

## THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

### **John: Believing On The Christ, The Son Of God, For Eternal Life Part XXIII: Handling The Account Of The Adulteress In John's Gospel (John 7:53-8:11)**

#### **I. Introduction**

- A. The Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, fn. to John 7:53-8:11 claims that its story of the adulteress "though probably authentic, is omitted in many manuscripts and may not have been originally a part of this Gospel."
- B. However, most versions contain the passage (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 346), and some people say it shows Jesus countered capital punishment since He did not call for the adulteress to be executed in line with the Law.
- C. We thus study this John 7:53-8:11 passage to understand how to handle it (as follows):

#### **II. Handling The Account Of The Adulteress In John's Gospel, John 7:53-8:11.**

- A. First, though John 7:53-8:11 is almost certainly not inspired Scripture, it is included in many versions since there is strong evidence that the events recorded in it were an authentic early tradition about Jesus (as follows):
  1. "The consensus of New Testament textual scholars is that this section was not part of the original text," Ibid. "It is absent from . . . early and diverse manuscripts" (Bruce M. Metzger, A Tex. Com. On The Grk. N. T., 1971, p. 219-220; U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. xiii), "and stylistic data in the passage indicate that this is non-Johannine [not penned by John] . . .," Ibid., Bible Know. Com., N.T., brackets ours.
  2. However, "the account has all the earmarks of historical veracity" with its "evident antiquity" seen by how many scribes have tried to include it in various parts of John's Gospel, but marking it "with asterisks or obeli, indicating. . . they were aware . . . it lacked satisfactory credentials," Ibid., Metzger, p. 220-221.
- B. Second, we view the contents of the passage to evaluate the Biblical validity of what it teaches about Jesus:
  1. The passage asserts the scribes and Pharisees brought a woman to Jesus who had been caught in the act of adultery and set her before Him, claiming Moses commanded that she be stoned to death, John 7:53-8:5a.
  2. However, to test Him, they asked Jesus what He would teach on handling the case, John 8:5b-6a.
  3. This test was formidable: (a) if Jesus condemned her, He would counter Roman law that forbade the death penalty in such cases, and the religious leaders would then report Him to the Romans for judgment. Yet, (b) if He did not condemn her, He would counter the Mosaic Law that called for her execution, and the leaders would discredit Jesus before Israel's people, Leon Morris, The Gospel Acc. to John, 1979, p. 887.
  4. Jesus is presented in the passage as wisely responding while fully upholding God's Biblical righteousness:
    - a. John 8:6b claims Jesus reacted to the religious leaders' question by stooping down to write something in the dirt. We are not told what He wrote, but He **may** have written Exodus 23:1b that forbids aiding the wicked as a malicious witness (Ibid., p. 888-889), for the woman's partner in her sin was absent, so she had been maliciously trapped by her accusers who had let her guilty lover escape without being charged, Ibid.
    - b. Jesus then stood up and said, "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her," John 8:7 KJV. Jesus may thus have asked for any accuser who was innocent of the Exodus 23:1b prohibition against maliciously entrapping the woman and not implicating her lover with her. Deuteronomy 19:16-21 taught that being convicted as a malicious witness in a case left such a witness facing the same punishment as the one convicted of the crime, and in the case of adultery, that involved the death penalty!
    - c. Jesus again stooped down, and again wrote on the ground what is not stated in the text, John 8:8. However, He may well have written Deuteronomy 19:16-21 on the punishment for malicious witnesses.
    - d. The accusers, likely troubled by their **own** violations of the Exodus 23:1b prohibition and its required capital punishment in such a case by Deuteronomy 19:16-21, all left the scene, starting with the oldest, the most responsible and so blameworthy in that era, and going down to the youngest, John 8:9; Ibid., p. 890.
    - e. Jesus then looked up and saw no man present, so He asked the woman if she had any accuser, John 8:10.
    - f. She replied that there was no one, and since Jesus Himself had not been a **human eyewitness** to her sin as required by the Mosaic Law (cf. Deuteronomy 19:15), He did not charge her. However, He told her to go and sin no more, John 8:11. Thus, even in this questionable John 7:53-8:11 passage, Jesus is seen as neither condoning adultery nor condemning capital punishment, but as upholding Biblical righteousness!

**Lesson and Application:** (1) *May we NOT base any doctrine on the John 7:53-8:11 account of the woman caught in adultery since it is likely not a part of John's Gospel. However, (2) may we see this passage as agreeing with the rest of inspired Scripture's claims that Jesus fully heeded the Mosaic Law, for He is presented here as neither countering capital punishment nor excusing adultery, but as standing entirely for Biblical righteousness.*