

Text Criticism Assignment

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Upon an initial reading of the text in both the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible and the New King James Version (NKJV) of the Bible, it is easy to pick up on the different styles of English that the two translations are using. However, upon closer reading, the difference in the spelling of a word such as Bethesda (NKJV), or Bethzatha (NRSV) will be noticed. There is a footnote for this word that tells the reader that some ancient traditions translate this word as Bethsaida. Yet, this is minor in comparison to the next footnote which has to do with the inclusion or exclusion of the second half of verse three and the entirety of verse four from some traditions. The NKJV includes the second half of verse three and all of verse four which reads, “waiting for the moving of the water. 4 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” (John 5: 3-4). The footnote for these verses within the NKJV version of the Bible indicates that the “NU,” or translations that make use of the Nestle-Aland Greek New Testament, and the United Bible Society’s Third Edition (NU borrows from the first two letters of the Greek texts) omit the second half of verse three and four altogether. While the inclusion or exclusion of the verses in discussion does not change the theme of healing that happens within this pericope, it is an entire verse and a half of the text which makes it very noteworthy. It also raises the question of who is correct in their translation and even which original manuscript is the most correct in its rendering of the text? Are verses three and four true to the original text, or are they simply added in to explain the stirring of the pool and why it is important? If the NKJV or the NRSV, is in the wrong, then why do so many people rely on these translations as their version of the word of God?

When consulting the Society of Biblical Literature’s (SBL) Greek New Testament there are a few things that seem to be of importance within its text-critical apparatus. The first note for

the standout verse three simply seems to be that some of the ancient manuscripts add the word πολύ (many) after πλῆθος (multitude) which would simply create an emphasis on the multitude of people making it “a great multitude” instead of simply “a multitude.” The second note for verse three within the critical apparatus acknowledges the addition of the second half of verse three and all of verse four making this a long omission and note within the text. The remainder of the notes for John 5: 1-9 take up issues that involve spelling and the addition of a word to another within different manuscript traditions. While these notes are very much important within the translation of this text, they do seem to pale in comparison to the issue that surrounds verses three and four! Bruce Metzger also takes up the issue that surrounds verses three and four in his work *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. Regarding verses three and four within John 5 he notes that the omitting of the second half of verse three and all of verse four to be the “proper” way to translate the text. He makes this case by noting the fact that the oldest and best manuscript traditions omit the verses in discussion which would allow a conclusion to be made that the manuscripts/translations that include the verses are wrong. Not only are the verses missing but the language of the addition does not even follow Johannine language (see Metzger p.197). As a whole, the work of the SBL and Bruce Metzger has shown me that, while the addition of verses three and four may be a helpful explanation, they are not found within the earliest and best manuscripts and are therefore later additions and not original to the author. If anything, it has confirmed for me that the Bible should be read with care and intensity so false conclusions are not drawn based on one translation. I think this means for me, as someone who does know how to translate Koine Greek, that I need to go back and read the text in its “original” form rather than rely solely on the work of the English translation. I think consulting the Greek and even the critical apparatus within the Nestle-Aland or SBL versions will also prove to be

fruitful in concluding what texts such as John 5: 1-9 mean. So, for the sake of resolving the issues surrounding the second half of verse three and verse four, it would be a fair assumption based on the work done within the SBL and the work done by Metzger that their inclusion would be an ill reading of the text and therefore should be omitted.

Reading the variants of John 5:1-9 have not changed my understanding of the text as a whole. Again, it seems that the addition that is made on the part of the NKJV is aimed at explaining the stirring of the waters and not attempting to change the overall meaning of the text. I may have this view because I have grown up reading the NRSV and have only put it into discussion within academic settings, but I don't see the meaning of this passage changing for me having consulted and investigated the variants. I think the larger impact that these variants have had on me lies within the trust that I put into the English translations of the Bible. Knowing that there are translations that make use of manuscripts that are not considered to be the best worries me and the interpretations that are made by their readers. It has made me realized that as someone who preaches from these texts, I need to spend time reading into them to make sure that I am providing the most accurate translation and rendering of the text to my congregation.