

ORIENT

You will notice when you turn to John 7:53 in your modern English translation (except KJV) that the text is set apart and there is a footnote. Why? Bible scholars across the theological spectrum are almost universally agreed that John 7:53-8:11 was not originally part of John's Gospel. Many think it is a historical event that actually happened, but almost no one believes that this text was originally part of the Bible.

4 Questions

1. *Why do we think this text isn't original?*

- a. Does not appear in any of the earliest and best manuscripts (copies) of the Greek New Testament.
- b. Does not appear in most of the early Versions (translations); some it appears with asterisk.
- c. Earliest Church Fathers make no reference to it, even in commentaries on John's gospel.
- d. When it is found it is included in 4 different places in John's gospel and once or twice in Luke.
- e. Both the style and language of this section in the original language are very different from the rest of John.
- f. Contextually it seems to disrupt the flow of John 7:52-8:12.
- g. Bible scholars old and modern, liberal and conservative almost universally agree (Carson, Piper, MacArthur, etc.). Leon Morris **"The textual evidence makes it impossible to hold that this section is an authentic part of the Gospel of John."**

2. *How did it get in there?*

- a. Many Bible scholars believe that this is a story that actually happened.
- b. Bears historical similarity to stories recorded by historians from around the time of Jesus.
- c. Most likely a story that actually happened and was passed down orally in the early church. Although the Holy Spirit did not inspire a

- gospel writer to include it in Holy Scripture it was most likely inserted by a well-intentioned scribe or group of scribes who wanted to see the story preserved.
- d. NKJV footnote – present in over 900 manuscripts; The story was found in some of the manuscripts used by the first English Bible translators during the 15th and 16th centuries. These manuscripts are medieval Greek minuscule manuscripts and other Versions and are considered by most Bible scholars to be secondary and/or inferior textual traditions. It made it in and it is very hard to completely remove it.

3. Can we trust our Bibles? (Does the Bible have errors?)

- a. A case like this can actually help us to understand how well preserved our Bibles actually are.
- b. The NT is a collection of twenty-seven 2,000 year-old documents. The Church has always confessed that the *original manuscripts* of those documents were inspired and inerrant and that the Bibles we now possess are an accurate and authoritative representation of those original manuscripts. As far as we know the original documents no longer exist. What we have is roughly 5,800 handwritten copies of various portions of these documents in the original language of Greek. In addition we have tens of thousands of ancient “versions” or translations into other languages. In addition to this we have enough writings of the early church fathers that we could reconstruct the entire NT solely through this source. By comparison some of the other great works of antiquity are survived by only a few or at most a few hundred copies. Also, the earliest manuscripts of the NT are much closer to the actual events than other works in history – some less than 100 years. In other words there are far more copies from far closer to the actual events than any other book in the history of the world.
- c. Textual criticism is the branch of science whereby scholars highly trained in original languages date, prioritize and compare the manuscript evidence to get us as close as possible to the original.

- Translation committees have used the best manuscript traditions to translate from the original languages and give us our English Bibles. Textual criticism assures us that the English Bible you hold in your hand is a very accurate representation of the original manuscripts.
- d. The doctrine of the Preservation of Scripture acknowledges that there is a supernatural element undergirding how the Scriptures have been passed down so as to ensure that we possess the Word of God as God desires us to have.
 - e. The Church has always understood that there are *variants* in the manuscript traditions. The vast majority of these variants have to do with spelling or word order. A few other places have to do with one or two verses (John 5:3-4). Only two places contain a significant passage (present and Mark 16:9-20). No variant reading affects a Bible doctrine or teaching in any significant way. If you take out John 7:53-8:11 the major idea is still found elsewhere. It isn't surprising *that* there are variants. It is surprising that there are so few.
 - f. Serious, honest investigation should strengthen not undermine our confidence and faith in the Bible we hold in our hands. *What if we only had 1? Would we know it was the true or could it be a fake?*
 - g. Further Study: [Why Trust The Bible?](#) Greg Gilbert;

4. What do we do with this text?

- a. If it isn't Scripture it doesn't carry the weight of Scripture.
- b. Good possibility that this actually happened.
- c. This sounds a lot like something Jesus would have done.
- d. If nothing else it is a great illustration of lessons Jesus teaches elsewhere.
- e. Read the text and draw a few universal, biblical conclusions

EXPOSE

Read John 7:53-8:11

V. 6 – “This they said to test him”

- They weren't looking for justice, they were setting a trap.

- Religious people use rules to entrap and hurt people. Jesus uses rules to help people.

V. 7 – “Let him who is without sin...”

- Jesus is not excusing sin, he is confronting the heart
- “Good” and “Bad” are the wrong categories.

V. 11 – “Go and sin no more”

- Grace means getting what you don’t deserve
- You don’t clean yourself up to come to Jesus. You come as you are, he cleans you, you go away different.

EXHORT

- You can trust your Bible
- The message of Jesus should challenge you and change you

Discuss:

- *What’s your take on all the technical discussion? Do you need follow-up?*
- *What lesson from the story speaks to your life?*
- *How does Jesus want to challenge you and/or change you through this message?*

NEXT WEEK – John 8:12-30