

## Modern Translations and John 7:53 – 8:11

Introduction: The goal of all good translators (and preachers called to preach their translations): Neither add to nor take away from the original manuscripts of Scripture (Rev. 22:18-19). Modern translations believe that John 7:53 – 8:11 (KJV) was added to the original. Here is why:

1. The section is missing in our earliest Greek New Testaments (Sinaiticus (4<sup>th</sup> century); Alexandrinus (5<sup>th</sup> century); and Vaticanus (4<sup>th</sup> century).
2. The section is missing in our earliest fragments of the Gospel of John (papyrus 66 and 67 (around 200 AD)).
3. The earliest extant inclusion of the section in a Greek New Testament appears in Beza (5/6<sup>th</sup> century), where the account “differs considerably from the common text” (Westcott, 141).
4. Ancient translations of the Bible do not have this passage (the Old Latin – 5<sup>th</sup> century, the Coptic – 3<sup>rd</sup> century, the Syriac – 4<sup>th</sup> century, the Gothic – 4<sup>th</sup> century, and the Armenian – 5<sup>th</sup> century).
5. “All the early church Fathers omit this narrative: in commenting on John, they pass immediately from 7:52 to 8:12” (Carson, 333; Tertullian – 220 AD; Origen – 254 AD; Theodore of Mopsuestia – 428 AD; Chrysostom – 407 AD; Cyril of Alexandria – 444 AD; Cyprian – 258 AD; Hillary – 367 AD).
6. The later Greek manuscripts that include the passage often do so with asterisks (\*) or obeli (†) indicating that its inclusion in the original is uncertain. Westcott counted 10 of such manuscripts that have the passage at the end of the Gospel, 225 that have it after John 7:36, and 69 that have it after Luke 21 (141).
7. Edersheim, the orthodox commentator with a Jewish background and expertise in rabbinic literature, sees historical shortcomings in the account (*The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2.4.163).
  - a. Jews would have brought witnesses to the crime of adultery who would have had to give testimony.
  - b. The scribes and Pharisees would not have followed this “utterly un-Jewish, as well as illegal, procedure.”
  - c. The use of this kind of situation to “tempt” Christ (v. 6) to violate the law seems out of place since “there is little evidence that it was carried out very often in first-century Palestine, especially in urban areas” (Carson, 335; cp. Joseph’s plan to put the pregnant Mary away privily so as to not put her to shame in Matt. 1:19).
  - d. The Jewish interpretation of the law in that day called for strangulation, not stoning.
  - e. That this display would be allowed in the Temple precincts is unlikely.
8. Verse 12 begins, “Then spake Jesus again unto them [i.e., the people in the temple who were divided about Him in 7:43],” but 8:9 has everyone leaving the temple with Jesus and the woman finding themselves alone. This seems to be literary evidence that the account was inserted between sections that belong together.

What are we to do?

1. Rejoice that this wonderful amount of evidence exists for understanding the true text of Scripture’s original manuscripts (the autographa). God has preserved His Word (Rom. 15:4). Modern translations adjust the KJV in this way and to this extent in only two places in the New Testament. More than 5800 ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament exist for us to read and compare, the earliest fragment dating to 125 AD. By way of contrast, those mentioning the existence of Julius Caesar include only 12 manuscripts of his autobiography, the oldest dating around the ninth century, 15 manuscripts containing the speeches of Cicero, 20 manuscripts of Sallust’s account of the Catiline’s Wars, 6 manuscripts of *Plutarch Lives*, and one manuscript of Suetonius’s *Twelve Caesars*. None of these original sources for Julius Caesar dates further back than 400 AD [<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/sources-for-caesar-and-jesus-compared>].
2. Give thanks for the work of translators and publishers who have devoted their lives to the work of compiling the correct text of Scripture from existing evidence and for the work of translators who have done the hard work of blessing us with a copy of the Scripture in our own language.
3. Read our Bibles believing that every word in the original manuscripts is living and powerful (Heb. 4:12).
4. Get further help where one English translation differs from another (Prov. 11:14).