land, with deep gorges running down to the Dead Sea. Verse 2 reads, “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters”. In Britain there is green pasture everywhere, and all that is necessary is for the farmer to let the sheep loose on the hillsides. In the Judean hills green pasture has to be searched for by the shepherd, and the sheep encouraged to stay there rather than wander off into desolate areas where there is no grass.

Streams in the Judean hills are fast-flowing, with cascades and falls. Sheep dislike loud noises (they hate the noise of planes, for example) and are put off from drinking by the noise of fast-flowing streams. The shepherd needs to find pools, or gently flowing stretches of streams, and will use stones to dam streams to create such areas if they do not occur naturally. Alternatively he will draw water from a well and pour it into a trough; such action is recorded in Exodus 2:16.


Olives in the desert

OLIVES are widely grown on the hillsides of Israel today, as they have been since Biblical times. However, in a recent project, the Jewish National Fund (JNF) has extended the growing of olives to the desert of the Negev, south of Beersheba. Here there are now 1,350 acres of olive groves, using brackish water obtained from an underground aquifer. These olives are now producing fruit, and olive oil from these trees is being marketed under the label Halutza Premium Olive Oil. According to the JNF, olives were grown in this area 3,000 years ago, the time at which David and Solomon ruled. Since olives are only grown today in this area where they can be irrigated, presumably there was higher rainfall in those days, although it must be remembered that the ancients were very skilful in storing and utilising rainfall.

In another experiment the JNF is trying to establish vineyards in the same area. An already successful project utilising brackish water is that of growing tomatoes, over 15,000 tons a year. While the attention of the world is centred on the conflict with the Palestinians and the controversy over evacuating settlements, work is going on to develop new techniques for making desert areas productive, surely a foretaste of the time to come when “the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose” (Isa. 35:1).


Seeing after long-term blindness

Nigel Bernard

The restoring of sight after long-term blindness involves both a physical and a psychological aspect. Doctors can sometimes restore physical sight, but their patients are often left overwhelmed and confused by the experience of seeing. But when the Lord Jesus healed the blind he also provided them with the ability to understand and cope with their new-found vision.

In John 9 we read: “And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth” (v. 1). Later the blind man is healed: “When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, and said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing” (vv. 6,7).

What is involved in such a miracle? We might think of it as being essentially a correction of a physical problem. After all, surgical procedures such as the removal of cataracts can restore sight. Perhaps the miracle was little more than miraculous surgery. However, such operations usually follow only a short period of poor eyesight. Yet this man had been blind from birth. He had never had the experience of seeing.

Medical cases where people have had sight restored after a significant period of blindness show that there is a psychological aspect to seeing as well. In this article we will consider two such cases. This consideration will help us to appreciate the true wonder of the miraculous healing of the blind performed by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Case studies

Writing in the British newspaper the Daily Express, the journalist Adrian Lee reported the case of Mike May, a forty-nine-year-old who had his sight restored after forty-three years of blindness. He had been blinded by a chemical explosion at
the age of three. His sight was restored following stem-cell treatment and a corneal transplant. Lee describes the moment he could see again:

“When the bandages were removed from Mike May’s eyes after 43 years of blindness, he saw his wife for the first time. The excitement of seeing his two sons... quickly followed. Then, after the initial thrill, came the realisation that his brain was simply unable to cope with much of the new information his eyes were providing.”

Although his sight was now physically much improved, May was struggling to interpret what he saw. Even after five years of sight “he still struggles with faces, to the extent that he often cannot tell the difference between men and women”. As Lee further comments: “He frequently finds himself staring intently at people as his brain attempts to decipher the information provided by his eyes. He searches for clues, such as long hair, a beard or plucked eyebrows”.

The neurologist Oliver Sacks records similar findings in the case of a man he calls “Virgil” (his real name is Shirley Jennings). Following illness as a young child, including meningitis, polio and cat-scratch fever, Jennings became functionally blind at six years old. He remained blind until the age of fifty. Up until this time it was thought that his retinas were too badly damaged for sight to be restored. However, one particular specialist disagreed, and when the cataracts were removed his sight was indeed partially restored. However, although he could now physically see, he had great difficulty making sense of what he saw. Sacks comments that “he had no idea of size or perspective”, and that, when he went into a shopping store, “everything ran together’, he said. He needed to get out of the store and close his eyes for a bit”.

Everyday things which sighted people take for granted presented a major challenge for him to understand. For example, steps seemed like “a flat surface, of parallel and crisscrossing lines; he could not see them (although he knew them) as solid objects going up or coming down in three-dimensional space”.

Sacks refers to other cases as far back as the eighteenth century where people with restored sight had struggled to cope with their new-found vision. The problems such people face relate both to comprehending what they are seeing and coping with the experience as a whole. In the case of Mike May, he was advised before his operation that there was a risk of developing depression if his sight was restored. May has not suffered depression, but Lee records the case of Sidney Bradford, who regained his sight in the 1950s aged fifty-two following fifty years of blindness. Lee writes that “he found the experience bewildering and died just three years later”.

Trees

That there may be more to healing a blind person than simply restoring the physical function of the eyes is seen in the healing miracle of Jesus recorded in Mark 8: “And he took the blind man by the hand, and led him out of the town; and when he had spit on his eyes, and put his hands upon him, he asked him if he saw ought. And he looked up, and said, I see men as trees, walking. After that he put his hands again upon his eyes, and made him look up: and he was restored, and saw every man clearly” (vv. 23-25). After the first stage of healing, the man could physically see, but he was confusing men with trees. In a footnote, Oliver Sacks refers to this passage as illustrating the problem those with restored sight have following long-term blindness.

For those of us who can see, we take trees for granted. But if you think about it, a tree, especially a high one, is potentially a very daunting prospect. To have something that tall, and moreover alive, towering above you must be an amazing experience for those who have not seen them before. Interestingly, in the case of both Mike May and Shirley Jennings, trees are specifically mentioned as being objects that they had trouble comprehending. May said that “seeing trees was... incredible”. The wife of Jennings reported that “he said that trees didn’t look like anything on earth”. That trees should be particularly commented on by both these people lends veracity to the record in Mark 8. Trees are clearly a major challenge for those with restored sight.

Spiritual sight

Prior to the miracle in Mark 8 we read, “And when Jesus knew it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not

3. Ibid., p. 114.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., p. 117.
yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? Having eyes, see ye not? and having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember?” (vv. 17,18). That the miracle immediately follows this account is surely intended to show that the disciples were like the man whose sight was restored but who saw “men as trees, walking”. When the Lord Jesus mentioned “leaven”, all they could see was natural bread; they could not see that he was speaking of doctrine (Mt. 16:12). If our hearts are hard, then spiritual things will seem like a visual barrage of images lacking perspective and meaning.

Synthesis
Shirley Jennings died in 2003, and in an obituary, also in the Daily Express, his wife gave more insight into how he coped with seeing a tree: “He couldn’t even recognise a tree. He knew the top and bottom separately: the trunk, the leaves. It took him six months to put a tree together”. It is this lack of ability to put things together that seems to lie at the heart of the problem. Sacks elaborated on this aspect: “He would pick up details incessantly—an angle, an edge, a colour, a movement—but would not be able to synthesize them, to form a complex perception at a glance. This was one reason the cat, visually, was so puzzling: he would see a paw, the nose, the tail, an ear, but could not see all of them together, see the cat as a whole”. The lack of ability to see things as a whole was also reported by Mike May. For example, when people were speaking, the various movements of their heads, lips and hands would distract him: “I would look at all that going on and lose track of what they were saying”.

Seeing things as a whole is an important ability for spiritual sight. Paul declared “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27), but sometimes it is difficult to see the whole picture, to see the counsel of God as a whole. This perhaps explains why some people never come to “the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 3:7). People often believe many aspects of the gospel. Occasionally we meet people who seem to agree with all the main teachings of the Bible. But identifying separate teachings is one thing; putting them all together and recognising them as a whole, as “the truth”, is another.

Conclusion
When the man “came seeing” in John 9 he was obviously not psychologically troubled. It would be inconceivable that the Lord Jesus would restore eyesight without providing the brain with the necessary skills to cope. Lest we should not appreciate that healing the blind involves not only the eyes but also the mind, the miracle in Mark 8 is broken down into two stages to illustrate this. We should not despise the cures which medical science can provide. However, the fact is that man has come close to matching only the first stage of the healing of the blind.


Travel in the Bible
Transporting goods
Tony Benson

I N THE PREVIOUS article we considered how people travelled in Bible times. We now look at the transportation of goods. Unless goods were transported by water this invariably involved animals. A general reference to various animals involved in carrying goods is to be found in 1 Chronicles 12:40: “Moreover they that were nigh them, even unto Issachar and Zebulun and Naphtali, brought bread on asses, and on camels, and on mules, and on oxen, and meat, meal, cakes of figs, and bunches of raisins, and wine, and oil, and oxen, and sheep abundantly”. Horses are missing from this list and were not used as pack animals in those times.

Asses
Asses are excellent for carrying goods over difficult terrain, such as steep and rugged mountain