

1-1-1998

A Lesson on Writing in the Dust (Perspective on the Word Logos)

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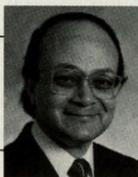
Rodriguez, Angel (1998) "A Lesson on Writing in the Dust (Perspective on the Word Logos)," *Perspective Digest*: Vol. 4 : No. 4 , Article 12.

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P E R S P E C T I V E O N T H E W O R D

LOGOS



ΛΟΓΟΣ

Angel Rodriguez*

An article in *The Bible Review* [December 1998] says that the story of Jesus writing on the ground in the incident with the adulterous woman does not appear in the earliest manuscripts. And also that Jesus wrote on the ground because it was the Sabbath. What does PD have to say about these allegations?

**A Lesson on Writing
in the Dust**

Scholars have recognized that John 7:53 to 8:11 was not originally part of the Gospel of John. The textual and historical evidence is simply overwhelming against it. However, most scholars consider the story to be original; that is to say, it describes an event that took place during the ministry of Jesus. It may have been transmitted in oral or written form independent of the Gospel but later attached to it in order to preserve the story.

The suggestion that Jesus wrote on the ground because it was the Sabbath is innovative. If I hesitate to accept it, it is because the text does not indicate the day it occurred. Of

course, the argument is that the reason we know it was the Sabbath is precisely because Jesus wrote

on the ground. But would the Pharisees dare accuse someone of adultery and bring her to a rabbi for a legal decision *on the Sabbath*?

Another pragmatic reason for writing on the ground could be that writing materials were not easily available at that time. Then the real question is, Why did Jesus write at all? He could have given a speech, but in that case the information He wanted to share with the scribes and Pharisees would have been heard by the crowd that was there. By writing, Jesus was sharing information of a private nature with the accusers. Unfortunately, we do not know what it was that He wrote in the dust.

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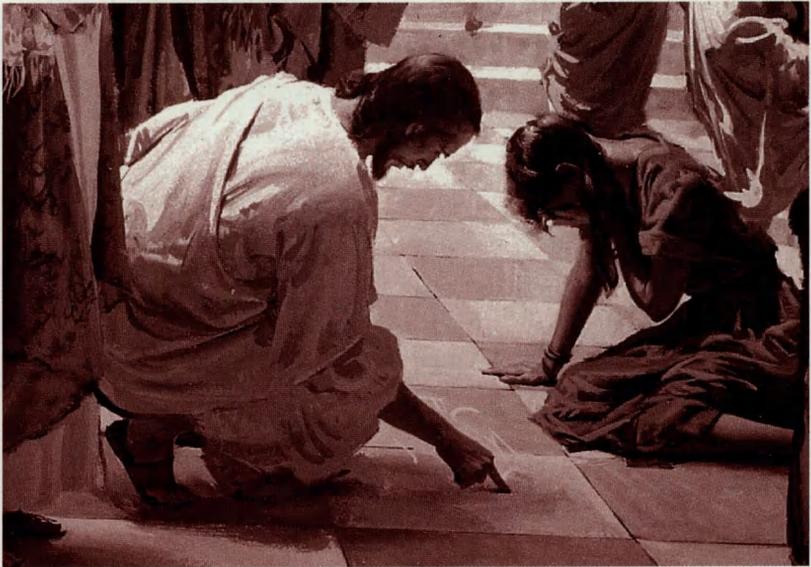
In *The Desire of Ages*, the magnificent account of the life of Christ, the author suggests that Jesus wrote in the dust “the guilty secrets” of the lives of the scribes and Pharisees (p. 461). “They [scribes and Pharisees] trembled lest the hidden iniquity of their lives should be laid open to the multitude; and one by one, with bowed heads and downcast eyes, they stole away, leaving their victim with the pitying Saviour” (ibid.).

Why did Jesus *write* in the *dust*? He was being merciful to His enemies! Instead of doing what they were doing—revealing in public the iniquity of a sinner and seeking judgment against her—He treated them with dignity and respect. He revealed their sins only to each one privately, and

did not condemn them aloud. Their own consciences condemned them. No visible record was left of their sins for others to see. He wrote on the dust, and perhaps the wind, or even better, Jesus Himself, erased the writing. What a wonderful lesson of love and compassion toward those who didn’t deserve either consideration.

If it could be shown that this incident in the life of the Saviour took place during the Sabbath, then *Bible Review’s* perspective and my comments could be combined in searching for an answer to the question, *Why did* Jesus write on the ground? □

Send your Bible questions to “Perspective on the Word,” 2121 Sondra Court, Silver Spring, MD 20905 or use the E-mail address on page 3.



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