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DOCTRINE OF THE **LAYING ON** **OF HANDS**

As with so many of the other doctrines of the New Testament, the Doctrine of Laying on of Hands has its roots and origin in the Old Testament. The LORD JESUS himself practiced it, and we see it in the New Testament Church, not only in the Acts, but also in the Epistles.

THE OLD TESTAMENT

We find the first occurrence of laying on of hands is in the book of Genesis. On realising that his earthly life was drawing to a close, Jacob told his son Joseph to bring his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh to him, that he might bless them. When Joseph, because of his father's blindness, guided Ephraim to Jacob's left hand, and Manasseh to his right hand, the old man crossed his hands, so as to lay the RIGHT on Ephraim, and the LEFT on Manasseh. We read in the passage that Joseph was displeased but Jacob was adamant. The greater blessing would belong to Ephraim. Thus we see here the laying on of hands for the impartation of blessing. Jacob was prophesying, concerning the future of his grandsons. Gen 48:1-22.

When we come to the book of Leviticus, we see in Lev 1:4 that when the Israelite brought a burnt offering to the LORD, he was to lay his hands on it, and then it would be accepted for him to make atonement for him. By his act of laying his hands on the BURNT OFFERING, he was identifying himself with it, and it was accepted on his behalf. See also Lev 8:14.

Similarly, with the PEACE OFFERING, the offerer was to lay his hands upon the sacrifice, and slay it. Thus he was identified with the animal offered, and it, vicariously, bore the penalty that should have been his, symbolically. Lev 3:2.

The same held good for the SIN OFFERING, where the person who was making the offering followed the same procedure. Lev 4:4.

On the DAY OF ATONEMENT, the HIGH PRIEST was enjoined to lay his hands upon the LIVE GOAT, CONFESSING OVER IT ALL THE INIQUITIES OF THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL. The GOAT then, symbolically, bore ALL THEIR INIQUITIES into a land that was not inhabited. Lev 16:20-22.

When the son of an ISRAELITISH woman blasphemed the name of the LORD and cursed, Moses was commanded to bring him without the camp, ALL THOSE WHO HEARD HIM WERE TO LAY THEIR HANDS ON HIS HEAD, and then the CONGREGATION was to stone him with stones. Lev 24:10-16. Thus the WITNESSES of the crime laid their hands upon the evildoer.

Then in Num 8:5-22, where we see the consecration of the Levites, the children of Israel were to lay their hands on them, in the presence of the LORD, so that they could execute the service of the LORD on behalf of Israel.

JOSHUA the son of NUN was also consecrated to follow MOSES, by the laying on of hands. See Num 27:18-23; Deut 34:9. Professor James Orr says concerning this, "The primary idea seems to be that of conveyance or transference (cf Lev 16:21), but, conjoined with this, in certain instances, are the ideas of identification and of devotion to God." I.S.B.E.1335.

THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

The LORD JESUS also laid his hands on men and women. There are certain passages recording some instances, but there must have been many more occasions when the LORD laid hands on those who were needy.

We saw JACOB blessing his grandsons, so, too, the LORD JESUS, we are told in Matt 19:15 and Mark 10:16, laid his hands upon the little children, and he blessed them.

Then the LORD JESUS laid his hands upon those who were in need of healing. We are told in Matt 9:18 that Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue in Capernaum, came to JESUS and worshipped him saying, "My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay thy hand upon her, and she shall live."

Mark 5:23 records the same story, and request on the part of Jairus, and while the text does not record the LORD JESUS doing so, (we read only that he took her hand, Mk 5:41), this does indicate that the practice was not alien to Jairus, nor to the ministry of the LORD JESUS, or else, why would such a request be made?

In fact, we are told by Luke in his gospel that, during the ministry of the LORD JESUS in Capernaum, "When the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with diverse diseases brought them unto him; and HE LAID HIS HANDS ON EVERY ONE OF THEM, and healed them." Luke 4:40.

As this incident took place much earlier in the ministry of JESUS, it is not beyond the bounds of probability that Jairus, as the ruler of the synagogue, was there at the time, and, in his time of need, knew that he could go to the LORD, and ask him to come and lay hands on his little daughter.

Luke also records the incident when a woman who had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years, and was bowed together, was seen by the LORD JESUS. We read, "He called and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And he laid hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God." Luke 13:13.

We also read in Mark 6:5, how, when the LORD visited his hometown of Nazareth, the people were filled with unbelief, and were offended at him. Mark writes, "He could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands upon a few sick folk, and healed them."

LAYING ON OF HANDS FOR OUR DAY AND AGE

Before the Lord JESUS departed he gave his great commission to the disciples. He said, "These signs shall follow them that believe; in my name shall they cast out demons; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them; they shall LAY HANDS ON THE SICK, and they shall recover."

Here, then was the promise of the LORD JESUS to his disciples concerning laying on of hands for healing.

While there are many healings recorded in the book of Acts, there are only a few where we read of hands being laid on the individual.

Thus when Ananias came to PAUL, after he had been blinded on the road to Damascus, he put his hands on Paul, saying, "Brother Saul, the LORD, even JESUS, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost." Acts 9:17. Immediately Saul received his sight.

Then we read in Acts 28:8 that Paul, after having been wrecked on MELITA, was lodged three days with Publius, the chief man of the island. We read, "The father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux: to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him."

It would be as well to mention here that, in James 5:14-15, where the elders are to be called to pray for the sick, the apostle mentions that the sick person is to be anointed with oil. No mention is made here of laying on of hands, although it is very often done.

We find that there were those who received the gift of the Holy Spirit through the laying on of hands. Here again, the laying on of hands is not the only means whereby the gift of the Holy Spirit can be received, just as, with healing for the body, many are healed without hands ever being laid upon them.

Thus, on the day of Pentecost, and in the household of Cornelius, the LORD JESUS imparted the gift of the Holy Spirit directly. However, we read, both in Acts 8:17-19 and Acts 19:6, that the Holy Spirit was received after hands were laid on the recipients. Thus Peter and John came down especially from Jerusalem to lay hands on the newly saved Samaritans, and they received the gift. Here we read that, when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostle's hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered money so that the Holy Spirit could be imparted by following the procedure of the apostles, namely, laying on of hands.

Paul also, when he came to Ephesus, laid hands upon the believers there and they received.

The laying on of hands also took place when a person was set apart to do some specific work of ministry in the church. Thus we see, in Acts 6:6, when seven men had been chosen as deacons, they were set before the apostles, who, when they had prayed, laid hands upon them.

At the church in Antioch, when the Holy Ghost said, "Separate me, Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them", we are told, "When they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." Acts 13:3.

While we are not told that elders are to have hands laid upon them, it is logical to assume that this is the case, as in two recorded cases, those called to perform a specific task, were commended to the work in this way. The O.T. precedent for it is also clear, for, as we have seen, the LEVITES were also commended to their ministry through the laying on of the hands of the people. This would seem to be the case from the warning given to us in Paul's epistle to Timothy where he says, "Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins." (1 Tim

5:22). By laying hands suddenly on a person, we can identify ourselves with them in their sin and disobedience, by so doing.

We see that GIFTS OF GOD, (most probably gifts of the Holy Spirit), are also imparted by the laying on of hands. Thus Paul, in 1 Tim 4:14, tells Timothy not to neglect the gift that is in him, which was given him by prophecy, with the laying on of hands of the presbytery." (Elders.) Again, in 2 Tim 1:6, Paul says, "Stir up the gift of GOD, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands." Here again, GOD'S GIFTS, so freely given, can be received, apart from the laying on of hands, but laying on of hands in receiving can be doubly blessed, for it is a tangible assurance of the reality of the experience.