



Believe

JOHN

MESSAGE

STUDY GUIDE

GROUP MATERIAL

SONGS

The Anonymous Adulteress, Jesus & the Finger of God

Bible Reading: John 7:53-8:11

[Watch LIVESTREAM at 10am](#)

SUMMARY: The “woman caught in adultery” is a renowned Gospel account, portraying Jesus’ extraordinary forgiveness. This narrative is both unique and controversial; experts judge it wasn’t originally written by John but added later by an interpolator. Nevertheless, it’s recognized as an ancient and authentic episode showcasing Jesus’ profound compassion and literary skills. The Pharisees present the accused woman to test Jesus’ adherence to Moses’ Law. In response, Jesus stoops and writes in the dirt twice, declaring, “Let the sinless one cast the first stone.” Struck by conscience, the accusers depart, and Jesus pronounces, “neither do I condemn you...” An intriguing parallel emerges between Jesus’ writing ‘with his finger in the dirt,’ and the Ten Commandments, ‘inscribed with God’s finger.’ The point is not *what* Jesus wrote, but *that* he wrote. His act of writing signifies Jesus shares the divine identity of the OT Law’s author; the allusion establishes his authority to interpret and even amend it. Applying the “law of Christ,” Jesus extends “no condemnation,” not only to the accused woman, but to all his believers. Like her, we are forgiven, & start anew, charged to live differently – “Go & sin no more.”

- “There is perhaps no other passage in the New Testament canon that is more beloved and yet more controversial than John 7:53-8:11, also known as the ‘Woman Taken in Adultery’.”—John D. Punch
- The adulteress’ “story is...one of the most memorable in...Scripture...not only due to Jesus’ astonishing and poignant acquittal of the adulteress...but also because [this] is the only text in the [NT] that presents [Jesus as a man of letters.”—Alan Rudrum & Julia Schatz

An Early Insertion into John’s Gospel

- Not Original to John’s Gospel
- An Early Insertion into John’s Gospel—When & Why?
- Does it Belong in the Bible? (Is it Scripture? Is it ‘Canonical’?)

The Account of the Anonymous Adulteress (7:53-8:11)

- A. Jesus' Teaching in the Temple (7:53-8:2)
- B. The Law of Moses & Adultery (8:3-6a)
 - 1. Jesus interrupted by Scribes & Pharisees (8:3a)
 - 2. The Scribes' Role
 - 3. The Pharisees' 'Pawn'—the Adulteress—"a woman caught in adultery" (8:3)
 - 4. The Accusation/Charge (8:4)
 - 5. Appeal to Moses' Law (8:5)
- C. Jesus— the Target of their Trap (8:6a)
- D. Jesus 'turns the tables'

Jesus & the Finger of God (8:6b-8)

- A. Jesus' Response: He "stooped down & *started to write...*" (8:6b)
- B. Interpreters fixated on *what* Jesus wrote
- C. Jesus Verbal Command (8:7)
- D. Jesus & the Finger of God
 - 1. Jesus wrote on the ground with his finger (8:6, 8)
 - 2. 10 Commandments written "*with the Finger of God*" (Ex. 31:18; Dt. 9:10)
 - 3. Parallels between the Adulteress' Account & God's Giving the Law
 - Ambrose (339–397 AD) "He [*Jesus*] wrote on the ground with the finger with which He had written the Law'." [Chris. Keith, *Pericope Adulterae*, p. 181]
- E. The Divine Literacy of Jesus (Jn. 8:6, 8; cf. Ex. 31:18; 32:15)
 - 1. Jesus is described having 'Divine Literacy'
 - 2. Jesus portrayed as Author of the 10 Commandments
 - 3. Jesus parallels God, superior to Moses
 - 4. Jesus' "*neither do I condemn you*" (8:11) comes from the 10 Commandments' author
- F. The Accusers' Response (8:9)
- G. Jesus' Equal Treatment of the Accusers & the Accused
- H. Jesus & the Woman (8:10-11)
 - 1. No Condemnation—"Neither do I condemn you" (8:11)
 - 2. Charged to live differently—"Go, &...don't sin anymore." (8:11)
 - "The woman enters as a pawn of the...Pharisees, & leaves as a person set free by Jesus."—R. Macconi

The Law of Christ (8:9-11; cf. Gal. 6:2)

QUESTIONS:

- A. Most scholars agree that this episode was not John's original composition, but a later addition to John's Gospel. Some 'hard line' textual critics argue it ought to be eliminated from our Bibles. Do you agree or disagree? What would we miss if it were eliminated? (Discuss)
- B. A few commentators argue that we've misjudged the "scribes & Pharisees" here; that they were simply consulting with the "young Rabbi Jesus," to avoid applying the penalty of stoning to this woman. Does the text support this "sympathetic" view of the "scribes & Pharisees"? Why or why not? (Discuss)
- C. What was the dilemma ('trap') which Jesus faced in responding to this case?
- D. What gave Jesus the right to override &/or redefine Moses' Law (10 commandments) in this case?
- E. The accusers focussed on the woman's sin of adultery; how did Jesus' statement (8:7) expand their focus to include the accusers' own sins?

- F. Why is it the case in this episode that “the point is not what Jesus wrote, but that he wrote”?
- G. Twice the text says Jesus “*wrote on the ground (with his finger)*” (8:6, 8). How does this symbolic action help us understand Jesus’ position/authority related to God’s OT Law, Moses, and this case?
- H. As Christian believers today are we under/subject to God’s OT Law or the “law of Christ”? (Discuss)
- I. Jesus told the woman: “I don’t condemn you...Go...from now on don’t sin anymore.” When we believe/receive Jesus does he do the same for us? Is there anything in addition? If so, what?