

## John 8:2-11 (ESV) – Woman Caught in Adultery

**Main point:** God sees our faults but forgives us.

**Open with a short prayer, inviting God to teach us.**



**Background:** Jesus is gaining popularity for his teaching and healings, and some of the Pharisees and chief priests are trying to figure out a way to arrest him, to catch him in some trap of the law. Some of the earliest manuscripts don't have this section in them, but many biblical scholars believe it to be authentic history, even if it was written later and not by John.

### Focus of the study:

<sup>2</sup> Early in the morning [Jesus] came again to the temple. All the people came to Jesus, and he sat down and taught them. <sup>3</sup> The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst <sup>4</sup> they said to Jesus, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. <sup>5</sup> Now in the Law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" <sup>6</sup> This the scribes and Pharisees said to test Jesus, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. <sup>7</sup> And as they continued to ask him, Jesus stood up and said to the scribes and Pharisees, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." <sup>8</sup> And once more Jesus bent down and wrote on the ground. <sup>9</sup> But when the scribes and Pharisees heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. <sup>10</sup> Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" <sup>11</sup> She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more."

### Questions:

1. *v. 2: Where is Jesus, and who is with him?*
  - a. At the temple, with "all the people" – a large crowd
2. *v. 3: What happens? Who shows up?*
  - a. Scribes: experts in the Torah law; they know it backwards and forwards
  - b. Pharisees: experts at observing the law, doing what it says
3. *Who do the scribes and Pharisees bring with them?*
  - a. A woman caught in the act of adultery
  - b. *Where do they put this woman?*
    - i. They place her "in the midst" – *what does that look like?*
    - ii. Public humiliation
  - c. *What do the scribes and Pharisees say about the law concerning adultery? What is the penalty?*
    - i. death by stoning (Leviticus 20:10)
4. *Without getting too graphic ... What condition is this woman probably in?*
  - a. Completely shamed, in the middle of a large crowd who are all staring at her, possibly without clothes, possibly about to be brutally executed ... miserable
5. *How do the Pharisees and scribes see her? How have they treated her? What is their purpose in dragging her into this crowd and asking Jesus a question about the law?*
  - a. They do not see this woman as a human being in trouble; they have no mercy

- b. They are using this woman as a tool to entrap Jesus: “This they said to test him, to bring some charge against him.”
  - c. This whole event is used only as a trap, not even to see justice done. Jews did not have the authority to execute law-breakers; only Rome did.
6. *So she was caught in the act adultery ... she’s guilty. Who else is guilty in adultery?*
- a. The man! Old Testament law demanded that *both* the man and woman are subjected to the same penalty. But interestingly, the man who also broke this law is nowhere in sight.
7. *So who is in violation of the law here?*
- a. The woman, yes ...
  - b. and also the man ...
  - c. and also the scribes and Pharisees. They know the law, but they have only brought the woman. Hypocritical and inconsistent.
8. *v. 4-5: What do the Pharisees and scribes say to Jesus? What do they point out?*
- a. The facts: the woman was caught in the act, no doubt about guilt
  - b. The law: Moses’ law says to stone her
9. *How do the scribes and Pharisees think they’ve trapped Jesus? What are the two choices they think they’ve put in front of Jesus?*
- a. Either to allow the woman to go free and publicly disobey the law of Moses, OR
  - b. Approve of her killing and forfeit his reputation as a friend to sinners (and possibly risk trouble with Rome for contributing to a capital punishment that they had not approved).<sup>1</sup>
    - i. The scribes and Pharisees have seen Jesus give mercy to sinners. They want to show that Jesus breaks Jewish law when he gives mercy to sinners.
  - c. The dilemma: Break Jewish law and let the woman go, or uphold it and see her stoned
10. [optional; can skip to question 11] *Let’s look for a moment at Jesus’ posture throughout this story.*
- a. Sitting, teaching the people
  - b. When Pharisees bring woman, stoops down and writes in dirt
  - c. When Pharisees continue to badger him, stands up to face them
  - d. Then stoops down again
  - e. Woman is left standing; Jesus stands up to face her
  - f. *Anything interesting about his choice of positions?*
    - i. Posture of gentle humility with the crowd and woman; authority when facing the scribes and Pharisees; authority and personal when dealing with the woman alone
11. *v. 7: What does Jesus finally answer?*
- a. “He who is without sin, cast the first stone.” – *I wonder what that means?*
    - i. No one is without sin!
12. *What happens next?*
- a. v. 9: All the scribes and Pharisees leave the scene, oldest to youngest. *Why do they leave, and why leave in that order, do you suppose?*
    - i. Oldest – more knowledge, understand what’s going on

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/passages/related-articles/Manuscript-History-and-John>

- ii. When you think about your own sin, it's hard/hypocritical to focus on someone else's sin.

13. v. 10: *Jesus then asks the woman a question ... and she answers ...*

14. v. 11: Jesus' final response: "Neither do I condemn you. Go and sin no more." *Is Jesus saying that the woman didn't sin?*

- a. No. The Greek word for "condemn" here is a strong one, suggesting the handing down of a judgment. But Jesus tells the woman that he is not making a judicial sentence/
- b. *In a trial, when there are no accusers, what happens?*
  - i. There is no case left.

15. *What is Jesus' final instruction/command to the woman?*

- a. Go, and sin no more. Jesus neither condemns nor excuses her; acknowledges her guilt, but challenges her to abstain from sin, to start a new life. Gives her a new chance.

16. *What does this story mean for us?*

- a. God sees our sin, and forgives us.
- b. We need to remember this truth and mercy when we are tempted to focus on other people's sins.

- Ask for prayer requests for today.
- Close in prayer, naming people and needs listed.
- End with a song, e.g., first verse of Amazing Grace

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Interesting notes about Jesus writing in the dust:

Most likely, [John 8:6](#), [John 8:8](#) represents simply a claim that Jesus could write—a claim quite significant in the ancient world, where most individuals were illiterate. Such a claim also explains why a scribe inserted the passage after [John 7](#), where the Jewish leaders question both Jesus' literacy specifically ([John 7:15](#)) and Galileans' knowledge of the law and ability to search it generally ([John 7:49](#), [John 7:52](#)). In addition, the author borrows the verbs for "writing" in [John 8:6](#), [John 8:8](#) from the Greek version of [Exod 32:15](#). This passage describes God's authorship of the Ten Commandments; the woman in John's gospel is accused of breaking the command against adultery. The context in [Exodus](#) insists that God wrote these laws with his finger ([Exod 31:18](#)), and in the story of the adulteress, Jesus, too, writes with his finger ([John 8:6](#)). The author of the story of the adulteress seems to be claiming not only that Jesus can write but also that this particular instance of writing parallels the actions of God himself, thus making Jesus superior to Moses, whom his enemies had challenged him to usurp by pronouncing judgment on the woman in the first place.<sup>2</sup>

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