

Did John Write John 5:3-4?

An Analysis of the Angelic Stirring

Charles Michael Snow

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by Charles Michael Snow

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This book is dedicated to the Great Physician from
whom all healing ultimately flows.

The Open Their Eyes

Textual Study Series

Introduction

My desire with “The Open Their Eyes Textual Study Series” is to present the very real debates over textual variants in a way that is accessible to the average church member. My goal is not to provide an exhaustive analysis of every textual variant with every possible angle brought under the microscope, but rather to present the essential arguments of each position so that a biblical conclusion can be reached. The Bible is still God’s inspired word, and it can certainly withstand the attacks and criticisms of our day.

My desire is to provide a defense of the Received Text and the King James Bible so that when conversations arise over what belongs, God’s people are able to put forward a robust defense of the holy scriptures. I pray that each entry in this series is a help to you in your understanding of God’s word.

Pastor Charles Snow

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Introduction

The account of the angel who troubled the water at the Pool of Bethesda, as recorded in John 5:3-4, has long been the subject of both criticism and wonder. Unlike many textual variants, John 5:3-4 not only challenges textual traditions and assumptions, but also theological ones. The acceptance or rejection of this text informs us as to the nature and workings of God. Therefore, it is vital to give an honest and thorough analysis of this passage. To do so will require first examining ancient manuscripts, beginning with the Greek and expanding to other languages. Second, there must be a consultation of the writings of early Christians, considering their quotations. Finally, there must be an investigation of both the lexical, as well as the contextual and theological consistency of the passage.

In the Authorized King James Version of the Bible, John 5:3-4 reads, “³ In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, **waiting for the moving of the water.** ⁴ **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.**” The bold text is the one debated.

The 2011 edition of the New International Version removes the affected text providing in its footnotes: “Some manuscripts include here, wholly or in part, *paralyzed – and they waited for the moving of the waters.* ⁴ *From time to time an angel of the Lord would*

*come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease they had.” (italics original).*¹

The Legacy Standard Bible retains this portion of scripture but places it into brackets. “³ In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered, [waiting for the moving of the waters; ⁴ for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever sickness with which he was afflicted.]”² The textual footnotes read, “Early mss [manuscripts] omit rest of v 3, and v 4”³, while Dr. John MacArthur, in the notes of his MacArthur Study Bible, writes, “The statement in the latter half of v. 3, ‘waiting for the moving of the waters,’ along with v. 4 are not original to the Gospel. The earliest and best Greek manuscripts, as well as the early versions, exclude the reading. The presence of words or expressions unfamiliar to John’s writings also militate against its inclusion.”⁴ This is a very strong statement from Dr. MacArthur, and it expresses a deep commitment to what he believes is a firm foundation of textual evidence (note the phrase “earliest and best”).

¹ John 5:3n, *New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011).

² John 5:3, *Legacy Standard Bible* (Anaheim, CA: Three Sixteen Publishing, 2021).

³ John 5:3n, *Legacy Standard Bible*.

⁴ John MacArthur, John 5:3b–4 study note, in *LSB MacArthur Study Bible*, 2nd ed. (Anaheim, CA: Three Sixteen Publishing, 2021).

The United Bible Society's 4th edition provides a slightly more positive approach to this variant when it records, "Other ancient authorities add, wholly or in part...".⁵ Note the UBS's confession that this variant is ancient inherently. Unlike other textual variants, where witnesses through ancient manuscripts may be scarce, this is not the case with John 5:3-4. This textual tradition is worth considering.

⁵ John 5:3n, Philip W. Comfort, trans., *The New Greek-English Interlinear New Testament*, ed. J. D. Douglas (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1990).

The Textual Tradition

Many things should be considered when examining the number of ancient manuscripts informing this variant. To aid this study, these manuscripts shall be grouped together by form, beginning with the highly esteemed papyri manuscripts and concluding with the “great” uncial codices, Sinaiticus (*X*) and Vaticanus (*B*).

Papyri Manuscripts

Papyri manuscripts are incredibly old and are usually the oldest manuscripts that have been discovered for any particular text. There are two papyri manuscripts discovered thus far containing the early portion of John chapter 5: P66 and P75. Neither of these papyri contain the account of the Angelic Stirring.

Papyri manuscripts are assigned their numbers according to the order in which they were discovered. For instance, P66 was the 66th papyrus manuscript discovered, while P75 was the 75th. Both P66 and P75 have been dated to approximately 175-225 AD around 85-135 years after the writing of John’s Gospel (some sources will date these papyri manuscripts as late as the 5th century).⁶ These papyri manuscripts were transcribed quite soon after John penned the original. For many this fact is so significant concerning the originality of the account of the Angelic Stirring that further examinations are unnecessary. There are, however, two additional

⁶ Philip W. Comfort and David P. Barrett, *The Text of the Earliest New Testament Greek Manuscripts* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 2001), 501–502.

things to consider regarding these papyri: location and consistency.

Both P66 and P75 were discovered in Egypt, while it is generally believed that John wrote his gospel account in Ephesus where he was an elder. Today, a journey from Dishna, Egypt, where P66 was discovered, to the archaeological site of Ephesus would take 23 days by foot.⁷ Certainly, in the absence of modern roads and conveniences, this journey would have taken far longer.

It is also known that among the early churches there were great persecutions and dispersions, so that Christians spread across the whole Roman empire. Copies of biblical writings were done by hand and likely didn't travel very far before they were copied again. These contribute to the understanding that simply because a manuscript is old does not make it the best. There are many factors that play a part in the copying and transmission of biblical texts to make such generalities. The original manuscript of John's gospel (autograph) could have been copied tens or hundreds of times before the text arrived in Egypt. This is unknowable, as the autograph does not exist to compare them with. (P75 contains not just portions of John, but

⁷ Google Maps, "Walking Directions from Ephesus Archaeological Site, Selçuk/İzmir, Türkiye to Dishna, Qena Governorate, Egypt via Jordan Valley Hwy/Route 65," Google, accessed June 4, 2026, <https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Ephesus+Archaeological+Site,+Atat%C3%BCrk,+Efes+Harabeleri,+35920+Sel%C3%A7uk%2F%C4%B0zmir,+T%C3%BCrkiye/Dishna,+Madinet+Dishna,+Dishna,+Qena+Governorate,+Egypt/>.

also of Luke, indicating additional handling than if it were a copy of John alone.)

Additionally, the papyri themselves are not pristine examples of manuscript transcription. Edward D. Andrews, the chief translator for the Updated American Standard Version, notes that P66 was not merely copied but also interpreted by the copyist, producing numerous scribal additions and singular and unique readings. He also seemingly omitted a number of portions as well.⁸ P75 is described as possessing similar textual alterations.⁹

Considering these things, it is evident that the papyri manuscripts alone form an insufficient foundation from which to render a conclusion regarding John 5:3-4.

Families of Manuscripts

In textual criticism, there are categories called manuscript families. These are manuscripts that researchers are able to group together as originating from a common source. For instance, if a copy of a book was

⁸ Edward D. Andrews, "Papyrus 66 (P66): One of the Earliest Available Papyri," Updating the American Standard Version (UASV), December 9, 2021, <https://uasvbible.org/2021/12/09/papyrus-66-p66-one-of-the-earliest-available-papyri/>.

⁹ Edward D. Andrews, "Papyrus 75 (P75): The Manuscript That Changed the Thinking of Textual Scholars," Updating the American Standard Version (UASV), December 5, 2021, <https://uasvbible.org/2021/12/05/papyrus-75-p75-the-manuscript-that-changed-the-thinking-of-textual-scholars/>.

brought to a town, such as Rome, and that copy was copied several times, and those copies were also copied several times, all without leaving Rome, those manuscripts might contain slightly different readings unique to them, just as people groups who are isolated from society at large might develop similar characteristics that differentiate them from the outside world.

When examining disputed passages, especially that of the Angelic Stirring, there are typically two textual streams: the Alexandrian (minority text) and the Byzantine (majority). Typically, disputed passages are included in the Byzantine text type and are omitted from the Alexandrian. There are, however, several manuscript families that generally follow the Alexandrian text type but also include the variant in John 5:3-4.

Family 1 (*f*¹) consists of around 17 manuscripts and typically follows an Alexandrian text type, resulting in the omission of the Pericope Adulterae (account of the woman caught in adultery in John 8). However, it also includes the account of the Angelic Stirring, which is typically a Byzantine reading. The manuscripts that make up this family are dated between the 10th and 15th centuries, showing a knowledge of majority text readings among minority text adherents at that time.¹⁰

¹⁰ "Greek NT Manuscripts," Library at Southeastern, Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, last modified July 30, 2025, accessed June 4, 2026, <https://library.sebts.edu/c.php?g=457318&p=4008172>.

Family 13 (f^{13}) similarly follows an Alexandrian text type while incorporating elements of Byzantine manuscripts, such as the account of the Angelic Stirring. These 13-17 manuscripts are unique in that they contain the Pericope Adulterae but transplant it from John 8 to Luke 21. They are dated similarly to between the 10th and 15th centuries.¹¹

Uncial Codices

Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus are often considered foundational manuscripts within modern New Testament critical scholarship. They are very complete ancient copies of the New Testament and Greek Old Testament (Septuagint/LXX). Codex Sinaiticus also includes two apocryphal works, the Shepherd of Hermas and the Epistle of Barnabas. They are both dated to the mid-4th century, making them the oldest complete (or almost complete, regarding Vaticanus) copies of the New Testament discovered thus far. They are both written in the Alexandrian text type, a family of related New Testament copies, originating in Alexandria, Egypt, that are similar amongst each other but differ from the majority of Greek New Testament manuscripts within the Byzantine text type, originating from the region of Antioch.¹²

¹¹ "Greek NT Manuscripts," Library at Southeastern.

¹² Daniel B. Wallace, "Some Famous Textual Problems: John 5:3b–4," Lesson 30 in *Textual Criticism* (course), Biblical Training Institute, accessed June 4, 2026, <https://www.biblicaltraining.org/learn/institute/nt605-textual-criticism/nt605-30-some-famous-textual-problems-john-5-3b-4>.

Neither Sinaiticus, nor Vaticanus contain the account of the Angelic Stirring, nor do they include marginal markings indicating the existence of a disputed text, as they do elsewhere. This indicates that the copyists were either unaware of the account, or were unfaithful to record its existence, no matter how disputed.

Some have made the case that these codices were produced during a time and in a region where great heresies were being propagated. Although there is no direct evidence showing tampering of this text, it does cause one to wonder regarding the philosophy of transmission held by these copyists, especially when considering the *laisse faire* approach of the papyri copyists in the same region.

Another significant uncial codex is Alexandrinus (A), a 5th century copy of the Greek New Testament and Septuagint. It defies the other ancient codices in its inclusion of the variant at John 5:3-4. It does, however, include a marginal marking called an obelisk, something which was included to indicate known dispute regarding a passage.¹³ There is some indication that Alexandrinus is a sort of conglomeration of manuscripts, with the gospels exhibiting Byzantine features and the remaining New Testament exhibiting Alexandrian features. Nonetheless, this codex proves both the existence and the debate of the Angelic Stirring approximately 200 years after John's writing.

¹³ Wallace, "Some Famous Textual Problems: John 5:3b-4."

Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (*C*) is a 5th century codex that does not include the Angelic Stirring in the original hand. There is evidence that a scribal gloss was added later in the margin, inserting the missing text. This codex was washed off at one point, to allow the parchment to be reused. Modern scientific techniques have allowed scholars to read the original biblical text, but they remain unable to date the scribal gloss (*C*³) due to the tampering (although some have attempted to date it to the 9th century at the earliest).¹⁴ The assumption posited by some, that a scribal gloss is always an addition to an already complete manuscript, is fallacious. This is not the only conclusion one can reach regarding these glosses. The opposite is also possible, namely, that a later reader of that manuscript realized his copy was incomplete and rather than go through the expensive or laborious process of acquiring a new one, simply annotated the old copy.

Codex Cypricus (*K*), a 9th century manuscript containing the four Gospels, is supposedly unique in that it omits the account of the Angelic Stirring, despite scholars claiming that it generally holds to the Byzantine text type. This claim can appear dubious at times, however. The claim that it appears Byzantine is based primarily on the type of handwriting and punctuation used. When it comes to the inclusion of certain

¹⁴ Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (Münster, Institute for New Testament Textual Research, Gregory-Aland 05 [docID 20005]), New Testament Virtual Manuscript Room, accessed June 5, 2026, <https://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/manuscript-workspace?docID=20005>.

traditionally Byzantine texts it appears Alexandrian, omitting passages such as the Pericope Adulterae. Therefore, whether or not Codex Cyprius is truly Byzantine or Alexandrian in its nature is based on very nuanced definitions of Byzantine and Alexandrian.¹⁵ A similar codex to Codex Cyprius would be Codex Sangallensis.

Codex Campianus (*M*) is a 9th century manuscript containing the four Gospels. Contrary to Codex Cyprius, however, Codex Campianus does contain the Angelic Stirring, as well as the account of the Pericope Adulterae, reflecting a purer version of Byzantine transmission, albeit with marginal markings to indicate known controversy.¹⁶ It is intriguing that these two manuscripts, dated to the same century, and which were discovered geographically close to each other, should have such variance.

Finally, it is important to note that even though these few manuscripts omit John 5:3-4, they fall into the great minority of Greek New Testament manuscripts. Only 10% to 20% of manuscripts discovered are consistent with the Minority Text, while 80% to 90% of

¹⁵ Codex Cyprius (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Grec 63; Gregory-Aland 017 [docID 20017]), New Testament Virtual Manuscript Room, accessed June 5, 2026, <https://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/manuscript-workspace?docID=20017>.

¹⁶ Codex Campianus (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Grec 48; Gregory-Aland 021 [docID 20021]), New Testament Virtual Manuscript Room, accessed June 5, 2026, <https://ntvmr.uni-muenster.de/manuscript-workspace?docID=20021>.

New Testament copies bare witness to the authenticity of the Angelic Stirring.

Ancient Translations

Greek is not the only language used by ancient Christians. As the Gospel spread, divers cultures and nations translated the scriptures into their own languages. Due to this, in addition to Greek, manuscripts have been found in Old Latin, Syriac, and Coptic. Concerning these ancient translations, pastor and received text advocate Jeff Riddle describes a strong foundation for the inclusion of the Angelic Stirring. In the Old Latin, there are at least seven codices that include the verses in question (codices Veronensis [it b], Colbertinus [c], Palatinus [e], Brixianus [f], Corbeiensis II [ff2], Rehdigeranus [l], Monacensis [q]). These codices form the majority of the Old Latin witness on this variant, although some additional codices do contain only the end of verse 3, while omitting verse 4. Most of the relevant Old Latin manuscripts were written between the 4th and 8th centuries, but they are believed to represent a manuscript tradition that began around 150 – 200 AD. In a later version of Latin (380s AD), Jerome included John 5:3-4 in his translation of the Bible into Latin (the Vulgate). Additionally, the variant has been found in several ancient Syriac (4th and 5th centuries) and Coptic

(3rd and 4th centuries) manuscripts.^{17 18} It is evident, therefore, that there are traditions of acceptance regarding the Angelic Stirring in regions beyond the use of the Greek language.

¹⁷ "What Historical Evidence Supports the Authenticity of John 5:4?," Bible Hub, accessed June 4, 2026, https://biblehub.com/q/Evidence_for_John_5_4_s_authenticity.htm.

¹⁸ Jeff Riddle, "Text Note: John 5:3b-4," *Stylos* (blog), July 23, 2015, <http://www.jeffriddle.net/2015/07/text-note-john-53b-4.html>.

Early Attestations of Authenticity

The account of the Angelic Stirring is remarkably well attested in the writings and sermons of Christians in the first few centuries following the apostles' ministry. Where manuscript evidence fails due to age, the quotations of the "church fathers" have been spared, producing direct quotations, and not mere allusions, within 50 years of John's writing.¹⁹

Tatian, a 2nd century Christian who compiled a harmony of the gospels, included John 5:3-4 in his *Diatessaron*.

"And there was in Jerusalem a place prepared for bathing, which was called in Hebrew the House of Mercy, having five porches. And there were laid in them much people of the sick, and blind, and lame, and paralysed, waiting for the moving of the water. And the angel from time to time went down into the place of bathing, and moved the water; and the first that went down after the moving of the water, every pain that he had was healed."²⁰

¹⁹ Peter Van Kleeck Jr., "Is the Angel at the Pool of Bethesda Scriptural?," Standard Sacred Text, July 9, 2022, <https://standardsacredtext.com/2022/07/09/is-the-angel-at-the-pool-of-bethesda-scriptural/>.

²⁰ Tatian, *The Diatessaron*, trans. Hope W. Hogg, Early Christian Writings, accessed June 4, 2026, <https://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/diatessaron.html>.

Tertullian, a 2nd and 3rd century apologist from Carthage said this in his sermon “On Baptism,”

“If it seems a novelty for an angel to be present in waters, an example of what was to come to pass has forerun. An angel, by his intervention, was want to stir the pool at Bethsaida. They who were complaining of ill-health used to watch for him; for whoever had been the first to descend into them, after his washing ceased to complain.” ²¹

Ambrose, the 4th century Bishop of Milan, seems to quote John 5:3-4 at least three times in his writings. Most notably, Ambrose writes this in his book *De Mysteriis (On the Mysteries)* Chapter 4, Section 22,

"What did you see? You saw water, certainly, but not water alone... Therefore it is said: *An angel of the Lord went down according to the season into the pool, and the water was troubled; and he who first after the troubling of the water went down into the pool was healed of whatsoever disease he was holden.*" ²²

²¹ Tertullian, *De Baptismo Liber*, ed. and trans. Ernest Evans (1964; repr., The Tertullian Project, 2006), accessed June 4, 2026, http://www.tertullian.org/articles/evans_bapt/evans_bapt_text_trans.htm.

²² Ambrose, *De Mysteriis* 4.22, in *Ambrose: Select Works and Letters*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, vol. 10 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1896), 321.

Also in the 4th century, John Chrysostom, the Archbishop of Constantinople, said this in his sermon on the gospel of John.

“Around this pool lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water; but then infirmity was a hindrance to him who desired to be healed, now each hath power to approach, for now it is not an angel that troubleth, it is the lord of angels who worketh all in all.”²³

When comparing the quotations of Ambrose and Chrysostom, it is clear that not only quotations, but also theological conclusions were derived from this text, confirming wide acceptance in both the Latin and Greek traditions.

Augustine, the 4th and 5th century Bishop of Hippo and student of Ambrose, quotes John 5:3-4 in his “Sermon 75” on two different occasions.

“When the angel gave the sign by the moving of the water. For thus was that pool sanctified, for that the angel came down and moved the water.” “And when did the sick man descend into the pool?

²³ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of John*, Homily 36 (on John 5:1-4), in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on the Gospel of St. John and the Epistle to the Hebrews*, ed. Philip Schaff, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, vol. 14 (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1889), 127-130.

When the angel gave the sign by the moving of the water.”²⁴

Jerome, the 4th and 5th century translator of the Latin Vulgate, wrote the following in his work *Dialogus contra Luciferianos* (*Against the Luciferians*),

“Bethesda, the pool of Judea, could not cure the limbs of those who suffered from bodily weakness without the advent of an angel.”²⁵

The 4th and 5th century Benedictine monk, John Cassian, wrote in his work *Collationes* (*Conferences*),

“And in the same way in the case of the man who had been lying for thirty-eight years near the edge of the pool, and hoping for a cure from the moving of the water.”²⁶

From these men alone, the account of the Angelic Stirring is shown to have been accepted from within 50 years of John’s writing to the 5th century and beyond. It was received by representatives from churches in

²⁴ Augustine, Sermon 75 [125 Old No.], on John 5:1–14, in *Augustine: Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament*, trans. R. G. MacMullen, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series, vol. 6, ed. Philip Schaff (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888), 478–481.

²⁵ Jerome, *Dialogus contra Luciferianos* 9, in *Jerome: The Principal Works of St. Jerome*, trans. W. H. Fremantle, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Second Series, vol. 6, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (New York: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1893), 324.

²⁶ John Cassian, *Collationes* 13.16, in *John Cassian: The Conferences*, trans. Boniface Ramsey, Ancient Christian Writers, vol. 57 (New York: Newman Press, 1997).

Europe, Asia, and Africa, clergy and laymen, from both Latin and Greek churches. It is also evident that many of these men did not quote John 5:3-4 in a supplementary fashion but rather as the basis for doctrinal and philosophical conclusions. The earliest evidence for the originality of the Angelic Stirring comes not from Greek manuscripts, but from quotations of early testimonies, overwhelmingly demanding its inclusion.

Lexical Consistency

Some arguments have been made regarding the lexical consistency of John 5:3-4 within the Johannine corpus. Consider once again this quote from Dr. John MacArthur: “The presence of words or expressions unfamiliar to John’s writings also militate against its [the Angelic Stirring] inclusion.”²⁷ Typically, a series of five words or phrases in this passage are questioned and said to be out of place in John’s writings. These instances shall be examined individually.^{28 29}

The phrase “waiting for” in verse 3 is the Greek root word ἐκδέχομαι. While it does only appear here in the Johannine writings, it has a wide use throughout the rest of the New Testament. Four to five different authors (depending on whether or not Paul wrote Hebrews) use ἐκδέχομαι. Luke uses it once in Acts. Paul uses it in 1 Corinthians three times. The author of Hebrews uses it twice. James uses it once, and Peter also uses it once. These instances reveal a wide and varied employment of this word. Additionally, Luke, James, and Peter use

²⁷ John MacArthur, John 5:3b–4 study note, in *LSB MacArthur Study Bible*, 2nd ed.

²⁸ "Should John 5:4 (Angel at the Pool) Be in the Bible?," KJV Today, accessed June 5, 2026, <https://sites.google.com/site/kjvtoday/home/should-john-54-angel-at-the-pool-be-in-the-bible>.

²⁹ "Textual Variants of John 5:3-7," *Praise Ministries International Blog*, November 3, 2021, <https://praiseministriesinternationalblog.home.blog/textual-variants-of-john-53-7/>.

ἐκδέχομαι as many times as does John. Are their verses to be discounted as well?

The word “moving” in verse three is the Greek root word κίνησις. This word is found nowhere else in the New Testament and is only found in the Septuagint twice (Job 16:5 and Psalm 44:14).

Some have pointed to the phrase “at a certain season” in verse 4 as being uncommon for John’s writings, but this is a difficult argument to make. The Greek phrase κατά καιρὸν does in fact only appear here in John’s writings, but that is because the other two places John uses the word καιρός are used in a personal manner. In John 5:4, John is writing of a specific time, while in John 7:6 and 8 he is writing of a personal time, with Jesus referring to “my time.” The absence of the specific phrase κατά καιρὸν in the remainder of the Johannine corpus merely points to the lack of similar situations and contexts requiring such language.

Others have mentioned John’s infrequent use of the word “angel” in his Gospel compared to the synoptics as something to question, but this is supremely odd. Not only does John mention angels twice more in his gospel (12:29 and 20:12), but he mentions them 76 times in the book of Revelation. In no way is John a stranger to the concept of angels.³⁰

Like the word “moving” in verse three, the word “disease” (νοσήματι) only appears in John 5:4 in the

³⁰ Wallace, "Some Famous Textual Problems: John 5:3b–4."

whole Bible, including the both the Old and New Testaments.

When analyzing these five supposed discrepancies of vocabulary, only two appear as truly unique to John. However, a single verse containing two unique words is ironically not unique at all in scripture. For example, Paul in Philippians 4:8 gives a list of six types of things to think upon. In this verse “virtue” (ἀρετῇ) appears only once in Paul’s writing and “lovely” (προσφιλῇ) appears only once in the entire New Testament. Yet no one questions the legitimacy of Philippians 4:8. This argument is foolhardy and holds no water when compared with the rest of scripture.

Ultimately, we know that the Holy Spirit inspired the text of scripture through human penmen (2 Peter 1:21), and is capable of using specific and correct language, even if it appears odd for the human writer.

Contextual Consistency

Perhaps one of the best points in support of John 5:3-4 is the argument that the verses are necessary to maintain context in the passage. Without this text, the background information presented at the beginning of the chapter is incomplete and causes the response of the impotent in verse 7 to lack context. The reader has no background information as to why the impotent responds to Jesus the way he does. Consider the difference when comparing this account as recorded in the Christian Standard Bible (2017) with the King James Version.

Christian Standard Bible

“¹ After this, a Jewish festival took place, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ² By the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there is a pool, called Bethesda in Aramaic, which has five colonnades. ³ Within these lay a large number of the disabled – blind, lame, and paralyzed. ^[4]

⁵ One man was there who had been disabled for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and realized he had already been there a long time, he said to him, ‘Do you want to get well?’

⁷ ‘Sir,’ the disabled man answered, ‘I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I’m coming, someone goes down ahead of me.’

⁸ ‘Get up,’ Jesus told him, ‘pick up your mat and walk.’ ⁹ Instantly the man got

well, picked up his mat, and started to walk.

Now that day was the Sabbath,” (Paragraph distinctions original) ³¹

King James Version

“¹ After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ² Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches. ³ In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water. ⁴ 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. ⁵ And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole? ⁷ 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. ⁸ Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. ⁹ And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.”

³¹ John 5:1–9 (Christian Standard Bible)

Lack of Context

In this text, we see two primary sections, the general background (vs. 1-5) and the present encounter with Jesus (vs. 6-9). In the CSB, we are told that by the Sheep Market there is a pool called Bethesda where there were five colonnades (covered porches). At this location a large number of disabled people congregated. There is no explanation given for why they chose to congregate around this specific pool, which would not be of any consequence except that the impotent man links the reason for his continued disability with the pool. The man's response demands an explanation regarding the pool. Why was the man's understanding of healing so strongly linked to the pool? This belief was obviously dependent upon his personal experience, as he had seen others go down before him, presumably receiving the healing that he perceived Jesus to be inquiring about.

This is a deficiency in the flow of the text, a deficiency that is completely unlikely considering the majority of the copies of John contain the fuller background explanation, as we see in the KJV. Perhaps this clarification of context was central in the decision of the LSB and NASB '95 to include the disputed text within the passage itself (albeit within brackets) contrary to almost every other modern version (including the NIV, ESV, CSB, NRSV, and NLT).

When examining the general background as presented in the KJV, we understand clearly why such a "great multitude" of disabled individuals would congregate around this one place, rather than where they

could focus on collecting alms (Acts 3:2). Far better in the eyes of these people was healing than alms, and at this pool they congregated for one reason: hope. There was a belief informed by experience (v. 7) that an angel stirred the water and the first one in the water was healed. The account as rendered in the KJV provides the necessary background to understand the impotent man's response.

Doctrinal and Theological Consistency

False Belief

Just because this crowd of disabled individuals believed that an angel came and touched the water, imbuing healing power, certainly does not necessitate that it is true. People possess very strong beliefs on things that are false all the time, creating many of the false religions seen today. Modern faith healers have many faithful devotees despite their obvious fraud. How is one to know whether the belief of this crowd was based on genuine healings or simply the placebo effect? After all, if the first person in the water was the only one to be healed, would that not lead us to logically conclude that the healthiest of the sick people were the ones who entered the water? There's no way to know. In the modern day, faith healers can be judged based on the evidence of their ministries. No tremendous miracles of healing come from them, so they are labeled as deceivers. However, when reading of miraculous acts in the Bible, they are to be accepted by faith as a matter of rule. So, without a personal, physical observation to verify the healings, and with the admonition of the scriptures to place faith in the miraculous nature of God, one must resort to doctrinal comparison. Does this miraculous display of healing abide by the revealed doctrines of angels and God's approach to healing as taught in the scriptures?

Doctrine of Angels

In the scriptures, the roles and duties of angels are very broad. They are ministers to God in the broadest sense (Psalm 104:4) and fulfill many of God's commands in the scriptures.

Most commonly, angels are sent as messengers, fulfilling the literal meaning of their name. Angels are sent to speak with Gideon (Judges 6), Manoah (Judges 13), Daniel (Daniel 8-9), Zacharias (Luke 1), Mary (Luke 1), Joseph (Matthew 1-2), and others.

There are also other tasks given to them. Angels are sent to kill the wicked in judgment (Numbers 22, 2 Samuel 24, 2 Kings 19), to deliver (Genesis 19, Acts 5, 12), and to collect the dead (Matthew 13:41-43, Luke 16:22). Therefore, it is clear that angels have been sent to perform many tasks in the scriptures. Healing, however, is not explicitly mentioned as one of those tasks, except here in John. The most similar task given an angel was when angels ministered to Jesus after His temptation (Matthew 4:11) and in the Garden of Gethsemane (Luke 22:43). An angel was also sent by God to provide food for Elijah when he was in need (1 Kings 19). So, while accounts of angels specifically healing are scarce, the broad nature of their working and the great nature of their power appear sufficient to facilitate this miracle.

God's Approach to Healing

In the Old Testament, God's healings can be divided into two broad categories: God's healing of ailments that He caused, and God's healing of natural ailments. Additionally, eight of the healings in the Old Testament involved a prophet in some way. Abraham prayed for Abimelech and his household who had been made barren (Genesis 20:17). Moses prayed for his sister, Miriam, when she became leprous (Numbers 12:10-15). Moses also prayed for the Israelites as they suffered judgment through snake bites (Numbers 21:8-9). An unnamed prophet prayed for King Jeroboam's hand after it had withered (1 Kings 13:4-6). Elijah begged God to raise the widow's son at Zarephath (1 Kings 17:17-24). Elisha prayed that God would raise the son of the Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4:32-37), while he simply instructed Naaman to wash in the Jordan to be healed (2 Kings 5:1-14). Finally, God heard the prayer of King Hezekiah and sent Isaiah to report his healing and extended life (2 Kings 20:1-7). Except for the leprosy of Naaman, every healing in the Old Testament required prayer, and arguably all except for perhaps Hezekiah and Isaiah required the direct working of God through a prophet.

Keep in mind that even though the account of John 5 occurs in the New Testament part of the Bible, it falls under the Old Covenant (Testament). John the Baptist was the first prophet to the people of Israel in nearly 400 years, since the ministry of Malachi. So, if God desired to heal someone during this time when He

intentionally withheld his direct revelation through prophets (Amos 8:11-12), and every instance of His healing in the Old Testament was through a servant, is it truly a far cry that He would use one of His angels?

Additionally, the scriptures do not tell us how long people congregated at this Pool. It would have to be long enough for word to spread about the miracles happening there. One could assume that the impotent man was by the Pool for a large portion of his 38-year struggle, which would mean the Pool was in use for this purpose longer than either Jesus or John the Baptist had been ministering, placing it firmly in an Old Testament context.

The question remains, though, even if God's using of an angel to bring healing was possible, what purpose did it serve? To some it may seem rather arbitrary for God to offer healing through this singular and odd means. However, this is where Jesus steps in.

In John 9:1-5, we read the account of Jesus' healing of a blind man near Siloam.

“¹ And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. ² And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? ³ Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. ⁴ I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work. ⁵ As

long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world.”

This passage introduces a disabled man not unlike the man by the Pool of Bethesda. This man had been blind for his whole life. Jesus’ explanation to His disciples as to why the man was born blind shines a bright light as to the nature of sickness in relation to healing. This man was born blind for this purpose: that the works of God should be made manifest in him.” Think on that. This man was born blind so that he could be healed. In so doing, Jesus’ power would be expressed and His message would be proved authoritative. Consider this truth in light of the impotent man.

The Bible describes this pool as one in which sick people could be physically healed by the power of God through this angel. However, these people would one day grow old and die nonetheless. The impotent man craved physical healing. He was consumed by the desire for it, so much so that when Jesus asked if he would be made whole the man thought of nothing but physical healing. When Jesus healed this man something happened that is not mentioned of those who were healed by the pool: the Jewish leaders were riled up. Not only did this miraculous healing indicated Jesus’ authority to preach (John 5:19-47), it also provided something better for the formerly impotent man than the pool could have ever provided: spiritual healing. John 5:14 records this, “Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.” Because of his newly

obtained health, the man was able to walk to the temple and worship God for the first time in at least 38 years, and when he did he was confronted by Jesus again, who drew his attention not just to his healing but his wholeness, and warned him of a thing far worse than lameness: Hell.

Not only does the account of the Angelic Stirring provide the necessary literary context to understand the passage, it also provided both the spiritual conditions Jesus needed for His ministry and those the impotent man needed for his salvation.

Attestations of Faithful Men

Finally, consider the thoughts of faithful Christians throughout the last several centuries who held to the validity of the account of the Angelic Stirring. This is not meant to produce an “Appeal to Authority” fallacy, as there are certainly just as many biblical scholars and pastors who do not hold to its authenticity. The goal is to prove that belief in the legitimacy of this passage is not held merely by a few cooks in a cave somewhere, but by highly respected and esteemed men.

Matthew Henry, the widely read 18th century Presbyterian commentator and minister wrote the following:

5. What virtue it had for the cure of these impotent folks (v. 4). *An angel went down, and troubled the water; and whoso first stepped in was made whole.* That this strange virtue in the pool was *natural*, or *artificial* rather, and was the effect of the washing of the sacrifices, which impregnated the water with I know not what healing virtue even for *blind* people, and that the angel was a *messenger*; a common person, sent down to stir the water, is altogether groundless; there was a room in the temple on purpose to wash the sacrifices in. Expositors generally agree that the virtue this pool had was supernatural. It is true the Jewish writers, who are not sparing in recounting the praises of Jerusalem, do none of them make the

least mention of this *healing pool*, of which silence in this matter perhaps this is the reason, that it was taken for a presage of the near approach of the Messiah, and therefore those who denied him to be come industriously concealed such an indication of his coming; so that this is all the account we have of it. Observe,

(1.) The *preparation* of the medicine by an angel, who *went down into the pool*, and *stirred the water*. Angels are God's servants, and friends to mankind; and perhaps are more active in the removing of diseases (as evil angels in the inflicting of them) than we are aware of. Raphael, the apocryphal name of an angel, signifies *medicina Dei*—God's *physic*, or *physician* rather. See what mean offices the holy angels condescend to, for the good of men. If we would do the will of God as the angels do it, we must think nothing below us but sin. The *troubling of the water* was the signal given of the descent of the angel, as the *going upon the tops of the mulberry trees* was to David, and then they must *bestir themselves*. The waters of the sanctuary are then *healing* when they are put in *motion*. Ministers must *stir up the gift* that is in them. When they are cold and dull in their ministrations, the waters *settle*, and are not apt to *heal*. The angel descended, to *stir the water*, not daily, perhaps not frequently, but *at a*

certain season; some think, at the three solemn feasts, to grace those solemnities; or, *now and then*, as Infinite Wisdom saw fit. God is a free agent in dispensing his favours.

(2.) The *operation* of the medicine: *Whoever first stepped in was made whole*. here is, [1.] miraculous extent of the virtue as to the *diseases* cured; what disease soever it was, this water cured it. Natural and artificial baths are as *hurtful* in some cases as they are useful in others, but this was a remedy for every malady, even for those that came from contrary causes. The power of miracles *succeeds* where the power of nature *succumbs*. [2.] A miraculous limitation of the virtue as to the *persons* cured: He that first stepped in had the benefit; that is, he or they that stepped in immediately were cured, not those that lingered and came in afterwards. This teaches us to observe and improve our opportunities, and to *look about us*, that we slip not a season which may never return. The angel *stirred* the waters, but left the diseased to themselves to *get in*. God has put virtue into the scriptures and ordinances, for he would have healed us; but, if we do not make a due improvement

of them, it is our own fault, we *would not be healed*. (italics original) ³²

The Reformer, John Calvin, wrote,

Now this is all the account we have of this *standing* miracle; it is uncertain when it began and when it ceased. Some conjecture it began when Eliashib the high priest began the building of the wall about Jerusalem, and sanctified it with prayer; and that God testified his acceptance by putting this virtue into the adjoining pool. Some think it began now lately at Christ's birth; nay, others at his baptism. Dr. Lightfoot, finding in *Josephus, Antiq.* 15.121-122, mention of a great earthquake in the seventh year of Herod, thirty years before Christ's birth, supposed, since there used to be earthquakes at the descent of angels, that then the angel first descended to stir this water. Some think it ceased with this miracle, others at Christ's death; however, it is certain it had a gracious signification. *First*, it was a *token* of God's good will to that people, and an indication that, though they had been long without prophets and miracles, yet God had not *cast them off*; though they were

³² Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, vol. 5, *On the Gospel of St. John* (on John 5:1-9) (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1953), 919-920.

now an oppressed despised people, and many were ready to say, *Where are all the wonders that our fathers told us of?* God did hereby let them know that he had still a kindness for the city of their solemnities. We may hence take occasion to acknowledge with thankfulness God's power and goodness in the mineral waters, that contribute so much to the health of mankind; for God *made the fountains of water*, Rev. 14:7. Secondly, It was a type of the Messiah, who is the *fountain opened*; and was intended to raise people's expectations of him who is the *Sun of righteousness*, that arises *with healing under his wings*. These waters had formerly been used for purifying, now for healing, to signify both the *cleansing* and *curing* virtue of the blood of Christ, that incomparable bath, which *heals all our diseases*. The waters of Siloam, which filled this pool, signified the kingdom of David, and of Christ the Son of David (Isa. 8:6); fitly therefore have they now this *sovereign* virtue put into them. The laver of regeneration is to us as Bethesda's pool, healing our spiritual diseases; not at certain seasons, but at all times. *Whoever will, let him come.* (italics original) ³³

³³ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Gospel According to John*, on John 5:1–6, StudyLight, accessed June 4, 2026, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/cal/john-5.html>.

John Wesley, one of the founders of the Methodist movement, wrote these thoughts regarding John 5:4,

An angel — Yet many undoubtedly thought the whole thing to be purely natural.

At certain times — Perhaps at a certain hour of the day, during this paschal week, went down - The Greek word implies that he had ceased going down, before the time of St. John's writing this. God might design this to raise expectation of the acceptable time approaching, to add a greater lustre to his Son's miracles, and to show that his ancient people were not entirely forgotten of him.

The first — Whereas the Son of God healed every day not one only, but whole multitudes that resorted to him. (bold original) ³⁴

David Brown, a 19th century minister in the Free Church of Scotland, in his comments on John 5 as part of the Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary, wrote the following bold defense:

4. an angel, &c.—This miracle differed in two points from all other miracles recorded in Scripture: (1) It was not one, but a succession of miracles periodically

³⁴ John Wesley, *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, on John 5:1–9, StudyLight, accessed June 4, 2026, <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/eng/wen/john-5.html>.

wrought: (2) As it was only wrought "when the waters were troubled," so only upon one patient at a time, and that the patient "who first stepped in after the troubling of the waters." But this only the more undeniably fixed its miraculous character. We have heard of many waters having a medicinal virtue; but what water was ever known to cure instantaneously a single disease? And who ever heard of any water curing all, even the most diverse diseases—"blind, halt, withered"—alike? Above all, who ever heard of such a thing being done "only at a certain season," and most singularly of all, doing it only to the first person who stepped in after the moving of the waters? Any of these peculiarities—much more all taken together—must have proclaimed the supernatural character of the cures wrought. (If the text here be genuine, there can be no doubt of the miracle, as there were multitudes living when this Gospel was published who, from their own knowledge of Jerusalem, could have exposed the falsehood of the Evangelist, if no such cure had been known there. 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. The internal evidence brought against it is merely the

unlikelihood of such a miracle—a principle which will carry us a great deal farther if we allow it to weigh against positive evidence).³⁵

Baptist minister and teacher Warren Wiersbe writes this in his commentary on John:

“While it is true that some manuscripts omit the end of John 5:3 and all of verse 4, it is also true that the event (and the man’s words in John 5:7) would make little sense if these words are eliminated. Why would anybody, especially a man sick for so many years, remain in one place if nothing special were occurring? You would think that after thirty eight years of nothing happening to *anybody*, the man would go elsewhere and stop hoping! It seems wisest for us to accept the fact that something extraordinary kept all these handicapped people at this pool, hoping for a cure.” (italics original)

Moody Bible Institute professor and commentator, Dr. John Phillips notes the following:

“From time to time the water was ‘troubled’ (5:4). There is some doubt about the validity of this verse. Perhaps it reflects the popular explanation of the time for the periodic disturbance of the water. That something happened periodically is evidenced by the fact that

³⁵ David Brown, *The Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary*, vol. 3, *The New Testament: Matthew to Revelation* (on John 5:1–9) (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 380–381.

all kinds of sick people waited by the pool, watching for the first sign of the occurrence. The popular belief was that whoever managed to jump in first, when the pool was agitated, received healing of whatever disease he or she had.”³⁶

Dr. Henry Morris, founder of the Institute for Creation Research, wrote:

“This verse is omitted in certain of the manuscripts, along with the last part of John 5:3. Most modern versions have omitted it because of what seems to be the unlikelihood of this cyclical miracle. The problem is, however, that John 5:7 (which is in all the manuscripts) makes no sense without it. Furthermore, the great majority of the manuscripts do include all these verses. Whether the miracle seems reasonable or not to our scientific minds, the probability is that it was recorded by John in his original text and was later deleted in some manuscripts because of the skepticism of the copyists. There is nothing impossible about the miracle, no matter how unusual it seems. Perhaps God, in view of the long absence of a prophetic voice in Israel, elected to maintain this continuing witness to His grace and power in Jerusalem, as a sort of perpetual messianic promise, to be

³⁶ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 1, *New Testament: Matthew–Galatians* (on John 5:1–9) (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 1989), 304.

repeated regularly until Christ would come.”³⁷

Dr. John R. Rice, Baptist evangelist and founder of the Sword of the Lord, wrote in his commentary on John,

"An angel . . . troubled the water" (vs. 4). Our English Bible is translated from ancient manuscripts into English. There are hundreds of these manuscripts, those of the Old Testament, or different parts of the Old Testament, being written in Hebrew while manuscripts of the New Testament are written in Greek. These manuscripts are copies of the original ones and there are so many of them, and they are so nearly exactly alike, that we can be sure the copies in the main are just like the manuscripts which John, Matthew, Paul and others originally wrote down, directed by the Holy Spirit.

However, there are some small differences caused by the copyists. Some manuscripts have a verse or two which other manuscripts do not have. However, there are only a few such cases in the Bible.

We are told that in the oldest manuscripts, the words *"waiting for the moving of the water"* (vs. 3) and that all of verse 4 are omitted. But it is written that an angel did

³⁷ Henry M. Morris, study note on John 5:4, in *The Henry Morris Study Bible*, King James Version (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 2012), 1573.

go down in a certain season and troubled the water and that the Lord miraculously healed the first one to go in. Why not? Certainly the people thought so. It is also certain that if one trusted the Lord for healing, he got it.

If in John 9:6,7 Christ used mud to restore sight to a man's eyes and had him wash at the pool of Siloam and that washing restored his sight, why could God not at certain seasons send an angel to trouble the waters and heal someone there? It would be no greater miracle for the man to be healed by faith, stepping into the water, than for Jesus to heal the man as He did. I believe in all the miracles mentioned by the Bible. If Jesus could not work miracles, then He would not be God.

On request, the elders are to pray for the sick, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord, "and the prayer of faith shall save the sick," says James 5:14-16. Why not faith when dipped in Bethesda? If God chose to heal Naaman's leprosy by having him dip in the Jordan seven times, why not heal some by having them dip in this pool?

Acts 19:11,12 says:

"And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: So that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from

them, and the evil spirits went out of them."

There were "special miracles." The fact that some have, without authority and without power, sent out handkerchiefs to radio listeners, does not change the fact that in Paul's case, God used "special miracles," that is, miracles of healing, in unusual ways.

God does work "special miracles" sometimes, as He did for Paul.

God raised the body of a dead man when he was hastily put in upon the bones of Elisha! (II Kings 13:21). Why do some want to leave out or explain away all the miracles? Let God do things in the way He chooses." (italics original) ³⁸

These are each well-respected men, widely viewed as largely credible across denominations. Each of them espouses a belief in the authority of this text, and several offer their own perspectives as to the defense of this account.

³⁸ John R. Rice, *The Son of God: A Verse-by-Verse Commentary on the Gospel According to John* (on John 5:1–9) (Murfreesboro, TN: Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1976), 110–111.

Conclusion

After examining the textual traditions, early Christian quotations, and considering the internal evidence, there is a firm case for the acceptance of the account of the Angelic Stirring in John 5:3-4. The textual basis for its legitimacy is far greater than is typically credited and the attestation by early Christians clearly demonstrates that this text was believed and used in the time immediately following the apostles, all over the Christian world. Additionally, the message of John 5 would be confused and hindered without the inclusion of John 5:3-4, and the scriptures teach that “God is not the author of confusion” (1 Corinthians 14:33).

The text of scripture as revealed in the Textus receptus and now in the King James Bible is trustworthy and defensible. It is worthy of full belief and acceptance.

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