

Immerse Day 59 :: April 22

Do you recognize these symbols? For well over 4000 years, this symbol has represented medicine or the medical field.



This representation is from around 2100 BC. The symbol has shown up in cultures ranging from Babylonian to Egyptian to Sumerian to Greek to American. It has been called “the staff of Hermes” in Greek mythology, and Iris’s staff in Egyptian theology.

But where did it come from? Well, in today’s text, we find it again, this time in Hebrew scripture. When the people complain against God AGAIN (this has got to be at least the 10th time God’s people have grown discontent and blamed Him or His messengers for their own punishment), He sends poisonous snakes into the camp. They repent (surprise!) and turn to Moses for salvation from the snakes. God instructs Moses to craft a bronze staff with a bronze snake on it. Moses lifts it up in the wilderness with the instructions that anyone who looks up to this snake will live. It becomes a symbol of their healing, their salvation from the snakebites. And hence, we have the symbol above called the Caduceus, the symbol of medicine.

But it represents something more than mere human medical ingenuity. It also represents Christ in the Old Testament. Anyone who looks up in faith to this symbol raised up on a pole will find life. And though it is odd for us to imagine a Snake as a symbol of Jesus (wasn’t the snake a symbol of the devil a few books ago?), Christ Himself identifies with it. In His discussion with Nicodemus in John 3, in fact immediately before the most famous verse in scripture, John 3:16, we find this statement from Jesus: “Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the wilderness, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes may have eternal life in him.”

And there you have it. One more instance of Jesus in the Old Testament. And odd one for sure, but true nonetheless!