

John 5:4 KJV/TR: Inspired Scripture or Inserted Invention?

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KJB1611

June 14, 2024

John 5:4 appears in the Greek Textus Receptus, the English King James Version or Authorized Version (KJV / KJB / AV), and in other Received Text – based Bibles. However, it is omitted in many modern Bible versions. The verse reads:

John 5:4 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.

ἄγγελος γὰρ κατὰ καιρὸν κατέβαινεν ἐν τῇ κολυμβήθρα, καὶ ἐτάρασσε τὸ ὕδωρ· ὁ οὖν πρῶτος ἐμβὰς μετὰ τὴν ταραχὴν τοῦ ὕδατος, ὑγιῆς ἐγένετο, ᾧ δὴποτε κατείχετο νοσήματι.

The variant actually concerns John 5:3b-5:4. The section in bold is what is omitted:

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.**

3 ἐν ταύταις κατέκειτο πλήθος πολὺ τῶν ἀσθενούντων, τυφλῶν, χωλῶν, ξηρῶν, ἐκδεχομένων τὴν τοῦ ὕδατος κίνησιν. 4 **ἄγγελος γὰρ κατὰ καιρὸν κατέβαινεν ἐν τῇ κολυμβήθρα, καὶ ἐτάρασσε τὸ ὕδωρ· ὁ οὖν πρῶτος ἐμβὰς μετὰ τὴν ταραχὴν τοῦ ὕδατος, ὑγιῆς ἐγένετο, ᾧ δὴποτε κατείχετο νοσήματι.**

Should we receive John 5:4 (or rather, John 5:3b-5:4) as part of God's holy Word? Yes, we should. Why?

1.) **In God's singular care and providence it has been included in the Textus Receptus, and received by the churches.** Scripture promises maximal certainty about its own text.

2.) **John 5:4 has great support in Greek manuscripts.** It appears in 99.2% of all Greek manuscripts. The United Bible Society's Greek New Testament, which is biased against the Textus Receptus, nevertheless lists as supporting witnesses in favor of John 5:4 the following: A C3 K L Xcomm Δ Θ Ψ 063 078 f1 f13 28 565 700 882 1009 1010 1071 1195 1216 1230 1241 1242 1253 1344 1365 1546 1646 2148 Byz Lect ita,aur,b,c,e,ff2,j,r1 vgcl syr,pal copbomss arm Diatessarona,earm,i,n Tertullian Ambrose Didymus Chrysostom Cyril.

Thus, for example, Tertullian explicitly comments on John 5:4 in his *On Baptism* (Tertullian, “On Baptism,” in *Latin Christianity: Its Founder, Tertullian*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. S. Thelwall, vol. 3, The Ante-Nicene Fathers [Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885], 671.) with no indication that anyone was questioning it. Undoubtedly, the testimony in favor of John 5:4 is both very extensive and very ancient. Its “appearance in an overwhelming number of surviving Greek manuscripts, its diffusion into the Latin and Syriac traditions (plus even some manuscripts of the Egyptian Bohairic version), along with its citation by fathers in both East and West ... serve to underscore its age[.]” (Zane C. Hodges, “The Angel at Bethesda—John 5:4: Problem Passages in the Gospel of John Part 5,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136 (1979): 29.)

3.) **John 5:7 does not make sense without John 5:4:**

 | 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.

If John 5:3b-5:4 is omitted from the Gospel of John, John 5:7 does not make any sense. What is the impotent man talking about?

4.) **The Copper Scroll from Cave 3 at Qumran** establishes that the spelling of the name as “Bethesda,” as found in the Textus Receptus and the vast majority of Greek manuscripts, is correct, while the alternative spellings that are featured in the tiny minority of MSS that omit John 5:4 (Bethsaida; Belzetha; Bethzatha) are incorrect. If the witnesses for omission are clearly wrong here, while the Textus Receptus is right, we should not be surprised if the Received Text is also right in including the passage.

5.) The **theology of the passage** fits with the rest of Scripture, although some have unreasonably questioned it. How can John 5:4 accurately record real events? I do not see why we should think that, in that period of time before there was a completed canon of Scripture and when the Jews, who desire a sign, were God’s nation and institution in a pre-Christian dispensation, that He could not have at unspecified intervals (John 5:4 does not say how often this happened) have miraculously healed people who came to this location through the instrumentality of angels. If demons contribute to at least some sicknesses and disease, why should we be surprised if God’s angels are associated with health? The area was destroyed by the Romans in A. D. 70, and so this miraculous action would have ceased by that point (if not earlier with the inauguration of the church as God’s institution, or even with Christ’s actions in John 5). Such miraculous healing could have been a sign that God’s special presence remained with His nation and people, even in the times of the Gentiles. Indeed, we should see that God even designed the entire place to point forward to Christ and to the manifestation of His glory as seen in John 5, after which the miracles likely ceased to take place there. The fact that, in this age when sign miracles (*semeion*) do not occur (although God works powerfully [*dunamis*] in His providential care and in many other wonderful ways) this verse can seem odd, and (in this dispensation) we are rightly highly skeptical about miracle claims, could easily explain

why someone wanted to take the passage out and why a small number of people who were fine “correcting” the Bible were able to get the verse out of less than 1% of Greek MSS. One writer comments:

*[I]t must be said that the miraculous intervention of angels in human life is so well established in the Bible, and so variegated, that only those who are uncomfortable with supernaturalism itself are likely to be genuinely troubled by the content of the verses under consideration. Indeed it may even be proposed that the reference to the angel is functional for Johannine theology. Already the Fourth Evangelist has pointed to the subservience of angels to the person of Christ by citing the Lord’s memorable words to Nathaniel, “Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man” (1:51). But here too the angelic ministrations at the pool of Bethesda is markedly inferior to the ministry of God’s Son. Indeed, the seasonal and limited character of the healings the angel performed—and which were of no avail to the invalid described in this passage—are an appropriate backdrop for the instantaneous deliverance which Jesus brought to a man who had virtually lost all hope (cf. v. 7) while he lay forlornly in a place where God’s mercy seemed always to touch others, but never himself. The concept that Messiah is greater than the angels—despite the reality of their divinely appointed activities—lies implicitly in the background of the Johannine text. That this was an important theme for early Christianity no one will doubt who has read the opening chapters of the Book of Hebrews. Its appearance here, therefore, is hardly surprising. (Zane C. Hodges, “The Angel at Bethesda—John 5:4: Problem Passages in the Gospel of John Part 5,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 136 [1979]: 38–39).*

It is also unfortunate that anti-Received Text presuppositions lead to the exclusion of any consideration of John 5:4 in many modern books on the doctrine of angelology.

In conclusion, John 5:4 (John 5:3b-4) is part of God’s Word, just as inspired as the rest of the text. We should receive it with fear and trembling, reverence and love, as we do the rest of holy Scripture.

–TDR