

“The Adulterous Woman” (John 8:3-11)

The very short story about the woman caught in adultery is found in some ancient manuscripts, but not all. Our modern culture wants to treat the Bible as myth and nonsense, so they are quick to point this fact out. They are delighted to itemize flaws, and demonstrate the existence of holes in the Text. Essentially, they are asserting that because this story is not found in all manuscripts, then the Bible is flawed. Being flawed you cannot trust the Bible to be accurate, and therefore you cannot use it as an authority.

This line of reasoning is taken from the modern-day legal profession, in that if you can poke a hole in any part of a legal contract, showing any inconsistency or failure, then the entire contract is nullified. This is why people love to poke holes at the Bible, so that they can dismiss it.

However, the success of this hole-punching-attack requires that the Bible is viewed as a modern-day type of legal document. This legal document view of the Bible is an assumption, a premise, which never seems to be challenged. We see this assumption in books, movies, and sitcoms. It is a consistent favorite premise in the academic communities.

But consider. **Who told you to view the Bible as a modern-day legal document that must be flawless in every detail?** If you think about this, you will realize that the reason why they appear to win in discrediting the Bible, is because they have set up this premise so that they will always win. They tell you that the Bible is like a legal document, and so they win when they poke holes in the Bible. This is a premise that needs to be challenged.

Instead of using a Western-Thinking style premise, consider insisting upon using a more Eastern-Thinking style view of the Bible. View the Bible as being more poetic, more lyrical. Instead of viewing the Bible as a modern-day legal document, **view the Bible as a beautiful musical concert and song.** You listen to the music, and you hear the song, and you enjoy it very much. When you hear that some version of the musical concert has left out a section, does that mean that the entire concert is now ruined? No. And neither does it ruin the Bible-music to discover that some copies of the concert have some words left out, some words added, and some “notes” played differently. The Bible is still beautiful music, a beautiful concert, and a beautiful song.

Let’s look closely at the story of the adulterous woman found in John 8:3-11.

Most of the time you will be recited this story, and told that the conclusion of the story is that we cannot render a condemning judgment against anyone for anything. We are told that the moral of the story is that Jesus (English, Greek 'Ieesous', Aramaic 'Yahoshua') does not condemn the adulterous woman, and therefore we cannot condemn anyone else for any sins they do either. Since we have all sinned, no one can cast that first stone at another sinner.

This interpretation may sound logical, except that it contradicts many other scriptures. For examples: 1-Cor. 5:1-8 “[I] have judged already, as though I were present, [concerning] him that hath so done this deed”. 1-Cor. 5:11 "if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat." And 1-Cor. 6:3 “Know ye not that we **shall judge angels?** how much more **things that pertain to this life**”. The Greek Text is replete with examples of us being required to make condemning judgments about other’s sins. Making condemning judgments about other’s sins is required to maintain righteous communities.

If the world's interpretation is wrong, then what is the moral of this story? To find the moral it will be helpful to look at the Greek Text.

- 1.) The trial scene is that those in authority brought a woman who had already been condemned as an adulterer, someone worthy of being stoned to death. But they wanted to present a trick, a trap, so they brought the trial to Jesus.
- 2.) They asked Jesus to render His own judgment to theirs. Thus, they placed Jesus into the position of being one of the Judges in the trial. Bounce down to verse 11, "neither do I condemn". Jesus was asked to become one of the trial's Judges. This is why the legal trial was ultimately dismissed, reversing the original verdict.
- 3.) It appears that there was no doubt in the evidence of the trial that the woman was an adulterer. Verse 11 in the Greek Text is: "go and from the now no-more sin". The indication is that she was guilty, but was told to stop sinning.
- 4.) The woman was not just "caught", she was seized. The Strong's Number is G2638: "to lay hold of, seize". This is to be combined with the accusation in verse 4, using G1888: "[in] the very act of". Why does this matter? It gives evidence that it was indeed obvious that the woman was an adulterer. The evidence is that she was indeed guilty, seized in the very act.
- 5.) From the point of view of legality and trials, in those days, on what grounds could the guilty be acquitted? Many examples can be presented, but the answer is a phrase we know, but do not use very often: "Guilty but Blameless". That is, "yes you did it", but you had extenuating circumstances which forced you into that situation, so you are not punished.

We actually see this all of the time in our own courts. The defense attorneys make an argument as to why their client had to do it, and those reasons-why are supposed to be ample reason for the jury to render a "not guilty" verdict. Certainly in circumstances of being attacked with mortal-danger, we understand that "bad things" have to be done in self defense, but no one should be condemned as being murders for having to do them. That is, they are "Guilty but Blameless".

Thus, from the point of view of legality and trials, what could Jesus have written into the earth which would give reason why the woman was "Guilty but Blameless"? There has to be a lot more to this trial than just an obvious verdict.

- 6.) Many readers may feel an urge to become the defense attorney for the woman. As the defense lawyer, you will want to find extenuating circumstances why the woman "did it". One obvious question: "Where is the man?" The Torah (Teachings of YHWH) describes that both the man and the woman are to be stoned. Since she was seized in the very act, the man-half of this incriminated dual had to be there too, so, where is the man? Again, there appears to be a lot more to this trial than just an obvious verdict.
- 7.) Many in Christendom want you to think that Jesus was writing into the earth a list of various sins that people do commonly. That is, we all sin somehow, and Jesus knew exactly how to itemize a good summary list of them, so that no one is ever left standing to cast a first stone at anyone else. But this interpretation is not correct, here is why.

Who was the audience of the earth-writing? It was not everybody watching, it was only those few that were the accusers of the woman, talking to Jesus. Verse 7 uses the word G4771: Personal

Pronoun, 'you', written in the grammar 'Genitive - 2nd Person – Plural', which means 'of you-all', or 'all of you'. "He that is without sin among "you-all" [all of you that are questioning me], let him first cast a stone at her". You also know this because in verses 9-10 we are told who left the scene. Verse 10 uses the word G2725: 'a prosecutor, accuser', written in the grammar 'Noun - Nominative – Masculine – Plural', which tells the reader "where are those [who are] your accusers [those men that were questioning me and prosecuting you]?"

The earth-writing audience was those men who were the judges of the trial. Jesus only had to disqualify those few men that were making the judgment to condemn the woman to death. The target audience was not all people everywhere, in general.

8.) We are not told who it was that seized the woman. Was it the husband, an enemy entrapper, a jealous wife? Knowing this would change what needed to be written into the earth.

9.) We are not told what was written into the earth. Verse 9 tells us that each of the accusers read the writing in the earth, were convicted by their own conscience, and then voluntarily left the trial as being disqualified. There was no one left to be an accuser of the woman.

10.) We can think of many scenarios which would demonstrate that the trial-judges condemning the woman were in some way also responsible for forcing that woman into that circumstance.

For example: wife-swapping was a legal practice. Because a man could legally nullify a marriage contract "for any cause", two men could agree to swap wives for awhile. At the agreed time they just dismissed the swapped wives "for cause". Men could also legally hire prostitutes to be wives for awhile, making the sex legal, and then dismiss them "for cause" when done. A woman accused of adultery in this circumstance, was she worthy of being killed? Which of those men judging this trial had earlier made a trial-decision which allowed husbands to legally dismiss wives "for cause"?

For example: what if the husband was selling his wife as a means of reducing a debt. Which of those men judging this trial had earlier made a trial-decision which set the price for a woman's sexual trades, so that they legally offset a debt-contract?

For example: the husband in a rage had thrown the woman out of his house because she had burnt the toast. Being outside without any means of support, she was then starving and turned to another man to feed her, of course for sexual trade. The husband did not want her to get help from another man, but wanted her to starve for awhile, to teach her a lesson. Which of those men judging this trial had earlier made a trial-decision which allowed husbands to legally punish their wives in this manner?

The above example scenarios are herein made-up, to make the point. The point is that Jesus was not demonstrating that everybody sins, and therefore no one can make any condemning judgments. Even today a Judge can only be disqualified from a case when they have a direct conflict of interest in that case. A Judge is not disqualified because they have done something wrong regarding something unrelated to the case. Likewise, whatever was written into the earth demonstrated that it was those very men which were pricked in conscience, and realized that they were disqualified in judging this woman for execution.

This is not a story demonstrating that the Torah commands are no longer valid. The moral of this story is that the Torah is to be applied with reason, even with mercy. There are situations wherein we stand "guilty as charged", but because of circumstances we also stand "Guilty but Blameless".

This story also demonstrates that women are not to be legalized into “second-class citizens”. The community’s laws are not to be written in favor of the male. Just because men write laws which make it legal to do wife swapping, and marrying prostitutes for just a night, does not mean that woman thereby lose their equal legal status in the eyes of YHWH.

Consider that in the day of our own judgment, standing before the Great Judgment Seat of the Messiah, that in many charges against us “Guilty but Blameless” is exactly the verdict we will want to hear too.

In Service To The Brethren,
Wayne L. Atchison, an Elder in the Body of the Messiah

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