

Comma Johanneum (1 John 5:7-8)

A Summary of the Evidence

I. What Is the Comma Johanneum?

If you own a King James Bible and turn to [1 John 5:7-8](#), you'll find these words: *"in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one. And there are three that bear witness in earth."* That phrase — the one mentioning the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost — is what scholars call the **Comma Johanneum**. "Comma" here is an old Latin word for a short clause or phrase, not the punctuation mark.

The question this study asks is simple: **Did the Apostle John actually write those words?** The evidence — from ancient manuscripts, from church history, and from the scholars who have studied this most carefully — points overwhelmingly to one answer: **No, he did not.**

This study is also a companion piece to: [*The Vatican Said "Lead All People to the Trinity." Revelation 13 Describes What That Looks Like.*](#)

II. What the Ancient Greek Manuscripts Show

This section tells a remarkable story on its own. Here's the key fact: *of the thousands of Greek manuscripts of the New Testament that have survived to this day, the Comma appears in only ten of them.*¹

But even that small number is misleading, because when you look closely at those ten manuscripts:

- Only eight are noted in the standard reference guide scholars use to compare manuscripts.
- Of those eight, **four contain it only as a side note** — something a later reader penciled in the margin, not part of the original text of the manuscript.
- The manuscripts that do include it (known by the reference numbers GA 61, 88, 221, 429, 629, 636, 918, and 2318) are almost all from the **1500s** — roughly fifteen centuries after John wrote his letter.
- The oldest manuscript to include it anywhere in its text is one called **GA 629**, dated to 1362–1363.² Even that is over twelve hundred years after John's time.

Most telling of all: every time the Comma shows up in a Greek manuscript, it appears to have been **translated back into Greek from Latin**, rather than coming from any genuine, independent Greek source.³

And here is the detail that should settle the question for anyone who thinks carefully about it: **Not one single Greek-speaking church leader from the early centuries — including the ones who spent their careers fighting over the Trinity — ever once quoted this passage.** If those words had been in their copies of John's letter, they would have used them. The fact that they never did means those words simply weren't there.⁴

III. How Did It Get Into the Bible in the First Place?

To understand how the Comma ended up in the King James Bible, you need to follow its trail backward through history. It's actually a fascinating detective story.

It appears the Comma **started life as a sermon illustration**. Sometime in the 300s AD, a Latin-speaking preacher was teaching on [1 John 5:7-8](#) and pointed out that the three witnesses John mentioned — the Spirit, the water, and the blood — could be understood as a picture of the Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. That kind of sermon commentary was common.

The problem came later. When readers or copyists wrote that commentary in the margins of their Bible manuscripts, a later scribe copying the manuscript saw the margin note and — as copyists sometimes did — accidentally incorporated it into the main text. This was not necessarily done with any intent to deceive. It was a common error in the era before printing.⁵

From there, it spread gradually through copies of the **Old Latin Bible** and eventually into certain copies of the **Latin Vulgate** — the official Bible of the Catholic Church. But here's an important detail: it was **not in the original Vulgate that Jerome produced**. Two of the oldest and most respected Vulgate manuscripts in existence — the **Codex Fuldensis** (copied around 541–546 AD) and the **Codex Amiatinus** (copied before 716 AD) — do not contain it. It was also not in the Vulgate as cleaned up and revised by the scholar Alcuin in the 800s.⁶

In fact, a *Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* states it plainly: *"It is now generally held that this passage, called the Comma Johanneum, is a gloss that crept into the text of the Old Latin and Vulgate at an early date, but found its way into the Greek text only in the 15th and 16th centuries."*⁷

A "gloss," by the way, simply means an explanatory note — something added to explain the text, not part of the text itself.

IV. Erasmus and the Story of How It Entered the KJV

Now the story takes a very human turn. In 1516, the great scholar **Desiderius Erasmus** published the first printed edition of the Greek New Testament. He left the Comma out — because he had searched the Greek manuscripts available to him and simply could not find it in any of them. He left it out again in his second edition in 1519.

This caused an uproar. Catholic critics accused him of undermining the faith by removing a passage that supported the Trinity.

Then, around 1520, a Greek manuscript suddenly appeared — now known as **Codex Montfortianus** (GA 61). It contained the Comma. Most scholars today believe this manuscript was produced specifically to pressure Erasmus into including the passage, since it shows signs of having been translated into Greek from the Latin, not copied from any genuine Greek tradition.⁸

Under intense pressure, **Erasmus included the Comma in his third edition in 1522**. But — and this is important — he did not do so because he was convinced it was genuine. In his own scholarly notes (called *Annotationes*), he makes clear he included it simply to protect himself from accusations of carelessness and bad faith.⁹

It is also worth noting that a popular story claims Erasmus had *promised* to include the Comma if anyone could produce a Greek manuscript containing it. This story turns out to be false. **H.J. de Jonge**, the world's leading expert on Erasmus's scholarship at the time of his research, specifically investigated this claim and found no evidence that Erasmus ever made such a promise.¹⁰

From Erasmus's 1522 edition, the Comma passed into what became known as the **Textus Receptus** — the standard printed Greek New Testament that most Protestant translators used for the next several centuries — and from there into the **King James Version of 1611**.

V. What This Means

The conclusion is straightforward. **The words added in [1 John 5:7-8](#) in the King James Bible are not original**. They began as a Latin sermon note, crept into the margins and then the body of Latin Bible copies, were translated back into Greek over a thousand years after John wrote, and entered the printed New Testament under duress in 1522.

Because of all this, every major modern Bible translation — whether produced by Protestants or Catholics — leaves the Comma out of the main text, or marks it as a late addition. It carries no weight as evidence for any doctrine, because it did not come from the Apostle John. It came from a later hand, in a later language, in a later century.

For my Seventh-day Adventist friends, additional denominational documentation is available at: <https://sidnash.org/t/1Jn5.7Documentation.html>

Footnotes

¹ Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed. (New York: United Bible Societies, 1994), 647–649; Kurt Aland et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament*, 4th rev. ed. (Stuttgart: United Bible Societies, 1993), apparatus at [1 John 5:7](#).

² Elijah Hixson, "The Greek Manuscripts of the Comma Johanneum ([1 John 5:7-8](#))," *Evangelical Textual Criticism* (blog), January 7, 2020. <https://evangelicaltextualcriticism.blogspot.com/2020/01/the-greek-manuscripts-of-comma.html>

³ Daniel B. Wallace, "The Textual Problem in [1 John 5:7-8](#)," Bible.org. <https://bible.org/article/textual-problem-1-john-57-8>

⁴ Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 648; Wallace, "Textual Problem." The writers most notably absent from any citation of this passage include Tertullian, Origen, Athanasius, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, and Cyril of Alexandria — every major Greek theologian of the Trinitarian controversies.

⁵ Wallace, "Textual Problem"; Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 648.

⁶ Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 648.

⁷ Reginald C. Fuller, Leonard Johnston, and Conleth Kearns, eds., *A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture* (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1951), 1186.

⁸ Grantley McDonald, *Biblical Criticism in Early Modern Europe: Erasmus, the Johannine Comma and Trinitarian Debate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Wallace, "Textual Problem."

⁹ McDonald, *Biblical Criticism in Early Modern Europe*; Wallace, "Textual Problem."

¹⁰ H.J. de Jonge, as cited in Michael Maynard, *A History of the Debate over [1 John 5:7-8](#)* (Tempe, AZ: Comma Publications, 1995); see also Wallace, "Textual Problem," n. 4.

Research for this article was conducted with the assistance of Claude 4.6 Sonnet (Anthropic), an AI language model.