

The Gospel of John

Lesson 8: *Pericope de adultera* John 8 (22 Oct 26AD)

John 7:53 Then they all went home, 8:1 but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

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. Now what do you say?"

6 They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him. But Jesus bent down and started to write on the ground with his finger. 7 When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." 8 Again he stooped down and wrote on the ground.

9 At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. 10 Jesus straightened up and asked her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?"

11 "No one, sir," she said. "Then neither do I condemn you," Jesus declared. "Go now and leave your life of sin."

Study to Show Thyself Approved

Introduction to the research paper: I first became interested in the authorship of this passage in 1978 while working as a chaplain assistant in the US Army for a Southern Baptist Chaplain. He said this passage was **not written by the Apostle John** but was just a good story that someone else had done that sounded like something Jesus should have done and so they inserted it into the gospel of John. I rejected this yet wondered whether it could be true. When I entered seminary I researched it, thinking it may be interesting to find that Luke wrote it. **Though Jesus and his disciples were not "educated"** in the Pharisees' schools, they were educated in the true school. They were disciples/learners of Jesus. **We must become educated**, not learning from those **biased against God** and the miraculous but learning from those **biased toward God**. Thus Paul tells us to **study to show ourselves approved**. We must learn many disciplines to understand God better because God created these disciplines. i.e. We must learn to **Read** to read God's Word. Some must learn **Greek and Hebrew** to translate it into English. We must learn **History** to know these ancient cultures. We must know **Geography** to understand places. We must know **science** to understand scientific ramifications in God's Word. **None of these truths ever contradict the Bible**, for truth does not contradict truth. What does seem contradictory is not the truth, but misinterpretations of the facts, either scientific or Biblical. Thus we need to learn to reconcile them.

My Research Paper to Dr. Stanley Horton

The Facts: remain on both sides of this question; some for, and some against; depending on **interpretation**. Yet we should maintain **mutual respect one for another**. **John's Gospel was written around AD 90**. The following manuscripts, minuscules, versions, etc. **do not** contain the questioned passage: Coptic (ii) Old Syriac (iii), Several Old Latin Manuscripts (iii or iv), Codex Vaticanus (iv), Codex Sinaiticus (iv), L and Delta leave space for it but do not have it written (viii), Egyptian Family, p66 (200), p75 (iii) and many more from the 6th - 10th century, and over 100 more minuscules.

The following Manuscripts, minuscules, versions, etc. **do** contain the passage in question: Memphitic (iii), Ethiopic Version (iv), **Latin Vulgate** (iv), Codex Bezae (v), E 8:2-11 (vi), L and Delta (viii) show they knew about it but with no text, and many others from the 9th - 10th centuries, S 8:3-11 (x), latin b and several other latin manuscripts, 225 after 7:36, Georgian Manuscripts after 7:44, Manuscript 1333 8:3-11 at the end of **Luke**, four manuscripts after Luke 21:38, a family of nine manuscripts after **John 21:25**, and in our position we have it in the Textus Receptus, Bohairic, and 450 or more cursive manuscripts.

As can be seen above, **the oldest manuscripts** which we have, **do not have** the questioned passage. It may also be noted that the oldest manuscripts **not having** the passage are from the **Egyptian manuscripts**. Those old Manuscripts **having** the passage are from the **West**.

There are several of the early church fathers who have **not** commented, referred to, or seem to have even known of the passage, of whom are the following: The early Eastern Fathers, Tertullian (220), Origin in his Commentary (253), Clement of Alexandria. Euthymius Zigabenus (xii) is the first Eastern Father who mentions the passage and then claims it to be an interpolation. There are reasons why these church fathers made no reference to the passage.

There were many early church fathers who **did** refer to or quote the passage. They are: **Papias (60-130)** who was a disciple of John the Apostle, 2nd Epistle of Callistus (217), Constitutions of the Holy Apostles or Didascalia Apostolorum (iii), Eusebius (315), Augustine (395), Jerome (390-404), Gelasius the Bishop of Rome (492), Roman Missal's Baptismal Liturgy (vi or vii), Byzantine Lectionary. Some faintly referred to it while others quoted from it extensively.

Observations About the Text: John 8:9 seems to leave Jesus alone whereas John 8:12-13 presumes a crowd once more. This is because only the accusers left, not the entire crowd, which is why the woman could still be described as **"being in the midst" in the KJV/NASB**. This being the last great day of the feast, the eighth day referred to in Leviticus 23:39-43, which follows the festival of booths, makes "each person will now go to their house," instead of to their booths, very important in placement. Having come back to the temple from the Mount of Olives he enters from the east into the court of the women. Having entered at deep dawn (8:2) with all of the incidents happening in a few minutes, the conclusion to the episode occurs as the sun rises over the horizon and beams into the temple shedding light on the end of the incident.

Against this backdrop Christ proclaims, "I am the Light of the world." Were this story omitted from this position in John, Christ's being "the Light of the world" greater than the sun rising in the eastern sky would not be as evident.

Observations Relating To The Passage: It will be noted that after AD 900 the Standard Greek Text has maintained the position of the passage after 7:52 where it stood in **the Vulgate** as well as today's versions. In earlier times it had been moved about or omitted for various reasons such as in #565 which says "I have omitted (it) as not read in the copies now current." 1 and 1582 say that it is not mentioned in the commentaries of Chrysostom, Cyril, and Theodore of Mopsuestia. The Codex Bezae, which has it, also has many other additions, i.e. At Luke 6:5 it inserts a well-knownagrapha, a parallel which serves the needs of discipline in the church, as well as several omissions. The Peshitta Syriac version does not contain it, but it also does not contain 2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, Jude and Revelation. Luke 21:37-38 where the Ferrar group places it is the same basic statement as at John 8:1-2. Because of the relationship between the passage and the story of Susanna in Apocryphal Daniel it has been stated that the one is a derivative of the other. It may be noted however, that in the Roman Missal of the 6th and 7th centuries, the Baptismal Liturgy links both these stories together quoting John 8:10-11. This story contrasts the compassionate Judge with Daniel's cruel justice. Daniel had the accusers of the woman chopped in half. According to **Jerome**, who put together the **Latin Vulgate** (ca. 420) from which came the **Textus Receptus** and then the **KJV**, **"in the Gospel according to John in many Manuscripts, both Greek and Latin, is found the story of the adulterous woman who was accused before the Lord."** Jerome used many Manuscripts **which are unavailable to us** today, but found it to be conclusive enough to include in the book of John where it now stands. Eusebius (340) speaks of a story related to him about Papias (60-130), who knew a story of a woman who was maliciously accused before Jesus concerning her sins, and this was to have been recorded in the Gospel according to the Hebrews. Unfortunately the Gospel according to the Hebrews is lost to us today and we

know it only through quotes by Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria, et. al. If Papias, the disciple of the apostle John, knew the story and expounded on it, why did he not find it in John's Gospel but in the Hebrews? Was it never there, or had it been removed for certain reasons? Augustine (ca. 430) says to the effect that **"certain persons of little faith, or rather enemies of the true faith, fearing, I suppose, lest their wives should be given exemption from punishment, penalty, or have impunity in sinning, removed from their MSS the Lord's act of forgiveness toward the adulteress, as if He who had said 'sin no more' had granted permission to sin."** Writers like Origen, Tertullian, and Cyprian do not mention this passage even though writing at length about adultery. Bishop Callistus of Rome had published an edict in 217 A.D. offering forgiveness of sins of unchastity but it created a storm of opposition within the church. The church, east and west, in the second and third century under persecution **held very severe punishments for fornication** in order to mark a divergence between Christian ethics and heathen ethics. It's no wonder this story of an easy forgiveness of adultery was removed from John. Only in the fourth century when Constantine established Christianity did the story become allowed. Ecclesiastical discipline began to be relaxed and less austere; a story which had formerly been thought dangerous because of its apparent leniency would naturally be appealed to by canonites and divines as indicating the tenderness with which our Lord Himself rebuked sins of the flesh. Thus with a more merciful attitude this apocryphal story, of questionable authorship and authenticity, began being used in lectionaries from which it was then copied into the texts in the places it appeared in the lectionary, i.e. The Byzantine Lectionary has it after Luke 21:12-19. **The penalty for an adulteress act was then able to be reduced to fifteen years penance** by Basil of Caesarea, because of the admonishment to bishops to demonstrate mercy in the Didascalia Apostolorum of the third century. Therefore, this apocryphal story originates in pre-70 as the second century's hard views on adultery would never have created a story with such leniency toward an adulteress. In light of all this, the suggestion made by Augustine that it had been removed from John's Gospel must be seriously considered. It could not have been created during a time when the church viewed adultery so negatively - **It only could be a truthful story created in the time of Christ by Christ as his own action.**

The Didascalia Apostolorum (iii) exhorts Bishops to forgive as Jesus did and reads: "But if you do not receive him who repents, because you are without mercy, you shall sin against the Lord God. For you do not obey our Savior and our God, to do as even He did with her who had sinned, whom the elders placed before Him, leaving the judgment in His hands, and departed. But He, the searcher of hearts, asked her and said to her; 'Have the elders condemned you, my daughter?' She says to Him, 'Nay Lord.' And He said unto her, 'Go, neither do I condemn you.'" Not to confuse this passage with that in the Apocryphal Daniel for the Didascalia separately refers to the story of Susanna also.

Varying Textual Opinions: The Didascalia Apostolorum has also been compared with the commentary remarks on Ecclesiastes made by **Didymus the Blind** in fourth-century Alexandria which can be translated somewhat literally as follows: "We find therefore in certain gospels (the following story). A woman, it says, was condemned by the Jews for a sin and was being sent to be stoned in the place where that was customary to happen. The savior, it says, when he saw her and observed that they were ready to stone her, said to those who were about to cast stones, 'He who has not sinned, let him take a stone and cast it.' If anyone is conscious in himself not to have sinned, let him take up a stone and smite her. And no one dared. Since they knew in themselves and perceived that they themselves were guilty in some things, they did not dare to strike her." (His reference material is likely the Gospel according to the Hebrews). The passage by Didymus the blind has been compared with that in the Didascalia Apostolorum to show that they are really two separate stories that have been conflated together to make our present account in the gospel of John. These differences **can be easily reconciled** by putting the stories together without trying to tear the account apart. For example, the **Scribes and Pharisees of John's account are also elders and Jews**, as in the Didascalia. Some of the other discrepancies seem to be more of a reading into the story more than is really there. The Didascalia does not really say that the elders left before the trial for it does not mention the part about the trial and one must read into it that the departure came prior to the trial.

Varying Conclusions About the Passage: Several conclusions **opposed** to its inclusion in John have been made as to how to interpret the evidence. One reads: Metzger, who is a scholar who helped put together the Greek New Testament, United Bible Society edition, says, "It is **obviously** a piece of oral tradition which circulated in certain parts of the Western church and which was subsequently incorporated into various Manuscripts at various places. Most copyists apparently thought that it would interrupt John's narrative least if it were inserted after 7:52. (Bias is shown by "**obviously**"). Burge claims that it first entered an early uncial Manuscript in Codex Bezae. The textual evidence confirms what a literary study only suggests: **The passage is an insertion.** Should it remain firmly anchored in the New Testament? **It should slip into the margin** as an edifying agrapha of Jesus. Augsburg's "Interpretation of St. John's Gospels", concludes that since John did not write this section, **we give no exposition of it.** Anchor Bible gives his position by his subtitle "**A non-Johannean Interpolation.**" Coleman, in Theology: A Monthly Review, says "It is an interpolation **not belonging** to the gospel. Beasley, in Word Biblical Commentary, states that "... consideration of the narrative of the Adulterous Woman (7:53-8:11) is set after the conclusion of the section, ... to enable the account of Jesus in the Feast of Tabernacles to be followed without a break, **as the Evangelist intended.**" William Temple, in "Readings in St. John's Gospel, says **Luke is the proper place**, but a scribe wrote it as a marginal gloss to John 8:15... until it was ultimately removed from its original Lucan position. B.W. Robinson says it is **from the Gospel to the Hebrews**. W. Bousset says that it **got into John by accident** after Jesus' disciples had been ashamed thereof. Bultman plainly says **it does not belong**. The Anglican Theological Review says; ... that since John has many references to Daniel and its fulfillment that this becomes **the natural gospel for a scribe to insert another Daniel story** of contrast. Perhaps in 200 A.D. or earlier, in the region of Southern Gaul an unknown scribe, following worship, felt that John needed this and supplies the story as best as he could, relating the Susanna story. Ehrman, in New Testament Studies (1988) says, "To sum up. By the fourth century there were actually three extant versions of the pericope de adultera: (1) the entrapment story known to Papias and the author of the Didascalia, (2) the story of Jesus intervention in an execution proceeding, preserved in the Gospel according to the Hebrews and retold by Didymus in his Ecclesiastes commentary, and (3) the popular version found in Manuscripts of the Gospel of John, **a version which represents a conflation of the two earlier stories.** Pulpit Commentary, states that "it ... was introduced, in very early times, into the Western text as a marginal note gloss on chapter 8:15. Hendricksen, in New Testament Commentary, concludes that "It can not be proved either way... Ministers should not be afraid to base sermons upon it. On the other hand, all the facts concerning the textual evidence should be made known." Though this is somewhat supportive, **many ministers will not preach on it because they don't believe it is scripture.**

Trites, in Bibliotheca Sacra, accepts it and concludes that the "Story fits well with the legal and judgment scenes of the first twelve chapters and of all of John." Hodges concludes **"On the hypothesis that the ancient parent of p66, p75, B and Aleph lacked the pericope de adultera by virtue of a deliberate act of editorial correction, the remainder of the textual data is rather easily explicable. The evidently scandalous character of the narrative when viewed through the eyes of the legalistically minded served to give the original excision a potential acceptability in some quarters that few other major corrections could even hope to attain. It is highly unlikely that an interpolating scribe dreamed up all these correlations to Johannine Style and fit the story where it fits so nicely when even today's scholars aren't brilliant enough to see this. If it was deliberately taken out then it is no wonder that these oldest manuscripts do not have it because it was not there to copy."** Hodges, from DTS, accepts it wholeheartedly and I agree with her arguments.

My Conclusion is that John wrote it as we now have it. As stated by Hodges, it had been taken out of some copies during John's lifetime, thus prompting his warning in Revelation against adding to or subtracting from. After being expunged from the gospel to prevent women from taking a lenient view toward adultery and to keep the women in check **it remained in only a few copies of John which we do not have today**, as well as in the Gospel according to the Hebrews. When the church began to accept a less stringent view toward sexual sins and a more hopeful view toward forgiveness, they began placing it in the lectionaries to be read during public services again. Naturally, being out of use for a couple of centuries, varying readings were now existent as it had not had the same checks as the rest of scripture. It only **maintained its purer form in the Roman west** where the head of the church migrated. Nonetheless the remainder were still not too far off to not be used. Upon recalling the passage into the lectionaries it began to be recopied into the texts, but without true knowledge as to where to place it in all geographical locations. Therefore it was placed variously, mainly where the lectionary readings presented it or where the scribe thought it should go. **It finally settled back into its original position as directed by the Roman Church** who got it correct in most cases. **This is how this most important passage of scripture has come to us today as the continued inspired Word of God.**

Psalms 119:105 Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.