with wrong. The writer of the book of Job approves of Job's comment here and says it wasn't wrong for him to say it.

And then if you go out to the next chapter, and his wife comes to him after he's been afflicted with sickness. In verse 9, his wife said to him, Do you still hold to your integrity? Curse God and die. Verse 10, But he said to her, You speak as one of the foolish women speaks.

Shall we indeed accept good from God and shall we not accept adversity? It's implied from God also. Shall we accept only one thing from God and not the other thing from him also? And notice the comment, In all this, he did not sin with his lips. Notice he spoke the

right way.

He didn't say anything wrong about God. So the book of Job points out that the devil was an instrument in bringing afflictions to Job. But it also says that God was the one who took it away.

God is the one who sent adversity. And that's obvious too from reading the account. As one writer said, No matter who brings your suffering, it's always God who sent it.

And Paul, in talking about the thorn in his flesh in 2 Corinthians 12, said that there was given to him. He doesn't say who gave it, but it sounds like it was God who gave it. He says, There is given to me a thorn in my flesh.

Then he said, A messenger from Satan sent to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. Now, the word of faith people say, Well, you see, it's a messenger of Satan. This was the devil, not God, who afflicted Paul.

But Paul said that he was afflicted by this messenger of Satan so that, this is the reason for it, so that he, Paul, would not be exalted above measure. In other words, was it the devil who didn't want Paul to be exalted above measure, or was it God who didn't want him exalted above measure? It's clear that the devil had a hand in it because Paul said it was a messenger of Satan who was involved. But who gave him this messenger of Satan to keep him from being exalted above measure? Was it the devil who wanted to keep Paul humble, or was it God? Well, that becomes clear as he goes on.

He prays against it, and three times he asks God to take it away, but God says, No. No, my grace is sufficient for you. My strength is made perfect in your weakness.

I want you this way. So, even though the devil was in it, God was behind it. And therefore, we know that it is true.

Some cases, at least, of sickness are caused, at least through the instrumentation of the devil. Although, God must be the one who wills it in the life of the believer, or else the devil can't do it. Other times, God directly afflicts.

He touched the sinew of Jacob's leg and crippled him for life. This was a direct touch from God. The devil wasn't involved at all.

And then, of course, we have every reason to believe, though the Bible doesn't state it so outright, no doubt some sickness is just caused by germs. It's not caused by the devil or by God. It's just caused by germs.

Although, this can't hit you either without God's permission because he's clearly superior to the germs. And he could kill them or prevent them from coming into you and affecting you. But, the point is, there is no biblical reason to assume that every sickness is caused

by the same thing, with the exception that we have to say God is behind it, God uses it, and sometimes he may wish to remove it through our prayers.

Other times, he may wish to use it and keep it there in place, as in the case of Paul and his thorn, whatever that may have been. So, the point I'm making is, while it is very common to hear people use Acts 10.38 as a proof that sickness is always of the devil, that argument rests entirely on the fact that Peter uses the verb healed. He healed all who were oppressed by the devil and therefore assumes that he's referring to sick people when he talks about those who were oppressed by the devil.

But, in fact, if he were talking about the demon-possessed people that Jesus relieved, he might have used the word healed and that would fit just as well, if not better, as the meaning of Peter's statement. We can't be sure what Peter was saying, but in view of the fact that Matthew speaks of a girl who was relieved of demons and says she was healed, that is very possible that Peter used the same language and meant the same thing. Okay, Janie, your hand was up during that diatribe.

Uh-huh. Well, who sent the fire and brimstone down to Sodom and Gomorrah? The devil. You know? Who sent the flood on the world of the ungodly? The devil.

That's true, but where is he going to find one? You know? I mean, who among us can say we don't deserve worse than we get? You know, no matter how bad we get it. Who can really say, I am so righteous that God has no right to deprive me of X, Y, Z comforts or provisions or whatever it may be that I wish I had. If God takes anything from me, I can't claim that he's got no right to it and that somehow I've earned better by my good behavior.

Anyone who thinks they can doesn't know what a dog they are. You know? Yeah, David's choice is in that he had the choice of being afflicted by man or by God. He preferred to be afflicted by God because he knew God's more fair and also more merciful than man.

But that's a good point. When David chose between the various options for judgment, he had the choice of either being afflicted directly by God or by the angel of the Lord, which is presumably, in the Old Testament, is treated as if the angel of the Lord is God, or else by people. That would be evil people.

And that would mean that God would be turning him over to his enemies and letting them do whatever they wanted, and he'd rather not have that happen. Even though the affliction that would come from his enemies in such a case could be seen as coming from God, since it's God who gave him the choice, if you want this, that, or the other thing, okay, I'll send your enemies against you. But David knew that if God sends the enemies, they don't always pull their punches as much as God might.

I think we talked about this not too many weeks ago. I remember somewhere that I was,

and I think it might have been when I was in Santa Cruz recently. It was either there or somewhere else other than here.

I was talking to somebody, and they said they had real problems with reading Lamentations and reading about the horrendous things that happened to the Jews and just thinking how God could judge people so severely. There's no question that what befell the Jews at the hands of the Babylonians was the judgment from God. And therefore, they just figured everything that happened must have been God's doing because these people would dash their babies against the stones and so forth.

And they said, how could God do such a thing as that? And my understanding is that the judgment of God was that he left the Jews unprotected from their enemies. The specific things their enemies did were not inspired by God. God didn't inspire the Babylonians to do these horrible atrocities.

That was what Babylonians did to everybody. Babylonians doing that. The judgment was that God didn't protect the Jews from this kind of stuff as he ordinarily would if he had no reason to judge them.

He would have protected the Jews from the Babylonians as he earlier protected them from the Assyrians when he sent an angel out to kill 185,000 Assyrian troops outside the gates of Jerusalem. He could have done that to the Babylonians too, but they were in such rebellion against God, that is the Jews were, that he just took off his protection. The Babylonians did their will, not God's, in a sense.

It was God's will for them to be taken into captivity. But as to the specific acts of cruelty and rape and torture and so forth, those were things that the Babylonians themselves imagined. There are places in the prophets where God complains about these oppressors and says, I was angry at my people a little, but you guys carried forward the suffering far more than I would have ever done myself.

And David apparently understood that too. If God turns me over to my enemies, if God removes the protection from my enemies that he's currently given me, who knows what horrible things may befall me at their hands. But if I just put myself in God's hands and let him punish me, I know he wouldn't be quite as cruel as all that.

That's what David's assumption was. I'm thinking, there is a, I think it's an Amos that the passage I'm thinking of comes from. It says that I was a little angry at my people, but these oppressors, they just carried it forward far worse than they needed to.

I don't see it at the moment. Anyway, that might even be a different passage. But I have a vague remembrance of a passage in the prophets where God was criticizing either the Assyrians or the Babylonians or someone like that who had been released by God on the nation of Israel and had done a tremendous amount of damage.

And God complains about the cruelty of these people. And he said, you went a lot further than I intended. I was a little angry, but you guys really acted like I was more angry than I was.

In other words, the judgment of God is not that he specifically ordains specific acts of cruelty, but that he just removes his protection from his people. And then they're at the mercy of merciless people. That's not a very good place to be, and David didn't choose that.

But David's choice did show that he understood, and certainly the text reveals that God does afflict. God plagued people. And anyone who wants to say that it was the devil doing it is going to have an interesting exegetical problem trying to identify the angel of the Lord with the devil, which is not the way the Bible speaks.

Now, we're a little on time. Let's try to finish up this chapter here. Matthew 15, 29, And Jesus departed from there, skirted the Sea of Galilee, and went up on the mountain and sat down.

So apparently he came back down into the country, or maybe he was on the eastern shore, I guess. Yeah, at this point he probably wasn't back in the country. He probably skirted the Sea of Galilee to the east and found himself on the eastern side of it.

It says, Then great multitudes came to him, having with them those who were lame, blind, mute, maimed, and many others. And they laid them down at Jesus' feet, and he healed them. So the multitude marveled when they saw the mute speaking, and the maimed made whole, the lame walking, and the blind seeing, and they glorified the God of Israel.

Now probably the saddest thing about this passage is it doesn't seem that remarkable to us. We're so accustomed to reading of Jesus healing all the sick, and casting out all the demons, and raising the dead, and curing lepers, and so forth, that this passage reads as, Oh, another one of those paragraphs, you know. But, you know, if you were there, you no doubt would marvel, like the people did.

The multitude marveled when they saw people who were mute actually talking. People who were maimed, their limbs were straightened, and no doubt, I mean, who knows what maimed may include. Maybe they'd lost limbs, and they were regenerated.

Who can say? You know, I mean, incredible things were happening. We're just, by now, accustomed to Jesus doing these incredible things. They almost become ordinary in the narrative.

But that's one of the saddest things about it, is that this passage is incredibly remarkable in terms of what it's describing, but not so remarkable in terms of what we've become accustomed to. That's fairly normal. Jesus is just healing people again.

Even the Gospels themselves sometimes take a bit of a ho-hum attitude after Jesus' tremendous healings have been explained. Remember when we talked about Jesus going to Nazareth the second time. I think it's in Mark.

It says, Jesus couldn't do many mighty works there. He just laid his hands on a few sick people and healed them, you know. And he marveled that they had so little faith.

He couldn't do much. Just healed a few people instantaneously with laying on of hands. And it's almost like healings of this sort became such common daily fare in the life of Jesus that the writer doesn't even bother to list specific cases or give details.

Just, you know, some maimed people were made whole and some people couldn't talk ever, were not speaking normally and so forth. But, you know, just another one of those days in the life of Jesus. Then we have something a little more unusual, although not unprecedented.

Then Jesus called his disciples to him and said, I have compassion on the multitude because they've now continued with me three days and have nothing to eat and I do not want to send them away hungry lest they faint on the way. Then his disciples said to him, Where could we get enough bread in the wilderness to feed such a great multitude? Jesus said to them, How many loaves do you have? And they said, Seven and a few little fish. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the ground and he took the seven loaves and the fish and gave them, excuse me, gave thanks and broke them and gave them to the disciples and the disciples gave them to the multitude.

So they all ate and were filled and they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left. Now those who ate were four thousand men besides women and children. And he sent them away, sent away the multitude and got into the boat and came to the region of Magdala.

Now, there are some people who have felt, liberals especially, who don't put much historical credence in the Gospels, that this is just another version of the story of the feeding of the five thousand. That, you know, that there were a couple of different traditions floating around, both sparked by the same incident. And one tradition held that there were five thousand fed from twelve loaves, excuse me, five loaves and two fishes.

And that there was another tradition floating around about the same incident, but the details were somewhat skewed in this other tradition. And it was really, you know, said to be four thousand from seven loaves and a few fishes. I mean, the similarities are great in the two stories.

And that's just the kind of thing that arouses suspicion in liberals who are always trying to find things to doubt in the Bible. I mean, when you find the story of Abraham going



down into Egypt in Genesis 12 and saying that Sarah is his sister, and then later him going to Gerar in the land of the Philistines and saying the same thing about Sarah, and then later find Isaac saying the exact same thing in Gerar about his wife Rebecca, the temptation is overwhelming to the liberal to say, oh, certainly there's only one story that these are three variant traditions of, and, you know, the details have simply been preserved separately and, you know, one author thought it was Isaac who did this. Another author thought it was Abraham.

The tradition became a bit muddled in the retelling. And here we have the surviving three different traditions of the same incident, which may have been fictitious in the first place anyway, as far as they're concerned. Now, I don't hold that view.

As far as I'm concerned, all three of those stories are true and happened on separate occasions. Likewise, the feeding of the multitudes, although this story has almost nothing about it that, you know, there's no lessons in this story that weren't already in the story of the feeding of the 5,000, nothing about it more miraculous. If anything, it's less miraculous than the feeding of the 5,000 because the 5,000, a larger number, were fed from a smaller number of loaves, five and two fishes, where here a smaller number of people are fed from a larger number of loaves, seven.

Furthermore, there was a larger remnant of food in the previous parable. After Jesus fed a larger number of people from a smaller number of people, there were 12 baskets left over of food, where here there were seven baskets full only. So, I mean, in a sense, this is almost an anti-climax, reading this story after reading the story of the feeding of the 5,000.

One thing it does tell us, though, we know that in John chapter 6, that after Jesus fed the 5,000, the very next day he alienated most of his audience. Most of those 5,000 he fed before had left him, having been put off by his hard sayings. And he seems to have been left with none more, or at least not many more than just his 12 after his sermon about the bread of life.

But by this time, he had gathered again some popularity, not quite the same size crowd, but quite nearly so. He was in a different region, and these may have been entirely different people. But we see that he was able to draw a crowd still at this point, although it was a smaller group.

But as far as the evidence of whether these are really two separate incidents, or two accounts, two traditions based on one original story, I think it becomes clear when you read the sequel in chapter 16, which we won't study today, but I'll just draw your attention to it, that when Jesus said to his disciples, beware of the 11 of the Pharisees and Sadducees in chapter 16, verse 6, the disciples, who had neglected to acquire sufficient food before crossing the lake, thought he was referring to how little bread they had. We'll talk about this in more detail later. And yet, when he told them they were

missing his point entirely, he reminded them of both incidents where he had fed the multitudes, and he treats them as separate cases.

He says in verse 9, Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the 5,000, and how many baskets you took up, nor the seven loaves of the 4,000, and how many large baskets you took up? Certainly, there's no indication here that we've got one incident that somehow two versions of the same incident got confused. In this Saint of Jesus, he acknowledges that there were a couple of different times when they had seen him feed multitudes from small amounts. All I can say is that whatever lesson there may be in the feeding of the 4,000, it is a separate incident from the feeding of the 5,000, but the same lessons are in it.

Whatever lessons those may be. Namely, that Jesus was the bread of life, but there are also corollary lessons. The fact that Jesus and his disciples need never fear for lack of provision, even a very little bit in the hand of Jesus can go a long way.

We know that in the Old Testament, Elijah stayed for three and a half years during a famine with a woman, a widow of Zarephath, who upon his arrival had only a little bit of meal and a little bit of oil, enough to make one biscuit, which she intended to eat with her son and then die. But because she obeyed the prophet's words and gave him the food first, God miraculously multiplied the food, so she had enough grain and enough oil miraculously appearing in her basket for three and a half years to feed them all. This is similar to the multiplication of the loaves, starting out with a little bit, but God multiplying it supernaturally.

So in the hand of Jesus, if your life is in his hands, you never have to fear that he will be unable to provide for you, and that certainly was one of the lessons of this too, although it's probably not the central lesson. Yes, Jefferson? She was a Gentile, a woman of Zarephath. Another thing I might point out, and this is spiritualizing the story a little bit, and I'm not sure that we're wrong to do so, since Jesus himself spiritualized the feeding of the 5,000 in his sermon about being himself the bread of life.

We often may feel that we don't have much to offer God or to offer the world, as far as that goes. There is a sense in which, having become Christians, our eyes have been opened to the starving world, starving not only for bread but for spiritual food, starving for the knowledge of God. It says in Amos 8, verse 11, Behold, I send a famine, not a famine for bread nor a thirst for water, but a famine for hearing the word of the Lord.

And that famine is observable. And once you've become aware of the Lord, you certainly become aware of how destitute and starving the world is for the knowledge of him. And yet, you may feel like, how can we in such a desert place, and I with so little to offer, so little talent, such a low IQ, so little money, so few opportunities, how can I make an impact? How can I feed this great multitude out here that's perishing for lack of knowledge of God? Well, that's exactly how the disciples wondered, how could we feed

this multitude with so few pieces of bread that we have available? But Jesus, in the first instance, in John 6, when he fed the multitude, he said to the disciples, what do you have? How much do you have? Let's take stock.

Well, only five loaves and two fishes, but what is that for so great a multitude? That won't do us much good. Jesus said, well, just give me that. Just give me that much, and we'll see what we can do.

And by breaking it, and blessing it, and multiplying it, Jesus was able to take that little that was there originally and make it adequate, supernaturally adequate to meet the needs of the people. And certainly, spiritually speaking, he can take what little you may think you have in terms of the littleness of your knowledge or of your skills or talents or your grasp of spiritual truths, as little as you may judge them to be. He can take such things, and he can multiply them and bless them and feed people with them to a greater extent than you would have thought imaginable.

And perhaps that lesson is in this, too. Because Jesus said to his disciples, you give them something to eat. And certainly that's what he's told us to do for the world, rather than to give them something spiritually to eat.

So, there you go. The last word in chapter 15 of Matthew is Magdala, the name of the place he retreated to. In Mark's version, we're told he went to somewhere called Dalmanutha.

I'm going to have to assume those were either terms, one would be a term for the general region and the other name would be a more specific name, or else they're interchangeable terms for the same place. But the name Magdala calls to mind a particular character about whom we know only little in the Gospels, and that is the woman named Mary, Mary of Magdala, or we call her Mary Magdalene. Magdalene means she was from a place called Magdala.

It is possible that it is on this visit to Magdala that Jesus encountered this woman. We're told elsewhere in Scripture that she had seven demons cast out of her. And so, we are never told at what point in Jesus' ministry that occurred.

We only find that later in his ministry she is one of his loyal followers, and of course, the first at the tomb after his resurrection. And so, it's very possible that it is on this particular occasion when Jesus went to Magdala that he met this woman, a demon possessed with seven demons, cast them out, and she became one of his most affectionate and loyal followers. But we can't be sure.

It's just that this is the only time in the whole Bible we read about Magdala, and therefore, it's possible that this is when he met the Magdalene. But the story is not related. Okay, well, as far as we've got today, we'll take 16 minutes.