

Pericope Adulterae, the controversy...

John 7:53-8:11 is called the Pericope Adulterae. Pericope, from Greek, means to cut around, so a passage that can sort of stand alone. Adulterae is obvious. Together it is the passage concerning the "Woman Caught in Adultery."

It is arguably the most controversial pericope in the Bible. Unless you're reading a King James Version, this passage in the Bible is marked off in some way, with brackets, a footnote, or italics, etc. By doing so, the translators call into question the validity of the passage.

Many modern Biblical scholars, even some very good ones, have thrown in the towel and have accepted that these verses do not belong here in John's Gospel and perhaps do not belong in the Bible at all. Daniel Wallace of conservative Dallas Theological Seminary, who is a highly respected Greek scholar calls it his favorite passage not in the Bible.

It does no one any good at all to ignore the issue, nor does it do any good at all to distort reality to make us feel better about holding on to the passage. On the

other hand, I believe that it also does no good to throw in the towel when the evidence is far less convincing than it seems at first blush.

What is the issue? Well, the NET Bible, one of the most conservative translations of the last 100 years, states it this way... “This entire section, 7:53–8:11, traditionally known as the Pericope Adulterae, is not contained in the earliest and best manuscripts and was almost certainly not an original part of the Gospel of John. Among modern commentators and textual critics, it is a foregone conclusion that the section is not original but represents a later addition to the text of the Gospel. Double brackets have been placed around this passage to indicate that most likely it was not part of the original text of the Gospel of John. In spite of this, the passage has an important role in the history of the transmission of the text, so it has been included in the translation.”

In 1971 Bruce M. Metzger, Princeton professor and Biblical Greek expert, wrote, “The evidence for the non-Johannine origin of the pericope of the adulteress is overwhelming.” Metzger was so well known and so well respected as a text critic, Greek expert, and New

Testament scholar, that when he threw in the towel, most of his peers and nearly all of those following him went along. For most people in the field, you just don't argue with Metzger and then when Wallace agreed with Metzger it became the consensus of nearly all others as well.

Here's the problem in detail:

1. The pericope is entirely absent from all pre-fifth century AD manuscripts.
2. When it does appear, it is located in ten different places in the manuscript traditions.
3. The pericope contains a large and consistent number of non-Johannine literary features.
4. The pericope is not dealt with in early patristic writings up to the fourth century.
- 5) It interrupts the sequence of 7:52 and 8:12.

Metzger's student, the atheist Bart D. Ehrman, says the evidence is overwhelming. He has made it his mission to disparage this incident. As he has aggressively argued his position in public forums more and more pastors, teachers, and scholars acquiesce.

Many Christians accept the pericope as a much loved, and largely true, free-floating oral story about Jesus that was not told by the Bible authors. As such people kept trying to insert it in different places until it somehow stuck in its present location.

Is that the correct course of action? Give in to the experts and enjoy it as a story that may or may not be true?

That's why we're here this morning. Let's take it one issue at a time:

1. The pericope is entirely absent from all pre-fifth century AD manuscripts.

Pre-fifth century means 399 A.D. or before... Within the first 300 years of the Bible's completion. Our manuscripts from those first 300 years are fragmentary. Only two are essentially complete, the uncials Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus. Only two others Papyrus 66 and Papyrus 75 contain the section of John in question. What I'm saying is out of the 100 or so manuscripts dating to the pre-fifth century, there are only 4 that contain the area where we should find the pericope. How different is it to say, "The pericope is

entirely absent from all pre-fifth century AD manuscripts,” and to say, in the 4 manuscripts prior to 400 A.D. the pericope is not present? In addition Codex Vaticanus has an obelisk symbol and a space where the pericope should be... Indicating that the scribe knew of the passage that was being left out intentionally.

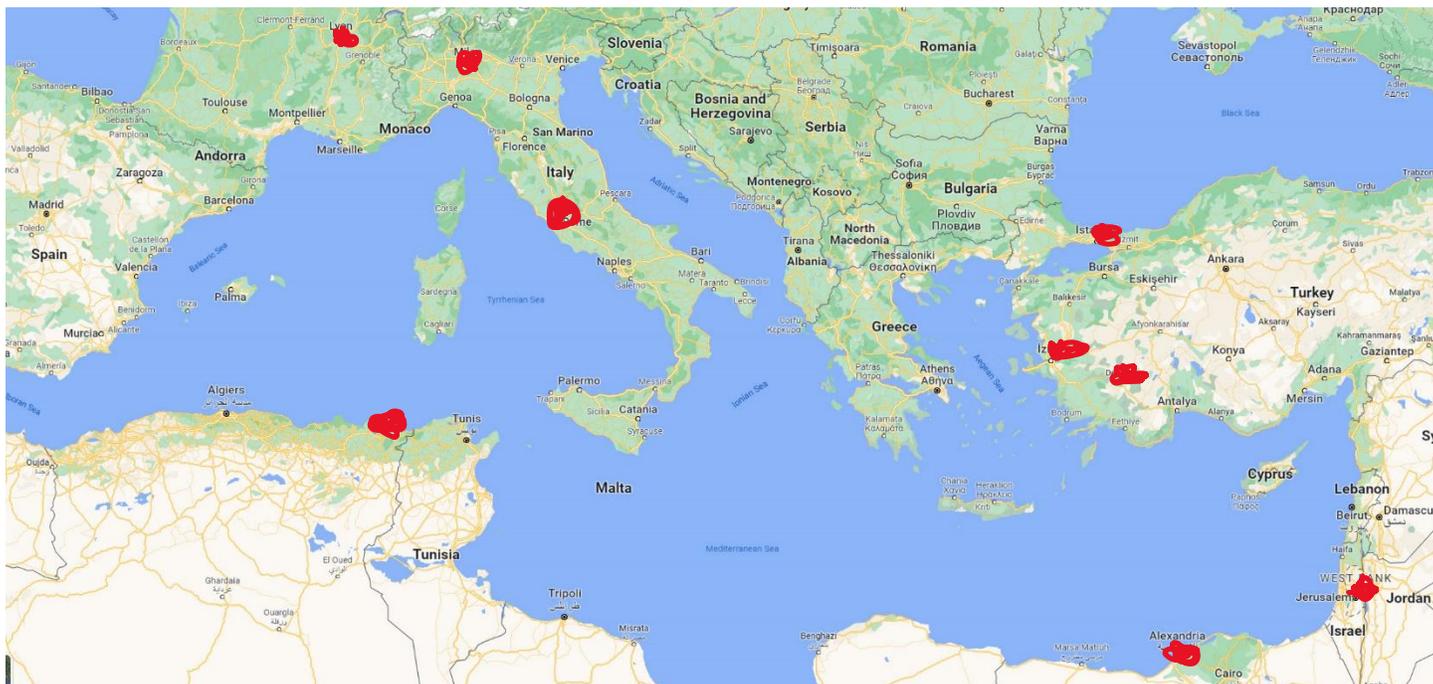
Jerome translated the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts into Latin. He wrote that in his translation he only translated from well recognized copies in the original language of the passage. He completed John's Gospel in 383 A.D., which included the Pericope Adulterae in its present location.

2. When it does appear, it is located in ten different places in the manuscript traditions.

In over half of the cases the reason for the location has to do with lectionary copies. Special copies made for the sequence of a church service. They are invalid examples to make the problem sound bigger than it is.

While there are different locations in the Bible where the pericope is found they are isolated. Nearly every

example has the text in its present spot. Therefore, the issue of different locations is related to the previous problem of the pericope missing entirely.



Augustine of Hippo (354-430) is considered one of the most brilliant Bible scholars of all time. He is venerated as such by all Christian groups, Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, as well as in Protestant denominations, (particularly mainline churches).

Augustine was the Bishop of Hippo Regius, which was founded as a major city by the Phoenicians of Tyre in about 1,200 B.C. in what is now northeastern Algeria on the African coast. It became an important city of the Carthaginian Empire until conquered by the Romans. It

was under Roman control during the lifetime of Augustine. The Vandals laid siege to the city in 430 A.D., eventually capturing it and making it the capital of their burgeoning empire. Augustine died during the siege. He was 75 years old. He was born on November 13, 354, became a Christian at the age of 31, and due to his brilliance, quickly rose through the ranks to be appointed Bishop 9 years later, at the age of 40, an office he held for 35 years. He's best known for his autobiography, "Confessions" and his 22-volume work, "The City of God."

He wrote extensively about the pericope in question, in his commentary on John. In another of his books called, "On Adulterous Marriages," Augustine explained what happened. He wrote in chapter 2, verses 6&7, ***"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's friend and mentor Ambrose of Milan 339-397 also affirmed that explanation and their

contemporary Jerome, the dude who translated the entire Bible into Latin between 382 and 405 A.D. chose to include it at this point in John's Gospel. Jerome reported that the Pericope Adulterae was found in its usual place in ***“many Greek and Latin manuscripts”*** in both Rome and the Latin West. He also found it while translating in Jerusalem – the East.

Pope Leo I (Pope from 440 to 461) cited the passage in his 62nd sermon, mentioning that Jesus said, ***“to the adulteress who was brought to him, ‘Neither will I condemn you; go and sin no more.’”***

Papias the Bishop of Hierapolis, a city in modern western Turkey was born in 60 A.D. and was together with Polycarp, a disciple of the Apostle John and one of the men who encouraged John to write his Gospel. Papias relates a story about Jesus from John in his own words that is so similar it must be based on the Gospel account.

“The Gospel according to the Hebrews” was written in about 125 A.D. and it contained the story. Portions of the story are quoted in “The Apostle's Teaching” dated to 225 A.D. Didymus the Blind (313-398) student of

Origen and Head of the Theological school he founded in Alexandria for 50 years wrote about the incident and said it was in the Gospels.

No scholar doubts the authenticity of the story as being a real event in the life of Jesus. There is nothing in the story that is at odds with what we know about first century Jerusalem, or the players involved, and it is certainly like Jesus to act in exactly this way.

That's why in or out of the Bible, it doesn't change anything, because there is nothing here that doesn't fit with what we already know about Jesus from the rest of the Bible.

In western Christianity we have used this pericope in the life of the church for 16 centuries. It is without doubt a true incident that either circulated independently and was eventually plugged in to the Bible, or was a part of the Bible lost, that was reunited.

3. The pericope contains a large and consistent number of non-Johannine literary features.

This problem is overblown. First, the unique subject matter requires unique words and phrases. If I write a book about the life of Jesus and in one passage relate a story from my military flying career, I will use words and phrases not found elsewhere in my book.

Secondly, it does seem that the pericope was missing from some copies of the Bible and reattached in other copies in different places. It is possible that our exact form of the pericope was reconstructed. If true, that would mean that John didn't write it exactly as we have it today. In that case, you either trust that godly men, moved by the Holy Spirit, did their best and that the Holy Spirit made sure the pericope survived as He wished.

4. The pericope is not dealt with in early patristic writings up to the fourth century.

That's simply not accurate. We don't have a writing from prior to about 400 A.D. specifically addressing this pericope? Yet we know it was in Greek Bibles that Jerome used to translate it into Latin in 383. We know of the story through many different pre-400, or Ante-Nicene Fathers including Papias, Eusebius, and

Didymus, as well as in the “Apostle’s Teaching” of 225 A.D.

5) It interrupts the sequence of 7:52 and 8:12. The only way to see it as an interruption is to tie the statement of Jesus “I AM the Light” to the Feast of Tabernacles which included light as a part of the festivities (lit torches at night, specifically). It is to see the “Come to Me and Drink” attached to the Water Drawing Ceremony and conclude that the Light statement must likewise be connected to the Feast.

Well, it’s not connected! The Light metaphor has to do with what happened in the pericope in question, not the festival that was concluded. More on that in the sermon today.

In every case the issues are overstated and overblown. Anytime you have anyone overemphasizing the facts it means they have stopped looking for the truth and are now looking for the proof. In other words, they have made up their mind and are now seeking to convince themselves and others of their position. They now have an agenda.

The modern problem first came to light about 500 years ago when Erasmus brought the Greek Bible from the East to the West. For more than 1,000 years, at that point, all of the West had been relying on the Latin Vulgate Bible, translated by Jerome.

The Greek Orthodox Bible was essentially identical to the Latin, but it got Western Bible Scholars interested in working with the Greek text. That interest led to the discovery and cataloging of almost 25,000 New Testament manuscripts over the last 5 centuries.

These manuscripts are, as the name implies, hand-written copies (manual scripting) that represent a host of languages from Latin to Syriac and from Greek to Coptic. In the Original language of Greek, we now possess approximately 5,800 New Testament manuscripts.

If we had the autographs, the original documents, straight from the author we would have no question about the text. If all of the copies we possessed were identical, we wouldn't really have any doubt about the original text. Since we have 25,000 copies all done by

hand, we have variations. In fact, no two handwritten copies are completely identical.

That seems like a problem, and so it would be, if we only had 2 or 3 copies, but with the incredible number of copies, it is fairly easy to compare them and figure out what the original text was in most cases. Most scholars agree that we have 95% of the Bible text as it was originally written. That process is called lower or textual criticism. It is a scientific approach to examining the documents to arrive at the original text as it was first written. The science got underway in 1898 with the publishing of the Greek New Testament, now on revision 28, as new manuscripts are discovered and translated.

Bruce M. Metzger, who I mentioned at the beginning as being one of the best textual critics of our time wrote in 1971, ***“the account has all the earmarks of historical veracity. It is obviously a piece of oral tradition which circulated in certain parts of the Western church and which was subsequently incorporated into various manuscripts at various places.”***

Metzger set the tone and his influence was massive Daniel B. Wallace a few years his junior, followed him by saying of the pericope “It is my favorite story that isn’t in the Bible.” Metzger’s student Bart D. Ehrman, Bible scholar turned atheist has now publicized the issue so dramatically that as I said it is clearly an agenda dismissing all other possibilities while amplifying the evidence supporting his position.

How could it be in every Bible, from every corner of the world and through every Christian tradition if it is a fake? Metzger, Wallace, Ehrman, and their disciples say that it was added because it shows grace.

Is it more likely given church history that scribes would add what wasn’t there in order to show the mercy, forgiveness, and grace of Jesus? Or is it more likely, as Augustine wrote 16 centuries ago, that scribes omitted it?

An example of the typical response of the church to make things more restrictive and more legalistic, not the other way around... The **NASB 1995: Romans 8:1, ¹Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.**

This translation is based on the “scholar’s text” used by nearly all of the major modern translations. It is unanimous that this was the original reading.

By the time we get to 1581 we have added a qualifier...
Douay-Rheims 1581: Romans 8:1, ¹There is now therefore no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not according to the flesh.

Then by 1611, another... **KJV 1611: Romans 8:1, ¹There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.**

This is one example of how the church, in every case, added qualifications to grace – they never made grace easier, or less complicated.