

John 5: The Pool of Bethesda

- Scholars debate whether actual healings are substantiated from this location or if this was common folklore for the area
- This scripture was highly disputed based on lack of archaeological evidence of any pools excavated in Jerusalem with five colonnades until 1956 when a team unearthed a rectangular pool 40 feet underground with two colonnades on each end and another running through the middle
- Until this, many supposed the gospel of John to be written by someone living much later than John and not a true eyewitness to the accounts recorded
- Also, both miracles performed by Jesus in Jerusalem occur in relation to water (blind man at Pool of Siloam and paralytic at Pool of Bethesda)
- Verses 3b and 4 are not contained by some early manuscripts and were added to later ones by scribes as an attempt to better set the context of the account
- Many believe the miraculous events surrounding this body of water to be more myth than fact and to be a result of Hellenistic (Greek) influence from the cults of Asklepios where worshippers would congregate in temples or around bodies of water awaiting a touch of healing from the god
- There were three feasts requiring the presence of Jewish males in Jerusalem (Passover or Unleaven Bread, Pentecost, and Tabernacles), we are not sure of which John refers in this chapter

John 5:1-9 ESV

- 1 After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.
- 2 Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades.
- 3 In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed.

John 5:3b-4 KJV (some translations remove 3b – 4 as these are not contained in some of the older manuscripts)

3 ... 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 One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.
- 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?”
- 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.”
- 8 Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.”

9 And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath.

John's writings and his theme of "water"

- *Bethesda*, Hebrew for *house of mercy* or *flowing waters*
- As much as water was "life giving" and necessary to sustain life, bodies of water were often feared as unknown and powerful
- John 1 John baptizes with water
- John 2 Jesus turns water into wine
- John 3 Jesus explains water and Spirit birth to Nicodemus
- John 4 the woman at the well and living water
- John 5 the Pool of Bethesda
- John 6 Jesus walks on water
- John 7 Jesus offers a drink to the thirsty
- John 9 Blind man washes in the Pool of Siloam
- John 10 Jesus returns to the place where John baptized at Jordan
- John 13 Jesus washes the disciples' feet
- John 18 crossing the Kidron brook
- John 19 Jesus thirsts and blood and water comes from His side

Is there significance to the numbers of 5 colonnades and 38 years of infirmity?

- Some scholars believe the 5 colonnades represent the Mosaic Law (5 books), the 38 years of infirmity represent the wilderness wanderings of Israel, and the pool represents the Jordan River
- The porches (colonnades) provided shelter from the elements and could parallel Israel's being "under the law" yet not "whole" – just as the paralytic had spent many years awaiting his healing
- The people waiting with a misplaced faith depending more on the healing waters than the One from which healing comes
- Israel, as a nation, watched the Ark of the Covenant enter the Jordan and the river recede so they could journey into the Promised Land, however, it was not the Ark that provided passage, it was the Lord
- This miracle illustrates it is not a movement of water, but a movement of God that changes lives
- We also see Jesus' concentration on individuals as much as a nation