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Healing the Blind Men of Jericho

Andrew Brown

It is estimated 40 million people are blind today with the world population around 7.7 billion (about 0.5%); 250 million people (3.3%) suffer from some form of visual impairment. If we use these percentages to estimate the numbers during Jesus' day, when approximately 2.5 million Israelites lived in the land of Palestine (per Roman historical data), the results would give a baseline. Today's 0.5% would yield 12,500 blind and 3.3% would yield 82,500 visually impaired during Christ's earthly ministry. However, this estimate would be exceedingly small considering our medical advancements allow 80% of visual impairment to be treated or cured which dramatically reduces the number of blind people today. Blindness in Christ's day was more prevalent without medical procedures to combat the decay of eyesight and various eyesight diseases. With such information some estimate that roughly 10% of the population could have been struggling with blindness while Christ walked Israel. This higher percentage would yield 250,000 blind in Israel during the time of Jesus. The pool of blind people for Christ to heal could likely range somewhere between 82,500 to 250,000!

Today one rarely comes across a blind person. However, the blind would have been part of daily interactions in Israel 2000 years ago. The gospels represent this. The parable of the wedding banquet comments, ***“Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the city and bring in here the poor and crippled and blind and lame”*** (Luke 14:21 NASB throughout). This infers the blind could be easily found on the streets.

Near the start of His ministry Jesus read from the Isaiah scroll at a Nazareth synagogue. He read about Himself. ***“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord”*** (Luke 4:18-19 emphasis mine). Revealing Himself as this anointed one led to the hearers attempting to cast Jesus off a cliff. Yet it set the stage for a ministry packed full of miraculous healings, which would include many blind.

Jesus first healed two blind men (Matthew 9). Then Jesus healed a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute (Matthew 12). He healed a blind man in stages (Mark 8). Jesus also healed the man born blind (John 9). There is only one gospel account for each of these healings, but each provides great lessons: ***“Since the beginning of time it has never been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind”*** (John 9:32). Jesus healed like nobody else before Him. He could heal more than one person at a time or could heal multiple diseases or problems simultaneously. Jesus could restore eyesight as well as understanding. Though he was not forced to heal the same way twice, He could. The gospels also chronicle the blind men of Jericho recounted in Matthew 20, Mark 10 and Luke 19. This listing of gospel content provides a mere glimpse at the multitude of blind people whom Christ healed.

“And large crowds came to Him, bringing with them those who were lame, crippled, blind, mute, and many others, and they laid them down at His feet; and He healed them. So the crowd marveled as

they saw the mute speaking, the crippled restored, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing; and they glorified the God of Israel” (Matt. 15:30-31). The Scriptural testimony is that people brought the blind to Jesus and He healed them.

Time after time the gospels reveal Jesus healing the blind, sick, and diseased. Jesus healed them everywhere He went (except Nazareth, which is another study). He healed every one of them. John the Baptist while imprisoned realized the major extent of Christ’s healing and questioned Him by sending messengers. **“Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Go and report to John what you hear and see: the blind receive sight and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them’” (Matt. 11:4-5).** These messengers saw Jesus heal the multitudes, which included many blind. The gospels repeatedly picture Jesus as the greatest miracle worker Israel had ever seen! People sought Him out. **“And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple, and He healed them” (Matt. 21:14).** The testimony is not Jesus healing only a few people but every blind person He encountered! **“Many followed Him, and He healed them all” (Matt. 12:15).**

With the Scriptural facts and historical data before us, we are better equipped to explain any discrepancy that may arise. God’s Word is accused of “contradictions,” which largely center in the gospels. When we analyze these supposed “contradictions” we can uncover a gem of truth and view the Bible more accurately. It is astounding these satisfying answers and awesome truths are not common knowledge! They seem so clear and simple when the context of Scripture is rightly considered. There is a hunger for answers that seem educated. A few well-meaning souls step into the debate of gospel “contradictions,” but they begin from a wrong vantage point that cowers to the deception that Scripture is uninspired and is a product solely of man’s efforts. Their attempts to “answer” the questions may sound intellectual but are weak and unconvincing because they sweep the real issues under a rug of unbelief. The Bible holds a treasure-trove of illuminating answers, but there will always be a crowd that desires an intelligent-sounding excuse to not believe. Let those who uphold the integrity of God’s written word no longer be gripped by fear or throw aside its perfection when critiqued. Rather, may their excitement rise at the questions because of the potential they bring for new depth. The gospels do not allow for error through author’s perspective. The foundation is secure.

The stories about the blind men of Jericho are an instance where many people see a few “contradictions.” We see one issue immediately, **“As Jesus was approaching Jericho, a blind man was sitting by the road begging” (Luke 19:5).** This event took place as Jesus was approaching Jericho. However, Mark reveals a different story. **“And as He was leaving Jericho with His disciples and a large crowd, a blind beggar named Bartimaeus, the son of Timaeus, was sitting by the road” (Mark 10:46).** Luke’s account is at the approach of Jericho, whereas in Mark Jesus heals blind Bartimaeus as he was leaving Jericho. Matthew raises the issue of how many blind men were healed. **“As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed Him. And two blind men sitting by the road” (Matt. 20:29-30).** Jesus heals two unnamed blind men leaving Jericho. The cheap, “scholarly,” secular view pronounces these events the same. Believers should not unite with that wave of the hand. It is obvious that concluding *different events* as the *same* would naturally create “contradictions”! These events are different, so one should expect differences.

This understanding handles the information carefully. It holds up to scrutiny powerfully compared to the strange “multiple Jericho” view: the idea that the events happened as Christ traveled in between districts of Jericho. Problems remain with this view; also it does not answer why the Divinely Perfect Word seems ambiguous. Do not conform beliefs to so-called intellectuals; open the Bible and let the Word of God itself mold your view.

There is another simple reason to conclude these stories are different: The Bible says they are! It's probable that the similarities are due to the tendency people have to copy something that has worked. Remember Jesus healed the two blind men in Matthew 9:27-31 near the onset of His ministry. The Jericho blind men and these two men's words are similar, and the former healing account reveals the blind men **“went out and spread the news about Him throughout all that land”** (Matt. 9:31). This gave the blind men of Jericho, along with all other blind men, a model to follow, and they apparently copied it hoping for the restored sight they desperately needed. This explanation brings understanding to the similarity of the accounts that allows them to speak without setting aside details or setting aside Divine authorship.

What is the perfect Word trying to tell us? Jesus healed nearly everyone He encountered including providing sight to many who suffered blindness. The blind men of Jericho very likely are records of three different events where Jesus healed four blind men. Jericho was a large city and could have hundreds of blind ready and waiting to be healed. Jesus healed one blind man upon entering Jericho and three blind men leaving. Although it's not reported, Jesus almost certainly healed the blind within Jericho as well. The Lord was swarmed with desperate people seeking and receiving healing. When students align their thoughts with Scripture, they will see this clear picture and attain a stronger understanding. We do not know the numbers of all the blind men who were healed during the Lord's three-year earthly ministry. The four blind men of Jericho and the five additional gospel accounts of blind receiving their sight give us a glimpse into the awe-inspiring magnitude. He also has perfectly designed an awe-inspiring Word where the gospels fit with each other in their testimony of His life. There are answers before us and perhaps now, seeing the record, more will believe.