

That You May Continue to Believe...



AN EXPOSITION OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN

Nobleman's Son & the Paralytic at Bethesda... John 4:46-5:18

I face a bit of a dilemma this morning in that I want desperately to start on John 5 and yet have not completely finished John 4. So if you will allow me to do so, I want to finish off John 4:46-54 by just reading through the section and making a few comments about it and by showing you how it fits within the opening section of the book and by thinking together about how its construction might have fit within John's larger purpose. My hope is to accomplish all of that in a matter of a just a few minutes.

^{ESV} **John 4:46...**So he came again to Cana in Galilee, where he had made the water wine. And at Capernaum there was an official whose son was ill.

The first thing I want you to notice is that this story takes place in Cana of Galilee. It forms a bookend with the story of the wedding at Cana. The wedding at Cana was the first of Jesus miracles and this is the second. Starting here you will begin to see a shift in the ministry of Jesus as it moves to Jerusalem and ultimately toward the cross.

Secondly, you ought to notice that this man is a “**royal official**”¹. In Greek, he is called a βασιλικὸς or little king, which meant that he was a royal official somehow attached to Herod and Herod’s government.²

^{ESV} **John 4:47**...When this man heard that Jesus had come from Judea to Galilee, he went to him and asked him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.

Verse 47 is particularly pitiful and the imperfect tense indicates that the man was continually begging Jesus to come down before his son died.

^{ESV} **John 4:48**... So Jesus said to him, "Unless you see signs and wonders you will not believe." ⁴⁹ The official said to him, "Sir, come down before my child dies."

The royal official was clinging to Jesus. He was clinging to Jesus only and His faith was rewarded.

^{ESV} **John 4:50**...Jesus said to him, "Go; your son will live." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and went on his way. ⁵¹ As he was going down, his servants met him and told him that his son was recovering. ⁵² So he asked them the hour when he began to get better, and they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." ⁵³ The father knew that was the hour when Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." And he himself believed, and all his household. ⁵⁴ This was now the second sign that Jesus did when he had come from Judea to Galilee.

Now this story has two clear purposes. First, it is to include one more group of people that put their faith in Jesus. Just as John the Baptist did. Just as the disciples Andrew, Philip and Nathanael did. Just as the Samaritan woman and the people of Samaria did. So did this royal official. No one was too high and no

one was too low. Jesus really was a leveler of people as John the Baptist had prophesied. The high were knocked down and the lowly were lifted up.

Secondly, it was to remind those first century believers who were on the fence between the synagogue and Jesus that Jesus could do what no one else could. He could give life. He could even give life eternal.

Now, having cleared that up, allow me to turn our attention to John 5. In March 1952, just a month before I was born, there was discovered in Cave 3 at Qumran an extraordinary scroll³. It was a scroll made out of copper and covered over with baked-on clay⁴. That it was made of copper should get your attention. You know, I know, that most scrolls were made out of leather that was carefully prepared and sanded smooth using polishing rocks prior to being written on. This scroll was different. It was hammered copper. It was hammered out into a very thin sheet and then punched with a stylus from behind to make the letters stick out on the copper. Even though the copper was covered by baked-on clay, it was still very oxidized. Scientists were afraid for years to do anything to it. One man, in particular, tried to read the lettering in reverse in the baked-on clay. One phrase that got his attention immediately and that he felt was being repeated was the phrase **“is buried at...”** When the scroll was finally cut up and deciphered at the University of Manchester the archaeologists discovered exactly what the phrase had caused them to suspect. The scroll contained instructions for locating buried treasure. The first line read, **“In Chorebbe, situated in the Valley of Achor, under the steps leading to the east, dig 40 cubits deep: a vessel full of silver with a total weight of seventeen talents...”**

In all, the treasure map lists 64 places where precious artifacts or treasures were buried. Now I care about the scroll but only indirectly. I think it is fascinating that such a scroll exists but the thing that really interests me about the scroll is hiding place number 57. Concerning hiding place number 57, the copper scroll writes, **“Close by, in Beth Eschdathajin, in the pool, at the point where the entrance to the jemumith (small sea or pool) is a vase with scents and a vase with perfumes.”**

Now, you don't have to be a linguist to realize that if you take the dual ending of Beth Eschdathajin it becomes Beth Eschda, which if you say with no break in the words turns into Bethesda⁵ (בֵּית־חַסְדָּא) possibly meaning **“House of Mercy”**⁶ or even **“House of the Flow”** or even possible **“House of the Dual Flow”**. Now, the reason that I think that is so remarkable is because for years liberal scholars denied the existence of the place called Bethesda and those that accepted the possibility of such a pool were not sure what it was actually called. But we'll talk more about that in a few minutes. Let's look at verse 1.

^{ESV} **John 5:1**...After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Now there is no way to know what feast is being referred to here. There is no article, no word “the” attached. If there were it would almost certainly refer to the Passover feast but as it stands all we know is that it was **“a feast”**. While in some passages the identity of the feast or activity that puts Jesus in a certain place means something very important. Here, the lack of an explanation as to which feast is in view means that that information is not a big part of the point John is making⁷. John is not concerned with any particular feast. He is concerned

with something else and that something is Jesus relationship to the Sabbath.
Verse 2...

^{NIV} **John 5:2**...Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool⁸, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades⁹.

Now verse two looks very simple in our English Bibles but has really generated all sorts of controversy in the underlying Greek texts. The reason it has caused a controversy is because the word "gate" is not in the original text. You can see the problem that has caused for translators just by looking at a few translations.

^{GNV} **John 5:2**...And there is at Jerusalem by the *place* of the sheep, a pool...

^{KJV} **John 5:2**...Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep *market* a pool...

^{NAS} **John 5:2**...Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep *gate* a pool...

^{NJB} **John 5:2**...Now in Jerusalem next to the Sheep *Pool* there is a pool...

Actually, what happens in Greek is something like this...

^{BNT} **John 5:2**...Ἔστιν δὲ ἐν τοῖς Ἱεροσολύμοις ἐπὶ τῇ προβατικῇ κολυμβήθρα ἢ ἐπιλεγομένη Ἑβραϊστὶ Βηθζαθά

There is in Jerusalem near the sheep _____ pool _____ which is called in Hebrew Bethesda...

Now those blanks cause translators either to supply a word right after "sheep" or a word right after "pool". Usually, if they supply a word after "sheep" the word they supply is "gate". If they supply a word after "pool", they put "Sheep" and "pool" together and add the word "place".

Now the reason they supply the rule “**gate**” is because there is a Sheep Gate mentioned earlier in Scripture. It is found in Nehemiah.

^{ESV} **Nehemiah 3:1**...Then Eliashib the high priest rose up with his brothers the priests, and they built the **Sheep Gate**. They consecrated it and set its doors. They consecrated it as far as the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Tower of Hananel.

Now there is no way to know for sure where this gate was at but most scholars and archaeologists think it to have been in the upper northeast corner of the city. They suppose it to have been the gate through which sheep were brought for ritual slaughter in the temple. Anyway once, such sheep were brought into the city they would have been washed and prepared for sacrifice and some suppose that the place where they would have been washed was called the “**Sheep Pool**”. I am inclined to take “**pool**” with “**sheep**” and supply the word “**place**” but my primary reason for doing that is that how the older commentators did it. For example, that is how Chrysostom, the great preacher of the Eastern Church in the fourth century (around 400 AD), took it.

Verse 2, 3...Now there is at Jerusalem a sheep pool, called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of halt, blind, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.¹⁰

Now whether I am right or not the one thing we know is that a “**Sheep Pool**” certainly existed. It is mentioned many other places¹¹. There are plenty of ancient references to the Sheep Pool at Jerusalem. Anyway, as I was telling you earlier there used to be a great deal of discussion about whether not any such place existed in biblical times. Of course, there were a lot of ancient references to the

“Sheep Pool” at Jerusalem. Jerome and Eusebius both mention it. One of the most interesting references is that of a man referred to as the Pilgrim of Bordeaux. He was an ancient traveler from Europe whose pilgrimages were recorded in detail. He wrote about the pool and included an interesting point to which both Eusebius and others also refer.

-Farther in the inner city, there is a twin pool with five porticoes, called Bethesda. The sick, having been ill many years, were cured there. The twin pool carries water, which is stirred (and colored) in a kind of scarlet¹².

Now, I was intrigued by the notion that one of the pools was scarlet in color. That is, the water was scarlet in color. Since both pools would have caught draining rain water any scarlet color, which was apparently in only one of the pools, would have had to come from somewhere else, perhaps an underground spring. Some of the ancient sources say that the water was stained by the blood of the sacrifices but I doubt that any good Jew would have bathed in water stained with blood. Instead, I suspect (and so do many others) that the water in one of the pools was connected to an iron enriched spring, which bubbled into the pool from time to time. In that sense, it would have been similar to Siloam which bubbled up at very predictable intervals depending upon what time of year it was. That may explain why people watched the pool so closely.

Now, as I was saying earlier, liberal scholars doubted for years whether there even was a Pool at Bethesda. In fact, some suggested that the reference to five porches was really only a metaphorical reference to the Torah or the first five books of Moses¹³. But all of that seems to have been put to rest around 1888 AD. Archaeologists found in an excavation at an ancient church in Northeast Jerusalem a marble foot dedicated to the gods at the spot of an ancient pool. Now

the fact that a Christian church was built over the top of the same spot meant that Christians also venerated the spot. As the archaeologists uncovered the area they discovered not one but two ancient pools that would have been for that day, considered enormous. The two pools were surrounded by five covered porches or colonnades. The northern pool was about 131' x 170' wide and approximately 25' deep. The southern pool was approximately 160' x 200' wide. It too was about 25 feet deep. The archaeologists determined that the two pools were divided by an area 21' wide that was also covered by porch or covered colonnade. Today the pools are still being uncovered are on the grounds of St. Anne's church in northeast Jerusalem.

Now let's look at verse 3.

^{ESV} **John 5:3...**³In these lay a multitude of invalids--blind, lame, and paralyzed.
⁵ One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.

If you are following along with me in the NAS you will notice that I skipped over the last part of verse 3 and all of verse 4. You should also notice that the verses I skipped are in brackets in your Bible. The reason for that is because almost none of the ancient texts have the end of verse 3 or any of verse 4. Most scholars believe that the end of verse 3 and all of verse 4 comprise a gloss or a comment from a scribe to explain why these people were lying around the pool. Of course, the explanation provided in some of the later texts fits well with verse 7 which would otherwise be very difficult to understand.¹⁴

Just as a reminder, I would encourage you not to be troubled by the exclusion of that verse. Not accepting it as a part of the original text does not mean that you

reject the miraculous or any such thing. It means that you think it more likely to have been added than deleted, that's all.

Now apparently there were a large number of physically distressed and sick people there, more or less camping out there in the porticoes that surrounded the pools. They may have received some therapeutic value from the baths there. Or they may felt like this man that being there when the waters were stirred provided their only hope for being made whole. At any rate Jesus picked out one man in particular and focused on him.

^{ESV} **John 5:6**...When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be healed?"

What a strange question for Jesus to ask. What we saw at the end of chapter 4 was a pleading with Jesus to heal. What we see here is Jesus sovereignly initiating the healing of the man at the pool. Why He chose this man over the others there is not explained. I think the point is that Jesus knew the man had been sick for thirty-eight years. I think it is another indication of the divine knowledge that Jesus possessed not unlike that which He demonstrated with both Nathanael and the Samaritan woman. It is not necessary that the man had lain the whole time at the pool. He may have come and gone at regular times in order to try to be there at the right time. Obviously, being there when Jesus came to the pool was the right time. Still the man misses the point of the question Jesus asked him. He was still focused on the pool.

^{ESV} **John 5:7**...The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.."15

The man's reply is really quite pitiful. He basically responds, "**I have no one to throw me in the pool. Someone always beats me there.**" That idea seems to fit with the idea that the first one in, and only the first one in, would be healed. At any rate, Jesus gives him three short commands.

^{ESV} **John 5:8**...Jesus said to him, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk."

Now notice the healing is immediate and notice to how John has successfully hidden until now that that particular day was a Sabbath.

^{ESV} **John 5:9**...And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath.

There are two things you ought to notice here. First, the man was healed immediately. I want you to think about that. His muscles had atrophied over a period of thirty-eight years and then all of a sudden he was able to stand up, to pick up his bed and to walk. He needed no therapy, no exercise, no transitional time to get stronger. He was healed and by healed I mean he was made a whole as he had ever been.

The other thing you ought to notice is that the conflict caused by his healing was almost immediate.

^{ESV} **John 5:10**...So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed."

Now, there is actually a Jewish tractate called the "**Sabbath**" that contained all of the rules for observing the Sabbath. It forbade the carrying of items from one domain to another (7:2) and it expressly forbade the carrying of bedding (10:5).

Now, I don't want to caricature the ancient Jews as joyless. Generally, the ancient Jews upheld the Sabbath with joy and thanksgiving but when they lost their way they completely lost their way. Particularly, in their dealing with Jesus they seemed unable to reconcile the good that He did with their understanding of what the Sabbath was all about. Leon Morris is right, I think, when he describes Jewish some of the peculiarities of their regulations regarding the Sabbath as less than wonderful. He writes:

For example...

“(On the Sabbath) a man may borrow of his fellow jars of wine or jars of oil, provided that he does not say to him, ‘Lend me them’” (Shab. 23:1). This would imply a transaction, and a transaction might involve writing, and writing was work and therefore forbidden. Or again, “If a man put out the lamp (on the night of the Sabbath) from fear of the gentiles or of thieves or of an evil spirit, or to allow one that was sick to sleep, he is not guilty of Sabbath breaking; (but if he did it with a mind) to spare the lamp or to spare the oil or to spare the wick, he is guilty” (Shab. 2:5). The attitude to healing on the Sabbath is illustrated by a curious provision that a man may not put vinegar on his teeth to alleviate toothache. But he may take vinegar in the ordinary course of a meal, and the rabbis philosophically concluded, “if he is healed he is healed” (Shab. 14:4)!¹⁶

Anyway, the Jews admonished this healed man straightway. And look how he answered their objections.

^{ESV} **John 5:11**...But he answered them, "The man who healed me, that man said to me, "Take up your bed, and walk."

You know, to my way of thinking, it is hard to refute this man's logic. If I had been bed-ridden for thirty-eight years and a man healed me, I too would have

done whatever he said. I particularly like John Chrysostom's restatement of his answer.

"Ye are silly and mad who bid me not to take Him for my Teacher who has delivered me from a long and grievous malady, and not to obey whatever He may command."

Still they wanted to know who had ordered him to carry his bed. Now, notice, they don't want to know who it was that healed him, who it was that healed him after thirty-eight years of paralysis. Look how they say it in verse 12.

^{ESV} **John 5:12**...They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?" ¹³ Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place.

Now, don't you think that is extraordinary? They do not want to know who it was that healed him. They only wanted to know who told him to "pick up his bed and walk." The unbelief and blindness of the Jews in this account caused some of the ancient commentators to see an allegorical connection between the thirty-eight years in which the man lay by the pool and the thirty-eight years that Jews wandered around in Sinai as a result of their disobedience and lack of faith. Now I don't see the allegorical connection but I do see the connection in unbelief. Still, the man that was healed did not know that it was Jesus who had healed him.

^{ESV} **John 5:14**...Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you."

Jesus told the man to stop sinning for fear that something worse might happen to him. In John 9, Jesus saw no connection between illness or physical malady and

sin. Here he seems to. I am not sure what that says about the nature of the man's paralysis. What I do think is telling is that the man was able to go to the temple for the first time in thirty-eight years. I think it is telling that he went straightway to worship. Still I am concerned with what he did in verse 15.

^{ESV} **John 5:15...** The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. ¹⁶ And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath.

Now, it is interesting that the Jews asked who it was that told him "pick up and carry" and he answered their question that it was Jesus who had healed him. Still, he told them it was Jesus. I think he must have known they were angry about Jesus' command but still he gave them Jesus' name and the text says they persecuted Him. Now, this is another use of the imperfect tense in the Greek and the idea is one of continuous action. The idea is that they were continually persecuting him. I'm not sure what action they took against Him. It may have been completely verbal or they may have threatened Him physically. It is hard to know but it was continuous and it was continuous because He had healed a man on the Sabbath.

Now, I love verses 17-18 and His response to those that persecuted Him. Listen to what He says...

^{ESV} **John 5:17...** But Jesus answered them, "My Father is working until now, and I am working." ¹⁸ This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

Do you get His response?

His response is, **“My Father is working, even on this day and His work is continuous and I am working just as He does.”**

Now, what is funny about His answer is that it is something that the Jews themselves had already considered. They worried about God working on the Sabbath. Can you imagine that? They knew that He worked of course. Babies were sometimes born on the Sabbath and people died on the Sabbath and since God superintended all the affairs of men that meant that He performed work. Of course, they knew He was no Sabbath breaker. Leon Morris includes the following in his commentary:

There is an account of a visit to Rome by four eminent rabbis who on being asked why God does not keep the Sabbath retorted that it is lawful to carry things within one's own courtyard and this whole universe is God's courtyard (*Midrash Rabba: Exodus, 30.9*).¹⁷

Now, I want you to get the point that Jesus is making and I want to drive this home as best I can. He is declaring that He must do good works on the Sabbath because that is what His Father does. He is saying that because God is His Father and because Sons do what their Fathers do, He had to do the works that His Father did.

He is saying He transcends the Sabbath.

He is saying that He is Lord over the Sabbath.

He is saying that He is God.

Now I want to remind you what John was trying to accomplish with his gospel. He was trying to remind those early Jewish believers who were straddling the fence between the synagogue and Jesus that Jesus was greater than all the glories of Judaism. He was trying to remind them that Jesus fulfilled the law on their behalf. He is trying to remind them that Jesus provided the rest that they were unable to find in the law. He was trying to remind them that...

He was greater than Jacob.

That He was greater than the ceremonial law.

That He was greater than the best and brightest wisdom of Judaism.

That He was greater than the Sabbath and the reason that He was greater than the Sabbath is because He is one with the Father and because of that the world was courtyard. He was trying to remind them that it was because of that they plotted against Him to kill Him.

Next week we'll dig into the full weight of the argument that Jesus will present in His defense against the Jews but as I close today I want to ask you this question, "Are you resting in Jesus? Is He your Sabbath rest? Or are you somehow hoping against hope to keep enough laws or commands to pacify God the Righteous Judge on eternity? If you are resting in anything other than the Sabbath rest God has provided, if you are resting in anything other than the Lord Jesus Christ Himself you are refusing the good work He has wrought on your behalf. If you are doing that, you are in fact a Sabbath breaker. But here's His promise, **'Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.'**"

¹ C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to John: An Introduction with Notes and Commentary on the Greek Text*, (London: S.P.C.K, 1967) 206. He writes: "This variant ("petty king", "princelet") is probably due to assimilation to the old Latin and Vulgate *regulus*. βασιλικος means either a "person of royal blood" or a "royal official", "person in the service of a king". Josephus uses the word of troops in the service of a king, generally (as at Bel. I, 45), and especially of forces serving the Herods (as at Vita 40of.). If, as is probable, this βασιλικος is to be identified with the centurion of Matt. 8.5—x3=Luke 7.1—10 we may think of him as an officer under Herod Antipas (who was not strictly a king but was a member of the royal Herodian house and was sometimes popularly referred to as a king—e.g. Mark 6.14).

² B.F. Westcott, *The Gospel According to St. John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1954), 78. Westcott writes: "The Vulgate, following an early but false reading (βασιλικος) gives *regulus*, "a petty king," "a chieftain." Some have conjectured that this officer was Chuza, "Herod's steward" (Luke viii. 3), or Manaen, his foster-brother (Acts xiii. 1)."

³ Joachim Jeremias, *Expository Times*, May 1960, Vol. 71.8, 227-8, "The Copper Scroll from Qumran" Jeremias closes his article this way: The fifty-seventh of the sixty-four hiding places is described as follows: 'Close by, in Beth Eschdathajin, in the pool, at the point where the entrance to jernumith is : a vase with scents and a vase with perfumes'... Precisely here, in and around Bethesda, is the greatest hoard of treasure hidden according to the list (hiding places fifty-seven to sixty). Bethesda on the copper scroll from Qumran! The copper scroll a witness to the reliability of a wrongly suspected piece of topographical information in the Fourth Gospel—what a notable result from the publication of a notable discovery!

⁴ Vendyl Jones, "The Copper Scroll and Excavations at Qumran". <http://www.vendyljones.org.il/copper.htm> Jones writes: Writing the script with a stylus on a copper medium was in itself an arduous task. There had to be a reason why the scroll was written from the back side in "mirror image" so that the letters would protrude on the face side. That answer was literally "wrapped-up" in the windings of the scroll! Those windings were filled with hard clay that was fired to the hardness of pottery in a low temperature kiln. Since the clay contained the impression of the protruding letters of the copper sheet, it was the clay that the writers expected to survive the eons of time, not the copper. Fortunately, the copper too survived because it was encased in the clay. However, the specialists (11) at Manchester did not realize the importance of the scroll's having been written in bas relief. They had no idea that the clay contained the impression of the text. Moreover, they thought that it was necessary to remove the clay before the scroll could be opened. Little did they realize that the clay itself contained readable text. Even more unfortunate, the process they used to remove the clay damaged the highly oxidized copper material and resulted in the loss of some of the scroll's text.

The Manchester team assumed that the windings of the scroll had simply become filled with dirt from the cave -- dirt which had become hardened. However, the consistency of the soil in Cave Q-3 (as in all the caves of the area) is a fine dust powder classified as "sandy loess" that is void of any silicon which would promote the hardening of the dust soil. When water is added to this soil and allowed to dry, the soil then returns to dust with no cementation. The hardened clay between the spirals of the scroll was therefore out of situ with the cave's geological environment. The clay

had to have been intentionally poured between the copper windings or applied to the surface of the copper before winding, and then fired in a kiln sufficient to bond the clay to a pottery-like hardness.

⁵ Joachim Jeremias, *Expository Times*, May 1960, Vol. 71.8, 227-8, "The Copper Scroll from Qumran" Jeremias writes: Beth Eschdathajin is a dual form of Bethesda, which (in agreement with the finding of archaeology) gives the information that the site of Bethesda comprised two pools.

⁶ Assigning a meaning for any place based on its name is problematic unless the text spells it out. Scholars wind up all over the place and sometimes when they engage in such practice. They actually add to the meaning the text is trying to convey.

⁷ D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1991), 241. Carson writes: "The truth of the matter is that we do not know what feast John has in mind. If the other feasts are named, it is because the context in each case ends Jesus doing or saying something that picks up a theme related to it. By implication, if the feast in John 5 is not named, it is probably because the material in John 5 is not meant to be thematically related to it. Mention of *a feast of the Jews* in that case becomes little more than an historical marker to explain Jesus' presence in Jerusalem."

⁸ C.H. Dodd, *Historical Tradition on the Fourth Gospel*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 180. Dodd writes: "It is therefore not without parallel that John has introduced his story with the statement that there was a pool surrounded by invalids waiting their turn to plunge into the healing waters, nor is there any great difficulty in supposing such material to be part of the tradition as it reached him. 'What is unlike the forms of traditional narrative known to us from the Synoptics is the communication of detailed topographical information in a style which is almost that of a guide-book: 'There is in Jerusalem, near the Sheep-gate, a pool called in Hebrew Bethesda,' which has five colonnades.' It has been held that the evangelist invented the five stoai (as a symbol of the five books of the Torah. It remains possible that he did intend the stoai to be symbolical, but there is now evidence which absolves him of the need for inventing them. Recent excavations in Jerusalem have revealed the existence of a pool in the required vicinity, with structural remains which the excavators interpret as the foundations of colonnades running round the edge of the pool and across it in the middle (4+1=5), dividing it into an upper and a lower pool. As it is unlikely that these structures escaped destruction in the sack of the city in A.D. 70, it appears that knowledge of them must have reached the evangelist by tradition, unless indeed he was one who had been well acquainted with the city before the catastrophe. We must, however, note that this gospel shows elsewhere a special interest in topography, apparently for its own sake. Whether this is a personal idiosyncrasy of the evangelist, which affected his treatment of his material, or whether the strain of tradition upon which he worked was richer in topographical detail than that represented by the Synoptics, must for the present remain an open question."

⁹ Aurelius Augustine, *The Gospel of John*, Tractate XVII (Ages CDRom) Augustine says that the five porches represented the five books of Moses. "That pool and that water seem to me to have

signified the Jewish people. For that peoples are signified under the name of waters the Apocalypse of John clearly indicates to us, where, after he had been shown many waters, and he had asked what they were, was answered that they were peoples. That water, then — namely, that people — was shut in by the five books of Moses, as by five porches. But those books brought forth the sick, not healed them. For the law convicted, not acquitted sinners... The five porches are the law. Why did not the five porches heal the sick folk? Because, “if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.”

¹⁰ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on John No. 36*. Ages CDRom. Cyril of Jerusalem (348-386 AD) also preached a homily called “The Paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda” in which he refers to the “Sheep Pool”.

¹¹ Joachim Jeremias, *The Rediscovery of Bethesda John 5:2*, New Testament Archaeology Monograph No. 1 (Louisville: Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1966), 10. Jeremias lists more sources than I want to get into. This article is the one that shapes all modern opinion about John 5:2.

¹² Jeremias, 17. Jeremias quotes both the Pilgrim and Eusebius at length.

¹³ This is the view taken by Augustine although he really believed in the pool. Still for him the significance of the five porches is the symbolic connection to the Law of Moses. See footnote 7.

¹⁴ Raymond Brown says that such superstitious ideas are not necessary to the text and reminds his readers that even today Muslims still think jinni or angels are connected to springs. R.E. Brown, *Gospel of John V.29* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 207.

¹⁵ Harris, W. Hall. *Commentary on John*. (Available at the NetBible.com website. He writes: The major problem in these verses is over the inclusion of verses 3b-4: few textual scholars today would accept the authenticity of these verses. However, in support of their inclusion, there is fairly broad geographical support. True, a considerable number of important manuscripts (P⁶⁶ P⁷⁵ ⋈ B C D) favor omission, but the standard canon that the older reading is preferred is not always conclusive. The same applies to the shorter reading—and the longer reading can just as easily explain the shorter in the case of accidental omission. Internally, it is argued that the verses are theologically offensive, and that at least 7 of the words are non-Johannine. But such statistical arguments prove little; and if the verse is theologically objectionable that gives strong weight to the probability it was deliberately excluded in some copies.

As far as I can see the text is incomplete without something here to explain verse 7, the reference to the troubling of the water. Most today would say this is what motivated a copyist to add verses 3b-4; but the text as it would stand without the verses in question is *so* difficult that it does not seem consistent with Johannine style elsewhere. It would seem, in fact, either obscure or careless to leave *this* incident unexplained, when elsewhere John goes to such great lengths to add notes and comments to aid readers who might not be familiar with Jewish customs, places, names, etc. Thus at this point I am inclined to think that some portion of verses 3b-4 may be authentic; but sorting out which exact combination of words is difficult and may be impossible given the present state of our knowledge of the history of the text.

It has also been said on the other hand that there was a popular tradition about the stirring of the water by an angel, which the author of the Gospel chose not to include because he regarded it as popular superstition, and therefore left the matter unexplained. It would seem, however, that he could have included the reference while pointing out that it was only legend; but in any case this is sometimes advanced as an argument in favor of the shorter reading.

¹⁶ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John (Rvd.)* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1995), 270.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 274.