

BIBLE SERIES: "EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"

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JOHN 9-10 BLIND MAN HEALED; CHRIST THE GOOD SHEPHERD



We now turn to the Gospel of John where there are several key events not mentioned anywhere else. This was shortly after Jesus kept His last Feast of Tabernacles while He was in Jerusalem.

His disciples noticed a man blind from birth and asked Jesus who had sinned to cause such a defect. While He still had time, Christ saw an opportunity to teach them about sin, compassion and doing God's will. Even if it was the Sabbath and He knew there would be trouble with the Pharisees, He still healed the blind man.

The account says, "Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'"

"When He had said these things, He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, 'Go, wash in the pool of Siloam' (which is translated, Sent). So he went and washed, and came back seeing. Therefore the neighbors and those who previously had seen that he was blind said, 'Is not this he who sat and begged?' Some said, 'This is he.' Others said, 'He is like him.' He said, 'I am he.' Therefore they said to him, 'How were your eyes opened?' He answered and said, 'A Man called Jesus made clay and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to the pool of Siloam and wash.' So I went and washed, and I received sight.' Then they said to him, 'Where is He?' He said, 'I do not know.' They brought him who formerly was blind to the Pharisees. Now it was a Sabbath when Jesus made the clay and opened his eyes. Then the Pharisees also asked him again how he had received his sight. He said to them, 'He put clay on my eyes, and I washed, and I see.' Therefore some of the Pharisees said, 'This Man is not from God, because He does not keep the Sabbath.' Others said, 'How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?' And there was a division among them" (John 9:1-16).

Jesus mentioned the Pool of Siloam and it was just discovered in 2005. It fed the lower Pool of Bethesda. Notice what *The Los Angeles Times* reported, "Scholars have said that there wasn't a Pool of Siloam and that John was using a 'religious conceit' to illustrate a point, said New Testament scholar James H. Charlesworth of the Princeton Theological Seminary. 'Now we have found the Pool of Siloam...exactly where John said it was.' A gospel that was thought to be 'pure theology is now shown to be grounded in history,' he said" (August 9, 2005, p. 1, online edition).

Another amazing detail is what John mentioned about the Hebrew *shiloah* meaning "sent." F. F. Bruce explains, "The Pool of Siloam...received the water which was carried, or 'sent,' through the channel from the spring of Gihon" (*The Gospel of John*, 1983, p. 210). We now know it was significant because it had the running or 'sent' water that made it and the lower pool of Bethesda apt for ritual cleansings. How important was this?

"The historical context is also right for a *mikveh* [ritual pool],' notes scholar Urban von Wahlde. "As the Tosefta says, referring to this period, 'Purity broke out in Israel.' In the second century B.C., continuous ritual purity, which had previously been prescribed only for the priests, was deemed important for all Jews. All the people of Israel were to keep to a state of purity all the time, especially within the city of Jerusalem. Not only the Temple Mount but all of Jerusalem was considered holy and to be honored with ritual purity....the excavators of the large Pool of Siloam, where Jesus cured the blind man, have interpreted it as a public *mikveh* for the festival crowds. The same was true of the Pool of Bethesda, These are in fact the two largest *mikva'ot* in Jerusalem" (*Biblical Archaeological Review*, Sept-Oct., 2011, pp. 46-47).

Why did the disciples ask Jesus if the parents or the son had sinned to cause this blindness? Leon Morris explains, "It was widely held that suffering, and especially such a disaster as blindness, was due to sin. The general principle was laid down by Rabbi Ammi: 'There is no death without sin, and there is no suffering without iniquity.' Jesus decisively rejects [this teaching]...Suffering is not always due to sin and this blindness is not the

result of sin either in the man or in his parents” (*The Gospel According to John*, 1971, p. 478). F. F.

Bruce adds, “This does not mean that God deliberately caused the child to be born blind in order that, after many years, His glory should be displayed in the removal of the blindness; to think so would again be an aspersion on the character of God. It does mean that God overruled the disaster of the child’s blindness so that, when the child grew to manhood, he might, by recovering his sight, see the glory of God in the face of Christ, and others, seeing this work of God, might turn to the true Light of the World” (op. cit., p. 209).

When those who knew the healed man took him to the Pharisees, they became more concerned about Christ supposedly “kneading” the mud with saliva than with this tremendous healing.

Bruce mentions, “Not that the act of healing as such infringed the Sabbath law, but an act of healing was very likely to involve something else which did infringe the [Pharisaic] law. On the former occasion Jesus encouraged a [healed] man to carry a burden through the streets on the Sabbath; on this occasion He made a mud poultice with earth and saliva. What was wrong with that? Simply this: one of the categories of work specifically forbidden on the Sabbath in the traditional interpretation of the law was kneading, and the making of mud or clay with such simple ingredients as earth and saliva was construed as a form of kneading” (op. cit., p. 212).

This is why they accused Jesus of being a Sabbath breaker and a “sinner” (John 9:16). They then excommunicated the blind man for backing Jesus. Christ later told the Pharisees *they* were the ones who were truly blind (John 9: 22, 35, 41).

Jesus, the True Shepherd

Jesus then used the analogy of a true and false shepherd to contrast His leadership with that of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, who had rejected Him. He was the true Savior of the Jews and the rest of mankind. Through His sacrifice and resurrection, He would not only bring healing to the blind, but salvation and eternal life in His coming kingdom to those who believed in Him.

Christ said, “Most assuredly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door, but climbs up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is the

shepherd of the sheep. To him the doorkeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice; and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. And when he brings out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. Yet they will by no means follow a stranger, but will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.’ Jesus used this illustration, but they did not understand the things which He spoke to them. Then Jesus said to them again, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who *ever* came before Me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture. The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. But a hireling, he who is not the shepherd, one who does not own the sheep, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees; and the wolf catches the sheep and scatters them. The hireling flees because he is a hireling and does not care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep. And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock *and* one shepherd. Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father.’ Therefore there was a division again among the Jews because of these sayings” (John 10:1-19).

As *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* points out, “The discourse on the Good Shepherd continues the same setting as in John 9:1-41...The Bible makes frequent use of this analogy. Many of the great men of the Old Testament were shepherds (e.g., Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David). Jesus developed this analogy in several ways. The connection with the preceding chapter is seen in Jesus’ contrast of the Pharisees with the man born blind. The Pharisees—spiritually blind while claiming insight--were false shepherds. As the True

Shepherd, Jesus came to seek and to heal. His sheep hear and respond to His voice.

“John 10:1-5 describe a morning shepherding scene. A shepherd enters through a gate into a walled enclosure which has several flocks in one sheep pen. The enclosure, with stone walls, is guarded at night by a doorkeeper to prevent thieves and beasts of prey from entering. Anyone who would climb the wall would do it for no good purpose. By contrast, the shepherd has a right to enter the sheep pen. The watchman opens the gate, and the shepherd comes in to call his own sheep by name (out from the other flocks). Shepherds knew their sheep well and gave them names. As sheep hear the sound of their owner’s familiar voice, they go to him. He leads them out of the pen till his flock is formed. Then he goes out toward the fields with the sheep following him.

“If a stranger enters the pen, the sheep run away from him because his voice is not familiar. The point of this figure of speech consists in how a shepherd forms his flock. People come to God because He calls them. Their proper response to His call is to follow Him. But this spiritual lesson was missed by those who heard Jesus, even though they certainly understood the local shepherd/sheep relationship. In their blindness, they could not see Jesus as the Lord who is the Shepherd (cf. Ps. 23:1-6).”

“Jesus then developed the shepherd/sheep figure of speech in another way. After a shepherd’s flock has been separated from the other sheep, he takes them to pasture. Near the pasture is an enclosure for the sheep. The shepherd takes his place in the doorway or entrance and functions as a door or gate. The sheep can go out to the pasture in front of the enclosure, or if afraid, they can retreat into the security of the enclosure. The spiritual meaning is that Jesus is the only Gate by which people can enter into God’s provision for them. When Jesus said all who ever came before Me were thieves and robbers, He referred to those leaders of the nation who cared not for the spiritual good of the people but only for themselves. Jesus the Shepherd provides security for His flock from enemies. He also provides for their daily needs (the sheep come in and go out, and find pasture). The thief, that is, a false

shepherd, cares only about feeding himself, not building up the flock. He steals sheep in order to kill them, thus destroying part of the flock. But Christ has come to benefit the sheep. He gives life which is not constricted but overflowing. The thief takes life; Christ gives it to the full.

“Jesus then developed the sheep/shepherd figure in a third way. When evening settled over the land of Palestine, danger lurked. In Bible times, lions, wolves, jackals, panthers, leopards, bears, and hyenas were common in the countryside. The life of a shepherd could be dangerous as illustrated by David’s fights with at least one lion and one bear (1 Sam. 17:34-37). Jacob also experienced the labor and toil of being a faithful shepherd (Gen. 31:38-40). Jesus said, ‘I am the Good Shepherd.’ In the Old Testament, God is called the Shepherd of His people (Ps. 23:1; Ps. 80:1-2; Eccl. 12:11; Is. 40:11; Jer. 31:10). Jesus is this to His people, and He came to give His life for their benefit. He is also the ‘Great Shepherd’ (Heb. 13:20-21) and “the Chief Shepherd” (1 Pet. 5:4).

In contrast with the Good Shepherd, who owns, cares, feeds, protects, and dies for His sheep, the one who works for wages—the hired hand—does not have the same commitment. He is interested in making money and in self-preservation. If a wolf attacks, where it says literally, ‘snatches away,’ he runs away and his selfishness causes the flock to be scattered. Obviously he cares nothing for the sheep. Israel had many false prophets, selfish kings, and imitation messiahs. The flock of God suffered constantly from their abuse (Jer. 10:21-22; Jer. 12:10; Zec. 11:4-17).

In contrast with a hired workman, the Good Shepherd has an intimacy with and personal interest in the sheep. ‘I know My sheep,’ stresses His ownership and watchful oversight. ‘My sheep know Me,’ stresses their reciprocal knowledge of and intimacy with Him. This intimacy is modeled on the loving and trusting mutual relationship of the Father and the Son. Jesus’ care and concern is evidenced by His prediction of His coming death for the flock. Some shepherds have willingly died while protecting their sheep from danger. Jesus willingly gave His life for His sheep—on their behalf as their Substitute. His death gives them life” (Notes on John 10:1-15).