



## International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

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### **John 5:1-9 Commentary New Revised Standard Version**

**Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse [\*International Bible Study Commentary\*](#). **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the *International Bible Study Commentary* website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [\*International Bible Study Forum\*](#).

**(John 5:1) After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.**

In John 5:1, John began with, "After this," and there is a connection between the people and events in chapter 4 and chapter 5. In chapter 4, the woman of Samaria and the Samaritan townspeople learned the truth from Jesus and responded with belief that He is the Savior of the world. Also, in chapter 4, a royal official from Capernaum believed Jesus could heal his son and traveled twenty miles to ask Jesus to do so. The Samaritans came to faith after meeting Jesus. The royal official had heard about

Jesus and expressed his faith in Jesus when he went home believing Jesus had healed his son. In chapter 5, we will see conflict more than faith resulting from Jesus healing a sick man.

The Jews required a pilgrimage to Jerusalem for three different festivals: Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. In fulfilling the Law of God, Jesus probably attended all three festivals each year of His ministry. In this instance, John does not tell us which festival Jesus attended, but we know that Jesus began attending the Passover festival yearly with His parents when they lived in Nazareth. When Jesus was twelve years old, He was found talking with the teachers in the Temple (see Luke 2:41-52). He may have continued to do talk with teachers in the Temple each time He went to a festival throughout His life, but the gospels are silent about Jesus' life between the age of twelve and about thirty. The Gospel of John tells us more about Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem and Judea than the other gospels. In Jerusalem during the festivals, Jesus could do the most good for the greatest number of people, but He would also face the greatest opposition from religious and political leaders. Because the Temple was in Jerusalem, the expression "went up" was used by Jews when going from anywhere to Jerusalem.

**(John 5:2) Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes.**

The Sheep Gate was the entry gate through the city wall for sheep that would have been sold and sacrificed in the Temple and used for food. The Sheep Gate is mentioned in Nehemiah 3:1, 3:32, and 12:39. The pool's name was given in Hebrew and was translated as: "Bethesda" in the KJV, the NASB, and the NIV, and as Beth-zatha in the NRSV. The five porticoes were probably covered porches where sick people were protected from the burning sun or driving rain while hoping to be healed in the pool.

**(John 5:3) In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed.**

The terms "impotent" (KJV) "sick" (NASB) "disabled" (NIV) and "invalid" (NRSV) were used to describe as a group those seeking to be healed at the pool. The blind, lame, and paralyzed at the pool probably begged for a living or depended on their family for survival until they were healed. Having tried other means of healing, waiting at the Pool of Bethesda for the waters to move was most likely their last hope for healing.

(John 5:4) [Omitted from the NIV, the NRSV, and the oldest Greek manuscripts, this verse better explains why sick people gathered at the pool] **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.** [John 5:4 has been inserted from the KJV]

God sometimes sends angels to help and heal His people. For example, after the devil tempted Jesus, we learn that angels came and ministered to Him (Matthew 4:11). And we learn in Hebrews 1:14, that angels serve the children of God: “Are not all angels spirits in the divine service, sent to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?” Whatever the cause, those who were ill or disabled believed that an angel stirred the water from time to time and the first person to enter the pool would be healed of whatever disease they had. The people had faith in the healing power of God working through the water when angels stirred the water. We are reminded of Jacob’s well and the water that Jesus gives which is “a spring of water gushing up to eternal life” (John 4:14). Jesus also healed many; whereas, the pool in Jerusalem had healing value for only a few.

**(John 5:5) One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years.**

Among all those waiting to be healed, Jesus saw a man who had been ill for thirty-eight years, which was longer than a lifetime for many in the time of Jesus. He was not ill from birth. In this situation, we find a sick man who saw Jesus but who did not know who Jesus was and who did not learn anything about Jesus until after Jesus healed him. Jesus taught truth to the Samaritan woman, but Jesus did not try to teach this sick man any truth prior to healing him. Perhaps Jesus knew that the man was too ill and in too much pain to think clearly about the truth and

Jesus. We learn later that Jesus knew about the man's sins, but He did not bring them up for discussion. The royal official with the sick son had some secondhand knowledge about Jesus' power to heal before Jesus healed his son; then, he believed and went home after Jesus spoke the word to heal his son. Jesus' ability to heal the sick man at the pool did not depend on the man knowing any new truth, or on him knowing Jesus, or on him having any faith in Jesus. As the Son of God, the Word of God, the Creator of the world, and the Savior of the world, Jesus had the power to heal the sick man with a word without relying on anything the sick man might think, feel, or believe.

**(John 5:6) When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well?”**

Since Jesus knew what was within all people, He knew the man had been at the pool a long time. Since the man had been there a long time, Jesus asked the man what He himself knew already, “Did the man *really* want to be healed.” Jesus wanted the man to think about his situation and his illness. Perhaps the man would be more comfortable begging for his living than being made well enough to work. Jesus' question was for the man's self-examination, not for Jesus' information. Some prefer to remain ill rather than take on the increased responsibilities that come with being well.

**(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 making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.”**

What do we know about the man? Very little really. He did not say, “Yes! Of course, I want to be healed!” He did not say, “No. I would prefer to remain a sick beggar.” Rather, the man immediately blamed other people for the fact that he had not been healed, and he had no idea that the man who spoke to him could heal him. He made it clear that it wasn’t his fault he was still sick. First, he had no one to put him into the pool. So, we know that for most of thirty-eight years the man did not have a friend to help him, or they had all given up trying to help him. Jesus came to the man as a Friend to the friendless, and Jesus would help him that very day. Perhaps the man had no family. For some reason, perhaps his family had given up all hope for him long ago. Perhaps his family earned their living from his begging and preferred he remain sick. Perhaps no one in his family could wait with him and try every day for thirty-eight years to get him into the pool first. Essentially, the man was alone, bereft of family and friends. Second, as far as we know, none of the others who were also sick offered the man the opportunity to enter the pool ahead of them. Since he had been there for so many years before them, surely at least one able-bodied sick person would have offered to help him be first into the pool. It appears none of the sick ever showed compassion for the one who had been sick the longest. For some reason, those who were

sick never took turns or waited in line for their turn to enter the pool first when the water was stirred. Perhaps the man was so disagreeable among family, former friends, and those around him that no one wanted to help him. Prolonged sickness can influence a person to become disagreeable. We will learn more about the man's moral character as John's account progresses, but as the Friend of sinners Jesus was filled with compassion. As His Savior, Jesus was willing to heal the man of all his afflictions. Furthermore, after Jesus healed him, if the man would receive Jesus as His Savior; then, he could become part of Jesus' family and receive the gift of eternal life. In John 1:12, we learned this promise, "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God." After Jesus healed him, if the man showed an interest, Jesus would give him new truths, the Holy Spirit, new friends, and a new family.

**(John 5:8) Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk."**

We do not know much about the man's illness. Jesus found him lying on a mat. He said he was not quick enough to get into the pool first. He was at least lame and weak. When Jesus healed the man, He healed him completely and gave him the desire and the power to stand up, the strength to pick up his mat, and the ability to walk after thirty-eight years of lying on a mat day after day. Jesus will give everyone the power to do whatever He commands them to do.

**(John 5:9) At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a sabbath.**

Without knowing Jesus or believing in Jesus or being brought to faith in Jesus, this hopeless man was made well by Jesus and did exactly what Jesus told him to do. By doing exactly what Jesus told him to do, he showed his complete healing to all around him. Unknowingly, the man demonstrated the power of the word of Jesus, the Son of God. However, after Jesus healed the man, we see no sign that the man expressed joy, praised God, or gave thanks for being healed. If he had expressed thanksgiving for what Jesus had done for him or for having been healed, John would surely have told us. We do not know what he thought after Jesus healed him. Maybe he thought that now he would need to get a job. We naturally have so many questions that we would like answered that the Holy Spirit working through John knew we did not need to know, for the Holy Spirit wants us to keep our focus on Jesus. Now, after Jesus worked this miracle, conflict begins and hostility toward Jesus increases in Jerusalem among the nation's religious leaders—Jesus had healed the man on the Sabbath. We see no indication that the religious leaders or anyone else gave glory to God because the man had been healed after thirty-eight years of sickness. Later, we will be able to contrast this man's response to Jesus with the response of the man born blind after Jesus healed him.

## Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Why was the pool near the Sheep Gate used by the blind, the lame, the paralyzed, and others? How was it used?
2. Why did Jesus speak to and heal one of the people at the pool?
3. What did Jesus ask the man? Why do you think Jesus asked His question?
4. What did Jesus say to the man and what did the man do?
5. What did the royal official in John 4 have before Jesus healed his son that the man at the pool did not have?

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