

The Pericope de Adultera

- I. Introduction & Definition
 - A. The pericope de adultera is the disputed text of John 7:53-8:11. It is one of the most significant problem texts in the New Testament.
 - B. Other significant problem texts.
 1. The end of the gospel of Mark. There are four separate endings for Mark in the manuscript evidence available today. The short ending (v.8), the intermediate ending, the long ending (v.20), and the long, expanded ending.
 2. *The Comma Johanneum* is the disputed passage (1st Jn. 5:7,8) that Erasmus knew didn't belong in the text.
- II. The Textual Evidence against John 7:53-8:11.¹
 - A. The account is lacking in the earliest existing Greek manuscripts.
 1. It is lacking in $\text{p}^{66} \text{p}^{75} \text{B L N T W X } \Delta \Theta \Psi 33 157 565 892 1241 \text{ fam. } 1424$.
 2. Codexes A & C are defective at this point, but it is highly probable that neither contained the section, for there would not have been space enough on the missing leaves to include it along with the rest of the text.
 3. The earliest Greek mss. known to contain the passage is codex Bezae (D), of the fifth, or sixth century, and is joined by several Old Latin manuscripts (*b c e ff² j*). The pericope appears to be a piece of floating tradition which circulated in certain parts of the Western church. It was subsequently inserted into various manuscripts at various places.
 - a. Most scribes thought that it would interrupt John's narrative least if it were inserted after 7:52 (D E F G H K M S U Γ Λ Π 28 579 700 1579 &c.).
 - b. Another placed it after 7:36 (ms. 225).
 - c. Others placed it after 21:24 (fam.1: 1 118 131 209; 1076 1570 1582).
 - d. The Old Georgian revision of 11th cent., after Jn. 7:44.
 - e. After Luke 21:38 (fam.13: 13 69 124 230 *et al*); or Luke 24:53 (1333).
 - f. Several mss. marked the passage with an obelus (\div or \square) (S), or an asterisk (E M Λ).
 - g. A few mss. added the words that Jesus wrote in the dirt ('the sins of each of them').
 - B. Ancient translations of the New Testament are also lacking the passage.
 1. The Old Syriac and the Arabic form of Tatian's Diatessaron betray no knowledge of the passage, nor is it contained in the best manuscripts of the Peshitta.
 2. The old Coptic churches did not include it in their Bible, for the Sahidic, sub-Achmimic, and the older Bohairic manuscripts lack it.
 3. Armenian manuscripts, Old Georgian versions, the Gothic version and several Old Latin manuscripts (*a f l^{*} q*) omit the story.
 - C. No Greek Church Father for a thousand years after Christ refers to the pericope.
 1. This includes even those who, like Origen, Chrysostom, and Nonnus, dealt with the entire Gospel verse by verse.
 2. Euthymius Zigabenus, who lived in the first part of the 12th century, is the first Greek writer to comment on the passage, and even he declares that the accurate copies of the Gospel do not contain it.
 - D. Early Latin Church Fathers did not quote it: Irenaeus, Tertullian, & Cyprian. Tertullian & Cyprian did write specifically on adultery, but did not reference this passage.
 - E. Internal evidence from the text
 1. The style and vocabulary of the pericope differ markedly from the rest of John. 14 out of 82 vocabulary words in the section are unjohannine. Also, the use of 'hos' as a temporal conjunction rather than John's usual 'oun.'
 2. The pericope interrupts the sequence of 7:52 and 8:12ff.
- III. Textual evidence for John 7:53-8:11²
 - A. The passage is found in a majority of existing Greek manuscripts.
 - B. It is easier to comprehend that a twelve verse section of Scripture would be deleted by a scribe, than it is to comprehend a twelve verse section of Scripture being inserted by a scribe.
 - C. New Testament text variants appear to have early attestation. The majority of variants appeared in the first two hundred years of transmission.
 - D. While it is true that the Peshitta omitted John 7:53-8:11, it also omitted 2nd Peter, 2nd & 3rd John, Jude, & Revelation!
 - E. Many Latin Church Fathers quoted it.

¹ Material taken directly from Bruce M. Metzger, The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration, 3rd edition, Oxford University Press, 1992.

² Taken from Zane Hodges, BibSac Vol. 136 #544 Oct-Dec 1979.

Ambrose at Milan (374) quotes it at least nine times; as well as Augustine in North Africa (396) about twice as often. It is quoted besides by Pacian, in the north of Spain (370),—by Faustus the African (400),—by Rufinus of Aquilea (400),—by Chrysologus at Ravenna (433),—by Sedulius a Scot (434)... It is referred to by Victorius or Victorinus (475),—by Vigilius of Tapsus (484) in North Africa,—by Gelasius, bp. of Rome (492),—by Cassiodorus in Southern Italy,—by Gregory the Great, and by other fathers of the Western Church” (Burgon, *Causes of Corruption*, pp. 247-48).

- F. Jerome included the passage in the Latin Vulgate, and noted that (ca. 420), “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, “The Dialogue against the Pelagians” (2.17).
- G. Augustine (ca. 430) was of the opinion that certain manuscripts were lacking the passage because it was deliberately removed. “certain persons of little faith, or rather enemies of the true faith, fearing, I suppose, lest their wives should be given impunity in sinning, removed from their manuscripts the Lord’s act of forgiveness toward the adulteress, as if He who had said ‘sin no more’ had granted permission to sin.” Augustine, “Adulterous Marriages” (2.7)
- IV. The editorial opinion of various modern English translators:
- A. NIV Bible: [The earliest and most reliable manuscripts do not have John 7:53-8:11].
- B. NASB Bible: John 7:53-8:11 is not found in most of the old mss.
- C. The Ryrie Study Bible: **7:53-8:11** This story, though probably authentic, is omitted in many mss. and may not have been originally a part of this gospel.
- D. The New American Bible, St. Joseph Edition: The story of the adulteress is missing from the best early Greek MSS. Where it does appear, it is found in different places in different MSS: here; or after Jn. 7:36; or at the end of this gospel; or after Lk. 21:38. It seems to have been preserved largely in Western and Latin circles. There are many non-Johannine features in the language, and there are also many doubtful readings. It appears in Jerome’s Vulgate. However, it is certainly out of place here; it fits better with the general situation in Lk. 21:38. The Catholic Church accepts it as inspired Scripture.
- E. The NIV Study Bible (Zondervan Study Bible): [The earliest manuscripts and many other ancient witnesses do not have John 7:53-8:11]. **7:53-8:11** This story may not have belonged originally to the Gospel of John. It is absent from almost all the early manuscripts, and those that have it sometimes place it elsewhere (e.g., after Lk. 21:38). But the story may well be authentic.
- F. New Scofield Study Bible: Although John 7:53-8:11 is not found in some ancient manuscripts, the immediate context, beginning with Christ’s declaration, “I am the light of the world” (8:12) seems clearly to have its occasion in the conviction created in the hearts of the Pharisees as recorded in 8:9, and also helps to explain the Pharisees’ words in 8:41. It is therefore to be considered a genuine part of the Gospel.
- V. Summarizing Thoughts on the Inspiration of Scripture, the Inerrancy of the original manuscripts, and the inevitable errors in the descendant manuscripts.
- A. Scripture is God-breathed. It is the work of God, and not the work of man (2nd Tim. 3:16).
- B. God’s works are never thwarted by human limitations and failures (Job 23:13; 42:2; Isa. 14:27; 46:10; Dan. 4:35).
- C. No textual variation affects any doctrine of the Church. The same orthodox fundamental Christianity is preached by faithful pastors using the Textus Receptus, the Majority Text, the Critical Text, or the “reasoned eclectic” approach to textual criticism.

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Part 4 Bibliology Lewis Sperry Chafer

II. Inspiration 4. General Objections to Verbal Plenary Inspiration

The claim for verbal, plenary inspiration is made only for the original writings and does not extend to any transcriptions or translations. It is also true that no original manuscript is now available. Naturally, these facts give rise to the query as to whether the present existing translations—notably the text with which one is most familiar—is really trustworthy. This problem is worthy of serious consideration and has received the attention of the greatest textual critics in all generations of the church.

Dr. Philip Schaff, Chairman of the American Committee of the Revisers, writes: “This multitude of various readings of the Greek text need not puzzle or alarm any Christian. It is the natural result of the great wealth of our documentary resources; it is a testimony to the immense importance of the New Testament; it does not affect, but rather insures, the integrity of the text; and it is a useful stimulus to study. “Only about 400 of the 100,000 or 150,000 variations materially affect the sense. Of these, again, not more than about fifty are really important for one reason or another; and even of these fifty not one affects an article of faith or a precept of duty which is not abundantly sustained by other and undoubted passages, or by the whole tenor of Scripture teaching. The Textus Receptus of Stephens, Beza, and Elzevir, and of our English Version, teach precisely the same Christianity as the uncial text of the Sinaitic and Vatican manuscript, the oldest versions and the Anglo-American Revision.”