

## Biblical Pool of Siloam Being Excavated in Jerusalem

*The Wired Word for the Week of January 15, 2023*

### In the News

The Pool of Siloam, built during the reign of the Old Testament King Hezekiah, and still in use in Jesus' day, is about to be excavated and opened to the public for the first time in modern history, Israeli authorities have announced.

The pool was destroyed and covered after the First Jewish-Roman War in A.D. 70. In modern times, a small section of it has been accessible, but the scheduled excavation will be the first opening of the full historic pool site since its destruction in the first century.

The Siloam pool, which was fed by waters from the Gihon Spring in the Kidron Valley, was constructed during the reign of Hezekiah (715-687/6 B.C.), as part of Jerusalem's water system. One aim was to rechannel the spring by means of a tunnel so as to leave besieging armies without access to its water while protecting the water supply for those in the city ([2 Chronicles 32:2-4](#)).

An older Canaanite water channel had been vulnerable to attackers, so, under threat from the Assyrian king Sennacherib, Hezekiah sealed up the old outlet of the Gihon Spring and built the new underground Siloam tunnel in place of the older aqueduct.

The tunnel and the pool underwent further development during its centuries of use. The pool is believed to have measured up to 1.25 acres and been inlaid with impressive flagstones.

In the Old Testament, the pool's construction is mentioned in 2 Kings 20:20, which reads, "The rest of the deeds of Hezekiah, all his power, how he made the pool and the conduit and brought water into the city, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah?"

The pool also figures into the New Testament account of Jesus healing a man born blind. John 9:6-7 tells that after Jesus covered the man's eyes with a mud poultice, he sent him to wash in the Pool of Siloam. The man did so and came back able to see.

Many historians believe the pool was used as a *mikveh* or ritual bath by millions of pilgrims before ascending through the City of David to the temple.

Moshe Lion, Jerusalem's mayor, described the Pool of Siloam in a statement as "a site of historic, national, and international significance."

The excavation is being made possible by cooperation between the Israel Antiquities Authority, the Israel National Parks Authority and the City of David Foundation.

More on this story can be found at these links:

[The Pool of Siloam, Where the Bible Says Jesus Healed a Blind Man, Will Be Open to the Public for the First Time in Nearly 2,000 Years. \*Business Insider\*](#)  
[Pool of Siloam. \*Wikipedia\*](#)

### **Applying the News Story**

The Pool of Siloam news gives us a good opportunity to explore the story told in John 9 of Jesus healing the man born blind, and to see what lessons we can take from it.

So, instead of drawing scripture texts from several places in the Bible, as we usually do, we're going to focus on some individual verses from the John 9 story, and the applications to ourselves we can draw from those verses.

### **The Big Questions**

1. What hope needs to be unearthed in your life? If people were to excavate the channels of life-giving water in your life, what might they discover at its source?
2. In what way did the water of the Pool of Siloam become living water for the blind man?
3. All of us are blind to some things that others perceive clearly. What have you discovered you are blind to, and what are you doing to see it more clearly? In what way is this part of your prayers?
4. If you feel mostly blind to the movements and actions of the living God in the world, what can you do to make yourself more perceptive to God's presence in your life and the life of the world?
5. Do you know people who are blind or who have low vision, or are you such a person yourself? If so, do they (you) understand that condition as a disability, a different ability, bad luck, punishment for sin, merely one type of limitation among myriad limitations that can affect human beings, a reason they (you) should receive special treatment or accommodation, nothing remarkable, something that calls for healing, not something that calls for healing, or something else?

### **Confronting the News With Scripture and Hope**

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

#### **John 9:6-7**

*When he had said this, he spat on the ground and made mud with the saliva and spread the mud on the man's eyes, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). Then he went and washed and came back able to see. (For context of all today's verses, read [John 9:1-41](#).)*

Jesus healed the man's eyes, so he could see. But actually, the man was the recipient of two miracles, for according to the story, he not only received his sight, but also was immediately able to start moving around as if he'd been seeing all his life. Remember that he had been *born* blind. He'd had absolutely no experience living as a seeing person. As commentator Scott Hoezee puts it, "not only had Jesus fixed his optic hardware but must also have installed the necessary mental software which allowed the man to make sense of the information coming through his eyes."

The fact is, most blind people who have their sight restored surgically cannot immediately begin to move through the environment the way normally sighted persons do. The formerly blind need time and experience to develop depth perception, reaction to colors and brightness and so on. It's not uncommon for people who have gained their sight to reach for things and miss or bump into walls because they have no experience with judging distances visually. Some even continue to use their white canes for a while until they adjust to having sight.

What's more, they don't necessarily recognize what things are. They know, for example, what a saltshaker feels like and even what it smells like, but they don't know what it *looks* like. The first time they see one, somebody's probably going to have to tell them what it is.

But this man who was born blind is able to start living as a person who already made all those adjustments, so he has been doubly blessed by Jesus.

**Questions:** What unexpected blessings have come your way recently? In what ways have you been doubly blessed? Do you believe in miracles? Why or why not?

### **John 9:8-9**

*The neighbors and those who had seen him before as a beggar began to ask, "Is this not the man who used to sit and beg?" Some were saying, "It is he." Others were saying, "No, but it is someone like him." He kept saying, "I am he." (For context of all today's verses, read [John 9:1-41](#).)*

Jesus' healing of the formerly blind man is so complete that people who knew him before have a hard time believing it's the same person. Some even suggest that the man is a different person who just happens to look like the blind man. And so he has to keep telling people that he is the same one whom they had seen blind. "I am he," he says. Or, as *The Message* paraphrases his words, "It's me, the very one."

**Questions:** What's different about you because of encountering Christ in your life? How do you react when someone from your past has come to recognize Jesus as their Lord? Are you gracious, joyful, suspicious, surprised ...? What in your life has been so radically changed because of Jesus that others who knew you before are startled?

### **John 9:10-11**

*But they kept asking him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man called Jesus made mud, spread it on my eyes, and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash.' Then I went and washed and received my sight." (For context of all today's verses, read [John 9:1-41](#).)*

Whereas in verses 6-7 above, John, the gospel writer narrates this information, here the healed man himself explains what happened. Notice that he tells them that Jesus said, "Go to Siloam and wash," and he adds that he did what Jesus told him to do, and the miracle happened.

We might describe what the man did as "sweat equity." When Jesus told him what he needed to invest in the process for the healing to happen, the man did it. It's quite possible that none of it made sense to him, but he obeyed anyway. And as he later testified, "I received my sight."

**Questions:** What have you needed to invest to make some kind of healing -- be it physical, emotional, mental, social or spiritual -- happen? Did you resist the effort that was called for? If so, why? If not, why not?

### **John 9:30-33**

*The man answered, "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."* (For context of all today's verses, read [John 9:1-41](#).)

It happens to be a Sabbath when Jesus' heals the man of his blindness. And that brings criticism and an uproar from the legalist Pharisees, who attempt to use the healed man as an ally against Jesus. But throughout all of that, the man remains soundly logical. The crowd brings the healed man to the Pharisees. But rather than congratulate this man on his healing or thank God for it, they get all hung up on the fact that Jesus performed this healing on the Sabbath day.

Part of the problem for them is that Jesus made mud, meaning that he mixed clay with his spit. Kneading, as in the mixing of bread dough, was a violation of the rules about not working on the Sabbath, and so they apply this to Jesus' making the clay. Therefore, in *their* logic, Jesus is a sinner, and if he is a sinner, then there's no way that he could be from God. There is, however, a split in their ranks, for at least a few of the Pharisees suggest that if Jesus is able to do such a miraculous, God-revealing thing as this, then maybe they are wrong about him being a sinner.

So the Pharisees turn to the healed man and ask him what he thinks about Jesus. He responds, "He is a prophet." There is a quiet logic in his answer, and the force of what he is saying is that whatever else Jesus may be, he is *at least* a prophet. A prophet is someone who brings God's message. This man views his healing as a blessing from God, so simply considering the evidence before him, he moves to the minimum conclusion: "Whatever else Jesus may be, he is at least a prophet."

At this point, the Jewish authorities get involved. The leaders have already set themselves against Jesus, and they don't want a miracle story floating around about him, so they try to debunk it. They speculate that the healed man either is an impostor or wasn't blind from birth. So they call in his parents and ask them to verify his identity and that he was born blind. The parents acknowledge that he is their son and that he was indeed born blind, but they go on to say that they have no idea how his eyes were healed or who did it. They add that their son is a grown man, so the leaders should ask him.

Thus, the leaders turn to the man who had been blind and tell him to give glory to God by admitting that Jesus is a sinner. The formerly blind man, however, is no religious authority, and he knows it. As far as the leaders were concerned, "sinner" was a specific category used to label people who'd broken certain rules. This man doesn't think of himself as in a position to make a religious pronouncement about Jesus' status before God. He has just met Jesus and knows nothing about him other than the popular rumors -- and, of course, that he'd been able to grant sight.

So the man answers the leaders: "I do not know whether he is a sinner. One thing I do know, that though I was blind, now I see."

There it is -- this man's clear logic. "I don't know the answer to all you're worried about. But I know this: I was blind until Jesus touched me, and now I can see."

With that, the leaders become verbally abusive, telling the man that he is a disciple of this hated Jesus while they are disciples of Moses. But the man is not intimidated, and he speaks to them again, with perfect logic: "Here is an astonishing thing! You do not know where he comes from, and yet he opened my eyes. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but he does listen to one who worships him and obeys his will. Never since the world began has it been heard that anyone opened the eyes of a person born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing."

In terms of rational application, the formerly blind man has won the argument, but the leaders won't admit it. Instead, they dismiss him with an insult, saying he was born in sin (implying that his blindness was some kind of divine punishment) and thus he has no business trying to instruct them.

**Questions:** To what degree was your current Christian faith a matter of logical choice? To what degree did it seem illogical at the time, but you made the decision anyway? How was the logic of your decision bolstered by your subsequent experience as a disciple of Jesus Christ?

If you received Christ through infant baptism and have never known life apart from him, how has your committing your life more deeply to him been a *logical* choice? How do you see the Holy Spirit as being involved?

### **John 9:35-38**

*Jesus heard that they had driven him out, and when he found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir? Tell me, so that I may believe in him." Jesus said to him, "You have seen him, and the one speaking with you is he." He said, "Lord, I believe." And he worshiped him. (For context of all today's verses, read [John 9:1-41](#).)*

Later, after all the commotion, Jesus seeks out the healed man and asks him if he believes in "the Son of Man" (another title for the Messiah). The man's answer, and his subsequent reception of Christ into his life, are described in the verses above.

In the end, this man moved beyond his logic, taking a leap of faith. But his logic got him to the place he needed to be to make that leap. Faith goes beyond reason, but it doesn't go in a different direction from reason. And so our reason, our logic, can help us in our decision to follow Jesus.

Your logic may say, "I'm not sure who Jesus is, but I know that being in church gives me peace and a sense of hope." Or "Well, I'm not an authority on religious matters, but I know that when I pray through Jesus, something real and life-giving occurs." Or "I was stuck in guilt and shame until I asked Christ to forgive me, and now I can face life full on." Or something similar. In fact, if there's any good thing in your life that you attribute to an action of God or Christ, it provides a place to stand from which to make a leap of faith. And there are plenty of Christians who testify that when you make that leap, the place you land is solid ground.

For a few of us, logic may have been enough to move us to become Jesus' disciples. For others of us, there may have been an emotional component or even the testimony of friends or other motivating forces as well. Most of the time, logic needs the guidance of love and inspiration, which, of course, is the bailiwick of religion.

But it's good to know that following Jesus is not an illogical choice. Many of us can say some version of "I don't know all there is to know about the Bible or theology, but this much I'm sure of: Once I was blind; now I can see." That's often enough to point us in the direction of Christ.

**Questions:** What is your response to the statement "Faith goes beyond reason, but it doesn't go in a different direction from reason"? What do you understand a "leap of faith" to mean? What role, if any, did such a leap play in your spiritual development? What is the difference between taking a leap of faith and having nothing left to lose?

### **For Further Discussion**

1. The building of the tunnel that conducted water from Gihon Spring to the Pool of Siloam was quite an engineering feat. Consider this from the "Siloam" entry in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. "The ... third water system is ... most probably the water channel that was hewn during the reign of Hezekiah. One of the great engineering feats of the ancient world, this tunnel currently stretches for 533 circuitous meters -- although it may have been slightly longer in ancient times -- and empties into the Siloam Pool. Often referred to as Hezekiah's Tunnel, it also bears the designation of Siloam Tunnel. ...

"After withholding tribute to Assyria following the death of Sargon II (705 B.C.), Hezekiah apparently enclosed many of the extramural dwellings of Jerusalem with a massive wall and redirected the Gihon waters into the more centrally located Siloam Pool by means of this tunnel, hewn through the bedrock underneath the City of David.

"The tunnel's winding path has engendered much speculation regarding its reasons, ranging from the following of karstic faults in the rock to the primitive methods of communication between the engineers of the project on the surface and those doing the actual work underground. Near the center of the tunnel one can find evidence of the last few imperfect attempts of the two crews of workers, one hewing from the north and the other from the south, to meet up. Nonetheless, when the tunnel was finally completed, the differential in height between its beginning in the northeast and end in the southwest of the southeastern spur upon which the

City of David is located was just 32 cm, which allowed for a steady yet controlled flow of water."

2. Consider this, from the same dictionary entry as #1: "Some 6 meters from the southern end of the tunnel an inscription associated with the completion of the work was found. This so called Siloam Tunnel Inscription is the longest Hebrew inscription thus far found from the Iron Age and was -- perhaps unexpectedly -- not written in praise of the king who ordered the work. Instead it details the last stages of work on the tunnel and the excitement of the workers as their labors were brought to a successful completion."

### **Responding to the News**

Think about using this lesson to consider whether there's some part of your own history or your family's, church's or community's history that needs to be restored. What would it take to do that and what benefit would it be?

### **Prayer**

Thank you, O Lord, that when we take the leap of faith, you provide solid ground on which we can land. In Jesus' name. Amen.