

The Woman Caught in the Act of Adultery

John 7:53 to 8:11

DIG: Why did the religious leaders bring the adulterous woman to Yeshua (see Leviticus 20:10 and Deuteronomy 22:22)? How was the Lord's attitude toward the woman different from the crowd's attitude? Why do you think the older men were the first to leave the scene? With which group or person in the story do you identify? What words would you use to describe the way Jesus treated the guilty woman? How did He address her sin? In the last thing that Christ said to the woman, what do you think the tone in His voice was and what did it mean?

REFLECT: How does Yeshua's interaction with this sinful woman encourage you? What was the attitude of the religious leaders toward the woman? Toward Jesus? How can we avoid these same attitudes? What does this passage reveal about God's view of sin? Why do you think we rank some sins as being far worse than others? How does this passage challenge your attitude about people caught in certain sins? Who are the people in your life that accept you no matter what you've done?

After the conflicts of the last day of Sukkot, Messiah went back to the Mount of Olives. Normally it was His custom when in Yerushalayim to seek the hospitality at the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary for the night (John 7:53 to 8:1). But more likely on this occasion Jesus followed the custom of the feast by dwelling in a temporary booth erected on the Mount of Olives rather than seeking the comfort of the home of His friends.⁹⁴⁵

The next day was the eighth day of the festival of Booths, which is mentioned in the Torah as a closing special assembly, where no regular work was to be done (Leviticus 23:36, 39; Numbers 29:35). It was actually considered to be a separate feast day. It is called *shemini 'atzereth* in rabbinic Hebrew, which means *festal assembly of the eighth day*.

The four great golden lampstands that had been lit every evening during the feast were still in the Court of the Women (see Nc2 - The Court of the Women). They stood there all year round, even if they were only used at Sukkot and Hanukkah. Yet, the visitors to the Temple were reminded of their particular significance all the time merely by their presence. This was the same place where the Sho'eva procession had culminated the previous day (see Gp - On the Last and Greatest Day of the Feast). At dawn on the eighth day Jesus appeared again in the Court of the Women, near the place where the offerings were collected, and sat down to teach as all the people gathered around Him (Yochanan 8:2).

Some nod **their** heads in agreement and open **their** hearts in obedience. **They** had accepted **the Teacher** as **their Teacher** and were learning how to accept **Him** as **their Lord**. We don't know **His** topic that morning. Prayer, perhaps. Or maybe kindness or anxiety. But whatever it was, it was soon interrupted because of an uproar coming straight toward **them**.

A small, but determined **group** exploded through the Eastern Gate (see **Nc1 - The Eastern Gate and the Court of the Women**) and stomped toward **the Teacher**. Listeners scrambled to get out of the way. **The mob** was made up of **Torah-teachers and Pharisees**, and struggling to keep **her** balance on the crest of this angry wave was a **woman**.

Only a short time before **she** had been caught in bed with a man who was not **her** husband. This was not an accidental discovery. It was a trap. A trap for **the woman** and a trap for **Jesus**. **The Torah-teachers and Pharisees** knew **the trouble-making Rabbi** would be there in the morning where **He** always was - teaching **the people**. Who knows for how long **they** had planned for this. Now the trap was set. During **the festival of Sukkot** all Israelites were supposed to live in **booths (Leviticus 23:42)**. At night one could go to the joyful worship service in **the Court of the Women**; however, that was not obligatory. **The people** also went to **their booths** to rest or to sleep. It seems that this **woman** found a man other than **her** husband to have sex with. Or, more likely, he found **her**. **The Torah-teachers and Pharisees** needed someone to be the victim in **their** wicked scheme.⁹⁴⁶ Barely having enough time to cover **herself** up, two men, obviously **Pharisees**, drug **her** into the street and toward the Temple Mount. **They** practically carried **her** through the Miphkad (or Inspection) Gate, through Shushan Gate, across the outer court, and through the Eastern Gate into **the Court of the Women** as fast as they could go. With holy strides **they** stormed toward **Messiah** and practically threw **her** in **His** direction. **She** stumbled and nearly fell.

They brought in a woman caught in adultery (**John 8:3a**). This brief episode illustrates the lengths **the religious leaders** would go to in order to trap and discredit **Yeshua** publically. **They** had already attempted to undermine **His** authority and had made efforts to arrest **Him**. Now **they** continued to test **His** beliefs with this crude confrontation in which a **woman**, clearly trapped in **their** plot, was brought before **Him** for judgment. The issue **they** selected was one where the penalty was not debatable - the issue of **adultery**.

The Torah-teachers and Pharisees made **her** stand before the group that the **Master** was teaching, and self-righteously said to **Jesus**, "Rabbi, this woman was caught in the very act of adultery" (**John 8:3b-4 CJB**). Everyone there knew what that meant. Then the leader gleefully sprung the trap when he asked **Jesus** skillfully, with venom dripping from his lips, "What do you say?" No one, neither the group **Messiah** was teaching, the **Kosher King's** opponents, nor the woman herself expected the answer **He** gave.⁹⁴⁷

There was no doubt about **her** guilt. **The Jews** had a court for the trial of such cases, but since it was customary to sometimes ask the opinion of a rabbi, **they** thought **they** had everything set up perfectly for the ambush. **Their** goal was to have **Yeshua** contradict **ADONAI**. This was the one attempt to get **the Nazarene** to say something to violate one of the 613 commandments of the **Torah**. **The lead Pharisee** said: **Now in our Torah, Moses commanded that such a woman be stoned to death.** The Greek is emphatic: **But YOU, what do YOU say about it (John 8:5)?** They thought **they** had **Him** this time. Checkmate!

They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing **Him** (Yochanan 8:6a). **They had been very diligent in their planning. But the fact that their motives were evil was exposed by the fact that they did not follow the Torah fully.** The Ruach HaKodesh inspired the human author **Moses** to write: **If a man commits adultery with another man's wife, that is, with the wife of a fellow countryman, both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death (Leviticus 20:10).**

But Jesus refused to answer. **He** merely **bent down and started to write on the ground with His finger (John 8:6b).** There has been much debate about what **Jesus** was actually writing. But the Bible is not incomplete. **The Holy Spirit** withholds nothing that we need to know from us. We might find out in heaven, but at this time we do not need to know what **He** wrote. The Greek text emphasized the **finger**, not the writing. **The** word **finger** placed in the emphatic position at the beginning of the Hebrew sentence. Why would the emphasis be on the **finger (Exodus 31:18, 32:15-16; Deuteronomy 4:13, 9:10)?**

Of the 613 commandments that **God** gave **Moses**, 603 were written on parchment with the pen of a man. Ten were inscribed into stone tablets by the **finger of God**. One of these commandments prohibited adultery (see my commentary **Exodus Dq - You Shall Not Commit Adultery**). **Yeshua** authored that commandment (**John 1:1**) and knew the punishment for **adultery** and sin all too well.

The Torah clearly required **the death** penalty for one found guilty of adultery. In addition, the commandments also required that those who testified at a trial could not be **malicious witnesses (Deuteronomy 19:16)**. But the fact that the man was not brought with **her** (it takes two to tango) suggests that the incident was set up to catch **the woman** and thereby confront **the renegade Rabbi** with an indefensible dilemma - support the commandment of **Moses** (calling for **her** execution), or support Roman law (which prohibited Jewish capital punishment by stoning). Whose authority would **Jesus** support?

When they kept on questioning Him, He straightened up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her (Jn 8:7b)." The Torah called for her to be stoned to death. But in keeping with the Torah, He demanded that qualified, or non-malicious witnesses initiate the execution. If a malicious witness takes the stand to accuse someone of a crime, the two people involved in the dispute must stand in the presence of God before the priests and the judges who are in office at the time. The judges must make a thorough investigation, and if the witness proves to be a liar, giving false testimony against a fellow Israelite, then do to the false witness as the witness intended to do to the other party. Show no pity; life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, and foot for foot (Deut 19:16-19, 21).

But Moses also said that those witnesses must, in effect, throw the first stone. In other words, they could not be guilty of the same sin as the accused. The hands of the witnesses must be the first in putting that person to death, and then the hands of all the people. You must purge the evil from among you (Deuteronomy 17:7). The one whom she was having sex with might have possibly been one of her accusers.

Therefore, Jesus said to them: Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her (John 8:7). This verse is constantly taken out of context. First, many say, "You shouldn't go around judging others." Confronting and disfellowshipping a believer involved in sin is quite different from simply "judging" someone because it involves discernment and judgment (see Gi - A Brother or Sister Who Sins Against You). Ultimately, Christ is the Judge. The Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son (Yochanan 5:22). But we are called to be fruit inspectors. By their fruit you will recognize them . . . every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit (Matthew 7:16a-17).

Jesus is also not saying, "Unless you are perfect yourself, you should not throw the first stone." If He said that, He would have contradicted the Torah. It did not require sinless perfection on the part of the accusers before a criminal could be executed. However, the Torah did require execution for certain sins, one of which was adultery. So if Jesus was saying that the accusers had to be perfect, He would have contradicted the Torah and the religious leaders would have succeeded in trapping Jesus. They would have had a basis for accusing Him and that was exactly what they were looking to do.

One more important point is that the two or three witness whose testimony condemned her to death, and who were responsible for throwing the first stone, must not be guilty of the same sin of which they accused her. Gulp.

Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground (John 8:8). Someone cleared his throat as if to speak, but no one spoke. Feet shuffled. They couldn't look at each other. Eyes stared at the dirt. Then thud . . . thud . . . thud . . . **stones** fell to the ground.

At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time. They came as one, but they left one by one. The older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there (Yochanan 8:9). How very striking. These religious authorities had challenged **Messiah** from the Torah. He met them on their own ground, then His written Word and spoken word defeated them. Convicted by their consciences, they left. Jesus straightened up and asked her: **Woman**, look up, **where are they? Has no one condemned you** (John 8:10)? Maybe she expected Him to scold her. Perhaps she expected Him to walk away in disgust. I'm not sure, but I know this: What she got, she never could have imagined. She got compassion and a commission.

"No one, sir," she said. The compassion was: **Then neither do I condemn you**, Jesus declared. The commission was: **Go, and sin no more** (Yochanan 8:11 KJV). The Savior of sinners was not excusing her **sin**. He was saying that her accusers had no legal right to **condemn** her. She then turned and walked into anonymity, never heard from again. But we can be confident of one thing. On that morning in Jerusalem, she saw the **Son of God**, and He saw her. Those eyes . . . how could she ever forget those eyes? Clear and tear-filled. Eyes that didn't see her as she was, but as she was intended to be.

Again, this was their first attempt to get **Yeshua** to contradict a point of the Torah, and it failed miserably. They never tried this ploy again but merely went back to continually accusing **Messiah** of violating the Oral Law (see **Ei** - **The Oral Law**).

One final thought. It should be noted that when **Christ** obeyed the Torah, He was obeying it because He was a Jew. The Torah was not given to Gentiles. But having perfectly obeyed the Torah, He also obeyed it as our substitute, especially for those who are Jewish believers. When the Lord died, He died bearing upon Himself the penalty of the Torah. Obviously, He was not guilty of violating the Torah, so the penalty of the Torah under which He died was not for His own sin, but as a substitute for others. Our Savior died a penal, substitutionary death. He was able to be our final blood sacrifice, our substitute, because He and He alone kept the Torah perfectly.⁹⁴⁸

Father, You are compassionate and forgiving. Like the woman in this story, we stand amazed that You would have such mercy on us. We thank You for Your unconditional love. We are not what we should be, but we accept Your forgiveness and claim Your salvation.