

WE HAVE SEEN HIS GLORY

The Glory of God's Preservation

TEXT: [John 7:53-8:11 \(ESV\)](#)

Introduction

In our study and my preaching through the Gospel of John, we now arrive at John, chapter 8. For many of you, you will see this comment in your Bible. This is from the ESV. We read "The earliest manuscripts do not include 7:53-8:11.

If you're using an NIV Bible you will see on your pages this kind of thing (Even the font has been changed to italics indicating an addition):

⁴ They replied, "Are you from Galilee, too? Look into it, and you will find that a prophet does not come out of Galilee."⁴

[The earliest manuscripts and many other ancient witnesses do not have John 7:53–8:11. A few manuscripts include these verses, wholly or in part, after John 7:36, John 21:25, Luke 21:38 or Luke 24:53.]

8 ⁵³ Then they all went home, ¹ but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.^f

² At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them.³ The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴ and said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery.⁵ In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women.¹ Now what do you say?" ⁶ They were using this question as a trap,⁶ in order to have a basis for accusing him.^g

said to them, ⁵¹ "Does our law judge a man without first ⁵² giving him a hearing and learning what he does?" ⁵² They replied, ⁵³ "Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that ⁵⁴ no prophet arises from Galilee."

[THE EARLIEST MANUSCRIPTS DO NOT INCLUDE 7:53–8:11.]^f

The Woman Caught in Adultery

8 ⁵³ [[They went each to his own house, ¹ but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and ³ he sat down and taught them. ³ The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst ⁴ they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ Now ⁶ in the Law, Moses commanded us ⁶ to stone

What does all that mean? Is this story in the Bible? Should we study it? How do we handle this abrupt intrusion into our study? Well to answer these questions, I will be asking several other questions:

- #1. Why is that comment in our modern Bibles?
- #2. Can we trust our Bible translations?

1. Why is that comment in our modern Bibles?

The short answer to that question is simply this: This story of the woman caught in adultery has not been found in early, reliable manuscripts and may be misplaced (that is, it belonged somewhere else) or may have been a true account but God did not intend it to be included in our Bibles. Dr. D.A. Carson who is recognized as one of the foremost scholars on the New Testament writes, "There is little reason for doubting that the event here described occurred, even if in its written form it did not in the beginning belong to the canonical books."¹

It's important to note why this problem occurred. First of all, we all have to admit a certain reality. All of us read from a translation, not the original text that was communicated through the inspiration of God to His appointed authors. All of us have a translation of that. Someone might say, "But I have a Greek New Testament; or I have an interlinear English/Greek Bible." You need to know that you also

¹ Carson, D. A. (1991). [The Gospel according to John](#) (p. 333). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

have a translation. It is a Greek translation. You don't have the original either. In our Church Statement of Faith this is our confession:

"We believe the Bible to be the complete Word of God; that the sixty – six Books as originally written comprising the Old and New Testament were verbally inspired by the Spirit of God and therefore entirely free from error; that the Bible is the final authority in all matters of faith and practice and the true basis of Christian union."

We believe that as God inspired men to write the Scriptures, that original inspiration was absolutely free from error and is fully authoritative. So why then do we see this comment on our Bibles that this story may not be in the Scriptures?

A simple way for me to explain the situation is to go back to the earliest and best known English translation. It is called the King James Version. This English Bible, written in the 17th Century was a translation of 6 Greek translations. Those 6 Greek translations were written in the 10th to the 13th Century.

Now fast forward nearly 200 years and the English world compiled a new English translation called the Revised Translation. It was a translation based upon (not 6) but 2000 Greek manuscripts that had been found and didn't know existed. Fast forward to today and the situation is radically different. God's grace and providence have enabled us to now locate over 5,800 manuscripts. The earliest of these date back to the late 1st Century and the 2nd Century.

So you see the conclusion. When the KJV was written it was based upon 6 rather recent manuscripts. We now have access to nearly 6000 manuscripts dating back to the earliest of Christian centuries. Now someone might ask, "Can I trust my KJV Bible?" My answer is yes. The difference between the KJV and some of the good translations we have today is less than 2% of the text. It just happens that the story of the adulterous woman in John 8 is one of those differences. This story is absent from virtually every early manuscript. Why it was included by later scribes is not known. Does it make a difference? No. The story may not have been included by John but it bears the evidence of truth and fidelity to Christian doctrine.

2. Can We Trust Our English Translations?

You might be listening to this and say, "Wow, can I even trust the Bible translation that I have on my lap?" And the answer is a resounding ... MAYBE! (I don't know what you have on your lap!)

There are 3 types of Bible translations that you can buy.

1. An attempt a word-for-word translation. That is to say that the editors have amassed as much as possible the early, reliable Greek translations (note again we do not have the original) and have tried to create an English version that directly correlates to the manuscript evidence. It is impossible

to do it exactly word-for-word. If they did that it would make no sense to us. Look at verse 52 of John 7. In the ESV it reads:

“They replied, “Are you from Galilee too? Search and see that no prophet arises from Galilee.”

If we used the Greek Translation *Textus Receptus* for example, that verse would read:

“They answered and said to him also you of Galilee are. Search and look that a prophet out of Galilee has not risen.”

Now you can readily see that word-for-word would be rough. But you can also see that the ESV has retained the text faithfully. The KJV, The NASB, The ESV and other translations do that, too.

2. Secondly, in addition to attempts at word-for-word translations, there are “Idea-for-idea” translations. There the editors have sought to faithfully perceive the ideas or thoughts of the passage and faithfully communicate them. They don’t try to be word-for-word, but they try to be faithful. The NIV is a good example of that.
3. Thirdly there are paraphrases. In these cases there usually isn’t an editorial team. They are usually written by an individual. These are nice to read but should not be used to study. These include such books as the Living Bible, The Living Translation, or The Message. It would be unwise to use them to study, although you might enjoy reading them.

So you might ask the question, still, “If I use a good word-for-word translation, it is still a translation, how can I trust it?” And this leads me to my conclusion:

You can trust a good translation because you can trust God.

God has promised to preserve His Word. By preserve I mean that God has sovereignly promised to ensure that as you read your good translation today that He not only oversees and superintends the transmission of His Word over countless generations and multitudes of people groups and languages; but He ensures that you can know and trust your Bible to be His Word.

When it comes to the promises of God, Jesus Himself says, *“For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.”* (Matthew 5:18, ESV) He couldn’t make that promise unless He was sure that God would preserve His Word. Jesus also said, *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.”* (Matthew 24:35, ESV) The prophet Isaiah affirmed that God’s Word would remain forever. *“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.”* (Isaiah 40:8, ESV)

The logic is that in order for the Gospel to be proclaimed to the ends of the earth (Acts 13:47); God would have to preserve the message of the Gospel.

Application

It is important to note that the Bible was not preserved to remain unused. We are called to study it and apply it in our own lives today (2 Timothy 2:15). As Romans 15:4 (ESV) teaches us,

⁴ For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

To ignore the Bible is to ignore God's instruction. It is to abandon God's encouragement. It is to disregard hope. Tim Challies has a insightful article on this topic (My notes have cited the reference.) and in it he writes these wonderful words:

"While thousands of years have passed since God breathed out the Old and New Testament Scriptures, they remain the living, perfect Word of God today. Though the Scriptures have passed through countless scribes and many forms— from papyrus to paper to phone— you can be confident that the Word you read today is the very Word that was breathed out by God and written by the prophets and apostles."²

The question today is not, "Is the story of the adulterous woman in the Bible?" The real question is, "Are you in the Bible?" "Are you investing your time and energy, nourishing your soul in God's revelation?"

One of the world's great novelists was Sir Walter Scott. Born in the 18th Century, some of his novels have found there way throughout the world and have been translated into most major languages. Lying in Abbotsford, England, during his last days, he said to his son-in-law, Mr. Lockhart, "Bring me that Book."

"What book?" asked Mr. Lockhart.

"There is but one Book," replied the famous author. "Read to me out of the Bible."

"The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the LORD is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the LORD are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward." (Psalm 19:7–11, ESV)

² <https://www.challies.com/articles/has-the-bible-been-preserved-for-us-today/>