

The Gospel According to John “Miraculously Transmitted, Undeniably Reliable”

John 7:53-8:11



John 7:37-39

[Everyone went to his home. But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and began to teach them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center of the court, they said to Him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?”

John 7:37-39

[They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground. But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, “He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her.” Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground.]

John 7:37-39

[When they heard it, they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center of the court. Straightening up, Jesus said to her, “Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?” She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more.”]

Main Idea

God, using fallible people, miraculously provided us with manuscripts of the New Testament in such a way as to bear undeniable witness to the reliability and authority of our Bibles today.

Miraculously Transmitted

What's the big deal?



Notice the note in your Bible

NASB “Later mss add the story of the adulterous woman, numbering it as John 7:53-8:11.”

ESV “Some manuscripts do not include 7:53-8:11; others add the passage here or after 7:36 or after 21:25 or after Luke 21:38, with variations in the text.”

NIV “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.”

How should we think about this?

What does this say about
the reliability of our Bibles?

Miraculously Transmitted

What's the big deal?

How do we have what we have?



Transmission of the Text

The New Testament was written by men in the 1st century who had been with Christ or had worked directly with an Apostle and who were moved by the Holy Spirit to write what they did.

2 Peter 1:20-21

But know this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but **men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.**

This means that these men wrote in their own styles but were moved and inspired by the Holy Spirit such that the words they wrote were their own and yet also God's authoritative Word to us.

2 Timothy 3:16-17

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching,
for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;
so that the man of God may be adequate,
equipped for every good work.

This inspiration goes to the very words
and grammar of the text.
(This is what is meant by *verbal* inspiration)

Transmission of the Text

These men wrote their texts in Koine Greek
or Common Greek.

God choose to use the common language of peoples spread throughout the known world so that even the least among men would have a text they could understand.

In large part this has validated the desire to translate the Scriptures into the languages of all peoples.

Transmission of the Text

These writings were understood to be Scripture
—precious and essential words from God—
from the beginning.

According to Peter regarding Paul...

2 Peter 3:15-16

...and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

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But what are these “Scriptures”?

The canon of the Bible includes 66 books—
39 Old Testament books and 27 New Testament.

These 39 books of the Old Testament had been
recognized as canonical before the time of Christ.

Though the canon of the New Testament was
not *formally* recognized until the councils of the
4th century, these leaders were simply attesting
to what was already received by the Church.

Transmission of the Text

We do not have the original documents of the NT.

But because these writings were understood to be Scripture and were to be read in churches and used to form the Church, there was an eagerness to get copies made and spread throughout the known world.

Paul's Instructions...

Colossians 4:16

When this letter is read among you, have it also read in the church of the Laodiceans; and you, for your part read my letter that is coming from Laodicea.

1 Timothy 4:11

“Prescribe and teach these things.”

Transmission of the Text

These copies were made both by professional and non-professional scribes and copyists.

As a result, we have thousands of manuscripts containing some or all of the New Testament; and now more than ever, they are available for review.

This is all by God's doing and for our confidence in His Word to us!

Critics often say,
“The Bible was changed by church leaders.”

But this claim is foolish considering the manuscript witness and is based either in ignorance or willful dishonesty.

Transmission of the Text

Manuscripts came down to us in various forms and are generally grouped into four categories:

Papyri, Uncials, Minuscules, and Lectionaries.

What is an *uncial*?

ALLSCRIPTUREISINSPIREDBYGODANDPROFITABLEFOR
TEACHINGFORREPROOFORCORRECTIONFORTRAINING
INRIGHTEOUSNESSOATHATTHEMANOFGODMAYBEADE
QUATEQEQUIPPEDFOREVERYGOODWORK

(2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Minuscules were in lower case print or
sometimes in cursive.

Transmission of the Text

We also have myriad translations and commentaries that clarify and bolster the manuscript witness.

Miraculously Transmitted?

In all of antiquity, there is nothing that even comes close to the witness we have for the New Testament!

A Few Notables:

- There are at least 5600 manuscripts (handwritten copies) that contain part or all of the New Testament.
- There are fragments that date within 100 years of the original and complete copies as early as c. 325 A.D.
- Homer's *Iliad* comes closest with 1800+ manuscript fragments. The oldest complete copy is 10th century, more than **1800 years** after the first draft.
- Plato's *Republic* is attested by less than 10 manuscript fragments.

Miraculously Transmitted?

The copyists *did* make mistakes as they copied.

Errors were generally one of two kinds...

Common transcriptional errors:

- Accidentally copying a word twice.
“We have an amazing amazing witness.”
- Accidentally omitting a word.
“We have amazing witness.”
- Transposing letters within a word.
“There is no reason to duobt our text”

Common correctional errors:

- Omitting a word or phrase believing it to have been wrongly added.
- Adding a word or phrase believing it to have been wrongly omitted.
- Mistakenly correcting grammar or spelling.
- Including a marginal note or comment in the text thinking it was original.

Miraculously Transmitted?

There *are* many mistakes in the copies;
but due to the nature of the mistakes and
because we have so many copies, they are almost
all easily identified, explained, and corrected.

Because we have so many copies, we are nearly
certain that what we have is what was original.

“If the great number of manuscripts increases the number of scribal errors, it increases proportionately the means of correcting such errors so that the margin of doubt left in the process of recovering the exact original wording is in truth remarkably small.”

(F.F. Bruce)

Where there remains any uncertainty,
no matter of doctrine is affected.

What are the “chances”?

ALLSCRIPTUREISINSPIREDBYGODANDPROFI
TABLEFORTEACHINGFORREPROOFFORCORRE
CTIONFORTRAININGINRIGHTEOUSNESSOTH
ATTHEMANOFGODMAYBEADEQUATEQEQUI
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*The uniformity of what we have is
unimaginable apart from miracle.*

Consider Two Things:

A textual witness that did not contain any human errors would likely be rejected by skeptics as clear evidence that it was rigged.

God provided us a textual witness produced by fallible human hands yet with a uniformity among the manuscripts that defies human explanation and that leaves no doctrine in doubt.

Miraculously Transmitted

What's the big deal?

How do we have what we have?

What about the story of the woman
caught in adultery?



What about this story?

As far back as we know, this story was either unknown as part of John's gospel or disputed, and it continues to be debated today.

Take Note:

No doctrine or matter of importance
is at stake in this debate!

The ending of Mark 16 is the only
other place in all of the Bible where
an open debate like this exists!

So, what will I do with this story and why?

It is important to note that faithful pastors have handled this text differently over the centuries.

Like them, I have sought to apply Paul's pastoral mandate in making my decision.

Paul's Pastoral Mandate:

2 Timothy 4:1-2

I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.

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and by His appearing and His kingdom: **preach the word;**

be ready in season and out of season; **reprove, rebuke, exhort,**
with great patience and instruction.

My mandate is to preach God's Word
and to do so with authority precisely
because it is God's Word.

The Tension of A Two-Way Warning

Revelation 22:18-19

if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

The Tension of A Two-Way Warning

Revelation 22:18-19

If anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book.

So, what will I do with this story and why?

Entrusting myself to God's mercy,
because I have not overcome a strong doubt
that John wrote this account in his Gospel,
I cannot preach it.

Why Such Uncertainty?

No manuscript that we have from the first ~five centuries contains the account at all.

With the exception of one troublesome manuscript, the passage is not found in a text until the 8th century.

In some manuscripts where it is included, it is placed in different locations with varying texts and sometimes with notes similar to our current translations.

Why Such Uncertainty?

Many if not most of the early church fathers seem not to have known of it.

[e.g. Chrysostom (ca 400) gives no indication of this text in his commentary on John.]

The text itself is unlike John's other writings, seems to interrupt the flow, and creates some confusion.

Reasons why it may have been added later seem more likely than reasons for early removal.

So, what do we do?

Consider...

Life is filled with uncertainties and often uncertainties surrounding matters of great importance that require us to act!

So, entrusting ourselves to a merciful God who knows our weaknesses, we seek the truth according to our ability and then act in faith.

Philippians 4:6-7

Don't worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Consider Job

Job 42:1-3

Then Job answered the LORD and said,

“I know that You can do all things,

And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.

Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?

Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand,

Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.”

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Conclusion

We can be confident that God has provided us with a supernatural witness to His written revelation that is undeniably reliable.

We can be sure that God is good and will not fail to accomplish His will, so we can entrust ourselves to Him whenever we need to act in uncertainty.