

## John 5:3-4 The Troubling of the Water

Many modern versions and some “scholars” cast doubt on the authenticity of the inspired words we find in John 5:3-4. Here we read of the pool of Bethesda, having five porches. “In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, WAITING FOR THE MOVING OF THE WATER. FOR AN ANGEL WENT DOWN AT A CERTAIN SEASON INTO THE POOL, AND TROUBLED THE WATER: WHOSOEVER THEN FIRST AFTER THE TROUBLING OF THE WATER STEPPED IN WAS MADE WHOLE OF WHATSOEVER DISEASE HE HAD.”

All these capitalized words are omitted in such modern versions as the ASV, NIV, RSV, NRSV, ESV, Wallace’s NET version, and the Message. The Greek texts that omit most of these words are Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, P66 and P75. However as we shall soon see, these so called “oldest and best” manuscripts are in constant disagreement even among themselves.

The NASB is of interest in its confusion in that from 1963 to at least 1972 they omitted all these words from their text and consigned them to a marginal note which said “many authorities insert...”

However in 1977 and again in 1995 the NASB has now once again placed these words in their text but placed [brackets around them, thus indicating doubt as to their authenticity. We should logically ask Mr. James White and the other NASB scholars this simple question. Are these verses inspired Scripture or not? Do they belong in the Text or not? Make up your minds for us, please. Either put them in or leave them out once and for all.

Likewise the Catholic versions are all over the map. The 1582 Douay-Rheims included both verses with no brackets or footnotes as also did the 1950 Douay-Rheims. Then the Catholic Jerusalem Bible came out in 1968 and it also included all of verse 3 and all of verse 4 in its text with no brackets and no footnotes.

Then the 1970 Catholic St. Joseph New American Bible came out and it included the last 7 words of verse three but omitted all of verse four. Then in a footnote the NAB criticizes the existence of verse 4 as “missing in our best Greek witnesses”, yet it grudgingly admits that “toward the end of the second century in the West, and among the fourth century Greek Fathers, there is knowledge of this additional verse.”

Then in 1985 the NEW Jerusalem bible appeared on the scene and it has once again omitted the last 7 words of verse 3 and all of verse 4, with a lame footnote telling us that “some witnesses add....”. But wait. There’s more. Now the 2009 the latest Catholic Public Domain Version has come out and they have gone back to including both verses in full with no brackets or footnotes!

Seems like the Catholics are not the only ones who don’t have an inspired and inerrant Bible. One of many Bible critics who do not believe that ANY Bible in ANY language IS or ever was the complete and infallible words of God is Dave Miller, Phd. He is the Executive Director of Apologetics Press. He has written an article criticizing the reading found in the King James Bible, in which he says: “The ultimate answer to this challenge to the Bible’s integrity is found in the fact that the last part of John 5:3 and the entirety of verse four were not a part of the original inspired autograph by John. The oldest, most reliable manuscripts omit the words, and with near unanimity scholars agree that the preponderance of the evidence shows its spurious status to be “virtually certain” (Metzger, 1971, p. 209). Renowned Greek scholar A.T. Robertson observed: “It is a relief to many to know that the verse is spurious” (1932, 5:79).”

Note: It is so funny to hear these scholarly types discussing “the Bible’s integrity” when none of them actually believes that any Bible or any text in any language out there in print is now the

complete and inerrant word of God. Mr. Miller often quotes from the NKJV in his articles, yet he obviously does not believe even the book he quotes from is the pure word of God. You see, his own NKJV also contains the very words Mr. Miller criticizes as being spurious and uninspired. The full quote from A.T. Robertson is this. "All of this verse is wanting in the oldest and best manuscripts like Aleph B C D W 33 Old Syriac, Coptic versions, Latin Vulgate. It is undoubtedly added, like the clause in verse 3, to make clearer the statement in verse 7. Tertullian is the earliest writer to mention it. The Jews explained the healing virtues of the intermittent spring by the ministry of angels. But the periodicity of such angelic visits makes it difficult to believe. It is a relief to many to know that the verse is spurious."

Actually, "renowned Greek scholar A.T. Robertson" is misleading and inaccurate in the information he provides. Even the recent Nestle-Aland 27th edition critical text acknowledges that verse four is found in **the Majority of all Greek manuscripts**, the Old Latin, the Vulgate Clementine, the Syriac Peshitta and Harkelian, and in some copies of the Coptic Boharic ancient versions. As for Robertson's codex C, it was amended to now agree with the reading found in the King James Bible, and the codex D he mentions retains the words Robertson would have us omit from verse three. Robertson's "oldest and best manuscripts" can't even agree among themselves.

The fickle nature of their "science" of textual criticism is seen in that ALL these words were found in all Traditional Text Bible translations from the very beginning and in all Reformation Bibles in all languages. But Westcott and Hort decided to omit them. But, later on the Nestle critical Greek text put them back in the text! **I have a copy of the Nestle critical Greek text 4th edition printed in 1934. Guess what. It contains ALL the missing words IN THE TEXT.** But later on the same Nestle-Aland group of 'scholars' decided to once again remove all these words from verses 3 and 4. It seems Robertson and the Nestle-Aland people can't get their stories straight.

Likewise, and not surprisingly, James White also criticizes these verses as found in the King James Bible. In his book, *The King James Only Controversy*, Mr. White says on page 156: "This verse provides a classic example of how a marginal note explaining something in the text can end up as part of the text somewhere down the line. John's reference to the pool of Bethesda and the sick lying about it would be confusing to some. A marginal note explaining the traditional belief of the Jews regarding the angel stirring the waters COULD HAVE easily been accidentally inserted into the text by a later copyist, thinking that it was actually a part of the text that had been accidentally left out and placed in the margin."

Well, it's nice of Mr. White to give us his conjectures and personal theories, but we may well turn the tables on his view and suggest that some few scribes may have had a problem with what the verses clearly say and simply removed them.

Not only are the verses found in the Majority of all Greek texts, including at least 22 uncial copies, but, as Dean Burgon and Jack Moorman note, so also in the Old Latin copies of a, aur, b, c, e, ff2, g1, j, r1, the Vulgate Clementine, the Syriac Peshitta, Harkelian, Palestinian, some Coptic Boharic copies, the Armenian and the Ethiopian ancient versions.

Jack Moorman significantly points out that by omitting the last part of verse three and all of verse four, we then have no explanation as to why all those people were gathered at the pool, and verse 7 makes no sense at all. Verse seven states: "The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me."

Both Burgon and Moorman also confirm that the verses in question are quoted by many early

church Fathers including Tertullian 200 A.D; Tatian 175 A.D., Gregory of Nazianzus 390 A.D.; Ambrose, Chrysostom 390 A.D. and Didymus 379 A.D, Ammonius, Hilary, Ephraem the Syrian, Nilus, Jerome, Cyril of Alexandria, Augustine, and Theodorus Studita. (See Burgon, The Traditional Text, Volume 1 pages 82-84).

In his book, The Revision Revised, Dean John William Burgon adamantly defends the authenticity of these verses. He says on page 283 regarding the troubling of the pool of Bethesda that this passage “is not even allowed a bracketed place in Dr. Hort’s Text. How the accomplished Critic would have set about persuading the Ante-Nicene Fathers that they were in error for holding it to be genuine Scripture, is hard to imagine.”

The so called “oldest and best” manuscripts, upon which many modern versions rely, omit not only these verses in John 5, but anywhere from 11 to 45 entire verses from the New Testament. They frequently don’t even agree among themselves. Instead of the traditional reading of BETHESDA, Vaticanus reads Bethsaida, D has Belzetha, while Sinaiticus has Bethzatha. For more information on what these “oldest and best manuscripts” actually say, please see my article here [Oldest and Best Mss?](#)

Personal studies that I have put together about the pathetic joke that is called the “science” of textual criticism may be seen starting here -

["Science" of text crit](#)

You may also want to take careful note to look at the Second Part of this study where I have documented many of the wild and contradictory variant readings found just in the gospel of John where these “oldest and best manuscripts” are in total disagreement. Please take a look at this last section.

Before going on with what some other scholars of equal or greater learning than those behind the modern version bibles have said regarding John 5:3-4, I would like at this time to mention the long list of Bibles that continue to include all the words found in John 5:3-4. The oldest Bible translation online that I was able to find is the Anglo Saxon Gospels, of 990 A.D. There is also a copy of the Saxon Gospels from 1175 A.D. Both copies contain all the words in both verses 3 and 4. It is almost impossible to read, but you can clearly see that this very old pre-English translation contained all the words found in John 5:3-4 This is what it looks like - "John 5:3 on þam porticum læg mycel menygeo ge-adluga blindra. & healtra ænð forscruncenra & ge-anbidedon þæs wæteres steriunge. John 5:4 "Drihtnes engel com to hys time on þonne mere. & þæt wæter wæs astyred. and se þe raðest com on þonne mere æfter þæs wæteres steriunge wærd ge-hæld fram swa hwilcere utrumnyse swa he on wæs."

Other Bible translations that include the two verses in full are Wycliffe 1395, Tyndale 1525, Coverdale 1535, the Great Bible 1540, Matthew's Bible of 1549, the Bishops' Bible 1568, the Geneva Bible 1560-1599, Wesley's New Testament 1755, Youngs, Darby, the Amplified Bible, J. B. Phillips translation 1962, the NKJV 1982, KJV 21st Century 1994, Third Millennium Bible 1998, the Hebrew Names Bible, Green's Modern KJV 2000, the Orthodox Jewish Bible of 2011 and the Concordant Version 2006.

Now there are two new bible versions recently put out both based primarily on the Westcott-Hort revised Greek texts which generally omit some 3000 words from the New Testament, and yet both the Holman Standard of 2003 and the 2007 International Standard Version have gone back to including all the words in these two verses. The new versionists are nothing but consistently inconsistent.

In addition to all these English Bible that contain the ending of verse three and all of verse four, the following foreign language Bibles also contain all these words: The Spanish Sagradas

Escrituras 1569, the Spanish Reina Valera 1602, 1909, 1960 and 1995, La Biblia de las Américas 1997 and La Nueva Biblia Latinoamericana de Hoy 2005, the Italian Diodati 1649 and the New Diodati of 1991, the Riveduta 1927, La Parola e Vita 1997, the Afrikaans 1953, Arabic, Basque Navaro-Labourdin, Bulgarian, Chinese Union Version Traditional, Croatian, Czech, Dutch Staten Vertaling, Danish, Finnish, the French Martin 1744, Louis Segond 1910, French Ostervald 1996, the French Louis Segond 21 of 2007, the German Luther 1545, both the Modern Greek and the Modern Hebrew, Icelandic, Hungarian Karoli, Japanese, Korean, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maori, the Romanian Cornilescu Bible, the Portuguese Almeida and O Livro 2000, Norwegian, Romanian, Russian Synodal Version and the Victor Zhoromsky translation, Swahili, Tagalog, Thai, Turkish, Ukrainian and Vietnamese.

All these words are also found in the NIV Portuguese bible of 2000 called Nova Versao Internacional!!! It reads: "Ali costumava ficar grande número de pessoas doentes e inválidas: cegos, mancos e parálíticos. Eles esperavam um movimento nas águas. 4 De vez em quando descia um anjo do Senhor e agitava as águas. O primeiro que entrasse no tanque, depois de agitadas as águas, era curado de qualquer doença que tivesse." So, the NIV English version omits all these words but the NIV Portuguese version includes them.

Other Bible Scholars and Commentators -

John Calvin included these verses of John 5:3-4 in his translation without any note of doubt as to their authenticity and expounded upon them in great detail. He says: "At intervals - God might have at once, in a single moment, cured them all; but, as his miracles have their design, so they ought also to have their limit; as Christ also reminds them that, though there were so many that died in the time of Elisha, not more than one child was raised from the dead, (2 Kings 4:32-33) and that, though so many widows were famished during the time of drought, there was but one whose poverty was relieved by Elijah, (1 Kings 17:9; Luke 4:25). Thus the Lord reckoned it enough to give a demonstration of his presence in the case of a few diseased persons. But the manner of curing, which is here described, shows plainly enough that nothing is more unreasonable than that men should subject the works of God to their own judgment; for pray, what assistance or relief could be expected from troubled water? But in this manner, by depriving us of our own senses, the Lord accustoms us to the obedience of faith. We too eagerly follow what pleases our reason, though contrary to the word of God; and, therefore, in order to render us more obedient to him, he often presents to us those things which contradict our reason. Then only do we show our submissive obedience, when we shut our eyes, and follow the plain word, though our own opinion be that what we are doing will be of no avail. We have an instance of this kind in Naaman a Syrian, whom the prophet sends to Jordan, that he may be cured of his leprosy, (2 Kings 5:10) At first, no doubt, he despises it as a piece of mockery, but afterwards he comes actually to perceive that, while God acts contrary to human reason, he never mocks or disappoints us.

Adam Clarke comments: "Waiting for the moving of the water." This clause, with the whole of the fourth verse, is wanting in some MSS. and versions; but I think there is NO SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE AGAINST THEIR AUTHENTICITY." (Caps are mine)

Barne's Notes on the New Testament says: "In regard to this passage, it should be remarked that the account of the angel in the 4th verse is wanting in many manuscripts, and has been by many supposed to be spurious. There is not conclusive evidence, however, that it is not a part of the genuine text, and THE BEST CRITICS SUPPOSE THAT IT SHOULD NOT BE REJECTED." (Caps are mine.)

David Guzik's commentaries does not question the truth of these verses at all, and he comments:

“A pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda: This pool has been excavated in the area just north of the temple mount, and found to have five porches, just as John says. There are many unusual occasions healing in the Bible, The purified pot of stew (2 Kings 4:38-41); The healing of Naaman by washing in the Jordan River (2 Kings 5:10-14); The healing of the man who touched the bones of Elisha (2 Kings 13:20-21); Healing of those who have the shadow of Peter upon them (Acts 5:14-16); The healing of those who have Paul's handkerchiefs upon them (Acts 19:11-12).”

Even Jamieson, Fausset and Brown support the verses saying: “The want of John 5:4 and part of John 5:3 in some good manuscripts, and the use of some unusual words in the passage, are more easily accounted for than the evidence in their favor if they were not originally in the text. Indeed John 5:7 is unintelligible without John 5:4.”

For more information on the disputes about the inspiration of these verses and why they are a part of God's words, see this site here

<http://www.kjvtoday.com/home/translation-issues/should-john-54-angel-at-the-pool-be-in-the-bible>

In summary, these words found in John 5:3-4 are part of God's precious, inspired and infallible words. Any bible that omits them is to varying degrees a corrupt and incomplete Bible. The only ones that omit these words are the inconsistent witness of the Catholic Church and the new Vatican Version "interconfessional" text United Bible Society versions like the English NIV, [NASBs], ESV, NET and some of the modern Catholic versions. The King James Bible is God's Book of the Lord and the Standard of absolute written truth. Accept no substitutes.

All of grace, believing the Book,  
Will Kinney