

The Pool of Bethesda

“Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, Bethesda, having five porches. In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the water. For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” The sick man answered Him, “Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me.” Jesus said to him, “Rise, take up your bed and walk.” And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked” (John 5:2-9).

The Pool of Bethesda is a pool of water in Jerusalem on the path of the Beth Zeta Valley. The story in John 5 is fascinating in that it causes one to wonder why this pool, in which an angel would stir the water causing the first to enter to be healed, existed. The description of the pool in chapter 5 is detailed and thought to be more

metaphorical than historical, however, the Bethesda Pool was excavated in the late 19th century. Archaeologists discovered the remains of a pool fitting the exact description in John’s Gospel which listed it as being “by the sheep gate” and having “five porches.” They have concluded that this is the pool in John 5. But, why the angel? Some scholars contend that the angel is only a myth, that the people believed there was an unseen angel stirring the water, and that the water stirring was actually air moving through the aqueduct. They state that some of the early manuscripts do not contain verse 4, which was later added.

We are unsure about the angel or its purpose, or the stirring of the pool. This is not the main point of the story. The man at the pool could not make himself well. The Lord asks the man, “Do you want to be made well?” The Lord healed him. This we have faith to understand. “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deuteronomy 29:29).

For the elders,
Tony Williams