

# BETWEEN THE LINES™

## DEEPER LOOK STUDY GUIDE

### Zaccheus

#### Speaking of Blemishes

I have a feeling that many Christians have never “put two and two” together in the nativity slice regarding John the Baptist’s father, Zacharias, and how his mute condition (Luke 1:18-23) surely rendered him unfit for active priestly duty. Have you considered disallowing “disabilities” here?

I’ve hoped to trigger your curiosity in this regard. Let’s now spend some time actually reviewing a sampling of the conditions that rendered a priest unfit for his calling. Leviticus 21:17-24 is our first source of consideration, but let me share with you insights from the Mishnah’s Tractate *Beckhoroth* (“Firstlings”) to expand upon the Bible’s definitions as Judaism did in His world.

#### A Priest Could Not ...

“Be blind... lame... have a flat nose...deformity in his feet... a chronic skin disease...”

**MISHNAIC EXPANSION:** Permanent and temporary deformities *both* disqualify...

An asymmetrical head would negate service.

“Humpback” was considered a blemish.

A truly “bald” priest could not serve. (A strip of hair from ear to ear was sufficient.)

Irregular symmetry of the facial features would disqualify a man from service.

Extraordinary light sensitivity or crossed eyes were not allowed.

If his eyes did not match (color, etc.) or if they watered too much it was negating.

The comparative size of his eyes or his nose were determining factors.

Ear size and appearance were also considered in this discussion.

The angle of lips and shape of the mouth were evaluated for the man’s “fitness.”

The priest had to have a full set of teeth to be allowed to serve.

His bodily posture should look masculine, and an umbilical hernia was disqualifying.

The genitalia were not out of bounds for evaluation in this process!

Both heavy pigmentation and albinism negated a man from active temple service.

Knock-knees and bow-legs would take you off of the roles.

Low mental ability was a negating factor for priestly service.

Curiously, even being ambidextrous was a disallowing characteristic!

**In Conclusion:** Why would I raise this discussion in the light of Luke 19’s episode of an unpopular tax collector named Zaccheus? Because of two words that allow speculation in Leviticus 21:20 (and *Beckhoroth* 7:6)... “a dwarf.” Enough said.

#### Taxes In Zaccheus’ World- I

Hey, none of us are thrilled with taxes. We don’t like the obvious ones and then we get even more frustrated when we discover how many taxes are “hidden” in our every day life- gasoline, telephone bills, water and garbage bills, airline tickets, etc., etc., etc.

Have you ever realized that Jews (in Zaccheus’ world) had twice as much of a justification for tax-aversion than other nations? On the one hand they had the demanded tribute of the empire in common with all nations. But, on top of that they also had to deal with the corrupt system of revenues related to the temple class. (Matthew 17:24-27, Matthew 21:12-13.)

Zaccheus was, in the eyes of the Jewish people, part of their “double-whammy” of tax corruption.

### Taxes In Zaccheus' World- II

Judaism didn't have a corner on the market in being frustrated by the taxes that were levied upon them. Even without the "double-whammy" of temple corruption the Roman system was just ripe for corruption.

In Romans 13:6,7 the apostle Paul touched upon the variations of taxation within the structure of the empire. I'd like to share with you some details of taxation in the Roman world so that you can better understand the ferment of the times with regard to this little man.

- ⊕ In ancient times the most common form of "taxation" was forced labor.
- ⊕ Eventually Rome joined the nations that had conquered and confiscated resources.
- ⊕ Tribute (Gk. *phoros*/Latin *tributum*) could be a tax on land or a personal tax.
- ⊕ If on land it was called *tributum soli*, if a personal tax it was referred to as *tributum capitis*.
- ⊕ Those taxes were used to support military occupation and capital/building improvement.
- ⊕ General empire taxes were collected by the Procurators in their regions.
- ⊕ After natural disasters the emperor would, at times, grant tax relief to the affected area.
- ⊕ Indirect taxes (Gk. *telos*/Latin *vectigal*) were levied in self-governing regions.
- ⊕ These taxes came from various sources: imports, exports, inheritance, public auctions, etc.
- ⊕ Even "emancipation" of a slave to free-man rendered him liable for 5% tax on the event.
- ⊕ The taxes on auctions (1%) funded the pensions of the Roman military.
- ⊕ Selling a slave cost you 4%. That money supported the local police force in your area.
- ⊕ You also were taxed for bridge and ferry tolls and also housing construction.
- ⊕ Zaccheus would have been a cog in the "tax farming" machinery of Rome.
- ⊕ Every five years the Senate "auctioned" off sections of the empire to "tax farmers."
- ⊕ The Senate set expected tax revenues for each area *without* any upper limit to be collected.
- ⊕ Greedy profiteers used this system to gain windfall profits on their auction-investments.
- ⊕ The whole Roman tax system was, quite obviously, wide open for corruption and cruelty.
- ⊕ Many times these men (and their agents) were accompanied by a protective military escort.
- ⊕ Tax collectors could open mail or enter homes without warrant.
- ⊕ The Mishnah proclaims the inhabitants of a home unclean if a publican has invaded it.
- ⊕ That same resource justifies lying to a tax collector. It was nearly seen as holy duty!

**In Conclusion:** Little wonder Zaccheus was absolutely astounded when Jesus invited Himself to enter the tax collector's home! Do you honestly think anyone in the region would have ever invited him in to their abode?

Then Jesus took it to the next level by self-invitation to Zaccheus' home. Astounding!