

John 7:53 - 8:11 ⁵³ *Everyone went to his home.*

^{NAU} **John 8:1** But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and *began* to teach them. ³ The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center *of the court*, ⁴ they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act. ⁵ "Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?" ⁶ They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground. ⁷ But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him *be the* first to throw a stone at her." ⁸ Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. ⁹ When they heard it, they *began* to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman, where she was, in the center *of the court*. ¹⁰ Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" ¹¹ She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."

Most English translations, and probably most every other translation in other languages, includes this section in their bibles. Among textual critics of this section it has come to be known in the Latin as *pericope adulterae*.

Pericope is a word that describes an entire section of a work that has been cut and pasted into another work. In fact, the Greek word, *perikope*, from which we get our English word, means a cutting.

Add the Latin word, *adulterae*, from which we get our English word adultery, and it becomes clear that those critics of this section of the adulterous woman, from John 7:53 through 8:1-11, identify this section as having been cut and pasted into this portion of John's gospel, and, according to these critics, this section was not part of the original autograph of John's gospel.

What does this mean from a practical standpoint as we open our bibles and are faced with an entire questionable section that is nestled quite securely in the midst of what is truly the word of God?

And for that matter, how do we know that this section is or is not the word of God?

This is not a new problem. Scholars have been addressing this issue for tens of hundreds of years and yet pastors and teachers over many generations have preached countless sermons on the woman caught in adultery in this section of John's gospel where believers were taught that this was part of the original gospel of John.

All of this debate has much to do with how our bible came into existence into its final form, identified as the canon of Scripture, and who determines what does or does not belong in this canon.

So, let me give a quick overview of how we got our bible and see if the *Pericope Adulterae* falls within the parameters of being included in the canon of scripture.

For many people, obtaining and appreciating how we got our bibles is as complicated as how we get a hamburger.

And of course everyone knows how we get a hamburger. It's simply a matter of going to McDonald's for a Big Mac. In like manner, as to how we got our bible, it's also only as complicated as going to your bookstore, Christian or otherwise, and laying down our cash for a nicely leather bound edition of the word of God.

But in reality the history of how and when we got our bibles is a little more complex than merely swiping a credit card.

The O.T. Scriptures for example didn't come together over a period of weeks or months. It was in the making for over 1,100 years. The Pentateuch, or the first five books of the bible, were put together by Moses, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, around 1,450 years before Christ.

Joshua and Judges around 1,000 B.C.; Psalms and Proverbs 800 B.C.; Isaiah around 700 B.C.; Jeremiah 540 B.C.; Ezekiel 500 B.C.; and Kings and Chronicles around 400 B.C.

Chronicles was actually the last set of books written and Jesus Himself confirms this in Luke's gospel.

Luke 11:49-51 ⁴⁹ "For this reason also the wisdom of God said, 'I will send to them prophets and apostles, and *some* of them they will kill and *some* they will ¹persecute, ⁵⁰ so that the blood of all the prophets, shed since the foundation of the world, may be

charged against this generation, ⁵¹ *from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah*, who was killed between the altar and the house of God; yes, I tell you, it shall be charged against this generation.'

In the context of God's judgment on those who have persecuted God's people Jesus uses the same kind of language we might use today when we say from A-Z, or from beginning to end.

And he does it by referencing two people: Abel and Zechariah. Abel is found in the book of Genesis and Zechariah is found in 2Chronicles.

2 Chronicles 24:20-21 ²⁰ Then *the Spirit of God came on Zechariah* the son of Jehoiada the priest; and he stood above the people and said to them, "Thus God has said, 'Why do you transgress the commandments of the LORD and do not prosper? Because you have forsaken the LORD, He has also forsaken you.'" ²¹ So they conspired against him and at the command of the king they stoned him to death in the court of the house of the LORD.

And so, what was Jesus saying in Luke as it relates to the beginning and the end of the O.T. Scriptures?

It begins with Genesis and ends with 2 Chronicles and every place in between you will find God's mouthpieces being killed for honoring Me, as Christ says in Luke 11:49-51. And in the Hebrew bible you will find 2Chronicles as their last book, unlike the western bible which has Malachi as the last OT book.

But, unlike the O.T., the N.T. Scriptures were put together in a mere 55 years. From around AD 40 until around AD 95 we have all of the gospels and epistles penned before the closing of the first century. And so, in about 1/20th of the time of the O.T. coming together, we have God's full NT revelation in place and being used by God's people to take the good news of Christ around the world.

As to the language of the Scriptures the O.T. utilized Hebrew as well as Aramaic, a close cousin of Hebrew. Only about 12 chapters of the entire O.T. were written in Aramaic. The language used by the N.T. writers was *koine* Greek.

And so, in our Western Bibles there are 66 books of the bible. 39 O.T. and 27 N.T.

But the question needs to be raised, when the last book of the bible was written in the early 90's of the first century, at which point

was the church acknowledging these 27 books as being God-breathed?

And the answer is, immediately. There wasn't a council that got together and decided which books were in and which books weren't, despite the fact that many later councils attempted to do this very thing, in some cases actually attempting to distinguish false letters that posed as the word of God, some of which we would identify as apocryphal.

If God is writing a book with the specific intention of relaying the good news of how one may attain eternal life and how one may grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, will He leave it to chance, or God forbid, to mere humans, when it comes to deciding what is of God and what is not?

Keep in mind, when it comes to the voice of God being given to men, what one person in the triune Godhead has been made primarily responsible for that transmission of God's voice to men?

Acts 13:2-4 ² While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, *the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."* ³ Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. ⁴ So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

Acts 28:25 ²⁵ And when they did not agree with one another, they began leaving after Paul had spoken one *parting* word, "***The Holy Spirit rightly spoke through Isaiah the prophet to your fathers,***

Hebrews 3:7-11 ⁷ *Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says,* "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, ⁸ DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS, ⁹ WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED *Me* BY TESTING *Me*, AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS. ¹⁰ "THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SAID, "THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART, AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS"; ¹¹ AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, "THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST."

Hebrews 10:15-17 ¹⁵ *And the Holy Spirit also testifies to us; for after saying,* ¹⁶ "THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THEM AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAYS THE LORD: I WILL PUT MY LAWS UPON THEIR HEART, AND

ON THEIR MIND I WILL WRITE THEM," *He then says,* ¹⁷
"AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR LAWLESS DEEDS I WILL
REMEMBER NO MORE."

And so, even though men have been given God's voice to be written down, no mere man can take credit for writing down anything other than what God desires they write down.

2 Peter 1:20-21 ²⁰ But know this first of all, that *no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation,* ²¹ *for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.*

It is true that men have debated which books would be included in the Canon of Scripture, but in the final analysis is there any book in the word of God that could ultimately be kept out or kept in if added by men, that God Himself did not want in the Canon, which as we should note is called God's word, not men's word?

Unless we believe that men have more authority than God, He will determine which books are in and which are out and He has done just that by bearing witness through the Holy Spirit those things He desires for us to use to know Him and follow Him.

In fact, it would make no sense for a lesser authority to be the controlling factor over anything a greater authority does. And so, by default God trumps all men as to what is considered authoritative and what it is not.

And so, the 66 books of the bible are acknowledged by men in a passive sense. The word of God is not authoritative because the church recognizes them, rather the word of God is authoritative based entirely on God's authority.

It would be like someone saying that the sun exists because I acknowledge its existence. Whether you or I ever existed the sun would still be the sun because the sun exists.

In the same way, the word of God exists, not because anybody exists and acknowledges it, but because the Word of God is God-breathed. It simply exists because God makes it to exist. We can simply sit back and marvel at it.

From a human stand-point, however, there were still tests by people to determine what books were acknowledged to be of God and what books were not.

- 1) Apostolic authority
- 2) Antiquity; that is those writings that are closest to the event, (ie. The resurrection)
- 3) Consistent with the O.T., supporting all teachings of O.T.
- 4) Inspiration; the fact that the book speaks with God's authority
- 5) The fact that the church was already using these books as the authoritative word of God for their rule of faith and practice, by the end of the first century.

But what about the bible containing parts of other books of antiquity that in and of themselves are not the word of God? How does this fit in with the fact that the word of God is God-breathed and yet segments of these other books are obviously not God-breathed?

For example, there are apocryphal books like the book of Jashar that is mentioned in Joshua 10:13 and 2Sam. 1:18. You've got the annals of Solomon spoken of in 1Kings 11:41 and the annals of King David mentioned in 1Chr. 27:24.

There is also the mention of the Book of the Wars of the LORD in Numbers 21:14.

How can portions of these other non-canonical books be part of the very word of God that is God-breathed, when in fact they are not?

Because simply quoting another book doesn't make that book God-breathed, but it does show us that God can use anything to get His message across and make that portion that He decides to use from other works that were not God-breathed, God-breathed.

We have examples of this all throughout Scripture.

Acts 17:23-24 ²³ "For while I was passing through and examining the objects of your worship, I also found an altar with this inscription, 'TO AN UNKNOWN GOD.' Therefore what you worship in ignorance, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands;

Paul is quoting something written by a pagan when he acknowledges this inscription to an unknown God. But does quoting that inscription make the quote God-breathed on its own, outside of the context in which Paul uses it?

Of course not. But because the Holy Spirit was placing Paul in that situation and prompting Paul to acknowledge what was written by a pagan, with the intention of lifting up the one true God as creator, makes that quote God-breathed in the context as it was written down by Luke.

What about the book of Enoch? Where is the book of Enoch in our bibles? Well, it doesn't exist in our bibles, but it was a real piece of literature, as Jude apparently quotes from it.

Jude 1:14-15 ¹⁴ *It was also about these men that **Enoch**, in the seventh generation from Adam, **prophesied**, saying, "Behold, the Lord came with many thousands of His holy ones, ¹⁵ to execute judgment upon all, and to convict all the ungodly of all their ungodly deeds which they have done in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him."*

If God had chosen to include the book of Enoch, (written by people other than the Enoch of the bible, around 300 BC to 100 AD), in the O.T. Scriptures, do you think that it would have made it the 67th book? Of course. But in quoting a non-canonical book Jude is following the prompting of the Holy Spirit who desired to make a portion of a non-Holy Spirit inspired book, inspired.

By the way, the prophets of Israel never recognized the book of Enoch as inspired scripture for some of the same reasons stated above in using certain tests applied to particular writings. The reason the book of Enoch was deemed apocryphal and not canonical is because much of it is clearly out of accord with the doctrines that already existed in Israel regarding man, God and salvation, as was revealed through the prophets.

But doesn't quoting a recognized prophecy from someone like Enoch necessarily make whatever else is attributed to him, (by persons tens of hundreds of years since his being translated bodily to heaven by God), inspired of the Holy Spirit?

No more than we have the "Book of Donkey" simply because a donkey spoke by the authority of God when addressing Balaam. God can and does use any means He desires and when He chooses to include that in His book, at that point only is it thus God-breathed.

But let's quickly move on to how we got our N.T. We have over 5,000 different Greek manuscripts that contribute to making up

what we call the N.T. Scriptures. We have a few papyri documents dating back to the beginning of the 2nd century and many dating to the 3rd and 4th centuries.

The early documents were written in a style that is known as Uncial; all capital letters with no spacing and no punctuation. SOALLTHELETTERSANTOGETHER, but could still be read and understood.

Later documents written in Greek took on the form we call Miniscule where letters are now in lower case and there are spaces between words with punctuation.

But when we take all of these manuscripts and begin to compile them we run into a problem. Some of them have variations from other manuscripts, for a variety of reasons.

And so, what ends up happening is that you have what are called textual variants. Now keep in mind that about 85% of all of the manuscripts have no textual variant, and of the 15% that do, 95% of those are easily resolved by examining the context of the text.

For example, the word “and” or “as” may have been added or deleted, and so it’s easy enough to get a sense of what God was actually saying as you compare these to other manuscripts. But this does leave about 3/4 of 1% that are more difficult to deal with and demand more in-depth textual study.

The point is that as scholars compare the thousands of Greek manuscripts and effectively deal with these variants we can have absolute assurance that what we possess in these manuscripts is reliable and consistent with the original letters written by the apostles to the church as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

There is no doctrine of the Christian faith that rests upon any textual variant, never, because no one verse actually defines a Christian doctrine.

But oddly enough these textual variants are a good thing that God has used to help us arrive at His true word because they provide the means of correcting human error.

For example, if we only had one text from one group in one place we wouldn’t know with any certainty if we had God’s words. Why might that be true?

Because we don't know if that one group indiscriminately made any changes and then passed them along with their self-appointed authority and then declared them to be God's word.

Instead what we have are thousands of documents from all parts of the world written at different times by different people. It would be impossible to have any sort of conspiracy, if you will, to have only one group declare that this is the word of God with so many different witnesses.

And what is amazing is that with of all of these different people and the thousands of different documents, they are all saying essentially the same thing, as we've noted, with few exceptions and those exceptions are easily dealt with. And those that are not easily dealt with are successfully dealt with to give us an accurate book that we can call God-breathed.

And this brings us back to our text in Joh 7:53 to 8:1-11, because of the thousands of Greek manuscripts that we possess not one, for the first 300 plus years of the church's existence, ever mentions this story of the woman caught in adultery.

How can that be?

What this tells us is that the original gospel of John that was written in the first century would have been the template from which every other copy was made. And so, if this story of the woman caught in adultery were original to John's actual writing it would have immediately shown up in every copy from the first century onward.

Now, we don't have the original writing of John, nor do we have copies of the original writing from the first century. But from about the second century on we have copies that are reliable and in every copy from these time periods, as was already mentioned, none, without exception up until the fourth century, contain this story.

Carl B. Bridges, Professor of New Testament at Johnson Bible College, gives this assessment of the mention of this story for the first 400 years of the church's history.

"The earliest witnesses to the text of the Gospel of John uniformly omit the pericope, including Tatian's Diatessaron (second century)² and the third-century papyri Π66 and Π75. Origen (died 253/254) does not include the passage in his commentary on John, and Tertullian (died after 220) never cites the passage or alludes to the story. John Chrysostom (died 407) covers much of

the Gospel in his homilies on John, but not this passage. Cyril of Alexandria (died 444) omits the passage from his Commentary on John 3."

"The earliest uncial manuscripts, with an exception noted below, also omit the passage: the fourth-century Sinaiticus (= Å) omits it, along with Vaticanus (also fourth century, = B), apparently Alexandrinus (fifth century, = A),⁴ apparently Codex Ephraemi (fifth century, = C), the Washington manuscript (fourth or fifth century, = W), and manuscript T (= 029) of the fifth century."

"The earliest mention of the passage in the east comes from fourth-century manuscripts of the early third-century Didascalia Apostolorum (Teaching of the Apostles), which quotes "go and sin no more" from John 8:11.6 Around 380 this reference to the pericope became part of the Apostolic Constitutions (2.3.24).⁷ Along with a reference by Didymus the Blind of Alexandria (died 398) to "some Gospels" that contained the pericope in his day,⁸ no other evidence of the passage appears before AD 400 in the east."

What is interesting is that the bible you likely have in your hand has a footnote regarding this entire section that acknowledges that all of the earliest Greek manuscripts do not contain this section.

From his website, Bible Research, Michael D. Marlowe points out the footnotes on the *pericope adulterae* in different English Bibles:

American Standard Version (1901). Marginal note: "Most of the ancient authorities omit John vii. 53--viii. 11. Those which contain it vary much from each other."

Revised Standard Version (1946). 7:53-8:11 given in the margin, with the note, "Most of the ancient authorities either omit 7.53-8.11, or insert it, with variations of the text, here or at the end of this gospel or after Luke 21.38." Since 1971 the section is printed as ordinary text, with the note, "The most ancient authorities omit 7.53-8.11; other authorities add the passage here or after 7.36 or after 21.25 or after Luke 21.38, with variations of text."

New American Standard Version (1963). "John 7:53-8:11 is not found in most of the old mss."

New International Version (1973). "The most reliable early manuscripts omit John 7:53-8:11." Later editions of the NIV have,

"The earliest and most reliable manuscripts and other ancient witnesses do not have John 7:53-8:11."

New King James Version (1980). "NU [that is, the United Bible Societies' Greek text] brackets 7:53 through 8:11 as not in the original text. They are present in over 900 mss. of John."

So, where did this story come from and is there any truth to it?

Again from the pen of Carl Bridges:

"But what of the story itself? Eusebius (fourth century) reports that Papias (early second century) "has expounded another story about a woman who was accused before the Lord of many sins, which the Gospel according to the Hebrews contains."13

"Eusebius' brief note does not say clearly whether Papias received the story from oral tradition (see Eusebius HE 3.39.2-4) and Eusebius reported its presence in the Gospel according to the Hebrews, or whether Papias himself cited the Gospel. Eusebius also does not make clear whether Papias refers to the same story contained in the pericope adulterae .14"

"If Papias and Eusebius are correct and if their story matches the one in the pericope adulterae, a future discovery of the Gospel according to the Hebrews might move the written record of the story back more than a hundred years closer to the time of Jesus' ministry. Even without the Gospel according to the Hebrews, if Papias's story is the same, he provides an early traditional witness to the account."

In other words, the story of an encounter with a sinful woman, possibly the adulterous woman, was a story that was being circulated in the early church. And so, to suggest that the story of the woman caught in adultery, and addressed by Jesus Christ, is a complete fabrication, is not necessarily true.

In fact, it is certainly possible that this incident, or a similar incident, took place during the ministry of our Lord. John himself testifies to the fact that many other amazing aspects of our Lord's ministry have not been recorded by the apostles simply because of the volume of such incidents.

John 21:25 ²⁵ And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.

So, just from this testimony of John, it is possible that such a story as the woman caught in adultery could have taken place. Having said that, that is different from saying that it did. But even if it did, since no Greek manuscript for the first 300 hundred years includes it, it is necessarily not a part of the Holy Spirit inspired word of God.

As to why it is not found in any Greek manuscript of the NT for at least the first 300 years of the church, some have suggested that it actually was part of the original writing of John but was excluded by early zealous transcribers who feared that such a truthful story would create an environment where adultery might be seen as acceptable and therefore it would put the church in jeopardy of pursuing loose morals.

Of course this begs the question, which Paul raises when there were those who suggested that if God's grace is showcased in the mercy that God extends to sinners, then why not continue to sin?

Romans 6:1-2 ^{NAU} What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? ² May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

It is very unlikely that every scribe from different parts of the world, who copied the words of John's gospel during the first 300 hundred years of church history, all conspired to delete this section, where presumably others decided it was best to place it back in the text some three hundred years into the church's early history.

But what about the morality of the story? Does it not belong in John simply in terms of how the grace and mercy of Jesus is shown to sinners like this woman, and how we too can be shown this mercy by a loving and forgiving God?

But, should this be the basis for including any story in God's word, that is not substantiated for the first 300 years, as being part of the original writing of the gospel of John?

Then why not create good stories of grace and mercy, label them as one of the works that were not included in any of the other gospels but could have happened since, as John says, "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, which if they were written in detail, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that would be written.."?

This is not how the canon of Scripture was put together by the Holy Spirit. We don't include things in the word of God simply because a story seems to emphasize a good moral ending.

We arrive at the text of Scripture based on the evidence of what the written word shows us through the God-breathed writings of the prophets and apostles, as they were handed down to us by the means that God established as they were copied and shared with the body of Christ.

And the only actual evidence that we can see and touch are the earliest copies of the original writings of men moved by the Holy Spirit, thus putting those writings, and only those writings, in the realm of God-breathed.

By the way, if someone wants to teach or preach on a passage that expounds God's grace and mercy being extended to sinners, like the alleged woman caught in adultery, why not turn to an actual passage in the word of God and exegete that passage. John 9 which teaches about the blind man receiving his sight from Jesus Christ comes to mind.

As encouraging as the story of the woman caught in adultery might be, and despite how many English translations have included this story in the midst of the word of God, (most with footnotes stating that this story was not included in any of the earliest manuscripts), the story known as the *pericope adulterae*, is not and should not be included in the text of the holy word of God.

And it was not included in holy Scripture for at least the first 300 years.

Unless, like the Roman Catholic bible, that includes a plethora of apocryphal books, (non-canonical), we decide to add what we like based on its collective acceptance as being "instructive" then I suppose we should include any non-canonical work that makes us "feel" good.

I for one desire to hear, read and study God's word, not man's.

Isaiah 40:8 ⁸ The grass withers, the flower fades, But the word of our God stands forever.