

Can We Analyze Miracles?
Applying Historical & Scientific Methods for Studying Miracles

I. Historical Methods for Studying the Miracle of Blind Bartimaeus

A. Application of Historical Factors

Mark 10:46-52	Historical Factors
“ leaving Jericho ” (customary path for Jews on way to Jerusalem to avoid Samaritans; good place to beg alms) “ Bartimaeus , son of Timaeus” (Mark 10:46)	<u>Historical Detail</u> . Specific geography & Jewish customs noted, thus confirming authenticity. <u>Name</u> : Healed people are rarely named; specific name allowed verification of eyewitness. <u>Aramaic</u> : Aramaic name indicates early origin.
“Jesus, Son of David , have mercy on me!” (Mark 10:47-48)	<u>Unusual Title</u> . “Son of David” is unusual Gospel title & does not appear elsewhere in Mark.
“Many were sternly telling him to be quiet . . . ” (Mark 10:48)	<u>Embarrassing Detail</u> . Being unkind to a blind man reflects poorly on crowd and is a detail that would generally be omitted unless true.
“And answering him, Jesus said, ‘What do you want Me to do for you?’ And the blind man said to Him, ‘ Rabboni , I want to regain my sight.’” (Mark 10:51)	<u>Aramaic</u> . Use of a very uncommon Aramaic title for Jesus indicates early origin & verifiability. Mary Magdalene used the same title for Jesus after His Resurrection. (John 20:16)
“And Jesus said to him, ‘Go; your faith has made you well.’ Immediately, he regained his sight and began following Him on the road.” (Mark 10:52)	<u>Eyewitness</u> . As a healed “follower” of Jesus, Bartimaeus had strong testimony for Jesus as both a healer and great teacher and/or Master.

B. Scholarly Conclusions

- Gary Habermas. “several clear indications of historicity.”¹
- Gordon Twelftree. “probably goes back to the memories of Jesus’ audience.”²
- John Meier. “from one of their earliest members and most notable witnesses” and “one of the strongest candidates for the report of a specific miracle going back to the historical Jesus.”³

¹ Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 259 (2024) (“from eyewitness testimony”); see also Richard Bauckham, *Jesus & the Eyewitnesses*, p. 40 (2017) (analyzing Bartimaeus as eyewitness).

² Gordon Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker*, p. 301 (1999).

³ John Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, Vol. II, p. 2:690 (1994).

II. Scientific Methods for Studying “Near-Death Experiences” (NDEs)

The medical and scientific communities have studied near-death experiences (NDEs) extensively in the last 40 years.

- Number of Reported NDEs. Between 4% to 10% of the world’s population have had a near-death experience – from 320 million to 800 million people.⁴
- Accuracy of Verified NDE Reports. One study of NDE patients (with multiple verifiable observations) concluded: “Of these out-of-body perceptions, 92 percent [of these observations] were completely accurate, 6 percent contained some error, and only 1 percent was completely erroneous.”⁵
- Guessing Not Accurate. For patients that did not have NDEs, “All had errors and misconceptions of the equipment used and incorrect procedures were described. . . This contrasted significantly with the surprisingly accurate accounts made by patients who claimed to be out of their bodies and observing the emergency situation.”⁶
- Scholarly Publications. “Over 900 articles on NDEs were published in scholarly literature prior to 2011, gracing the pages of such varied journals as *Psychiatry*, *The Lancet*, *Critical Care Quarterly*, *the Journal for Near-Death Studies*, *American Journal of Psychiatry*, *British Journal of Psychology*, *Resuscitation* and *Neurology*.”⁷
- Scientific Proof of NDEs. “NDEs provide such powerful scientific evidence that it is reasonable to accept the existence of an afterlife.”⁸

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⁴ D. Kondziella, J.P. Dreier JP, M.H. Olsen, “Prevalence of near-death experiences in people with and without REM sleep intrusion,” National Institute of Health, National Library of Medicine, *Pub Med* (Aug. 27, 2019) <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31523519/> (10% of surveyed population); John Burke, *Imagine Heaven*, p. 37 (2015) (4.2% of United States and German populations); IANDS Q&A (https://iands.org/iands-qa-what-percentage-of-the-population-has-had-an-nde/?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

⁵ J. M. Holden, “Veridical Perception in Near-Death Experiences,” in J.M. Holden, B. Greyson, & D. James, eds., *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences*, p. 185-211 (2009) quoted in John Burke, *Imagine Heaven*, pp. 42-43 (2015).

⁶ Penny Sartori, *The Near-Death Experiences of Hospitalized Intensive Care Patients: A Five-Year Clinical Study*, pp. 212-15 (2008) quoted in John Burke, *Imagine Heaven*, p. 39 (2015).

⁷ J. Steve Miller collecting articles and quoted in John Burke, *Imagine Heaven*, p. 43 (2015).

⁸ Dr. Jeffery Long with Paul Perry, *Evidence of the Afterlife*, p. 44 (2010) quoted in John Burke, *Imagine Heaven*, p. 41 (2015); see also Gary Habermas, *On the Resurrection: Evidences*, p. 958 (2024) (NDEs as “very strong empirical evidence” for probability of afterlife).