

A HARMONY OF THE GOSPELS
XXXIX. Christ's Discipling Of A Paganized Hebrew
(John 5:1-14)

I. Introduction

- A. The Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 directed believers in the Early Church to disciple "all nations."
- B. However, Jesus' earthly ministry was directed toward "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 10:5-6), so there is precious little record in the Gospels of Jesus' example in discipling pagan people.
- C. However, in the case of Christ's healing of the paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda in John 5:1-14, Jesus first healed and then He disciplined this Hebrew paralytic who had been influenced to adopt a pagan superstition.
- D. Jesus' actions in relating to this man provide a great example in discipling those who are affected by pagan beliefs. We view this event for our insight, application and edification (as follows):

II. Christ's Discipling Of A Paganized Hebrew, John 5:1-14.

- A. At a Hebrew feast Jesus attended in Jerusalem, He visited a pool near the Sheep Gate just northeast of the temple complex, John 5:1a. (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 289; J. Dwight Pentecost, The Words and Works of Jesus Christ, 1991, p. 160) It was called the Pool of Bethesda and consisted of two pools next to each other. There were four rows of columns surrounding the pools with a fifth row running along the wall that separated them, and these columns supported roofs that shielded the many infirmed people who were there, John 5:1b-3a. (Ibid., citing Zane Hodges, "The Angel at Bethesda – John 5:4," Bib. Sac., 541 (Jan.-Mar. 1979): 37)
- B. John 5:3b-4 in the KJV text does not appear in the earliest manuscripts, and this section asserts the pagan superstition that the infirmed would wait for an angel to stir up the water so that the first infirmed person to enter the water could be healed. (Ibid., Bib. Know. Com., N. T.; Bruce M. Metzger, A Text. Com. on the Grk. N. T., 1971, p. 209) This superstition likely rose from the popular pagan belief found in Babylonian cuneiform inscriptions that there existed "holy wells" that could produce healing. (Alfred Edersheim, The Life And Times Of Jes. The Mes., 1972, v. I, p. 463, ftn. 1) However, the sudden stirring of the water was due to natural causes, "and to this day the so-called 'Fountain of the Virgin' in Jerusalem exhibits the phenomenon," Ibid.
- C. For that reason, when Jesus saw a paralytic lying by the pool who had suffered for thirty-eight years, and He had asked him, "Wilt thou be made whole?" (John 5:5-6 KJV), the infirmed man explained that there was no one available to help him when the water was stirred to get him into the pool ahead of the other infirmed people so that he could be healed, John 5:7. This man likely due to mental and emotional pain over his long-time infirmity had come to believe the superstitious pagan view to cling to some hope that he could be healed!
- D. We know that this man was a Hebrew, for after Jesus had healed him He later directed him to sin no more lest a worse ailment come upon him, John 5:14. This man was a Hebrew under the Mosaic Covenant, and he had suffered his ailment due to his personal sins in fulfillment of Deuteronomy 28:15, 22 NIV, ESV.
- E. However, when the man shared his belief of the stirring of the water, Jesus knew it would be useless to try to correct the man's pagan view at the time, for the man was too focused on the hope of being healed to concern himself with correct theology, so Jesus graciously said, "Rise, take up thy bed, and walk." (John 5:8 KJV)
- F. The man immediately was made whole, he took up his bed, and walked, John 5:9a. "Muscles long atrophied were completely restored," and without any need for extended physical therapy, he picked up his bed, balancing his body against the weight of the bed he carried, and walked, "a public sign that the Messiah had come" in fulfillment of Isaiah 35:1-7. (Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N. T.)
- G. This great healing event drew a multitude of people to crowd around the man, so Jesus left the area, John 5:13. However, He later contacted the healed man when he entered the temple precinct just to the south of the Pool of Bethesda (Ibid.) and there Christ told him to sin no more lest a worse infirmity come upon him, John 5:14.
- H. Jesus thus brought the healed Hebrew man back to align with Biblical truth: He revealed that the cause of the man's illness had been sin, that its solution came not by heeding a pagan superstition about an angel stirring the water in the Pool of Bethesda, but by obeying God and His Messiah Who had graciously healed him!

Lesson: *When the long-time suffering Hebrew paralytic in desperation had adopted the pagan superstition that he could be healed by the waters of the Pool of Bethesda if he could be the first to enter it after an angel had stirred its water, Jesus graciously healed the man to capture his faith in Him before bringing him back from his pagan error.*

Application: *To disciple people who are steeped in false beliefs, or who have mixed false beliefs with the truth, may we heed Jesus' example and earn their trust by our edifying actions before trying to correct their errant beliefs.*