



August 2021

VACCINATION: BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Jiří Moskala, ThD, PhD Dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University Professor of Old Testament Exegesis and Theology

The word vaccination does not occur in the Bible as is the case with many other important health terms like vitamins, transfusion, high blood pressure, kidney transplant, injection, pills, carbohydrates, biopsy, body temperature, blood clots, diabetes, etc. Biblical writers do not use phrases like preventive medicine, psycho-somatic connections, cardio-vascular exercise, do not smoke, breathe fresh air, drink 6–8 glasses of water every day, wash your hands before each meal, brush your teeth, regularly eat breakfast, do not drink alcohol, or daily obtain sufficient sleep of 7–9 hours. One could create a long list of such good practices which are not verbally addressed in Scriptures.

Similarly, there is no biblical command, “Be vaccinated” or “Don’t be vaccinated,” therefore one needs to reason whether to be or not to be vaccinated. Biblical teaching can help to counter the mis- and dis-information on health issues even though it is not a medical textbook on health because the Holy Scriptures present important health principles that are to be the bases of such reflections, are very beneficial, and need to be implemented into our everyday routines of life. The general rule is plain: What is in harmony with biblical health principles and does not contradict them is permissible. One can argue that it may be recommended or even required when health or life is to be preserved.

Allowed are activities which are in congruence with God’s revelation even though they are not directly mentioned in the Bible (like having Sabbath School or potlucks on Sabbath; celebrating the Lord’s Supper once in three months; building schools, universities, libraries, hospitals, and sanatoria; organizing the Church structure with Conferences, Unions, Divisions, and General Conference). In other words, forbidden is (1) what is in contradiction to the explicit command of God, and (2) is in opposition to general principles of life expressed in the Word of God.

These two principles are plainly in harmony with the first two commandments given by God in the Garden of Eden to Adam. “And the LORD God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die’” (Gen 2:16 NIV). Note well that God first commanded freedom by creating for humans

a safe space for life and growth (general rule), and then He put clear boundaries: you cannot eat from one tree, "from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (specific command). It was not necessary to enumerate all that was allowed (like you may eat from the apple, orange, fig, pear, banana, peach, cherry, apricot, and pomegranate trees), because it was included in the general statement, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden." However, the specific prohibition had to be stated explicitly. The same is true and must be applied to vaccinations: what is not prohibited is acceptable when it is in harmony with God's revealed health principles.

In addition, the importance of vaccinations from the biblical-theological perspective can be demonstrated from different angles. Prayerfully consider the following principles:

- 1.** Only God is the Healer, the true Physician who heals our diseases (Deut 7:15; 28:60; Ps 103:3; Luke 4:40; 6:18; 7:21). In Exodus 15:26 God promised that no disease (or plague) He sent upon Egypt would fall on Israelites if they followed His commands. He will also protect His people during the seven last plagues as He protected Israel from the Egyptian plagues, and He will help with other sicknesses or diseases. He is the Source and Giver of life for His children; He gives abundant life (John 11:25; 14:6). Medicine and different remedies can be beneficial, however, only the Lord preserves and restores health.
- 2.** God created humans in His image (Gen 1:27) as intelligent beings to use their minds to reason and acquire knowledge and discern what is right, good, and profitable. Humans also need to apply common sense to the problems of life. We are rational beings, and our Creator gives us the ability to think and know what works best for our health. Our Lord wants us to take care of our bodies and live responsible lives because we are accountable to Him. Paul plainly states: "Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies" (1 Cor 6:19-20 NIV; cf. 1 Cor 3:16-17; 2 Cor 5:10). Our spiritual health is closely connected to our physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being. One does not need to have a direct "thus says the Lord" to know what to do or not to do because results and benefits of many of our decisions and actions are obvious. However, whatever we do should spring from biblical principles. Vaccination is a human product, but a result of God's capacities given to humans to think and be creative. God gives wisdom for research and inventions (Dan 12:4). He created the marvelous, intricate immune system as a defense; it is the foundation upon which vaccines and immunization work (Ps 139:14).
- 3.** One cannot expect that God will work for us when we overlook basic principles of life and are negligent, biased, or lazy to implement them. It is not enough to pray for knowledge, but one needs to diligently study; it is not enough to ask for God's intervention for reaping a good harvest and then not be willing to till the fields and work hard on maintaining the crop. In the same way, it would be presumptuous and arrogant on our part to ask God to give us good health and neglect health principles, and not be willing to study and apply the results of modern medicine which He enabled to be discovered to help suffering humanity. One needs to work diligently under God's guidance and blessing: "Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain" (Ps 127:1 ESV).
- 4.** God wants us to preserve health in the best possible shape and conditions (3 John

1:2), not only to live longer, but to be able to serve others and be useful for as long as possible. Why die prematurely only because we neglect remedies that are available to protect and prolong our lives thus enabling us to be a blessing to others?

5. God commands that we protect life and care for the health of our neighbors (Lev 19:18; Ezek 34:4, 16). To be vaccinated is an unselfish act because one thinks about the wellbeing and protection of others. Even though there are some unknowns in the long-term research and its effects, the benefits of the vaccination outrun its potential problems. To be vaccinated is an act of kindness because vaccinations are helping to protect others from becoming seriously sick or even dying, and thereby building community or herd immunity.

6. Prayers for healing and vitality do not annul the use of different remedies, surgeries, medicines, or vaccinations. Knowing how to apply them all depends on life's situations. Several examples come to mind from biblical material. God could have miraculously and instantaneously healed the dying King Hezekiah by His power, but instead He chose to heal him through the remedy of a fig poultice (2 Kgs 20:5-7; Isa 38:21). God promised to heal him, yet the bandage of figs had to be applied to his wound. Jesus could have healed a blind man by His word, but He used mud mixed with His saliva for this purpose. The blind man also had to go and wash his eyes in the pool of Siloam in order to receive his sight (John 9:1, 6-7). Thus, we are taught how to collaborate with God. In addition, Moses healed the bitter waters by adding a piece of wood (Exod 15:23-25). The close cooperation between God and humans is seen in the situation of "the deadly stew" when Elisha added more flour, and it became edible (2 Kgs 4:38-41) as well as in the case of Naaman who had to go and wash in the River Jordan seven times to be healed of his leprosy (2 Kgs 5:10-14). In all these instances, God could have performed miracles of healing simply by prayer, but He chose to give lessons of collaborating closely between God and people by using available remedies. Vaccines, too, are instruments to preserve health and stop the spread of disease. Ellen White affirms: "It is no denial of faith to use rational remedies judiciously" (Manuscript 31, 1911 published in 2SM 346).

7. Prevention is always more important than actual healing. To avoid being sick is a biblical obligation (John 10:10; 1 Cor 6:20; 3 John 2) because we need to glorify our Creator also with our bodies. Staying safe and keeping family and community safe should be our motivation. Health is not primarily about vaccination but about establishing and developing a balanced lifestyle resulting in being in good shape to serve God and others in need in a most efficient way for a long time. Ellen White admonishes: "Train the people to correct habits and healthful practices, remembering that an ounce of prevention is of more value than a pound of cure. Lectures and studies in this line will prove of the highest value" (Letter 17a, 1893 published in 2SM 280). Vaccination is about preventing a virus from spreading within us and through us to others which may be deadly. Vaccination is nothing magical; it must be supported by intelligent choices in life. It is important before taking a vaccination to cultivate one's prayer life, healthy lifestyle, witnessing, and trust in God, but these activities point to vaccination when there is a need for it, is available, and should be applied according to our best knowledge and health conditions.

8. Medical science and faith work closely together and must be applied hand to hand. They are complementary. Creativity and ingenuity are God's gifts. The evidence of science is transparently clear, namely, vaccines save lives, and the side effects are mostly minor and short-term. Many positives overwhelmingly outweigh minimal negatives and health risks. Ellen White states: "God is the author of science.

Scientific research opens to the mind vast fields of thought and information, enabling us to see God in His created works. Ignorance may try to support skepticism by appealing to science; but instead of upholding skepticism, true science contributes fresh evidences of the wisdom and power of God. Rightly understood, science and the written word agree, and each sheds light on the other. Together they lead us to God by teaching us something of the wise and beneficent laws through which He works" (CT 426).

It is a gross misuse of Scripture to claim that taking a vaccination against COVID-19 is receiving the book of Revelation's mark of the beast and that it will change your DNA (misinformation connected to the confusion with the mRNA basis of the vaccination against corona virus and SARS). Various conspiracy theories terribly misapply biblical texts to create fear and dependency on false "teachers." Biblical prophets do not speak against vaccinations. Let me state it clearly: vaccination has nothing to do with the mark of the beast or with false Babylonian teaching for the following reasons:

- A.** The mark of the beast is a false religious system which opposes God, His people, and His law.
- B.** The mark of the beast is about the distortion of God's character of love by accepting the non-biblical teaching regarding Sunday sacredness and the immortality of the soul, including eternal torture in hell.
- C.** The mark of the beast is about false worship with its poisonous Babylonian teaching.

The seal of God, on the other hand, is to experience the true rest in Jesus Christ in its fulness by living and keeping the biblical Sabbath as a sign of Creation and redemption, and the expression of faithfulness to biblical comprehensive doctrines centered in the Triune God. The seal of God consists of loving and honoring God and giving Him glory as our Creator and Savior. It is about the restoration of believers to reflect God's image in our character and lifestyle. This integrates and restores our physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and social life by God's grace, through His Word, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

Our biblical-theological reflections are supported and confirmed by the practice of Ellen White because she was herself vaccinated and encouraged others to do so for two reasons: (1) personal health benefits enable us to efficiently serve others; and (2) not to transmit disease and contaminate others. True, Ellen White did not write about vaccination, not a single statement. However, we know that she encouraged others to take a smallpox vaccination, and she took it herself according to eyewitness D. E. Robinson, one of Mrs. White's secretaries, as reported in the second volume of Selected Messages: Ellen White "was vaccinated and urged her helpers, those connected with her, to be vaccinated" (2 SM 303). She was aware that it would protect her as well as others: "She also recognized the danger of their exposing others if they failed to take this precaution" (2 SM 303). Ellen White wisely advised: "Those who seek healing by prayer should not neglect to make use of the remedial agencies within their reach. It is not a denial of faith to use such remedies as God has provided to alleviate pain and to aid nature in her work of restoration. It is no denial of faith to co-operate with God, and to place themselves in the condition most favorable to recovery. God has put it in our power to obtain a knowledge of the laws of life. This knowledge has been placed within our reach for use. We should employ every facility for the restoration of health, taking every advantage possible, working in harmony with natural laws. When we have prayed for the recovery of the sick, we

can work with all the more energy, thanking God that we have the privilege of co-operating with Him, and asking His blessing on the means which He Himself has provided" (MH 231-232).

Conclusion

The above biblical-theological principles need to be carefully studied. Believers should discern the benefits of these principles and see how they help them to cultivate a balanced, healthy lifestyle as well as taking vaccinations. Vaccines can save lives by stopping the spread of disease, but if one waits too long, it may be too late. One prevents serious disease complications by their use. We should pray and thoughtfully apply what God makes available for us to preserve life and also protect others from being harmed.

We did not find any biblical command or regulations that would stop or forbid people from being vaccinated. On the contrary, based on the biblical material, one can strongly recommend such practice to people who have no specific serious health preconditions, and in consultation with their healthcare providers. If our bodies are not our own, and we are accountable to God how we have cared for them, and if God will require an account of our love toward our neighbor, then to care for our own health as well as for health of our neighbor is a must. Paul emphatically states that "whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (1 Cor 10:31 NIV). By taking concrete actions to protect our health, we honor and glorify the LORD; and the wise, responsible use of vaccination can be one such action.

We need to pray for divine wisdom and knowledge to know how to be well informed and make mature decisions. Evidence-based science is beneficial in this decision process because we can thus choose the best available options in given life situations. Such an approach is affirmed by Ellen G. White. The result may be missiological as she aptly states: "If they [unbelievers] see that we are intelligent with regard to health, they will be more ready to believe that we are sound in Bible doctrines." (Counsels on Health, p. 452) On the other hand, she clearly warns: "But when men advocate reform, and carry the matter to extremes, and are inconsistent in their course of action, people are not to blame if they do become disgusted with the health reform. . . . These men are doing a work which Satan loves to see go on." (2T 377).

COVID fatigue can be overcome if we allow God to guide us. May our gracious Lord grant us discernment and power to act unselfishly according to His will so that we can be blessed by Him and be a blessing to others. Ellen White wisely advises: "God's miracles do not always bear the outward semblance of miracles. Often they are brought about in a way which looks like the natural course of events. When we pray for the sick, we also work for them. . . . We are to use every blessing God has placed within our reach for the deliverance of those in danger. . . . We ask to be kept from the pestilence that walketh in darkness, that is stalking with such power through the world; we are then to cooperate with God, observing the laws of health and life. Having done all that we possibly can, we are to keep asking in faith for health and strength. . . . God gives us no encouragement that He will do for us what we can do for ourselves" (Letter 66, 1901 published in 2SM 346). In the light of the outlined biblical-theological principles in this study, it is significant that Ellen White chose to be vaccinated both for herself and for the benefit of the community. Our prayer is that you will be guided through prayerful consideration to make the best decisions that will preserve health and service in the mission of the Lord and Church we love.

This document is the property of GC Adventist Health Ministries and subject to prevailing copyright protection.

Publication link:

<https://www.healthministries.com/vaccination-biblical-theological-reflection>

