

John 7:53-8:11 - The Woman Caught in Adultery

Some of your bibles will have this passage in brackets and say “*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*” There is a lot of debate about whether this passage should be included in our Bibles today. I’ve listed 4 reasons why I take the passage to be an authentic part of the Bible.

1. It has all the hallmarks of being eyewitness testimony

The writer of the story knew key eyewitness details: Jesus had been to the Mt of Olives before coming to teach in the temple at dawn. It was the Pharisees who brought the woman in. They knew how Jesus responded before talking *and* the order in which people left the temple. While most scholars agree the passage did not circulate with the earliest copies of the Gospel of John, they do generally agree that the story happened as it has been recorded. “*The account has all the earmarks of historical veracity*” (Metzger - *Textual Commentary*, 220). “*There is little reason for doubting that the event here described occurred*” (Carson - *The Gospel According to John*, 333).

2. The picture of Jesus, and the Pharisees is consistent with the rest of the Gospels.

Jesus regularly taught in the temple courts (e.g. Matt 26:55). This is not the only example of the Pharisees trying to trap Jesus (e.g. Matt 22:15, Mark 12:15, Luke 20:26). The Pharisees showed great concern for keeping the Law strictly (e.g. Matt 12:1-13) Jesus regularly associated with people who led sinful lifestyles and called them to repentance (e.g. Matt 9:11-13, 11:19, Mark 2:15-17, Luke 5:30-32 etc).

3. No contradictions with other passages and consistent theology

Jesus’ command “*Let him who is without sin cast the first stone*” intensifies, and supersedes the Torah in a similar way to Matthew 5:21-43 “*You have heard it said..*” The major theological themes of the passage are well attested in other scriptures:

- A. all people are sinners (e.g. *Psalm 53:2-3, Rom 3:23*)
- B. the punishment for sin is death (e.g. *Gen 2:16-17, Rom 6:23*)
- C. Jesus is the only sinless one (e.g. *Heb 4:15*)
- D. Jesus paid the price for our sin on the cross (e.g. *2 Cor 5:14-17*)

4. Not everything Jesus said and did was included in the Gospels

John 21:25 says “*Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.*” All the New Testament writers had to be selective in what they included their Gospels. Given limited space, time and the expense of creating a book it is not unrealistic to think that this may have been just one of many stories John chose not to include in his gospel. Modern biographers writing about Winston Churchill face the same challenges today. The Gospels we have are not exhaustive accounts of Jesus life but sufficient accounts for us to know and believe in Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

Further Reading:

John Piper’s provides some further info in an accessible format:

<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/neither-do-i-condemn-you--3>