

In Defence
of
John 7:53–8:11



Pericope Adulteræ

JESUS AND THE WOMAN TAKEN IN ADULTERY



'Inquire for the Old Paths'. Jer. 6:16.

BIBLE STUDENTS,
TRACTS.

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION—WHY THE MATTER IS SERIOUS	1
2. A word of caution against hasty judgement.....	1
A Note on Sources	2
3. The passage itself	2
4. The manuscript question in perspective	3
The two streams of manuscript transmission.....	3
The numerical weight of the manuscript tradition	4
The modern critical committee’s own uncertainty—Metzger’s {C} rating	6
The principle of errors of omission.....	6
The claim that Jerome introduced the passage and the Old Latin witness.....	6
Asterisks, obeli, and the wandering location.....	7
The evidence of the lectionary tradition.....	7
A double standard in manuscript criticism	7
Burgon on the character of Sinaiticus and Vaticanus—a ‘blind superstition’.....	8
Why these manuscripts survived—Burgon’s argument from preservation	8
The scholars behind the elevation—Westcott, Hort, and the collapse of the ‘Neutral text’ theory	8
The Reformation context—why the received text matters	11
The Emphatic Diaglott—a note on its textual basis	12
In defence of the Received Text—tradition versus printed edition	12
An honest acknowledgement—Russell, Woodworth, and Shallieu.....	13
5. The testimony of the early church fathers.....	14
Eusebius’ canon tables—a difficulty resolved.....	14
Papias (early second century).....	15
Didascalia Apostolorum (third century).....	15
The Apostolic Constitutions (c. 380 AD).....	16
Pacian of Barcelona (c. 310–391 AD).....	16
Ambrose of Milan (339–397 AD).....	16
Didymus the Blind of Alexandria (c. 313–398 AD).....	16
Jerome (c. 347–420 AD).....	17
Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD).....	17
6. The dispensational and historical context: law, repentance, and the ministry of Christ	18
‘The law and the prophets were until John’.....	19
John the Baptist’s ministry of repentance—and what it implies	19
The cessation of the <i>sotah</i> trial—a remarkable piece of external evidence.....	19

Roman law had suspended Jewish capital jurisdiction.....	20
Christ’s consistent pattern—mercy, repentance, and forgiveness.....	20
Three encounters—a consistent pattern, and an instructive concession.....	22
John 3:17—the governing principle of the First Advent.....	23
Difficulties Considered.....	23
7. Positive internal evidence for authenticity.....	25
The narrative coherence of John 7–8.....	25
The treasury—the Court of Women.....	26
The Feast of Tabernacles.....	26
Thematic coherence with John 8:12 and 8:15.....	27
The absent man—a legal defect in the accusation.....	27
The legal precision of Christ’s response.....	28
The meaning of ἀναμάρτητος (<i>anamartētos</i> , G361)—‘without sin of this kind’.....	28
The echo of Jeremiah 17:13—and the significance of <i>katagraphein</i>	29
No discernible motive for forgery.....	30
The Johannine aside of John 8:6—and a challenge answered.....	30
The Protoevangelion of James—early independent testimony.....	31
Summary of positive evidence.....	34
8. Difficulties considered and resolved.....	35
Difficulty I: John 7:53—‘every man went unto his own house’ cannot be true during the feast.....	35
Difficulty II: The scribes and Pharisees would not have brought a woman into the Temple precincts.....	36
Difficulty III: Jesus would have been obligated to uphold the Mosaic penalty.....	36
Difficulty IV: ‘Hiding eyes from sin’—does Christ’s response make him complicit?.....	38
Difficulty V: The statement ‘without sin’ would logically halt all response to any sin.....	38
Difficulty VI: The passage would ‘contradict and destroy the Law’.....	39
Difficulty VII: The feast-day chronology creates a contradiction.....	39
Difficulty VIII: Jesus could not have written in a paved Temple court.....	40
Difficulty IX: ‘Beginning at the eldest’—considered and resolved.....	42
Difficulty X: The woman shows no repentance.....	42
Difficulty XI: The scribes and Pharisees address Jesus as ‘Master’—considered and resolved.....	43
Summary of difficulties and resolutions.....	44
9. A survey of commentary witnesses.....	45
John Calvin (1509–1564).....	45
Adam Clarke (1760–1832).....	45
John Gill (1697–1771).....	45

Johann Albrecht Bengel (1687–1752).....	45
Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer (1800–1873).....	45
Albert Barnes (1798–1870).....	46
Matthew Henry (1662–1714).....	46
Jamieson, Fausset and Brown.....	46
Vincent’s Word Studies.....	46
F. B. Meyer (1847–1929).....	46
Dean John William Burgon (1813–1888).....	46
10. Pastor Russell and the passage.....	47
The New Creation—Volume 6 of Studies in the Scriptures.....	47
Zion’s Watch Tower—R3434.....	48
R5095—the spirit of Christ’s ministry.....	48
R2437–2438, R5033, R1921, R4130.....	48
11. Conclusion.....	48
Appendix: The Revelation 20:7 Reading in <i>The Keys of Revelation</i> —A Textual Note.....	53
What the reading proposes.....	53
The manuscript evidence.....	53
The grammatical question.....	53
What Pastor Russell concluded.....	54
A note on methodological consistency.....	54
Notes and Supplementary References.....	54



In Defence of John 7:53–8:11

*The Pericope Adulterae*¹—an examination of the evidence for and against its authenticity

I. INTRODUCTION—WHY THE MATTER IS SERIOUS

The question of whether John 7:53–8:11 is genuine Scripture is not a mere academic curiosity. It touches upon something of considerable spiritual weight: the integrity of the received Word of God, the character of the Lord Jesus Christ as Scripture consistently portrays him, and the responsibility that rests upon every student of the Bible before dismissing any portion of the sacred text.

Twelve verses are at issue. They record one of the most memorable encounters in the Gospel narrative—a woman accused of adultery, brought before the Lord by those who sought to entrap him, and the masterful response of Christ that convicted her accusers and sent them away one by one. The passage closes with words that have echoed through the centuries: *‘Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.’*

Those who dismiss these verses do so primarily on the grounds that they are absent from certain early manuscripts. That is a legitimate textual observation and deserves honest engagement. However, it will be argued here that this observation, taken alone, is insufficient grounds for dismissal—and that the full weight of evidence, properly assessed, supports the passage as authentic and inspired Scripture. Certainly not an easy subject, and one that demands care on all sides.

2. A WORD OF CAUTION AGAINST HASTY JUDGEMENT

It has been suggested in some quarters that John 7:53–8:11 may be influenced by the Adversary—that is, not merely a later scribal addition but something of diabolical rather than divine origin. This is a very serious claim, and it is worth pausing on it before proceeding further.

To cut out twelve verses of what may be inspired Scripture and refer to them as potentially of the Adversary—one should be absolutely certain that those verses are not genuine; otherwise, it is effectively the case that a part of inspired Holy Scripture—a product of the Holy Spirit—is being attributed to the Wicked One. This is a very serious matter indeed. Our Lord warned those who attributed the works of the Holy Spirit to Beelzebul that they were in danger of the unpardonable sin (Matthew 12:31–32). The same principle applies, with equal force, to the written Word. To describe these verses as spurious is one thing—that is a textual judgement, and it can be debated. To suggest they are diabolically inspired is quite another, and requires a standard of proof that the absence of a passage from two manuscripts, however ancient, cannot begin to meet—particularly when patristic testimony, the Latin tradition, internal evidence, and the witness of multiple scholars across many centuries all point in the opposite direction.

Those who make this claim bear a correspondingly heavy burden of proof—one that the evidence presented in this document shows has not been discharged.

¹ *Pericope Adulterae*: Latin, ‘the passage of the adulteress.’ From Greek περικοπή (*perikopē*), ‘a section of text’ (Liddell-Scott, s.v.), and Latin *adulterae*, genitive of *adultera*, ‘adulteress’ (Lewis and Short, s.v.).

A NOTE ON SOURCES

The **difficulties** examined in Section 8 of this document are drawn in part from a body of material known as the *Old Testament Studies* and *New Testament Studies*,² widely attributed to Frank Shallieu, who was a respected teacher within the Bible Student movement and who devoted decades to detailed Scriptural study. These Studies are available at revelation-research.org and cover an extensive range of Scriptural passages.

These Studies carry an explicit disclaimer attached to each section. In substance it states: the Studies were not prepared from a written text but were delivered extemporaneously; the notes were transcribed by others and represent the transcriber's best effort to faithfully record what was said, rather than a verbatim rendering; and Frank Shallieu himself did not review the transcribed notes for possible errors. The reader is therefore advised to treat them as a useful study guide rather than as a definitive or authoritative statement of his personal views. This document takes that disclaimer seriously. Nothing that follows is intended as a personal criticism of Frank Shallieu, who was a faithful and diligent student of Scripture. The document addresses the doctrinal positions as they appear in the *Old and New Testament Studies*. Any reader who believes a position has been inaccurately summarised is warmly invited to provide the correct statement with supporting documentation, and this document will be updated accordingly. It should also be noted that certain understandings articulated in the Studies have been adopted and repeated by some within the Bible Student movement as settled doctrinal positions. It is those positions—as living claims circulating within the community—that this document examines. The argument is with the doctrine, not the person.

3. THE PASSAGE ITSELF

*Jesus went unto the mount of Olives. And early in the morning he came again into the temple, and all the people came unto him; and he sat down, and taught them. And the scribes and Pharisees brought unto him a woman taken in adultery; and when they had set her in the midst, they say unto him, Master, this woman was taken in adultery, in the very act. Now Moses in the law commanded us, that such should be stoned: but what sayest thou? This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him. But Jesus stooped down, and with his finger wrote on the ground, as though he heard them not. So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, **He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.** And again he stooped down, and wrote on the ground. And they which heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one, beginning at the eldest, even unto the last: and Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. When Jesus had lifted up himself, and saw none but the woman, he said unto her, **Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee?** She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, **Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more.***

John 7:53–8:11 (KJV)



² Hereafter abbreviated as OT Studies and NT Studies, or collectively as Studies (not to be confused with Pastor Russell's *Studies in the Scriptures*).

It is worth reading this passage carefully before engaging with the arguments. Does it read like a forgery? Does it serve any obvious theological agenda? Does it promote any known heresy or doctrinal error? These are questions worth keeping in mind throughout.

4. THE MANUSCRIPT QUESTION IN PERSPECTIVE

THE TWO STREAMS OF MANUSCRIPT TRANSMISSION

Before examining the individual manuscripts, it will help the reader considerably to understand that the entire Greek New Testament manuscript tradition divides into **two principal geographical and textual streams**—and that the question of the *Pericope Adulterae*'s authenticity maps directly onto this division.

The first is the **Alexandrian stream**—manuscripts originating in or closely associated with Alexandria in Egypt. Its primary representatives are Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲁ), Codex Vaticanus (B), and the early papyri P66 and P75. This stream is geographically concentrated: its manuscripts come from one region, reflecting the textual traditions of *the Egyptian church*. F. H. A. Scrivener, in *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament* (1883), was one of the first to characterise this as a distinct regional stream, noting its **divergence from the mainstream of Greek transmission**. B. H. Streeter (Burnett Hillman Streeter, 1874–1937), in *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins* (Macmillan, 1924, pp. 26–76), further established that the Alexandrian manuscripts represent a geographically localised text-type, not a universally distributed one. Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, in *The Text of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 2nd ed. 1989, pp. 48–71)—the standard modern reference on manuscript families—confirm the Alexandrian text-type as **one of the two dominant streams**, alongside the Byzantine.

The second is the **Antiochian stream**—also called the Syrian, Byzantine, or **Majority Text stream**—*associated with Antioch* in Syria and **transmitted through the Greek-speaking churches** of Asia Minor, Greece, Constantinople, and the broader Eastern Mediterranean. This is by far the larger stream: of the over 5,000 surviving Greek New Testament manuscripts, 90% or more belong to this tradition. Scrivener identified the Syrian or Antiochian text as the mainstream of Greek transmission (*ibid.*), and Streeter confirmed that it represents the textual inheritance of the church at large, as distinct from the Egyptian local tradition. Aland and Aland similarly identify the Byzantine text-type as the dominant tradition by sheer numerical and geographical weight (*The Text of the New Testament*, pp. 59–64).

These two names—the **Alexandrian stream** and the **Antiochian stream**—are descriptive geographical designations with solid scholarly grounding, and they will be used throughout this document. Their relevance to the *Pericope Adulterae* is immediate and decisive: the passage is *absent* from the **Alexandrian stream** and *present* in the **Antiochian stream** overwhelmingly. That single fact, properly understood, is the heart of the manuscript argument.

Before examining those manuscripts individually, the reader should know what the earliest Greek manuscript witness for the passage is. It is Codex Bezae (D)—a fifth-century Greek-Latin diglot, one of the most important manuscripts of the New Testament, now housed in Cambridge University Library. Codex Bezae contains the *pericope* in full and is the oldest surviving continuous-text Greek manuscript to do so. Critics of the passage sometimes argue that Bezae represents an independent 'Western' textual tradition prone to expansion and therefore cannot be trusted. This argument, however, cuts against them more than for them. If Bezae's text is genuinely independent of the Alexandrian tradition represented by Sinaiticus and Vaticanus—as is universally acknowledged—then its inclusion of the passage is not a copy of an Alexandrian reading but an independent

witness from an entirely different textual stream. Two geographically and textually independent traditions containing the passage are more significant than two geographically proximate manuscripts omitting it.

Turning to the manuscripts that omit the passage: Codex Vaticanus itself marks the end of John chapter 7 with an umlaut (¨)—a scribal symbol used to flag a disputed or variant reading at that point in the text. As Bruce Metzger observes in his *Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2nd ed., United Bible Societies, 1994, pp. 187–189), this indicates that the scribe was aware of the passage and its contested status. Even the manuscript most frequently cited against the passage’s authenticity contains internal evidence that its scribe was aware the passage existed and was disputed—which is rather different from the passage being simply unknown.

Papyrus 66 (P66)—dated to approximately 200 AD and often cited alongside P75 as among the weightiest early witnesses against the passage—likewise repays closer examination. Several scholars, including Philip Comfort in his study of the early papyri, have observed that P66 exhibits anomalies at the relevant point in John 7–8 that suggest scribal awareness of the passage’s existence (Philip Comfort, *Encountering the Manuscripts*, Broadman & Holman, 2005). The manuscript does not simply continue the text seamlessly as though the *pericope* had never been heard of; there are features of the transition that are most naturally explained by a copyist who knew of the passage and was deliberately passing over it. This is a more cautious form of the same argument made for the Vaticanus umlaut, and it applies the same logic: a copyist who shows signs of knowing the passage exists but omitting it is a quite different witness from one for whom the passage was entirely unknown.

THE NUMERICAL WEIGHT OF THE MANUSCRIPT TRADITION

The overwhelming majority of Greek manuscripts—numbering in the thousands—do *include* the passage. The Byzantine manuscript tradition, which represents the widest and most geographically distributed textual witness, overwhelmingly contains these verses. Dean John William Burgon, whose substantial scholarly work *The Causes of the Corruption of the Traditional Text* remains one of the most thorough defences of the passage, argued at length that the numerical and geographical weight of the manuscript tradition cannot simply be set aside in favour of two or three early codices, however distinguished. The antiquity of a manuscript does not automatically confer superiority—an early manuscript may itself preserve an early corruption. This is not a fringe view; it is a serious and well-reasoned position in textual scholarship.

Philip Mauro, the American lawyer and biblical scholar whose analysis of the Revised Version drew on the collation work of Burgon and Scrivener, stated the numerical disproportion plainly: the most important departures of the Westcott-Hort text from the Received Text were made ‘with the support of less than one percent of all the available witnesses; or in other words, the readings discarded by the Revisers have the support of over 99 percent of the surviving Greek Texts, besides Versions and Fathers.’ (*Which Version? Authorized or Revised?*, 1924.) Whatever one concludes about individual disputed passages, the disproportionate weight of testimony is a fact that must be honestly reckoned with. The dismissal of the *Pericope Adulterae* rests on the testimony of a small fraction of the surviving witness—a fraction whose own character, as will be shown, gives grounds for serious caution.

The geographical dimension of this disparity deserves particular emphasis. John David Punch, whose doctoral dissertation at Radboud University Nijmegen (2010) represents one of the most thorough academic examinations of the manuscript evidence for and against the passage ever undertaken—over 400 pages—concluded from his own collation that the evidence for the omission of the *pericope*, while early, is mainly limited textually to the *Alexandrian text* and geographically to the **vicinity of Egypt**. The manuscripts that omit the passage are not geographically distributed across Christendom; *they cluster in a single region*. The **manuscripts that include it** are *geographically universal*—found across Asia Minor, Syria, Greece, Italy, Spain, North Africa, Armenia, and the

In Defence of John 7:53–8:11

Latin West alike. This geographical concentration of the negative evidence in Egypt, alongside the universal distribution of the positive evidence, is a fact that numerical counting alone does not fully capture but that any honest weighing of the testimony must account for.

The following table summarises the principal manuscript witnesses on each side, together with approximate dates, text-type, and stream designation:

Witness	Date	Stream	Text-type / notes	Passage
Papyrus 66 (P66)	c. 200 AD	Alexandrian	Egyptian	Omits
Papyrus 75 (P75)	c. 175–225 AD	Alexandrian	Egyptian (Sahidic-influenced)	Omits
Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲱ)	4th century	Alexandrian	Egyptian; umlaut at 7:52	Omits
Codex Vaticanus (B)	4th century	Alexandrian	Egyptian; umlaut end of ch. 7	Omits
Syriac Peshitta	5th century	Alexandrian-influenced	Eastern Syriac	Omits
Codex Ephraemi (C)	5th century	Mixed	Damaged at this point	Lacuna ³
Codex Bezae (D)	5th century	Antiochian (Western)	Earliest Greek MS including passage	Includes
Vetus Latina (Old Latin)	2nd–4th century	Antiochian (Latin West)	Pre-Jerome; independent of Vulgate	Includes
Latin Vulgate (Jerome)	Late 4th century	Antiochian (Latin)	Based on Greek MSS known to Jerome	Includes
Byzantine Majority Text	5th–15th century	Antiochian	90%+ of all Greek MSS	Overwhelmingly present
Byzantine Lectionary Tradition	From 4th century	Antiochian	Appointed annually (St Pelagia)	Includes
Ferrar Group (f13)	11th–15th century	Antiochian (displaced)	Places passage after Luke 21:38	Includes

The pattern maps precisely onto the two-stream distinction: the Alexandrian stream *omits the passage*; the Antiochian stream—representing the continuous textual inheritance of the Greek-speaking church—*includes it*

³ *Lacuna* (pl. *lacunae*): a gap in a manuscript caused by physical damage or loss of material, as distinct from a deliberate scribal omission. At the relevant point in Codex Ephraemi Rescriptus (C), the original leaves are missing, making it impossible to determine whether the passage was present in that manuscript.

overwhelmingly. The umlaut markings in both Sinaiticus and Vaticanus confirm that even the primary Alexandrian witnesses show scribal awareness of the passage's existence.

THE MODERN CRITICAL COMMITTEE'S OWN UNCERTAINTY—METZGER'S {C} RATING

This is further confirmed by a detail rarely mentioned in popular discussions: the rating assigned to the passage by the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament committee, whose decisions are recorded in Bruce Metzger's *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (1971; 2nd edition, 1994). The committee assigned the passage a {C} rating—meaning, in the committee's own grading system, that there was 'considerable degree of doubt' about the decision reached. The {A} rating signifies virtual certainty; {B} some doubt; {C} considerable doubt; {D} a very high degree of doubt. A {C} rating on the passage by the very committee responsible for the text of the modern critical editions is an admission, from within the critical establishment itself, that the evidence is not clear-cut. Those who cite modern critical editions as having definitively resolved the matter should be aware that the committee behind those editions explicitly flagged their uncertainty.

THE PRINCIPLE OF ERRORS OF OMISSION

There is a principle of evidence directly applicable to the manuscript case against this passage that is rarely stated clearly but is of fundamental importance. The commonest of all errors in the copying of manuscripts are errors of omission. A copyist's eye slips; a similar phrase at the end of one section draws the eye prematurely to a later section; and the intervening material is lost without trace. This is universally recognised in scribal transmission, and it is the reason why affirmative evidence carries inherently greater weight than negative evidence. As Mauro stated the principle (*Which Version? Authorized or Revised?*, 1924): 'the testimony of one competent witness, who says he saw or heard a certain thing, carries more weight than that of a dozen who, though on the spot, can only say that they did not see or hear it.' Applied to the manuscript tradition: the affirmative testimony of the hundreds of manuscripts that contain the *pericope* is inherently weightier than the negative testimony of the two that omit it—because omission is precisely the class of error to which scribal transmission is most prone.

This principle is given specific and documented force in the case of Codex Sinaiticus—the primary Greek manuscript cited against the *pericope*. Dr Scrivener, whose collation of Sinaiticus remains the standard work, demonstrated that the original scribe was characteristically prone to *homoioleuton*—where the eye slips from the end of one passage to the end of a later passage with a similar ending, causing the entire intervening material to be dropped. Scrivener documented that this specific class of error occurs in Sinaiticus no fewer than 115 times in the New Testament alone. Burgon confirms: 'that gross blunder, whereby a clause is omitted because it happens to end in the same words as the clause preceding, occurs no less than 115 times in the New Testament.' A scribe guilty of 115 such omission errors across the New Testament is not a reliable negative witness. His silence about a passage is not evidence that the passage did not exist in the manuscript he was copying.

THE CLAIM THAT JEROME INTRODUCED THE PASSAGE AND THE OLD LATIN WITNESS

One of the most common arguments against the passage is that it was introduced by Jerome when he compiled the Latin Vulgate in the late fourth century, and that its wide presence in the Latin manuscript tradition reflects Jerome's influence rather than an independent Greek tradition. This claim does not survive examination.

The *Vetus Latina*—the Old Latin Bible tradition—predates Jerome by one to two centuries. These are Latin translations made independently from Greek manuscripts in the second and third centuries, before any question of Jeromian influence could arise. Multiple Old Latin manuscripts contain the *pericope*. This means that the Latin evidence for the passage predates Jerome by at least a century and therefore cannot be attributed to him. When

Jerome produced the Vulgate, he was not inserting the passage from his own knowledge—he was preserving a passage already well established in the Latin textual tradition that preceded him.

Jerome himself confirms this. In *Adversus Pelagianos* 2.17 (c. 415 AD) he states that the story of the adulterous woman ‘is found in many Greek and many Latin manuscripts of the Gospel of John.’ He is explicitly acknowledging the passage in the Greek manuscripts—not only in the Latin tradition he had produced. A Latin translator inserting a Latin invention would not then claim to have found it in many Greek manuscripts.

ASTERISKS, OBELI, AND THE WANDERING LOCATION

Many manuscripts that include the passage mark it with asterisks or obeli—symbols indicating that the copyist was aware of a dispute about its status. This is sometimes cited as evidence against authenticity. It is equally evidence that the passage was known and circulating widely enough to be debated—a purely invented late insertion would be unlikely to generate widespread discussion across multiple manuscript centres.

The Harclean Syriac—a seventh-century revision of the Peshitta toward the Greek Majority Text, produced by Thomas of Harkel in 616 AD—is instructive here: it includes the passage marked with asterisks, indicating that its revisers were deliberately reintroducing a passage they knew had been absent from the older Syriac tradition. The asterisks are therefore not evidence of doubt about the passage’s existence but of a conscious editorial decision to restore it from the Greek Antiochian stream—confirming that the passage was known, recognised, and regarded as belonging to the authentic text.

The passage’s appearance in different manuscript locations—after John 7:36, after John 21:25, and in the Ferrar group after Luke 21:38—is sometimes cited as proof that it was floating tradition without a fixed home. Von Soden’s extensive research answered conclusively this argument: he demonstrated that the passage had a single fixed original location between John 7:52 and John 8:12, and that the variant placements represent secondary displacement from that original position, not independent evidence of varied insertion. The Ferrar group placements derive from a single corrupt common archetype—not from several independent witnesses.

THE EVIDENCE OF THE LECTIONARY TRADITION

One further witness deserves mention: the lectionary tradition. Lectionaries are not simply manuscript copies of the Gospels—they are collections of passages appointed to be read aloud in church worship, across centuries. They represent what Christian communities actually used and trusted in practice. The Byzantine lectionary tradition includes the *Pericope Adulterae* as an appointed reading—prescribed as the Gospel lection for the feast of St Pelagia (October 8) throughout the Greek-speaking church, as far back as records extend. This is confirmed by manuscript 1333, which carries the explicit marginal rubric: ‘The Gospel-reading for October 8, for Saint Pelagia.’ The passage was thus not merely copied into manuscripts but was *read publicly in worship* across the Eastern church for centuries—a form of continuous, living attestation quite independent of the manuscript omission question.

A DOUBLE STANDARD IN MANUSCRIPT CRITICISM

The critical standard applied to this passage is not consistently applied elsewhere. Many other readings absent from Sinaiticus or Vaticanus are retained without controversy: Matthew 17:21, Matthew 18:11, Mark 16:9–20, John 5:4 (the angel troubling the waters at Bethesda), and the doxology of the Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:13b)—all absent from one or both manuscripts, all retained, none generating the controversy directed at John 7:53–8:11. The singling out of the *Pericope Adulterae* for special scepticism, when the full weight of evidence is no more unfavourable than for several of these passages, is a point worth pressing.

Canon Cook, a Church of England scholar entirely independent of Burgon, assessed the role of these manuscripts in the Revision directly: ‘By far the greatest number of innovations, including those which give the severest shocks

to our minds, are adopted on the testimony of two manuscripts, or even of one manuscript, against the distinct testimony of all other manuscripts.’ And of the theoretical framework: ‘Dr. Hort’s system is entirely destitute of historical foundation.’ Scrivener, who sat on the Revision Committee itself, assessed Hort’s hypothesis as ‘destitute not only of historical foundation but of all probability.’^[^1]

BURGON ON THE CHARACTER OF SINAITICUS AND VATICANUS—A ‘BLIND SUPERSTITION’

Dean John William Burgon personally collated both Sinaiticus and Vaticanus and knew them at first hand. On their elevation to near-supreme textual authority he wrote in *The Revision Revised* (1881), p. 11:

‘Singular to relate, Vaticanus and Aleph have within the last 20 years established a tyrannical ascendancy over the imagination of the critics, which can only be fitly spoken of as a blind superstition. It matters nothing that they are discovered on careful scrutiny to differ essentially, not only from ninety-nine out of a hundred of the whole body of extant manuscripts besides, but even from one another.’

—Dean J. W. Burgon, *The Revision Revised* (1881), p. 11

The significance of this observation is considerable: the two manuscripts that critics have elevated to near-supreme authority disagree not only with the overwhelming majority of all other manuscripts in existence, but with each other. The statistical evidence Burgon assembled confirms their instability: in the Gospels alone, Vaticanus has 7,578 departures from the received text; Sinaiticus has 1,460 singular readings affecting 2,640 words. These are not minor variations—they are manuscripts of substantial internal instability, hardly the profile of texts deserving unconditional deference.

WHY THESE MANUSCRIPTS SURVIVED—BURGON’S ARGUMENT FROM PRESERVATION

One of Burgon’s most striking arguments concerns the very fact of these manuscripts’ survival. Manuscripts in constant liturgical use wear out and are replaced. The copies that survive in pristine condition down the centuries tend to be those that were not used, because the churches that possessed them did not trust them. Burgon put it directly:

‘We suspect that these two manuscripts are indebted for their preservation, solely to their ascertained evil character, which has occasioned that the one eventually found its way, four centuries ago, to a forgotten shelf in the Vatican library; while the other, after exercising the ingenuity of several generations of critical Correctors, eventually got deposited in the waste-paper basket of the Convent at the foot of Mount Sinai.’

—Dean J. W. Burgon, *The Revision Revised* (1881)

This argument received independent confirmation from Kirsopp Lake—no ally of the Received Text—who concluded from his own manuscript research that ‘scribes usually destroyed their exemplars when they copied the sacred books’ (*Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 21, 1928). If true, the manuscripts most frequently copied—those of the Traditional Text type—are precisely those most likely to have perished. The survival of Sinaiticus and Vaticanus may therefore testify not to their authority but to their disuse.

THE SCHOLARS BEHIND THE ELEVATION—WESTCOTT, HORT, AND THE COLLAPSE OF THE ‘NEUTRAL TEXT’ THEORY

The dismissal of the *pericope* by modern critical scholarship rests historically on the textual theory of Brooke Foss Westcott (1825–1901) and Fenton John Anthony Hort (1828–1892), whose two-volume critical edition of the Greek New Testament was published in 1881. Westcott and Hort argued that Sinaiticus and Vaticanus represented a ‘Neutral’ text—one never subjected to deliberate revision—and therefore the most faithful witnesses to the original. On this theory, the omission of the *pericope* from these two manuscripts was effectively decisive.

This ‘Neutral text’ theory has since been substantially abandoned—not by traditional text defenders, but by the mainstream of critical scholarship itself. Kirsopp Lake demonstrated that the text of Sinaiticus and Vaticanus was a regional Alexandrian text-type, not a pristine original. B. H. Streeter in *The Four Gospels* (1924) further dismantled it. Kurt Aland acknowledged that the original Westcott-Hort classification had been oversimplified and the ‘Neutral’ label abandoned. The modern critical text is built on fresh case-by-case manuscript evaluation, not on the Westcott-Hort genealogical theory. Those who still cite the passage’s absence from Sinaiticus and Vaticanus as effectively decisive are relying on a framework that critical scholarship itself has moved on from.

The theological views of Westcott and Hort are well documented in their own letters and private writings^[3], and they are not easily dismissed. On the Received Text, Hort was unambiguous. Writing in December 1851 he described it as *‘that vile Textus Receptus leaning entirely on late MSS.’* and expressed relief that earlier manuscripts existed to replace it (*Life and Letters of F. J. A. Hort*, Vol. I, p. 211, Macmillan, 1896). On the question of biblical authority, Hort wrote to Lightfoot on 1 May 1860 that he could not cooperate with anyone who made ‘a decided conviction of the absolute infallibility of the N.T. practically a sine qua non’ (*Life and Letters of F. J. A. Hort*, Vol. I, p. 420). In the same correspondence, Westcott wrote to Hort on 5 May 1860 that he too must *‘reject the word infallibility—of Holy Scripture’* (*Life and Letters of Brooke Foss Westcott*, Vol. I, p. 207, Macmillan, 1903). Hort described systematic Bible readers as **‘bibliolaters’** whose habit of **‘reading so many chapters seems exactly to correspond to the Romish superstition of telling so many dozen beads on a rosary’** (*Life and Letters of F. J. A. Hort*, Vol. I, pp. 76–78). He denied the substitutionary atonement, describing **‘the popular doctrine of substitution’** as *‘an immoral and material counterfeit’* (*ibid.*, p. 430), and declared that **‘Protestantism is only parenthetical and temporary’** (*Life and Letters of F. J. A. Hort*, Vol. II, pp. 30–31).

Westcott expressed admiration for a Roman Catholic shrine and wrote that he *‘could have knelt there for hours’* (*Life and Letters of Brooke Foss Westcott*, Vol. I, p. 81); he was openly devoted to Marian shrines and believed in apostolic succession through the Roman Catholic line—neither position being consistent with the Protestant and Reforming tradition from which the Received Text emerged. These are not characterisations made by hostile critics. They are the men’s own words, preserved in their published correspondence. A useful compiled survey is David Blunt, ‘From Their Own Mouths’, James Begg Society Traditional Text Pamphlets.

This is not an ad hominem argument—it is a methodological one. Burgon himself makes precisely the same point, observing that textual methodology cannot be entirely divorced from theological presuppositions. A man who does not regard the Bible as the verbally inspired Word of God will approach its text with different assumptions from one who does. The presuppositions of Westcott and Hort shaped their methodology; their methodology elevated Sinaiticus and Vaticanus; and it is upon that elevation that the dismissal of the *Pericope Adulterae* substantially rests. These are facts the careful reader should weigh.

Equally important is how the Westcott-Hort text was introduced to the Revision Committee itself—for this bears directly on the authority that should be ascribed to the Committee’s implicit rejection of the *pericope*. Burgon documented that Westcott and Hort had circulated their unpublished Greek text among the Revision Committee members privately and, in his words, ‘under pledges of the strictest secrecy.’ The text had not been published; it had not been subjected to scholarly scrutiny; its principles had not been publicly examined. When the Revision Revised brought these facts to light, the scholarly world discovered that the Committee had implicitly endorsed a text they had never formally reviewed on its merits.

The actual procedure by which the Committee settled the Greek text at each point was described by one of its own members, Dr Newth, and confirmed as accurate by the chairman, Bishop Ellicott. (Both accounts are cited and discussed by Philip Mauro, *Which Version? Authorized or Revised?*, 1924.) The procedure was as follows: when a

passage came under consideration, Dr Scrivener and Dr Hort would briefly state the evidence for and against the proposed change—and the Committee would then vote. There was no examination of the evidence by the Committee as a whole; no weighing of the manuscript testimony; no assessment of the character of the witnesses. As Mauro summarises: ‘in no case was there any examination of the question, or weighing of the evidence by the Committee.’ Sir Edmund Beckett’s observation is pointed: if Dr Newth’s account of the procedure ‘is not a kind of a joke, it is quite enough to settle this Revised Greek Testament in a very different sense.’ When those who are responsible for deciding that John 7:53–8:11 is doubtful Scripture reach that conclusion by majority vote after hearing a brief summary from two men—one of whom held a theory his own colleagues on the Committee regarded as unproven—the authority of that conclusion is considerably less than is generally assumed.

And the chairman of the Committee himself eventually conceded the point. Bishop Ellicott, writing in 1901, twenty years after the Revision was published, acknowledged three significant deficiencies in the Westcott-Hort system, drawing on the work of Dr Salmon of Trinity College Dublin. (These concessions are documented by Philip Mauro, *Which Version? Authorized or Revised?*, 1924, and by the James Begg Society, *From Their Own Mouths: Westcott and Hort*.) Firstly, Hort ‘has shown too distinct a tendency to elevate probable hypotheses into the realm of established facts’—which is precisely what Burgon had argued in 1883. Secondly, the fourfold classification of manuscript families on which Hort’s system rests cannot be accepted, the objections being ‘both reasonable and serious.’ Thirdly, Westcott and Hort’s ‘continuous and studied disregard of Western authorities’ is a ‘grave drawback’, and it is ‘not unlikely’ that future discoveries will require ‘many decisions in the Text of Westcott and Hort’ to be modified. The chairman of the Revision Committee, after two decades of reflection, conceded that the theoretical foundations of the text underlying that committee’s rejection of disputed passages were in important respects unsound. That concession applies directly to the *Pericope Adulterae*.

It is also worth noting, as a matter of documented institutional record, that following the 1968 UBS-SPCU ‘Guiding Principles for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible’,⁴ Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, S.J., was added to the editorial committee of the *Novum Testamentum Graece*—the critical apparatus underlying virtually all modern Bible translations and critical discussions of disputed passages including the *Pericope Adulterae*. The involvement of a **Roman Catholic Jesuit Cardinal** in the editorial oversight of the standard critical Greek text is *not an allegation—it is a matter of documented institutional record*. (Source: Thomas P. Johnston, Ph.D., ‘Worldwide Bible Translation and Original Language Texts’, 16 January 2009, citing the 1968 and 1987 UBS-SPCU Guidelines.) Those who cite modern critical editions as authority for dismissing the passage are, perhaps without realising it, *citing a text produced under formal Roman Catholic editorial co-oversight*.

One further point about Codex Sinaiticus’ credentials deserves brief mention. In 1862–63, a Greek scholar named Constantine Simonides publicly claimed that he himself had written the manuscript in the 1840s, and that Tischendorf had mistaken his work for an ancient original. Simonides’ claim is not accepted by mainstream scholarship. The point is not that he was telling the truth—it is that a manuscript whose provenance was publicly and specifically contested, with allegations detailed enough that even a sceptical author writing forty years later could not simply dismiss them, and which Burgon independently characterised as a deeply corrupt text on purely internal evidence, ought not to be treated as an unimpeachable judge of what is and is not genuine Scripture (See J. A. Farrer, writing in *Literary Forgeries* (1907, pp. 39–66).

⁴ United Bible Societies and Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (Roman Catholic Church), ‘Guiding Principles for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible’ (2 June 1968; revised edition, Rome, 16 November 1987). The 1987 revised edition is available at the Vatican’s own website: <https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/documenti/altri-testi/en.html>. Discussed in Thomas P. Johnston, ‘Worldwide Bible Translation and Original Language Texts’ (16 January 2009), already cited.

THE REFORMATION CONTEXT—WHY THE RECEIVED TEXT MATTERS

There is a broader historical context to the manuscript debate that is too often overlooked, and which is directly relevant to how the Alexandrian manuscripts came to be elevated above the Received Text, of the Antiochian stream, in the first place.

The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century was, amongst other things, a return to the Greek and Hebrew sources of Scripture, in place of the Latin Vulgate that had served as the Roman Catholic Church's official text for over a millennium. This return to the original languages was actively and violently resisted.⁵ William Tyndale, whose English New Testament was translated from the Greek in 1525–26, was strangled and burnt at the stake in 1536.

Jan Hus had been burnt in 1415 partly for his insistence on Scripture's authority over church tradition. The Council of Trent, meeting from 1545, formally declared the Latin Vulgate to be the sole authentic text of Scripture—a direct response to the Reformers' appeal to the Greek. The *Index of Forbidden Books* (*Index Librorum Prohibitorum*) maintained by Rome, in various forms until 1966, included many vernacular Bible translations.

The Roman Catholic response to the Protestant vernacular Bible (a translation of Scripture into the everyday spoken language of the people, as distinct from the Latin Vulgate of the clergy) took the form not only of persecution but also of a *rival* English translation. The Douay-Rheims Bible—its New Testament published at Rheims in 1582, its Old Testament at Douai in 1609–10—was produced by English Catholic scholars in exile as a deliberate Counter-Reformation project, explicitly described on its title page as being translated from the Latin Vulgate rather than from the Greek.⁶ Its New Testament appeared almost thirty years before the King James Version. The KJV translators explicitly acknowledged it in their preface, devoting space to criticising its word choices, they stated explicitly:

‘We have shunned the obscurity of the Papists, in their AZIMES, TUNIKE, RATIONAL, HOLOCAUSTS, PRAEPUCE, PASCHE, and a number of such like, whereof their late Translation is full, and that of purpose to darken the sense, that since they must needs translate the Bible, yet by the language thereof, it may be kept from being understood.’⁷

The connection to Sinaiticus and Vaticanus is indirect but real: the Douay-Rheims was translated from Jerome's Vulgate, which was itself influenced by the Alexandrian manuscript tradition and shares many readings with Vaticanus as a result. When modern critical editions, following Westcott and Hort, rejected the Received Text in favour of the Alexandrian manuscript stream readings, they were in many cases returning to readings that the KJV translators had *deliberately and knowingly rejected*.

Those translators were not ignorant of variant manuscript readings—the critical apparatus available to scholars of that period included knowledge of Alexandrian stream variants, and Erasmus dismissed Vaticanus as a Latinized manuscript—a Greek text altered to match the Vulgate—and therefore unreliable as a witness to the original New Testament.⁸ The rejection of the Alexandrian tradition, predominantly located in Egypt, by the

⁵ The Protestant Reformation's return to the Hebrew and Greek sources—the *ad fontes* principle—is the standard account in Reformation historiography; see Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 87–92. The resistance this met is exemplified by William Tyndale's own account: translating directly from the Greek rather than the Vulgate, he was driven from England, worked in exile, and was ultimately executed in 1536. His prologues to the New Testament (1525–1534), in which he declares his intention to translate from the Greek original, are available at: <https://www.faithofgod.net/TyNT/Prologue.htm>.

⁶ All details are confirmed by the title page of the Bible itself: *The Holy Bible, Translated from the Latin Vulgate—the Old Testament published by the English College at Douay, 1609, and the New Testament by the English College at Rheims, 1582*. The full title page is visible at <https://archive.org/details/holybibletranslaobalt>.

⁷ ‘The Translators to the Reader’, prefixed to the King James Version (1611). Full text available at <https://www.bible-researcher.com/kjvpref.html>.

⁸ An-Ting Yi, ‘The Changing Fortunes of Codex Vaticanus’, *Text and Canon* (7 September 2024), <https://textandcanon.org/the-changing-fortunes-of-codex-vaticanus/>—a scholarly overview of Erasmus's rejection of Vaticanus and the subsequent history of the manuscript's reception.

scholars who produced the Received Text and the King James Version was a considered judgement, not an oversight.

THE EMPHATIC DIAGLOTT—A NOTE ON ITS TEXTUAL BASIS

The *Emphatic Diaglott*—the interlinear New Testament produced by Benjamin Wilson (1864), subsequently published and widely distributed by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society—played a significant role in the early Bible Student movement. It was through Wilson’s rendering of *parousia* (G3952) as ‘presence’ rather than ‘coming’ that Russell came to understand Christ’s second advent as an invisible presence.⁹ The Watch Tower endorsed the *Diaglott* warmly, acquired the copyright after Wilson’s death in 1900, and published it on its own presses from 1927.



What is less commonly appreciated is that the *Diaglott*’s full title identifies its Greek text as based on ‘the Recension of Dr J. J. Griesbach’ and its English version as drawing on ‘the Various Readings of the Vatican Manuscript’. Griesbach had examined Codex Vaticanus under tightly restricted conditions—compelled to commit readings to memory and record them later—but his engagement with the Alexandrian manuscript tradition exerted significant influence on the *Diaglott*. The *Diaglott* stands therefore within the Alexandrian critical tradition—the same stream that produced Vaticanus and that Westcott and Hort later systematised. When it is used to make arguments about the text of the New Testament, including about disputed passages, this textual heritage should be borne in mind.

IN DEFENCE OF THE RECEIVED TEXT—TRADITION VERSUS PRINTED EDITION

A charge frequently levelled against the Textus Receptus is that it rests on only a handful of late manuscripts—that Erasmus, compiling his first printed Greek New Testament in 1516, had access to just a few Byzantine minuscules, and that such a narrow base cannot be trusted over against the ancient Alexandrian witnesses. This charge contains a partial truth but conceals a more important distinction.

It is true that Erasmus’ 1516 edition was compiled with some haste from a small number of late manuscripts. But the Textus Receptus did not stand still at 1516. Erasmus revised it four times; Robert Estienne produced four editions (1546–1551), drawing on Codex Bezae and additional manuscripts; Theodore Beza published nine editions between 1565 and 1604, the 1598 edition being the primary Greek text used by the KJV translators. At least three-quarters of a century of scholarship had gone into the Textus Receptus by 1611. The charge that it rests on ‘only a few manuscripts’ mistakes the first printed edition for the developed tradition it represents.

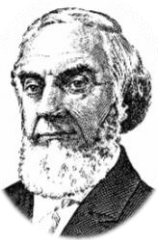
More importantly, the Textus Receptus must be distinguished from the Byzantine or Majority Text tradition that it codified. Of the thousands of surviving Greek New Testament manuscripts, the overwhelming majority are predominantly Byzantine in character—acknowledged even by critical text scholars. D. A. Carson, writing from within the critical tradition, stated that ‘there are far more manuscripts extant in this tradition than in the other three combined’ (*The King James Version Debate*, Baker, 1979, p. 26). Erasmus himself expressed distrust of Vaticanus’ readings, believing them to reflect Latin influence; Henk Jan de Jonge summarised his position as: ‘Erasmus regarded the text of this codex as influenced by the Vulgate and therefore inferior’ (*Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 56 [1980]: 385). The debate is therefore not ‘a few manuscripts versus many’ but two major

⁹ Russell acknowledged Keith’s role directly in Zion’s Watch Tower, R187–188 (February 1881), p. 3, in the article ‘Cast Not Away Therefore Your Confidence’: ‘Bro. Keith (one of our contributors) was used of the Lord to throw another beam of light on the subject... His surprise was, at finding that the Greek word *parousia* which signifies presence, had in our common version been improperly rendered coming.’ The full article is available in the Watch Tower Reprints at R187. For the fuller historical context of the *Diaglott*’s role in the early Bible Student movement see ‘The Emphatic *Diaglott* and the Watch Tower Society’, <https://truthhistory.blogspot.com/2013/07/the-emphatic-diaglott-and-watch-tower.html>.

streams with fundamentally different histories of transmission—and the elevation of the Alexandrian stream above the continuous Byzantine inheritance of the Greek-speaking church is precisely what shaped the modern dismissal of the *Pericope Adulterae*.

AN HONEST ACKNOWLEDGEMENT—RUSSELL, WOODWORTH, AND SHALLIEU

Intellectual honesty requires an acknowledgement that the ‘oldest is best’ framework was not confined to Westcott, Hort, and their immediate circle. It was the dominant scholarly consensus of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and it influenced those within the Bible Student movement as much as anyone else.

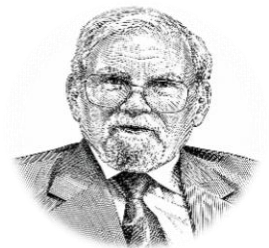


Pastor Russell himself, in the Zion’s Watch Tower of February 1880, described Codex Sinaiticus as ‘the oldest existing MSS’ and drew on its omissions to support textual conclusions. He was working, as most scholars of his time were, within the framework that Westcott and Hort had established or were in the process of establishing. His acceptance of this framework is a matter of historical record, and it does not diminish his many genuine contributions to biblical understanding. It does, however, mean that his occasional appeals to the authority of Sinaiticus and Vaticanus should be weighed accordingly—as the considered judgement of a faithful and learned man working within the best available scholarship of his era, rather than as a final pronouncement on a question that the evidence, more fully examined, renders considerably more complex.



C. J. Woodworth, in the *Berean Scripture Study Manual* of 1909—one of the individuals who later assisted in compiling and preparing *The Finished Mystery* and who remained loyal to Rutherford during the schism following Pastor Russell’s death in 1916—stated of Sinaiticus: ‘The Sinaitic MS. is perfect and complete and is the oldest known copy of the Scriptures, having been written (it is believed) in the year 331 AD’ The description of it as ‘perfect and complete’ is demonstrably inaccurate—Burgon catalogued thousands of corrections by multiple hands across the manuscript—but it faithfully reflects the consensus of the period.

The Keys of Revelation—a formally published work attributed to Frank Shallieu and widely used within the Bible Student movement—describes Codex Sinaiticus as ‘the oldest and generally most reliable manuscript’ (p. 16, footnote). The same volume draws on Sinaitic readings at several points to adjudicate textual questions, and at Revelation 20:7 it advances a specific interpretation based on what it identifies as a distinctive reading in that manuscript. A detailed examination of that reading is provided in the **Appendix**. The *New Testament Studies*, attributed to the same author, similarly assess Sinaiticus and Vaticanus as ‘the most helpful’ manuscripts ‘in trying to see what the original Bible actually said’, describing them as ‘vastly superior to other manuscripts, which are riddled with interpolations’, and placing their reliability at approximately 98 percent against 90 percent for other manuscripts (commentary on John 20:31). At John 21:25, the *Studies* conclude: ‘The Berean Manual says that verse 25 is not in the Sinaitic manuscript. Certainly John did not write it.’ This is a confident and wide-ranging position, and it is the framework that underlies the *Studies*’ assessment of the *Pericope Adulterae*. It is not a criticism of Frank Shallieu’s scholarship—by all accounts a man of serious classical formation—to observe that this framework is one the evidence assembled in this document suggests should be examined with care.



The point is not to censure any of these teachers. It is simply to observe that the assumption ‘oldest is best’ is exactly that—an assumption, not a demonstrated fact—and that it has been adopted, in varying degrees, by respected figures within the Bible Student tradition itself. That does not make it correct. The proper course is to examine all of the evidence (or as much, at least, as is possible): the manuscript tradition in its full breadth, the

patristic testimony, the internal evidence, the historical context, and the known character of the manuscripts in question—rather than to rest a conclusion on the age of two manuscripts whose own credentials are, as this document has shown, not beyond question. God has preserved His Word (Isa. 40:8; 1 Pet. 1:25); but the question of precisely how He has done so, and through which textual tradition, is one that requires *careful and open-minded study* rather than deference to any single critical school.

5. THE TESTIMONY OF THE EARLY CHURCH FATHERS

It is sometimes argued that the silence of certain early Greek fathers—Origen, Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria—on this passage is weighty evidence against it. Several things need to be said about this. Firstly, none of these fathers explicitly deny or reject the passage—silence is simply silence, and it has many possible explanations. Secondly, and more decisively, the argument from silence is directly answered by the positive testimony of those early witnesses who do speak—and they are numerous, geographically diverse, and chronologically early. Thirdly, and most specifically, the silence of the named Greek commentators is fully explained by two factors operating together rather than separately: the ancient Pentecostal lectionary (that is, the lectionary lesson appointed for the feast of Pentecost—not the modern Pentecostal movement) excluded the passage from public reading, and the subject matter—a woman caught in adultery—made it actively controversial to cite in an era of severe penitential discipline. Origen, Chrysostom, Cyril of Alexandria, Apollinarius, and Theodore of Mopsuestia all wrote commentaries following the lectionary text. The Pentecost lesson ran from John 7:37 to John 8:12, omitting John 7:53–8:11. Commentators on the publicly-read text did not comment on what was not publicly read. As Burgon observed, commentators on the publicly-read text could not be expected to comment on what was not publicly read. And even had a given father wished to cite the passage independently, the well-documented severity of early church discipline regarding adultery—Cyprian and Tertullian explicitly treated it as an unpardonable sin, and the Syrian church formally declared it such—made the passage uncomfortable to invoke. Augustine himself noted that certain men removed the passage from manuscripts precisely because of this moral nervousness. These two factors—lectionary exclusion and moral unease—most plausibly account for the silence of the Greek fathers, without requiring any inference that they rejected or were unaware of the text.

The Eastern church was not, however, silent about the passage in its entirety. John 8:3–11 was appointed as the annual lectionary lesson for the feast of St. Pelagia—October 8—throughout the Greek-speaking church, as far back as records extend (Burgon, *The Revision Revised*, 1881, Article III; confirmed by manuscript 1333, which carries the explicit marginal rubric: ‘The Gospel-reading for October 8, for Saint Pelagia’). This feast appointment reaches back to the very same period in which those fathers whose silence is invoked were active. The passage was thus being read publicly every year in Eastern worship, generating its own stream of liturgical familiarity quite apart from commentary on John’s Gospel. The great Eastern church, as Burgon put it, ‘speaks out on this subject in a voice of thunder’ through this annual lectionary appointment (*The Revision Revised*, Article III). Those who cite the silence of Chrysostom and Cyril should account for the fact that the church over which they presided was reading the passage every year from the lectern at the feast of St. Pelagia.

EUSEBIUS’ CANON TABLES—A DIFFICULTY RESOLVED

One patristic argument against the passage that is occasionally cited but deserves a direct answer is the absence of the *pericope* from Eusebius of Caesarea’s canon tables. Eusebius (c. 260–339 AD), the church historian, devised a system of numbered cross-references designed to allow readers to find parallel passages across the four Gospels—an early form of concordance. The *pericope* does not appear in these canon tables. Some scholars have cited this as evidence that Eusebius’ copies of John did not contain the passage.

The difficulty is less substantial than it first appears, for two reasons. First, Eusebius' canon tables were designed specifically for *synoptic* cross-referencing—identifying parallels between Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. Material unique to a single Gospel and without a parallel in any other Gospel was not systematically indexed. Since the *pericope* has no synoptic parallel, its absence from the canon tables is exactly what one would expect whether or not Eusebius' copies of John contained it. Second, Eusebius is himself the source who records that Papias—a disciple of the Apostle John—knew a story about a woman accused before the Lord of many sins (Ecclesiastical History 3.39.17), widely identified as a reference to this very incident. If Eusebius was transmitting Papias' knowledge of the account whilst simultaneously having no knowledge of it in John, that would require a very peculiar selectivity on his part. The more natural reading is that the canon tables' silence reflects the design of the system, not the absence of the passage from his text.

PAPIAS (EARLY SECOND CENTURY)

Eusebius of Caesarea records that Papias—a disciple of the Apostle John, a figure of the apostolic generation itself—knew a story about a woman accused before the Lord of many sins. Eusebius' own words are: '*And he [Papias] relates another story of a woman who was accused before the Lord of many sins, which is contained in the Gospel according to the Hebrews.*'—(Ecclesiastical History, 3.39.17.) Many scholars identify this as a reference to the *Pericope Adulterae*. If this identification is correct, knowledge of the incident goes back to the apostolic circle itself—long before any question of a Jeronian or Roman Catholic introduction could arise.

DIDASCALIA APOSTOLORUM (THIRD CENTURY)

This early third-century Syrian church manual—one of the oldest surviving documents of Christian church order—contains a clear and specific reference to the account in the course of instructing bishops on the extension of mercy to penitent sinners. The precise reference is chapter 2.24 (Funk edition, vol. I, p. 93). Without naming John's Gospel explicitly, it quotes words corresponding directly to John 8:10–11 as a well-known, authoritative example of Christ's conduct—treating the account not as a novelty but as established common ground between the author and his readers:

' . . . to do as He also did with her that had sinned, whom the elders set before Him, and leaving the judgment in His hands, departed. But He, the Searcher of Hearts, asked her and said to her: Have the elders condemned thee, my daughter? She saith to Him: Nay, Lord. And He said unto her: Go thy way: neither do I condemn thee.'

—*Didascalia Apostolorum*, 2.24 (Funk ed., I, 93), third century AD

The passage is not introduced with any note of doubt or qualification. It is simply cited, as a climactic illustration of divine mercy, to encourage bishops to deal gently with sinners. This tells us two things: first, that the account was sufficiently well established in third-century Syria to serve as authoritative common ground in a church manual; and second, that the account was being used doctrinally—not as a contested text but as a recognisable and settled example of the Lord's conduct.

Even scholars who question the passage's Johannine authorship treat the *Didascalia* quotation as the primary surviving evidence for the account's earliest form. Bart Ehrman proposed that the passage as it appears in John is a conflation of two earlier independently circulating accounts, one of which—the form known to Papias and the *Didascalia*—he termed 'PAEAST' (Bart D. Ehrman, 'Jesus and the Adulteress', *New Testament Studies* 34, 1988, pp. 24–44). Kyle Hughes, developing Ehrman's thesis, concluded that this *Didascalia* form was almost certainly part of Luke's special source material, dating its transmission to the first century; he affirmed that the account 'would almost certainly not have been the kind of account the early church would have invented' and that 'we can affirm the essential historicity of the event' (Kyle R. Hughes, 'The Lukan Special Material and the Tradition

History of the *Pericope Adulterae*, *Novum Testamentum* 55.3, 2013, pp. 232–251, at p. 247). The *Didascalia* witness is thus accorded central importance even by those who reject Johannine authorship—and the historicity of the underlying event is conceded by those same scholars.^[10]

THE APOSTOLIC CONSTITUTIONS (C. 380 AD)

This fourth-century expansion of the *Didascalia* echoes the same appeal in its own treatment of the same subject:

‘And when the elders had set another woman who had sinned before Him, and had left the sentence to Him, and were gone out, our Lord, the Searcher of the hearts, inquiring of her whether the elders had condemned her, and being answered No, He said unto her: Go thy way therefore, for neither do I condemn thee.’

—*Apostolic Constitutions*, Book II.24, late third to fourth century AD

These two documents, separated by perhaps a century and independently drawing on the same account for the same doctrinal purpose, confirm that the *pericope* was actively cited and used across more than a century of church life in the Eastern tradition, entirely independently of the Latin West.

PACIAN OF BARCELONA (C. 310–391 AD)

Pacian, a fourth-century Spanish bishop, provides an additional early witness that tends to be overlooked entirely. Writing against the rigorist Novatians, who denied any possibility of post-baptismal forgiveness for serious sins, he appeals directly to the *pericope* as a Gospel authority. The Bible Researcher website (*Woman Taken in Adultery*, drawing on Edward F. Hills’ textual scholarship) records his words as follows:

‘Are you not willing to read in the Gospel that the Lord also spared the adulteress who confessed, whom no man had condemned?’

—Pacian of Barcelona, c. 370 AD, cited in E. F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended*

Pacian is appealing to the passage as something his opponents themselves know from the Gospel—he is not introducing a novelty but citing a recognised authority. And he is doing so in Spain, independently of the North African and Italian traditions, which confirms that the passage was known and used across the breadth of the Western church by the fourth century.

AMBROSE OF MILAN (339–397 AD)

Ambrose is confirmed as having preached on the passage around 374–375 AD—independently of Jerome and indeed some years before him. The witness of Ambrosiaster (a Latin commentator writing between 366 and 384 AD) falls within the same period, providing a second independent Latin witness from this era. Ambrose notes that the passage ‘caused offence to the unskilled’—meaning it was already sufficiently well known in his congregations to generate controversy—and preserves a striking early tradition about what Christ wrote in the dust. As one scholarly summary records, the passage was actively cited by Ambrose as a pastoral and doctrinal authority in the Western church from the 370s onward. The detail about Christ writing in the dust—preserved in preaching and in early Christian art—suggests a tradition of considerable antiquity, predating any question of Jeromian introduction by decades.

DIDYMUS THE BLIND OF ALEXANDRIA (C. 313–398 AD)

Didymus the Blind, the celebrated head of the catechetical school at Alexandria in the fourth century, explicitly knew and commented on the passage. His commentary was discovered in 1941 among the Tura papyri near Cairo—a cache of texts preserved since antiquity—and it contains a direct reference to the account, making him the earliest clear Greek patristic witness.

He writes:

‘We find in certain gospels a woman who had sinned, accused before the Lord, and was sent away, that there should be no further examination of her case.’

—Didymus the Blind, *Commentarii in Ecclesiasten*, 223.6–13 (Tura papyrus)

The phrase ‘in certain gospels’ reflects manuscript diversity in Alexandria—some copies had the passage and some did not—but what is beyond doubt is that Didymus knew the account, drew upon it, and treated it as a recognisable part of the Gospel tradition. This is a fourth-century Alexandrian Greek witness—exactly where Sinaiticus and Vaticanus originate—and he knew the passage. That is a point that the manuscript argument conveniently passes over. Didymus was not in some distant corner of the church unfamiliar with Alexandrian scribal traditions. He was the head of the Alexandrian catechetical school—the most distinguished theological institution in the very city from which the manuscripts that omit the *pericope* come. If the Alexandrian manuscript tradition had so comprehensively suppressed or forgotten the passage that no trace of it reached learned Alexandrians, Didymus could not have written what he wrote. His knowledge of the passage, in Alexandria, in the same century as those manuscripts, is direct evidence that the Alexandrian omission was a scribal-liturgical decision, not a reflection of genuine ignorance of the text.

JEROME (C. 347–420 AD)

Jerome’s direct testimony deserves to stand on its own. Writing in his work *Against the Pelagians* around 415 AD, he stated:

In Euangelio secundum Iohannem in multis et Graecis et Latinis codicibus inuenitur de adultera muliere, quae accusata est apud Dominum.

—Jerome, *Adversus Pelagianos*, 2.17 (c. 415 AD)

In English: ‘The story of the adulterous woman who was accused before the Lord is found in many Greek and many Latin manuscripts of the Gospel of John.’ This is not a vague general claim. Jerome is writing in 415 AD, at a time when the manuscript tradition was actively living and he had access to a wide range of Greek and Latin copies. He found the passage in many of them—and not only in the Latin Vulgate tradition he had himself produced, but in the Greek as well. He also uses the passage as an authoritative text in his rebuke of the Pelagians—something no careful scholar would do with a passage whose authority was genuinely in doubt.

AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO (354–430 AD)

It is worth pausing on Augustine, because his testimony here is directly relevant on more than one level. He not only cited the passage repeatedly but offered what remains one of the most penetrating explanations of why it may have been omitted from certain manuscripts:

‘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 of Hippo, *De Adulterinis Conjugiis*, II.7

This is a remarkable statement. Augustine is writing while the manuscript tradition is still actively being copied and discussed—he is far closer to the evidence than any modern critic. He identifies a specific, historically credible human motive for the deliberate removal of the passage: certain men feared that their wives, taking comfort from the passage, would consider themselves at liberty to commit adultery without consequence. That fear was a misreading of Christ’s words—‘sin no more’ is a command to cease from sin, not a permission to commit it—but

Augustine's point is precisely that this misreading existed, and that some scribes or owners of manuscripts acted upon it by removing the passage altogether. That explanation is psychologically plausible, entirely consistent with what is known of scribal practice, and provides a compelling account of why certain manuscripts might omit a passage that the majority tradition preserves. It is, in short, a better explanation than forgery.

It is also important to note what Augustine's explanation implies about the passage itself. The irony he identifies is acute: the words 'sin no more'—which are a direct command against the continuation of sin—were read by some as though Christ had granted permission to sin once without penalty. The passage was removed not because it was morally permissive, but because its mercy was misread as permissiveness. Those who today object that the passage 'encourages laxity' are, unknowingly, repeating the very misreading Augustine was correcting.

What makes this explanation still more compelling is that it was not confined to Augustine's time and place. A Greek writer named Nikon—attributed by most scholars to the tenth century, though Westcott and Hort placed him in the thirteenth—recorded that the Armenians had 'cast out the account which teaches us how the adulteress was taken to Jesus, saying that it was harmful for most persons to listen to such things' (cited in Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 4th ed., 1984, Chapter 6; Nikon's treatise is referred to as 'On the Impious Religion of the Vile Armenians'). This is a direct and explicit acknowledgement, made in the Eastern church centuries after Augustine, that the motive for the passage's suppression was precisely what Augustine had identified—a moralistic nervousness about its pastoral effect, not a textual judgement about its authenticity. The moralistic scruple was still operative, still being openly avowed, and still producing the same result: deliberate omission. This is powerful confirmation that Augustine's account of the deletion motive was not a local Latin phenomenon but a tendency that ran across the full breadth of the ancient church.

In *Tractate 33* on John's Gospel, Augustine engages with the passage at length and draws out its moral precision with characteristic clarity. He makes a careful and important distinction—Christ condemned the sin, not the sinner; the passage is not a licence for adultery but a refusal to execute an adulterer in a legally defective proceeding:

'Therefore the Lord did also condemn, but condemned sins, not man. For if He were a patron of sin, He would say, Neither will I condemn you; go, live as you will: be secure in my deliverance; how much soever you will sin, I will deliver you from all punishment even of hell. He said not this.'

—Augustine of Hippo, *In Johannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 33.6

And his celebrated summary of the encounter itself:

Relicti sunt duo: misera et misericordia.—'There remained two: the wretched one and mercy.'

—Augustine of Hippo, *In Johannis Evangelium Tractatus*, 33.5

The accused woman, standing alone before the Lord who is mercy incarnate—her accusers gone, no lawful witness remaining, no sentence pronounced—and the Lord who, as Augustine makes clear in the very next breath, condemns sin without condemning the sinner. It is difficult to believe that so precise and so organically theological an insight was prompted by a forged text.

6. THE DISPENSATIONAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT: LAW, REPENTANCE, AND THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST

One of the most important dimensions of this debate—and one that is too often neglected—concerns the theological and historical context within which Christ's ministry took place. Those who argue that Christ would have been 'obligated to agree to the stoning' assume that the Mosaic penal code was fully in force, fully operative,

and to be applied strictly in every case Christ encountered. An examination of the Scriptures and of history calls each of these assumptions into question.

‘THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS WERE UNTIL JOHN’

‘For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.’—(Matthew 11:13)

‘The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it.’—(Luke 16:16)



THE MAN CHRIST JESUS

These two statements of Christ are of great significance and deserve more attention than they typically receive in this discussion. They indicate that a dispensational transition was already under way during the First Advent. The Law and the prophets had a specific terminus—John the Baptist. From John’s ministry onward, a new dispensation was commencing: the preaching of the Kingdom of God, the call to repentance, the offer of forgiveness on the basis of Christ’s atoning sacrifice. The moral content of the Law was not abolished—Christ came to fulfil it (Matthew 5:17), and his response in John 8 is shown in Section 8 (Difficulty VI) to be precisely a fulfilment, not a violation, of that Law—but the rigid penal application of the Mosaic code was being superseded by an administration of mercy, repentance and grace. To demand that Christ, in the midst of this dispensational transition, act as a civil executioner of the Mosaic death penalty is to misunderstand the nature and purpose of his First Advent entirely.

JOHN THE BAPTIST’S MINISTRY OF REPENTANCE—AND WHAT IT IMPLIES



John was sent ahead of Christ specifically to ‘prepare the way’—baptising the people as a symbol of repentance (Matthew 3:2, 11). Consider what this means in practice. Among those who came to John in repentance were, without doubt, individuals guilty of sins that the Mosaic Law would technically have punished with death—including fornication and adultery. Yet John baptised them. He did not first demand that they submit to the civil penalties of the Law. He received them on the basis of genuine repentance of heart.

This is not a fringe point. It demonstrates that a new administration of repentance and forgiveness—grounded in the sacrifice already being upon the altar—was fully operative alongside—and in practice superseding—the strict penal mechanism of the Law, even before Christ’s own ministry began in earnest. If adulterers and fornicators could approach John for baptism as a symbol of repentance, and be received, on what basis is it maintained that Christ—who came not to condemn the world but to save it (John 3:17)—would have been obligated to demand the death penalty in every case of adultery he encountered? The question answers itself.

THE CESSATION OF THE SOTAH TRIAL—A REMARKABLE PIECE OF EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

The Talmud provides striking external confirmation of the breakdown of the Mosaic legal apparatus for adultery during precisely the period of Christ’s ministry. The *sotah*—the trial of a suspected adulteress by the bitter waters (Numbers 5)—was formally discontinued by Rabban Jochanan ben Zaccai, who was alive and active during Christ’s lifetime. The relevant source is the Mishnaic tractate *Sotah* 9:9. The reason given for the discontinuation is significant: adultery had become so widespread that the trial was no longer workable.

John Gill records:

‘When adulterers increased, the bitter waters ceased; and Rabban Jochanan ben Zaccai caused them to cease. . . He cited in vindication the passage in Hosea 4:14.’

—John Gill, *Exposition of the Entire Bible*, on John 8:7

Let this sink in for a moment. The formal legal mechanism for dealing with adultery under the Law of Moses had been officially suspended by Jewish religious authority—because adultery was so endemic that the mechanism had become unworkable. The *sotah* required the husband to be innocent; since adultery was widespread even among the religious leadership, the trial was discontinued. By the time of the incident in John 8, the Jewish legal system had already, in effect, ceased to prosecute adultery according to the Mosaic procedure. The scribes and Pharisees were not the upholders of a functioning legal system—they were representatives of a legal apparatus that had broken down from within.

The passage Rabban Jochanan ben Zaccai cited in vindication of discontinuing the trial was Hosea 4:14: *‘I will not punish your daughters when they commit harlotry, nor your brides when they commit adultery; for the men themselves go aside with harlots, and they sacrifice with ritual harlots.’* God himself, speaking through Hosea, had declared that he would not punish women for adultery when the men were equally guilty. This is a striking scriptural undergirding for precisely what Christ demonstrated in John 8: when those who sought to stone the woman were themselves guilty of the same sin, their accusation was without standing. The prophet Hosea had said as much centuries earlier.

Christ himself described that generation as ‘adulterous and sinful’ (Mark 8:38; Matthew 12:39). He was not speaking loosely. The Talmudic evidence confirms it. Gill further notes that the signs of the Messiah’s coming, according to Jewish tradition, included the house of assembly becoming ‘a brothel house’. These were the men seeking to stone the woman of John 8. The irony is considerable.

ROMAN LAW HAD SUSPENDED JEWISH CAPITAL JURISDICTION

Quite apart from the internal breakdown of Jewish legal mechanisms, Roman imperial law had explicitly removed from the Jewish courts the authority to carry out capital punishment without Roman approval. This is not a matter of inference—John 18:31 records the Jews themselves acknowledging to Pilate: *‘It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.’* This was the legal reality of Christ’s entire ministry. A stoning carried out without Roman authority would have been an illegal lynching—and Christ, who in Luke 12:13–14 explicitly declined to act as a civil judge (*‘Who made me a judge or a divider over you?’*), would not have sanctioned one. His response to the accusers was therefore not a circumvention of the Law but a legally and historically accurate navigation of the real conditions that prevailed. Do we see Jews stoning adulterers to death today? No. And they were not doing so in Christ’s day either—at least not lawfully.

CHRIST’S CONSISTENT PATTERN—MERCY, REPENTANCE, AND FORGIVENESS

Throughout his ministry, Christ’s consistent approach to sinners was not to demand the application of Mosaic penalties but to call individuals to repentance, expose sin gently but honestly, and extend forgiveness on the basis of his atoning work. Consider the evidence from passages no one disputes. The sinful woman of Luke 7:36–50—described in commentary as a harlot, ‘deeply penitent’—wept at Christ’s feet. He did not berate her, demand she face any legal consequence, or refuse her his mercy. He forgave her sins.

Pastor Russell's notes on this passage are instructive:

'On the strength of his covenant and sacrifice he had authority to tell the woman that her sins were forgiven, because he was making the Atonement which would be applicable to her...The ransom price for the sins of the whole world was already on the altar.'

—Pastor C. T. Russell, *Zion's Watch Tower* R5033: 168.



This is theologically important. Christ's ability to forgive sins during his earthly ministry—including grave sexual sins—rested on the fact that the ransom price was effectively already being laid down. He was, in Pastor Russell's words, *'in the very act of paying the ransom-price'* (R324:4). The forgiveness extended to the sinful woman of Luke 7 was not lawless—it was grounded in the atoning work Christ was in the process of accomplishing. The same theological basis applies equally to the woman of John 8.

Then there is the Samaritan woman of John 4. Christ knew she had had five husbands and was living with a man who was not her husband—she was, in effect, living in adultery at the time of the conversation. Yet he did not accuse her, did not demand she face any legal consequence, did not refuse to drink the water she drew for him. He engaged her with profound spiritual truth, gently exposed her situation, and left the matter to work upon her conscience. As Pastor Russell wrote: *'It is not for us to break the hearts of those around us, but to find those who are broken-hearted.'* (R4130, page 41)

THREE ENCOUNTERS—A CONSISTENT PATTERN, AND AN INSTRUCTIVE CONCESSION

It is worth drawing these three encounters together, because they form a pattern that bears directly on the question of John 8. In each case Christ knew the woman's moral condition, did not demand legal consequences, gently exposed or addressed the sin, and left the woman with either an explicit or implicit call to repentance. Luke 7—the sinful woman who wept. John 4—the Samaritan woman living with a man who was not her husband. John 8—the woman accused of adultery. The moral structure of all three is the same.

What makes the Samaritan woman encounter particularly relevant here is what commentary on that passage concedes—even commentary that is sceptical of John 8. The sin in John 4 was not merely historical: the woman was living in an adulterous arrangement at the precise moment Christ spoke with her. She was not a reformed sinner looking back on past failings. She was

a current adulteress. Christ knew this—he said so himself—and still he engaged her, honoured her with a profound conversation, and revealed himself to her as the Messiah. The explanation given for why Christ nevertheless engaged her is her heart condition: that it must have been right, whatever her outward circumstances.

Now consider the logic of that concession. If Christ's engagement with a woman living in active adultery is explicable and acceptable on the grounds of her heart condition—if the operative principle is internal disposition rather than external legal status—then the same principle, applied consistently, is entirely adequate to explain the encounter of John 8. The woman there was accused of adultery; Christ neither confirmed nor denied the accusation in legal terms; he dealt with her accusers on the basis of their own guilt and with her on the basis of her evident disposition—she addressed him as 'Lord', she did not flee, she stood and received his charge. If heart condition suffices to explain John 4, it suffices to explain John 8.

There is also an important point about repentance to be drawn from the comparison between Luke 7 and John 8. The Luke 7 woman wept openly—her repentance was visible and demonstrable, and the passage was therefore felt by early readers to be 'safe': no one would misuse a story in which repentance was so evidently present. Augustine's explanation for why certain scribes removed John 8—that they feared it would be used to excuse adultery—rests implicitly on this contrast. John 8 was felt to be more dangerous precisely because the woman's repentance was not so visibly on display. But this cuts both ways. It tells us that early Christian readers were comparing the two passages and treating both as known Gospel narratives. The removal of John 8 was not a verdict of spuriousness—it was a pastoral calculation by nervous scribes. And it confirms that the passage was well enough known and well enough established to be a target for deliberate removal, which is quite a different thing from never having existed.

The question, then, is not simply whether the scenario of John 8 is consistent with the letter of the Law of Moses. It is whether it is consistent with the character and method of the Lord Jesus Christ as the Gospels uniformly portray him. On that question, the evidence of Luke 7, John 4, and John 8 speaks with one voice.



JOHN 3:17—THE GOVERNING PRINCIPLE OF THE FIRST ADVENT

‘For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.’

John 3:17

This is not an isolated sentiment. It is the governing principle of Christ’s entire earthly mission—he came to call sinners to repentance (Matthew 9:13; Luke 5:32), not to act as an enforcer of the Mosaic penal code. The woman of John 8 received what Augustine so memorably described: the wretched one, and mercy. That is entirely consistent with who Christ was and why he came.



DIFFICULTIES CONSIDERED

The following summarises the specific difficulties raised by the *New Testament Studies* that this document addresses. Source references are provided for each. The positive evidence examined in Section 7 and the detailed resolutions in Section 8 together address each of these in turn.

Difficulty I—‘Every man went unto his own house’ cannot be true during the feast: The Studies argue that this statement cannot be correct: since chapters 7 and 8 deal with the Feast of Tabernacles, and it was now the last day of the feast, for the Jews to go to their own houses would mean returning to Galilee and other lands—making it impossible for them to have been in Jerusalem for the rest of the feast. *NT Studies, John 7:53 commentary—addressed in Section 8, Difficulty I*

Difficulty II—The scribes and Pharisees would not have brought a woman into the Temple precincts: The Studies suggest that men so fastidious as to require handwashing before eating would surely not have brought a woman caught in the act of adultery into the Temple. *NT Studies, John 8:6 commentary—addressed in Section 8, Difficulty II*

Difficulty III—Jesus would have been obligated to uphold the Mosaic penalty: The Studies argue that since Jesus was sinless and obeyed the Law perfectly, if this account were genuine he would have been obligated to agree to the stoning. *NT Studies, John 8:6 commentary—addressed in Section 8, Difficulty III*

Difficulty IV—Christ’s response amounts to hiding eyes from sin: The Studies argue that under the Mosaic Law, hiding one’s eyes from a sin as serious as adultery made a person as guilty as the one who committed it—and that Christ’s response therefore implicates him in the sin. *NT Studies, John 8:7 commentary—addressed in Section 8, Difficulty IV*

Difficulty V—‘Without sin’ would logically halt all response to any sin: The Studies argue that the statement ‘let him that is without sin cast the first stone’ contains a logical fallacy: it would stop any criticism of sin whatsoever, since all are sinners (Romans 3:10). *NT Studies, John 8:7 commentary—addressed in Section 8, Difficulty V*

Difficulty VI—The passage would contradict and destroy the Law: The Studies argue that since Christ declared he came not to destroy the Law but to fulfil it (Matthew 5:17), the incident in John 8—if authentic—would contradict and thus destroy the Law. *NT Studies, John 8:7 commentary—addressed in Section 8, Difficulty VI*

Difficulty VII—The feast-day chronology creates a contradiction: The Studies argue that since John 7:37 places the action on the last day of the Feast of Tabernacles, and John 8:12 continues on that same day, an intervening night on the Mount of Olives would mean the incident occurred after the feast had ended—creating a discrepancy that proves the passage spurious. *NT Studies, John 8:2 commentary—addressed in Section 8, Difficulty VII*

Difficulty VIII—Jesus could not have written in a paved Temple court: The Studies argue that Christ could not have written on the ground in the Temple, since he was in a paved court, and paintings depicting him writing by the seashore are contradicted by the text itself placing him in the Temple. *NT Studies, John 8:6 commentary—addressed in Section 8, Difficulty VIII*

Difficulty IX—‘Beginning at the eldest’ is too fictional to be credible: The Studies argue that the detail of the accusers departing one by one beginning at the eldest is too contrived to be credible—implying they would have had to inquire who was oldest before exiting in order. *NT Studies, John 8:9 commentary—addressed in Section 8, Difficulty IX*

Difficulty X—The woman shows no repentance: The Studies argue that the passage contains a flaw in that the woman is not recorded as asking for forgiveness, and that repentance is essential before forgiveness can be extended. *NT Studies, John 8:11 commentary—addressed in Section 8, Difficulty X*

Difficulty XI—The scribes and Pharisees addressing Jesus as ‘Master’ is incongruous: The Studies argue that it would be incongruous for scribes and Pharisees who wanted to kill Jesus to address him collectively as ‘Master’—and that this represents a further flaw in the account. *NT Studies, John 8:4 commentary—addressed in Section 8, Difficulty XI*

7. POSITIVE INTERNAL EVIDENCE FOR AUTHENTICITY

The case for the passage does not rest merely on resolving the difficulties addressed in Section 8. There is a body of positive evidence—internal, contextual, literary, and linguistic—that points independently toward authenticity. The most substantive arguments are developed below; a summary table follows gathering all positive evidence points with cross-references.

THE NARRATIVE COHERENCE OF JOHN 7–8

John chapter 7 closes with the dispersal of the crowd—every man to his own booth—and Christ retiring to the Mount of Olives. Chapter 8 opens with his return early in the morning. The *pericope* provides a natural and coherent sequence across two days. Without it, John 7:52 (a contentious exchange mid-argument amongst Pharisees) connects directly to John 8:12 (Christ teaching again in the Temple)—an abrupt and contextually awkward transition. Removing the *pericope* does not make the narrative flow more smoothly; it makes it less so.

Burton pressed this point with characteristic force, and it deserves to be heard directly. Between John 7:37 and 7:52, two hostile parties crowded the Temple courts; some were for laying violent hands on Christ; the Sanhedrin had assembled and was reproaching its servants for failing to bring him prisoner; a heated argument was in progress amongst the chief priests and Pharisees. The text then, in the manuscripts that omit the *pericope*, runs immediately to John 8:12: ‘Again therefore Jesus spake unto them, saying, I am the light of the world.’ Burton’s question is unanswerable: how can the Evangelist have proceeded to those words from that scene, with no transition, no movement, no account of what happened in between? The reader is snatched from the middle of a hostile council chamber debate back to Christ teaching again in the Temple without a word of explanation. Such a rupture is not impressionistic writing; it is a wound in the narrative that the *pericope* exists to heal.

Particularly telling is the testimony of Karl von Soden—the scholar who produced the most extensive study of the *Pericope Adulterae* in its manuscript tradition ever undertaken (*Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments*, Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1902–10), and who did not himself accept it as genuine. Despite his rejection of the passage’s authenticity, von Soden’s evidential conclusions answer conclusively the most common critical argument against it. The argument—repeated by Metzger and others—is that the *pericope* was ‘a piece of floating tradition which circulated in certain parts of the Western Church’ and was subsequently ‘inserted into various

manuscripts at various places’, with no fixed home. Von Soden’s research established the opposite. He showed that the usual location of the *pericope*—between John 7:52 and John 8:12—is also its original location. The manuscripts that place it elsewhere (after Luke 21:38 in the Ferrar group, or at the end of John) are exceptions representing later displacement, not independent evidence of varied insertion. In his own words: ‘It has been established with certainty that the *pericope* was not intruded into the Four Gospels, perhaps in various forms, in various places. This hypothesis is already contradicted by the fixed place which the section has.’ And again: ‘In spite of the abundance of the variant readings, it has been established with certainty’ that the passage had a single original location, defended it against all attacks with varying success, and that the variant locations and readings are secondary developments. When the scholar who conducted the most thorough manuscript investigation of this passage—and who rejected it as non-Johannine—nevertheless demolishes the ‘floating tradition’ argument on purely evidential grounds, that concession carries considerable weight.

Von Soden also observed that the Ferrar group of manuscripts, which places the passage after Luke 21:38, derives from a single common corrupt archetype. Burgon had made the same point: ‘these four codexes are derived from a common archetype, and therefore represent one and the same ancient and, I may add, corrupt copy.’ A single corrupt archetype does not constitute independent evidence of alternative placement—it constitutes one divergent witness, not several.

The introductory verses of the *pericope* confirm this picture of a single original location. John 7:53—‘And every man went unto his own house’—describes the breaking up of the stormy council meeting that immediately precedes in John 7:45–52. John 8:1–2 explain what Jesus did in the interval and how he returned early the next morning to teach in the Temple. These three verses make contextual sense only in their current position. In every other location in which the passage appears—after Luke 21:38, or appended to the end of John—these introductory verses are contextually incoherent; they refer to events that in those alternative positions have not been described. This is not an ambiguous data point. It is direct internal evidence that the passage belongs where the overwhelming majority of manuscripts have always placed it.

THE TREASURY—THE COURT OF WOMEN

John 8:20 identifies the location of Christ’s subsequent teaching as ‘the treasury’. Vincent’s Word Studies, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown, and Adam Clarke all identify the treasury as situated within the Court of Women—the precise area to which the woman could most plausibly have been brought. Jamieson-Fausset-Brown stated this directly: ‘This may confirm the genuineness of John 8:2–11, as the place where the woman was brought.’ Jesus taught here on other occasions (Mark 12:41). The incidental geographical detail of John 8:20, which coheres perfectly with the setting of the *pericope*, is characteristic of authentic historical narrative, not of forgery.

THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

The Feast of Tabernacles provided the setting for chapters 7 and 8 of John, and the *pericope* sits at the exact structural centre of the two great ceremonies that defined that feast. The Feast of Tabernacles was organised around two daily rituals performed in the Temple courts: the water-pouring ceremony, in which water drawn from the Pool of Siloam was poured at the altar as a symbol of the outpouring of the Spirit, and the lamp-lighting ceremony, in which four enormous golden candelabra were lit in the Court of Women, illuminating the entire Temple Mount and much of the surrounding city. It is not coincidental that both of these ceremonies receive direct responses from Christ in John 7 and 8. John 7:37–39—‘if any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink’—is Christ’s response to the water-pouring ceremony. John 8:12—‘I am the light of the world’—is Christ’s response to the lamp-lighting ceremony, which took place in the very court where the encounter with the woman occurred.

The *pericope* is therefore structurally sandwiched between these two great declarations. Christ's response to the water rite announces himself as the source of living water; his response to the lamp-lighting announces himself as the light of the world. Between the two declarations stands the encounter with the woman—a woman received in mercy, freed from condemnation, and sent forward into life rather than death. The structural and typological coherence is exact: the light that illuminated the Temple courts during the feast is the same light that exposed the darkness of the accusers, saw the woman clearly, and directed her toward life. The lamp-lighting ceremony in the Court of Women is the natural context for a declaration of 'I am the light of the world'—and the encounter that immediately precedes that declaration is the natural enacted illustration of what that light does in practice. A forger inserting twelve verses into this chapter would need to have understood this intricate typological structure and reproduced it seamlessly. That is not a plausible profile for an interpolation.

THEMATIC COHERENCE WITH JOHN 8:12 AND 8:15

The declaration 'I am the light of the world' in John 8:12 follows immediately after 'go and sin no more' in John 8:11. Without the *pericope*, this self-declaration follows the hostile council chamber exchange of chapter 7 and connects somewhat abstractly to a scene of teaching. With the *pericope*, 'I am the light of the world' functions as an almost final remark to the encounter just concluded: the light that had pierced the darkness of the accusers' consciences, exposing them one by one until they fled; the light that had seen the woman clearly and without condemnation; the light that had guided her forward into a new life. The declaration interprets the encounter, and the encounter enacts the declaration. Remove the *pericope* and the declaration stands alone; include it and the declaration becomes the summation of what has just been witnessed. This kind of integral unity between narrative and theological statement is recognisably Johannine—it is precisely how John structures his Gospel.

Immediately following the *pericope*, Christ also declares: 'I judge no man' (John 8:15). Without the preceding encounter with the accused woman, this statement hangs somewhat loosely. With the *pericope*, it reads almost as a direct reflection on what has just occurred—a statement whose full resonance depends on the account that precedes it. Christ had just declined to act as judge and executioner of a woman brought before him in a quasi-judicial proceeding. 'I judge no man' is not an abstract theological claim when it follows that encounter; it is the governing principle of the First Advent stated in its living context. The removal of the *pericope* does not make the surrounding text flow more smoothly or think more clearly—it weakens it.

THE ABSENT MAN—A LEGAL DEFECT IN THE ACCUSATION

Deuteronomy 22:22 requires both parties to be brought to judgement, and it is worth quoting the verse in full: 'If a man be found lying with a woman married to an husband, then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman: so shalt thou put away evil from Israel.' The accusers brought only the woman. The male party was absent. This was a fatally defective proceeding under the very Law the accusers claimed to be upholding—the Law explicitly requires that both parties be found and both be put to death. Christ, who knew the Law perfectly, would have been immediately aware of this fundamental defect. The absence of the man may well be among the things he wrote in the dust.

The Greek word translated 'taken in adultery, in the very act' in John 8:4 is *autophōros* (αὐτόφωρος)—a technical legal term drawn from classical Greek law, originally applied to the capture of a thief but by the first century used specifically for sexual offences committed in flagrante. Liddell & Scott define it as 'caught in the very act'. Its use here is legally precise: *autophōros* capture is not merely accusation but apprehension during the act itself. Under Jewish legal tradition, this was the one circumstance most closely approximating the conditions under which capital punishment for adultery could be applied. But *autophōros* by definition requires two parties to be caught together in the act. The woman was brought; the man was not. Whatever the circumstances of the

‘capture’, the accusers had failed to produce both of the parties that the Law required—and had failed to do so in a case where the very terminology they used implied that both parties had been caught simultaneously. The legal defect in their proceeding was not merely a procedural nicety; it was a critical failure that any competent jurist in the first century would have recognised at once. The precision of this detail, embedded in a single Greek word, is exactly the kind of legally accurate specificity that authenticates rather than undermines the account.

THE LEGAL PRECISION OF CHRIST’S RESPONSE

Deuteronomy 17:7 required the witnesses to be the first to cast the stone. Christ’s challenge directly and precisely invoked this requirement, demanding that the witnesses be innocent of the same sin before proceeding. The legal accuracy of this response is entirely characteristic of Christ’s authentic teaching method—always engaging the questioner on the questioner’s own terms, with a precision that left no opening for counter-accusation. There is a further legal dimension that is rarely noted: the entire proceeding was an act of entrapment, which was itself contrary to the spirit of Mosaic law. Deuteronomy 19:15–21 establishes that false or malicious witnesses—those who bring a charge for purposes other than genuine justice—bear the very penalty they sought to impose on the accused. The accusers were not seeking justice; they were, as John 8:6 explicitly states, seeking grounds to accuse Christ. A proceeding designed not to uphold the Law but to manufacture a charge against an innocent party was not a lawful proceeding at all, and Christ’s response, which exposed the accusers’ own guilt and caused them to withdraw, was the most precise possible application of the Law’s own provisions against the misuse of legal process.

THE MEANING OF ἄναμάρτητος (ANAMARTĒTOS, G361)—‘WITHOUT SIN OF THIS KIND’

This point deserves particular emphasis, because it is the key to the entire encounter—and the most common misreading of the passage. When Christ says ‘he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her’, the natural English reading of ‘without sin’ suggests that only a perfectly sinless person could ever call out any sin. That reading would make Christ’s response a blanket amnesty for all sin, and would indeed be theologically troubling. It is also mistaken.

The Greek word translated ‘without sin’ in John 8:7 is ἀναμάρτητος (*anamartētos*, G361). It does not mean ‘without any sin whatsoever’. It means ‘without sin of this particular kind’—that is, without the sin of adultery. This is not a modern reinterpretation. It is the conclusion of classical Greek philological scholarship, established independently by four scholars across three centuries. Adam Clarke’s direct words are worth setting before the reader:

‘He that is without sin—ἀναμάρτητος (*anamartētos*, G361), meaning the same kind of sin, adultery, fornication, etc. Kypke has largely proved that the verb *hamartanein*, G264) is used in this sense by the best Greek writers.’

—Adam Clarke, *Commentary on the Bible*, on John 8:7

Clarke is not offering a personal theological opinion. He is citing J. G. Kypke’s *Observationes Sacrae* (1755)—a rigorous classical philological study—which demonstrated from the usage of the best Greek writers that ἁμαρτανεῖν (*hamartanein*, G264), the verbal root of ἀναμάρτητος, was regularly used to denote specifically sexual sin. John Gill arrives at the same conclusion from a different route, noting that Christ is addressing witnesses in a quasi-judicial proceeding and that the qualification speaks to their fitness to act in that specific capacity—not to whether they have ever sinned in any respect. Bengel’s *Gnomon Novi Testamenti* and Meyer’s *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of John* both confirm the procedural-legal reading independently, from within rigorous German Protestant philological traditions.

The practical consequence is decisive. Christ's challenge was addressed not to all humanity—'who among all of you has never sinned?'—but to the accusers and witnesses in their specific legal capacity: 'who among you proposing to execute the death sentence for adultery is himself innocent of adultery?' That is a precise legal and moral demand rooted in the Law itself. Deuteronomy 17:7 required the witnesses to be the first to cast the stone; Hosea 4:14 explicitly refused to punish women for adultery when the men were equally guilty; Romans 2:22 repeated the principle in the apostolic context. Christ was not inventing a new principle—he was applying a principle the accusers' own tradition already contained and which they were themselves violating. The accusers departed not because they had ever committed any sin but because they were guilty of the *same* sin—adultery—and knew it. The disciples, who had presumably not committed adultery, did not depart.

This single philological point resolves Difficulties III, IV, and V in Section 8 below. Difficulty III (Christ was obligated to agree to the stoning) fails because the proceeding was already legally defective. Difficulty IV (Christ was hiding his eyes from sin) fails because Christ addressed the sin directly and charged the woman explicitly to cease from it. Difficulty V (the statement would halt all response to any sin) fails because the challenge was never a universal principle—it was a specific legal demand. The reader who understands *ἀναμάρτητος* correctly will find that three of the eleven difficulties dissolve before Section 8 is reached.

THE ECHO OF JEREMIAH 17:13—AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF *katagraphein*

Christ's writing in the dust almost certainly echoes Jeremiah 17:13: 'O Lord, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth.' This is a silent, living enactment of the prophet's words directed against those who, in seeking to trap Christ, had forsaken the righteousness they claimed to uphold. The scriptural allusion is precise and exact—and it is reinforced by the Greek verb John uses for 'wrote'.

The ordinary Greek word for writing is *graphein* (G1125). John 8:6 uses the compound *katagraphein* (κατέγραψεν)—a form that carries the specific sense of writing down a record against someone, registering something officially. This is precisely the same word used in the Septuagint rendering of Jeremiah 17:13, where the unfaithful are 'written in the earth'. The linguistic connection between Christ's action and the prophet's declaration is not accidental. It is the kind of quietly layered scriptural precision that characterises the authentic Christ throughout his ministry, and that no later forger would have thought to engineer.

There is a second and deeper scriptural significance that confirms the Johannine character of this gesture. When Moses received the Law on Sinai, Exodus 31:18 records that the two tablets were 'written with the finger of God'. Christ writes with his finger in the earth—the finger of God, now manifest in the Son, writing not commandments on stone but silent judgement in dust. John's Gospel is structured throughout by Moses typology: 'For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ'. (John 1:17.) The Son, who is 'the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his [the Father's] person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high' (Hebrews 1:3), remains distinct from the Father, yet perfectly reflects His very being. The contrast is exact. Moses' finger inscribed the Law on enduring stone; Christ's finger inscribes a transient, unread record in perishable dust—and then, to the accused woman, offers not death but life. This is precisely the kind of typological depth that John deploys elsewhere—the bread of life superseding manna (John 6), the light of the world announced at the feast of lights (John 8:12), the good shepherd superseding the hireling. Punch, presenting his dissertation findings at the 2014 Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary symposium on the *Pericope Adulterae*, noted this Moses typology explicitly as evidence of the Johannine character of the passage: this is 'just the sort of contrast with Moses that one might expect from John.' The detail is not artfully devised—like unto a fable (2 Pet. 1:16); it is a cohesive theological design.

The difficulty sometimes raised—that writing in the ground was impossible on a paved temple surface, or that the Greek preposition *eis* ('into') requires carving into hard stone—is answered in full in the response to Objection VIII above. In brief: *eis tēn gēn* describes directed motion toward and contact with the ground surface, not penetration of solid stone; the Herodian temple courts were paved with large limestone slabs that accumulated considerable surface debris after eight days of festival; and the compound verb *katagraphein* describes the nature and purpose of the writing, not the physical medium required.

NO DISCERNIBLE MOTIVE FOR FORGERY

Invented passages typically serve a purpose—theological, apologetic, or ecclesiastical. This passage promotes no known heresy, serves no obvious liturgical agenda, and—as Augustine himself observed—was actually problematic to certain copyists precisely because it seemed to extend *too much mercy*. A forger seeking to insert a passage favourable to Christ would be unlikely to choose a narrative that some readers found theologically troubling. F. B. Meyer put it plainly:

*“This passage has been the subject of much controversy, but there is no possibility of accounting for it except on the supposition that this incident really took place. It reveals in our Lord’s character such tenderness, wisdom, hatred of sin, and insight into the heart of man, that it is impossible to suppose that any evangelist could have invented the story.”*¹⁰

—F. B. Meyer, *Through the Bible Commentary*

That observation—that the passage reveals something about Christ that no forger could have constructed—is, in the end, one of the most compelling arguments of all.

THE JOHANNINE ASIDE OF JOHN 8:6—AND A CHALLENGE ANSWERED

One of the most precisely Johannine features of the passage is the authorial aside in John 8:6: ‘This they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him’ (*touto de elegon peirazōn auton, hina echōsin katēgorein autou*). Alan Johnson, in his 1964 doctoral dissertation, drew attention to the fact that this construction—an explanatory aside by the narrator, typically introduced by *de*, a demonstrative, and a form of *legō*—is a distinctive and repeatedly documented Johannine feature. It appears in virtually identical Greek at John 6:6: ‘And this he said to prove him’ (*touto de elegen peirazōn auton*). The two verses are grammatically identical, differing only in number because one refers to Christ’s testing of Philip and the other to the scribes’ testing of Christ.

This parallel was examined and disputed by Daniel Wallace, who argued that similar constructions appear in Matthew 4:3 and 19:3, and therefore that the feature is not distinctively Johannine. John Paul Heil addressed this difficulty directly and decisively: Wallace’s Matthean examples are direct narrative statements, not authorial asides. The aside in John 8:6—like the aside in John 6:6—is a narrator’s interjection explaining the hidden motive behind what has just been said or done. The Matthean examples contain no such interjection; they are straightforward narrative statements of fact. The distinction is precise, and the Johannine character of John 8:6 in this respect remains intact. Punch, in his doctoral research, confirmed this assessment, noting that the Johannine aside pattern in 8:6 is fully consistent with a recognised and repeated Johannine literary habit, and that the attempted rebuttal did not succeed in neutralising it.

¹⁰ F. B. Meyer, *Through the Bible Commentary*, on John 8:1–11. Available online at <https://bibleportal.com/commentary/section/f-b-meyer-s-through-the-bible-commentary/322798>.

THE PROTOEVANGELION OF JAMES—EARLY INDEPENDENT TESTIMONY

A further witness to the early reception of Johannine material deserves mention. The *Protoevangelion of James*—a second century pseudepigraphal (or apocryphal) work, generally dated to the mid to late second century A. D.—is a text that demonstrably draws upon the canonical Gospels and presupposes their authority. While some earlier scholars, such as Zervos,¹¹ have argued that certain narrative elements in the work may preserve pre Gospel infancy traditions, the consensus—summarised by Punch—is that the *Protoevangelion* is a derivative composition whose narrative and theological framework presupposes the existence and authority of the canonical Gospels, including John. The direction of dependence therefore runs from John to the *Protoevangelion*, not the reverse.

This remains significant for the present discussion. A second century Christian author, writing within a generation or two of the apostolic age, composed a devotional narrative that assumes the canonical Gospels as its source material. This is entirely consistent with the *pericope* of the adulterous woman being part of the Gospel tradition well before Jerome, and with its circulation in Christian communities early enough to be known, echoed, or presupposed by later apocryphal writers.

It is also worth noting—briefly, since this is not primarily a technical linguistic discussion—that the passage exhibits characteristics consistent with John’s Gospel elsewhere. The dramatic staging of the encounter, the use of direct dialogue, the focus on a named and geographically specific location, the confrontation between Christ and hostile religious leaders, and the pattern of Christ engaging a sinful individual privately after the public confrontation has resolved—all of these are recognisably Johannine. John’s Gospel is notably interested in one-to-one encounters between Christ and individuals in morally complex situations: the Samaritan woman (John 4), the man at Bethesda (John 5), Mary Magdalene (John 20). The woman of John 8 fits this pattern naturally—and fits it in a way that would be remarkable for a later forger to reproduce so precisely.

The Samaritan woman encounter in John 4 is worth particular mention here. Commentary on that passage notes that Christ honoured the woman ‘with a one-to-one conversation, whereas he often spoke to multitudes or to his disciples’—and observes that John specifically chose to record these rare private conversations, as he did with Nicodemus. The woman of John 8 receives exactly the same kind of private, one-to-one attention from Christ after the crowd has dispersed. The structural parallel between the two encounters—public setting, withdrawal of the crowd, private engagement, moral charge, departure— is entirely natural to the narrative. This is not the work of a later scribe embellishing the Gospel text; it is the recognisable hand of an author who had a consistent interest in how Christ dealt with individuals in private.

Particularly worth noting is the phrase ‘go and sin no more’ in John 8:11. The identical charge—‘sin no more’—appears in John 5:14, where Christ addresses the man healed at Bethesda: ‘Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.’ John 5:14 is a passage no one disputes. The appearance of this identical phrase in the same Gospel, in a similar context of Christ engaging privately with an individual after a public encounter, is a small but pointed piece of internal evidence. It is the kind of verbal echo one finds within an author’s genuine work—not the kind of detail a later editor or compiler would be likely to reproduce precisely.

One difficulty sometimes raised on stylistic grounds is that the word ‘scribes’ (γραμματεῖς, *grammateis*) appears nowhere else in John’s Gospel. This is true, and deserves a direct answer. The reason is straightforward: the *pericope* describes a quasi-judicial proceeding brought by scribes and Pharisees acting in a formal legal capacity—the only such event in John’s Gospel. The word appropriate to that unique situation naturally appears here and nowhere

¹¹ <https://www.bloomsbury.com/au/author/george-t--zervos/>

else. Its absence elsewhere in John reflects the absence elsewhere in John of such proceedings—not the hand of a different author.

The broader vocabulary difficulty—that the passage as a whole contains too many words not found elsewhere in John—has been examined systematically and found to prove far less than its proponents claim. Alan Johnson, whose 1961 doctoral dissertation at Dallas Theological Seminary examined the passage in full (*A Re-examination of the Pericope Adulterae, John 7:53–8:11*, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1961), published his statistical findings in the *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* in 1966, writing from Moody Bible Institute, Chicago.¹² He applied the same statistical criteria used against the *pericope* to other undisputed Johannine passages—and found that John 2:13–17, the cleansing of the Temple, performs considerably worse than John 7:53–8:11 by every measure. Punch confirmed and reproduced Johnson’s findings in his doctoral research.

A methodological point should be noted at the outset. G. Udney Yule, a professional statistician and reader of statistics at the University of Cambridge, demonstrated that at least 10,000 words are required to form any solid statistical basis for authorship (*The Statistical Study of Literary Vocabulary*, cited in Johnson, 1966). The *Pericope Adulterae* contains only 174 words. The statistical method is therefore operating far below the threshold at which it can yield reliable conclusions about authorship.

A brief note on Johnson’s categories:

- ‘Hapax in John’ means words appearing only once in John’s Gospel;
- ‘Hapax in the Synoptics’ means words not found in Matthew, Mark, or Luke;
- ‘Hapax in NT’ means words found nowhere else in the New Testament;
- ‘Hapax in Greek Bible’ means words found nowhere else in the Greek Bible;
- ‘Lukan preferred words’ means words occurring with notably higher frequency in Luke than in other Gospels;
- ‘Johannine preferred words’ means words occurring with notably higher frequency in John than in the Synoptics—the measure most directly relevant to assessing whether a passage is stylistically Johannine.

The comparison, set out in tabular form, is as follows:

Criterion	John 7:53–8:11	John 2:13–17
Total words	168	73
Total vocabulary	81	47
Hapax in John (%)	13 (16%)	14 (30%)
Hapax in Synoptics (%)	1 (1%)	3 (6%)
Hapax in NT (%)	4 (5%)	4 (9%)
Hapax in Greek Bible (%)	2 (2%)	4 (9%)
Lukan preferred words (%)	4 (5%)	2 (4%)
Johannine preferred words (%)	14 (17%)	4 (9%)

¹² https://etsjets.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/files_JETS-PDFs_9_9-2_BETS_9_2_91-96_Johnson.pdf

On every single measure, John 2:13–17 is more non-Johannine than John 7:53–8:11—higher hapax percentage, higher Lukan affinity, and less than half the proportion of Johannine preferred words. The *pericope*, by this standard, is the more Johannine of the two passages. Johnson’s conclusion is direct: ‘No one should feel compelled from statistical tabulations to exclude the *pericope* from the Gospel of John’ (*Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 9.2, 1966, p. 95). If the vocabulary difficulty were applied consistently, it would remove the cleansing of the Temple from the Gospel before it removed the woman taken in adultery. No scholar advocates this. The criterion is therefore not a principled one; it is applied selectively to passages already suspected on other grounds.

A second comparison makes the same point from a different angle. Johnson and Punch both note that John 4:4–16—the encounter with the Samaritan woman, the most structurally parallel passage to the *pericope* in the entire Gospel—contains eighteen words found nowhere else in John, including two absolute New Testament hapax: *sunchraomai* (to associate with) and *threma* (livestock). Nobody disputes John 4. The conclusion is the same: unusual vocabulary in a short Johannine passage is normal, not suspicious. Punch’s overall conclusion from his examination of both internal and external evidence was that the passage’s linguistic style supports Johannine authenticity, or at the least does not speak against it.

Johnson also identified a positive stylistic argument that has received insufficient attention. One of the unmistakable literary patterns of the Fourth Gospel is the practice of interjecting short explanatory phrases that interpret the significance of words just spoken in the narrative—introduced by the conjunction ‘now’ (δέ), the demonstrative ‘this’ (τοῦτο), and a form of the verb ‘to speak’ (λέγειν). This pattern occurs at least ten times in undisputed sections of John’s Gospel (6:6, 6:71, 7:39, 11:13, 11:51, 12:6, 12:33, 13:11, 13:28, 21:19) and is completely absent from the Synoptic Gospels. An exact duplicate of this pattern occurs in the middle of the *Pericope Adulterae* at John 8:6: ‘Now this they were saying tempting him, that they might have to accuse him’ (τοῦτο δὲ ἔλεγον πειράζοντες. . .)—with all three introductory elements present. Ernest Cadman Colwell, President of the Claremont School of Theology, confirmed in correspondence with Johnson (12 March 1964): ‘I certainly think that what you have identified is an element of Johannine style in the sense of literary pattern in the Fourth Gospel.’ Johnson observed that this fact had been entirely overlooked: he checked twenty-five to thirty critical commentaries on John, including French and German works, and found complete silence on the point. This stylistic trait—first identified by Johnson in 1966—was subsequently the subject of debate between J. P. Heil and Daniel Wallace, with Heil defending its evidential weight and Wallace challenging it. The exchange is significant: it confirms that the Johannine aside at John 8:6 is a serious piece of internal evidence, not a minor or marginal observation.

To this should be added a point about the narrative rupture that is sharpened beyond what Burgon observed. John 7:52 ends with the Sanhedrin debating amongst themselves—without Jesus present in the scene. John 8:12 opens with Jesus speaking to them and the crowd. This is not merely an atmospheric break; it is a character presence discontinuity. Jesus is absent in 7:52 and present in 8:12, with no account of his return. The *pericope* (John 7:53–8:2) provides exactly that account: the crowd dispersed, Jesus went to the Mount of Olives, and early the next morning he returned to the Temple. Without it, a reader would not merely find the transition abrupt—they would have no information about how Jesus came to be present at all in the scene that follows. The insertion theory requires us to believe that a later scribe constructed twelve verses that happen to repair, with surgical precision, a character presence discontinuity that would be invisible to anyone who had not read the passage without them. That is not the profile of an insertion. It is the profile of original material.

Zane Hodges and Arthur Farstad, textual scholars who approached the manuscript evidence with rigorous scepticism, arrived at the same conclusion from the internal side. After examining the contextual and stylistic

compatibility of the *pericope* with the Tabernacles Discourse, they stated plainly: ‘If it is not an original part of the Fourth Gospel, its writer would have to be viewed as a skilled Johannine imitator, and its placement in this context as the shrewdest piece of interpolation in literary history’ (*The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*, Thomas Nelson, 1985, p. 25). The cumulative weight of contextual compatibility, stylistic integration, narrative function, and verbal parallels with undisputed Johannine passages makes the idea of a later insertion require a forger of extraordinary—indeed, implausible—sophistication.

SUMMARY OF POSITIVE EVIDENCE

Evidence	Summary	Developed
Narrative coherence / character presence	John 7:52 ends mid-debate with Jesus absent; John 8:12 opens with Jesus teaching. The <i>pericope</i> supplies the only account of his departure and return. Without it there is a character presence discontinuity no transition resolves. Von Soden—who rejected the passage’s authenticity—disposed of the ‘floating tradition’ argument: the passage had a single fixed original location.	Section 7 above
Feast of Tabernacles typology	The <i>pericope</i> is structurally sandwiched between Christ’s response to the water-pouring ceremony (John 7:37–39) and the lamp-lighting ceremony (John 8:12). The encounter enacted what the declaration announced. A later insertion would require precise knowledge of this typological structure.	Section 7 above
Thematic coherence with John 8:12 and 8:15	‘I am the light of the world’ and ‘I judge no man’ read as direct reflections on the encounter just concluded. Without the <i>pericope</i> , both statements lose their living context.	Section 7 above
ἀναμάρτητος—‘without sin of this kind’	Clarke (citing Kypke), Gill, Bengel, and Meyer establish from classical Greek philology that the word denotes freedom from the <i>same kind of sin</i> , not from sin in general. Christ was not excusing sin—he was applying a precise legal standard to the witnesses. Resolves Difficulties III, IV, and V.	Section 7 above; Difficulties III and V in Section 8
<i>autophōros</i> and the absent man	The word ‘taken in the very act’ is a classical legal term implying both parties caught simultaneously. Only the woman was produced. The male party’s absence was a fatal defect in the proceeding under Deuteronomy 22:22.	Section 7 above
Legal precision of Christ’s response	Deuteronomy 17:7 required witnesses to cast first. The entire proceeding was an act of entrapment, itself contrary to Deuteronomy 19:15–21. Christ’s response engaged every legal dimension with precision.	Section 7 above; Difficulty III, Section 8
Johannine aside at John 8:6	The construction ‘this they said, tempting him, that they might have to accuse him’ is grammatically identical to John 6:6 and is a recognised, repeated Johannine literary pattern absent from the Synoptics. Confirmed by Johnson, Heil; contested by Wallace; Heil’s response upheld.	Section 7 above
Vocabulary comparison (Johnson/Punch)	John 2:13–17 performs worse than the <i>pericope</i> on every statistical hapax measure; John 4 contains eighteen hapax including two absolute NT hapax. The vocabulary argument, applied consistently, proves too much.	Section 7 above

Evidence	Summary	Developed
The treasury—Court of Women	John 8:20 identifies the treasury as in the Court of Women—the precise location to which the woman could plausibly be brought. Jamieson-Fausset-Brown noted this directly confirms the passage’s genuineness.	Section 7 (Clarke, Jamieson-Fausset-Brown)
Jeremiah 17:13 and <i>katagraphēin</i>	John uses the compound verb <i>katagraphēin</i> —the same word in the Septuagint rendering of Jeremiah 17:13—carrying the sense of writing a record against someone. The allusion is deliberate and exact.	Difficulty VIII, Section 8
Moses typology—finger of God	When Moses received the Law, the tablets were ‘written with the finger of God’ (Exodus 31:18). Christ writes with his finger in the earth—not commandments on stone but silent judgement in dust. Moses inscribed the Law; Christ enacts mercy. Punch confirms this Moses typology is ‘just the sort of contrast with Moses that one might expect from John.’	Difficulty VIII, Section 8
No discernible motive for insertion	The passage promotes no heresy and was actively problematic to certain copyists (Augustine). A forger seeking to honour Christ would not choose a narrative others found theologically troubling. F. B. Meyer: ‘it is impossible to suppose that any evangelist could have invented the story.’	Section 7 above; Section 9 (F. B. Meyer)
Protoevangelion of James	A second century apocryphal work presupposing canonical John as its source confirms Johannine material was in wide circulation well before Jerome.	Section 7 above
Hodges and Farstad concession	Two textual scholars approaching the evidence with rigorous scepticism concluded that if the <i>pericope</i> were not original, its composer ‘would have to be viewed as a skilled Johannine imitator, and its placement... the shrewdest piece of interpolation in literary history.’	Section 7 above

8. DIFFICULTIES CONSIDERED AND RESOLVED

The difficulties that careful readers have identified in this passage are worth taking seriously—some of them, at least on the surface, appear substantial. Each is examined below. It will be seen that each admits of a considered resolution.

DIFFICULTY I: JOHN 7:53—‘EVERY MAN WENT UNTO HIS OWN HOUSE’ CANNOT BE TRUE DURING THE FEAST

Difficulty I—NT Studies, John 7:53 commentary

‘This statement is not true. Chapters 7 and 8 deal with the Feast of Tabernacles, and it was now the last day of the feast (John 7:37). If the Jews went to their own houses, it means they returned to Galilee and other lands and could not possibly have been in Jerusalem for the rest of the feast.’

Resolution

This difficulty rests on a misreading of what ‘his own house’ means in the context of the Feast of Tabernacles. The feast required pilgrims to dwell in booths—temporary tabernacles erected throughout Jerusalem and on the surrounding slopes (Leviticus 23:42). These booths were their ‘houses’ for the duration of the feast. Pastor Russell’s own description of the feast (R2437) is vivid on this point: ‘Every available spot inside Jerusalem, and in the hollows, and on the slopes around it, was covered with huts or tabernacles

of wattled or interplaited twigs. ‘Every man went unto his own house’, in this context, most naturally means every man returned to his own temporary lodging or booth for the night—entirely consistent with the feast still being in progress the following morning. This is precisely what one would expect after the heated exchanges and attempted arrests of John 7. The crowd dispersed to their various lodgings; Christ retired to the Mount of Olives; and early the next morning he returned to the Temple. There is no contradiction here—only a natural and realistic description of how the evening of a major festival concluded.

DIFFICULTY II: THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES WOULD NOT HAVE BROUGHT A WOMAN INTO THE TEMPLE PRECINCTS

Difficulty II—NT Studies, John 8:6 commentary

‘If the scribes and Pharisees were so fastidious as to require hands to be washed before eating, then surely they would not have brought a woman caught in the act of adultery (that is, not merely a reported matter) into the Temple.’

Resolution

This difficulty attributes to the scribes and Pharisees a degree of inward holiness that the Gospels consistently and explicitly deny them. Christ’s own assessment is on record in John 7:19: *‘Did not Moses give you the law, and yet none of you keepeth the law?’* Matthew 12:39 and Mark 8:38 describe that generation as ‘adulterous and sinful’—and, as the Talmudic evidence in Section 6 demonstrates, this was literally true, not merely figurative. John Gill shows that adultery was so widespread among the religious leaders that the formal trial of suspected wives had to be officially discontinued. Romans 2:22 directly accuses those who teach against adultery of committing it themselves.

External fastidiousness and internal immorality are not mutually exclusive—they are, in fact, the precise combination Christ repeatedly condemned: *‘Ye are like unto whited sepulchres’* (Matthew 23:27). These same men conspired to kill Christ within the Temple precincts (John 7:30, 32, 44), met with Judas in the Temple to arrange the betrayal, and brought false accusations against Stephen (Acts 6:13–14) and Paul (Acts 21:27–29). To suggest that bringing an accused woman before a teacher in the Temple courts was beyond what they would do is giving them far more credit than the Gospel record warrants—as though they were inwardly holy.

DIFFICULTY III: JESUS WOULD HAVE BEEN OBLIGATED TO UPHOLD THE MOSAIC PENALTY

Difficulty III—NT Studies, John 8:6 commentary

‘Also, Jesus was sinless, which means he obeyed the Law perfectly. Therefore, if this account were true, he would have been obligated to agree to the stoning.’

Resolution

This is the most substantial difficulty raised, and it deserves the most thorough treatment. It will be shown that it rests on several false premises—each of which is independently sufficient to answer it.

Firstly: Roman law had removed capital jurisdiction from the Jewish courts. John 18:31 records the Jews themselves acknowledging to Pilate: ‘It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.’ This was the legal reality of Christ’s entire ministry, not merely at his trial. A stoning without Roman authority would have been an illegal lynching. Christ—who explicitly declined to act as a civil judge in Luke 12:13–14—would not have sanctioned one. John Gill observes precisely that Christ ‘did not take upon him the judiciary power, with which they could accuse him to the Roman governor.’ Had he ordered the stoning, he would himself have been in breach of Roman law. This alone is sufficient to resolve the difficulty.

Secondly: Deuteronomy 22:22 requires both parties to be brought to judgement. *‘Then they shall both of them die, both the man that lay with the woman, and the woman.’* The accusers brought only the woman. The male party was conspicuously absent. The legal proceeding was fatally defective from the outset—under the very Law the accusers claimed to be upholding. Christ, who knew the Law perfectly, would have recognised this immediately. The absence of the man may well be among the things he wrote in the dust.

Thirdly: The witnesses were themselves guilty of the same sin—and the word ἀναμάρτητος (*anamartētos*, G361) confirms it. Deuteronomy 17:7 required the witnesses to cast the first stone: *‘The hands of the witnesses shall be first upon him to put him to death.’* Christ’s challenge—*‘he that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her’*—is not a vague appeal to universal human sinfulness. It is a precise legal challenge addressed to the witnesses, requiring them to be innocent of the very sin with which they charged the woman. The Greek word translated ‘without sin’—ἀναμάρτητος (*anamartētos*, G361)—is the key. Adam Clarke’s commentary on this word is worth quoting directly:

*‘He that is without sin—ἀναμάρτητος (*anamartētos*, G361), meaning the same kind of sin, adultery, fornication, etc. Kypke has largely proved that the verb ἁμαρτανειν (*hamartanein*, G264) is used in this sense by the best Greek writers.’*

—Adam Clarke, *Commentary on the Bible*, on John 8:7

Clarke is not offering a personal opinion. He is citing J. G. Kypke’s *Observationes Sacrae* (1755), a rigorous classical philological study that demonstrated from the usage of the best Greek writers that ἁμαρτανειν (*hamartanein*, G264)—the verbal root of ἀναμάρτητος (*anamartētos*, G361)—was regularly used to denote specifically sexual sin. On this philological basis, ‘he that is without sin’ means ‘he that is without this kind of sin’—adultery. John Gill’s commentary arrives at the same conclusion by a different route, noting that Christ is addressing witnesses in a quasi-judicial proceeding and that the qualification is to their fitness to act in that specific capacity:

‘Let him that is without sin among you; meaning, not that was entirely free from sin, in heart, in lip, and in life; for there is no such person. . . but that was without any notorious sin, or was not guilty of some scandalous sin, and particularly this of adultery; which was in this age a prevailing sin, and even among their doctors.’

—John Gill, *Exposition of the Entire Bible*, on John 8:7

The Apostle Paul confirms that this was precisely the condition of the scribes and Pharisees: *‘Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery?’* (Romans 2:22). And the prophet Hosea, centuries earlier, had established the very same divine principle: God himself refused to punish women for adultery when their accusers were equally guilty (Hosea 4:14). Christ’s challenge was not a novelty—it was the application of a principle embedded in both the Law and the prophets. The accusers’ guilty departure confirmed that they knew it applied to them. As Gill observes, ‘perhaps none of those Scribes and Pharisees were free from it’—and the Talmudic evidence about that generation’s moral state confirms this was not an overstatement.

Fourthly: The dispensational context. As argued in Section 6, the Law and the prophets were ‘until John’ (Matthew 11:13; Luke 16:16). A dispensational transition was already under way. The new administration of repentance and forgiveness, inaugurated by John and fulfilled in Christ, was superseding the strict penal application of the Mosaic code. Adulterers and fornicators were receiving baptism from John as a symbol of repentance without first submitting to execution. Christ’s charge to the woman—*‘go and sin no more’*—is entirely consistent with this new dispensation.

Fifthly: Christ did not contradict the Law—he applied it with precision. It is worth quoting Gill's conclusion in full, because it is directly to the point: *'Though he passed no sentence upon the woman, and so took not upon him the judiciary power...he manifestly appeared to agree with Moses, that such an one deserved to be stoned; wherefore they could not charge him with being contrary to Moses.'* Notice that none of Christ's accusers—those who had specifically come to find grounds to accuse him of violating the Law—actually accused him of it afterwards. These were the same men who accused Stephen of speaking against the Law (Acts 6:13) and Paul of teaching contrary to Moses (Acts 21:21). Had Christ genuinely contravened the Law on this occasion, they would certainly have used it. Their silence is itself evidence that his response was legally sound.

The passage does not contradict Matthew 5:17. It is not the destruction of the Law—it is its fulfilment.

Sixthly: The Samaritan woman encounter—an instructive parallel from undisputed Scripture. This parallel is examined in detail in Section 6 above, but its direct relevance here is this: at the moment Christ spoke with the Samaritan woman, she was living in an adulterous arrangement, and Christ knew it. Yet he engaged her, honoured her with the most profound conversation in John's Gospel, and declined to demand any legal consequence—on the grounds, as commentary on that passage notes, that 'her heart condition must have been right'. If that principle governs Christ's conduct in John 4, it governs his conduct in John 8. The argument that Christ was 'obligated to agree to the stoning' cannot be sustained without equally condemning his response to the Samaritan woman—which no one proposes to do.

DIFFICULTY IV: 'HIDING EYES FROM SIN'—DOES CHRIST'S RESPONSE MAKE HIM COMPLICIT?

Difficulty IV—NT Studies, John 8:7 commentary

'Under the Mosaic Law, if a person hid his eyes from a sin as serious as adultery, he was considered to be as guilty as the one who committed the act.'

Resolution

Christ did not hide his eyes from the sin. He explicitly acknowledged—as Gill's commentary makes clear—that the woman's conduct, if the charge was true, was deserving of stoning under the Law. He then applied that very Law with precision, requiring the witnesses to be innocent of the same sin before they could lawfully proceed. He charged the woman directly to 'go and sin no more'. None of this is passivity. It is a masterly and legally exact engagement with every dimension of the situation—moral, procedural, and civil—that left both the accusers and the woman confronted with truth. There is no hiding of eyes here.

DIFFICULTY V: THE STATEMENT 'WITHOUT SIN' WOULD LOGICALLY HALT ALL RESPONSE TO ANY SIN

Difficulty V—NT Studies, John 8:7 commentary

'There is another fallacy with this supposed statement; namely, it would stop any criticism, for it implies that reacting to any sin—no matter how blatant—is a wrong attitude, since we are all sinners (Rom. 3:10). This spurious statement is a very nice way of telling others to keep quiet.'

Resolution

The difficulty arises from reading a statement made within a specific legal context as a sweeping general principle—which it was never intended to be. As established in Section 7 above, the Greek word *ἀναμάρτητος* (*anamartētos*, G361) does not mean 'without any sin whatsoever'. Clarke, drawing on Kypke's classical philological research, demonstrates that it means 'without sin of this particular kind'—that is, without the specific sin of adultery. The challenge is therefore addressed to the witnesses in their specific

judicial capacity, not to all humanity in general. Bengel and Meyer confirm this procedural-legal reading independently.

The result confirms this reading perfectly. The accusers did not depart because they were imperfect in some general sense—everyone present was imperfect, including the disciples standing nearby, none of whom departed. They departed because they were guilty of the specific sin of adultery, making them legally and morally unfit to serve as witnesses and first executors of the sentence in this particular proceeding. The statement did exactly what it was intended to do, nothing more and nothing less.

DIFFICULTY VI: THE PASSAGE WOULD ‘CONTRADICT AND DESTROY THE LAW’

Difficulty VI—NT Studies, John 8:7 commentary

‘In Matthew 5:17, Jesus said, “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.” If the incident in the eighth chapter of John were authentic, it would contradict and thus destroy the Law.’

Resolution

As the responses above demonstrate, the account does not contradict or destroy the Law. Christ applied Deuteronomy 17:7 precisely. He acknowledged the woman’s conduct as deserving of stoning. He declined to act as a civil magistrate—which was not his office—and declined to sanction an illegal execution under Roman law. He charged the woman directly to repent. None of this destroys the Law. The Law’s underlying purpose was always the eradication of sin from the people. Christ’s response served that purpose more effectively than a legally-defective, Roman-prohibited, witness-disqualified stoning ever could have done. The scribes and Pharisees’ own departure in convicted silence was itself a more powerful application of the Law’s moral force than any stone.

DIFFICULTY VII: THE FEAST-DAY CHRONOLOGY CREATES A CONTRADICTION

Difficulty VII—NT Studies, John 8:2 commentary

‘John 7:37 said it was the eighth (or last) day of the Feast of Tabernacles. If Jesus had gone to the Mount of Olives to spend the night and the incident with the adulterous woman occurred the next day, the feast would have been over. This discrepancy proves that John 7:53 through 8:11 is spurious because John 8:12 continues on with Jesus’ words on the eighth (last) day of the feast.’

Resolution

Pastor Russell addressed the chronological question directly in R2437–2438, identifying a ninth day—the *Shemini Atzeret*, the ‘Feast of Joy for the Law’—as a solemn continuation following the eighth day proper:

‘The ninth day, or day after the expiration of the eighth, which belonged to the “Feast of Tabernacles,” is a solemn day likewise, and is called, “The Feast of Joy for the Law”. . . On this ninth day the custom of the Jews was to take all the books of the Law out of the chest, and to put a candle into it, in allusion to Prov. 6:23, and more particularly to Psa. 119:105.’

—Pastor C. T. Russell, *Zion’s Watch Tower*, R2438, page 55

The events of John 7:53–8:11 most naturally occurred on this ninth day: every man to his booth, Christ to the Mount of Olives, and early the following morning back to the Temple. There is no discrepancy—only a narrative sequence across two days that makes complete sense once the existence of the ninth day is taken into account.

As for the ceremony of lights: it is argued that this ceremony on the eighth day provides the natural backdrop for ‘I am the light of the world’, and that the *pericope* therefore disrupts this connection. Consider, however, what it would mean if John 8:12 was spoken on the ninth day—the morning after the close of the light ceremony. The lights of the feast had been extinguished. The great golden lamps had been put away.¹³ Into that very absence, Christ stepped forward and declared: ‘I am the light of the world’. Is that not, in fact, the more resonant moment? The *pericope* does not destroy this thematic connection—it arguably deepens it considerably.

It should also be noted that removing the *pericope* creates its own narrative problem. John 7:52 ends mid-argument amongst Pharisees. John 8:12 begins with Christ teaching again in the Temple. The transition without the *pericope* is abrupt. With it, the narrative moves naturally and coherently through the close of the feast, the overnight retirement, and the following morning’s return.

DIFFICULTY VIII: JESUS COULD NOT HAVE WRITTEN IN A PAVED TEMPLE COURT

Difficulty VIII—NT Studies, John 8:6 commentary

‘To do so would have been impossible, however, for he was in the Temple in a paved court. He usually taught in Solomon’s Porch, which was stone. Incidentally, paintings of this incident show its taking place by the seashore where there is sand. The spurious account itself denies this setting by saying that Jesus was in the Temple (verse 2).’

Resolution

This difficulty, as commonly presented, conflates two distinct claims that need to be examined separately: a linguistic claim about what the Greek word for ‘writing’ and the preposition ‘into’ require, and a factual claim about the nature of the temple pavement. Both claims, on examination, are weaker than they first appear.

The Greek: *katagraphein* and *eis tēn gēn*

The ordinary Greek word for writing is *graphein* (G1125). John 8:6 uses a compound form: *katagraphein* (κατέγραψεν). This compound has been seized upon by some as proof that the text requires writing *into* a surface—carving or scratching into hard stone—but this reading gets the argument precisely backwards. The verb *katagraphein* carries the sense of purposeful, deliberate inscription—to write down a record, specifically to register something against someone. The same Greek word is used in the Septuagint rendering of Jeremiah 17:13, where those who forsake the Lord shall be ‘written in the earth’. Far from creating a problem, this compound verb deepens the passage’s scriptural resonance: Christ was not doodling idly but inscribing a record, silently, in the earth—precisely as the prophet had declared the unfaithful would be written. An Armenian manuscript tradition preserved exactly this understanding, translating the passage as: ‘*He himself, bowing his head, was writing with his finger on the earth to declare their sins; and they were seeing their several sins on the stones.*’ (David Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 99–100.) Whether or not that specific interpretation is accepted, the verb itself supports deliberate purposeful action, not a casual or impractical gesture.

¹³ Mishnah, Sukkah 5:2–4. The text records four golden menorot in the Court of the Women, each fifty cubits high with four golden bowls at the top, and states that “there was not a courtyard in Jerusalem that was not lit up from the light of the water-drawing.” Available at https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Sukkah.5.2.

The preposition is the second focus of this difficulty. The Greek reads *eis tēn gēn* (εἰς τὴν γῆν)—literally ‘into the earth’. The difficulty is that *eis*, as a preposition of directed motion or penetration, requires writing into rather than on a surface, and that a paved surface would make this impossible.

This is linguistically unsound. In Koine Greek, *eis* has a broad semantic range covering motion toward, contact with, and arrival at a surface—as well as literal penetration into it. The preposition denotes ‘the point reached or entered, of place, time, purpose, result’—meaning that ‘direction toward’ and ‘surface reached’ are well within its range, without requiring literal penetration. When one writes on paper, one writes toward and onto its surface; the preposition *eis* captures this directionality without implying the finger is pressed through the material. Indeed, *eis* is used throughout the New Testament in contexts where no penetration is intended: Matthew 2:11—the wise men came ‘into the house’ (*eis oikian*), which simply means they entered it; the curtain of the Temple was torn ‘into two’ (*eis duo*, Mark 15:38). The preposition describes directed motion and the object reached, not necessarily deep physical penetration. No scholar of Greek proposes that Christ was required to drive his finger into solid stone.

Furthermore, the noun *gē* (γῆ)—‘earth, ground, soil, land’—does not specify a paved floor. In a courtyard context during a harvest festival, ‘the ground’ most naturally refers to the surface material underfoot: accumulated dust, grit, loose material, and the organic debris of eight days of festival activity by tens of thousands of pilgrims. This is the natural referent of *gē* in this setting, independent of whatever lay beneath it.

The archaeology: what the Temple courts were actually like

Josephus is the primary ancient source for the Temple courts, and his testimony is explicit. In *Wars* 5.192 he stated that ‘those entire courts that were exposed to the air were laid with stones of all sorts.’ The open courts, including the Court of Women where the treasury was located, were indeed paved. This much is not in dispute, and the defence document has never suggested otherwise.

The critical question is what kind of paving—and here the archaeological evidence materially qualifies the picture. The Temple Mount Sifting Project has recovered over a hundred geometrically cut and polished stone tiles (*opus sectile*) (Snyder, Barkay, & Dvira, 2016). Analysis of these tiles suggests that the delicate polished pavement was most plausibly confined to the roofed porticoes and interior spaces, though the precise location remains a matter of scholarly discussion (Ritmeyer, 2016). The open courts, by contrast, were paved with large, thick slabs of local limestone—a relatively soft, porous material, very different from polished marble—as confirmed by surviving in-situ Herodian paving stones still visible on the Temple Mount today (Ritmeyer, 2016). Limestone paving of this kind is not a smooth, impermeable surface; it is uneven, with gaps and joints between slabs, and accumulates surface material readily.

After eight days of the Feast of Tabernacles—during which Leviticus 23:40 required pilgrims to carry palm fronds, boughs of leafy trees, and willows of the brook—tens of thousands of people had been passing through the Temple courts with these organic materials. The booths erected throughout Jerusalem were constructed from the same plant matter. The surface of an open limestone court after such a festival would not have resembled a modern tiled floor. Dust tracked in from the surrounding city, debris from the booth-building materials, loose grit between the limestone slabs, and the general accumulation of eight days of dense foot traffic would together have provided ample surface material for writing with a finger.

Josephus himself, in *Wars* Book VI, records a Roman soldier slipping on the temple pavement during the siege of 70 AD—evidence that the surface was stone, not evidence that it was impractically smooth. A

stone floor after eight days of festival use is a very different thing from a freshly laid polished surface. And writing in the accumulated surface material of such a floor—dust, grit, organic debris—is not the same as attempting to carve into polished stone.

The deeper point: Jeremiah 17:13

The physical arguments, taken together, resolve the practical difficulty. But they should not be allowed to obscure the theological significance of what Christ was doing. Jeremiah 17:13 declares: ‘O Lord, the hope of Israel, all that forsake thee shall be ashamed, and they that depart from me shall be written in the earth.’ Christ’s writing in the dust was almost certainly a deliberate and visible scriptural allusion—a silent, living enactment of the prophet’s words, directed against those who, in seeking to trap him, had forsaken the very righteousness they claimed to uphold. The verb *katagraphein*—to write down a record—makes the allusion still more precise. This is not the kind of detail that a late forger would think to include. It is the kind of layered, allusive, quietly precise scriptural gesture that characterises the authentic Christ of the Gospels throughout his ministry.

Albert Barnes adds a further practical observation: the act also demonstrated Christ’s deliberate unwillingness to pronounce a civil judgement—visually reinforcing the same principle he expressed verbally in Luke 12:13–14—buying time, reducing the tension around the accused woman, and redirecting the attention of the accusers from her to themselves.

DIFFICULTY IX: ‘BEGINNING AT THE ELDEST’—CONSIDERED AND RESOLVED

Difficulty IX—NT Studies, John 8:9 commentary

‘Verse 9 states, “They . . . went out one by one, beginning at the eldest.” This is too fictional to be credible. Did the scribes and Pharisees all stand there and inquire who was the oldest so that they could exit in this order? Of course not!’

Resolution

Stated in those terms, the verse may seem implausible—but that is not what the Greek actually says. Adam Clarke’s commentary is unambiguous: ‘Beginning at the eldest even unto the last—ἀπὸ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ἕως τῶν ἐσχάτων—from the most honourable to those of the least repute. In this sense the words are undoubtedly to be understood.’ The phrase means simply that those of greatest social standing—those with most to lose publicly—felt the conviction most keenly and left first. This is entirely natural human behaviour, requiring no contrived protocol of age-ordering whatsoever. The most senior figures, with the most at stake reputationally, departed first. This is entirely natural human behaviour, requiring no contrived protocol of age-ordering.

DIFFICULTY X: THE WOMAN SHOWS NO REPENTANCE

Difficulty X—NT Studies, John 8:11 commentary

‘Here is another flaw, for nothing was said about the woman’s asking for forgiveness. There was just a blanket statement, “Go, and sin no more.” Nothing was said about her repentance, and repentance is essential in order for forgiveness to be extended.’

Resolution

This difficulty, if pressed consistently, would create difficulties in other undisputed passages. The Samaritan woman expressed no formal repentance during her encounter with Christ. The man healed at Bethesda (John 5:14) received healing before being charged to ‘sin no more’. The sinful woman of Luke 7,

though she wept, made no verbal profession of repentance before Christ forgave her sins. Christ consistently engaged with sinners before a formal verbal declaration of repentance—the charge to ‘go and sin no more’ in John 8:11 is itself a call to repentance and a direct moral injunction against the sin in question. The difficulty proves too much.

The Luke 7 comparison deserves particular attention. That woman wept openly—her repentance was visible and demonstrable. The woman of John 8 made no such visible display. This contrast is, in fact, the very reason Augustine gives for why certain scribes removed the John 8 passage: they feared it would be misused to excuse adultery, precisely because the woman’s repentance was not as unmistakably on display as in Luke 7. In Augustine’s words, they removed it ‘as if he who had said “sin no more” had granted permission to sin.’ That is not a verdict of spuriousness. It is evidence that the passage was well-known, actively read alongside Luke 7, and felt sufficiently established to be worth the trouble of deliberate removal. Passages that do not exist do not need to be suppressed. The parallel with John 4, examined in detail in Section 6, reinforces the same point: if the operative principle in Christ’s dealings with a current adulteress is her inward disposition rather than her external legal situation, it applies equally here.

It is also worth considering the woman’s situation in John 8 specifically. She had been publicly dragged before a crowd and used as a pawn in a political trap. When her accusers fled one by one, convicted by an invisible hand, she was left standing alone before the Lord. She addressed him as ‘Lord’—not ‘teacher’, not ‘rabbi’, but ‘Lord’. That is not the response of an indifferent sinner. Gill concludes: Christ ‘called her to repentance, and, as the merciful and compassionate Saviour, gave her reason to hope pardon and eternal life.’

DIFFICULTY XI: THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES ADDRESS JESUS AS ‘MASTER’—CONSIDERED AND RESOLVED

Difficulty XI—NT Studies, John 8:4 commentary

‘On rare occasions, an individual who was seeking to trap Jesus addressed him as “Master,” but it would be incongruous for the scribes and Pharisees to do so as a group when they wanted to kill him. So here is still another flaw.’

Resolution

This argument would, if accepted, require the rejection of several other passages where the Pharisees use exactly the same form of address: Matthew 12:38; 22:15–16, 24, 36; Mark 12:14. Are all of these spurious because the Pharisees call Jesus ‘Master’? Evidently not. The title was a common courtesy—used in some cases respectfully, in others with deliberate condescension or sarcasm. Its appearance in John 8:4 is entirely consistent with the broader Gospel portrait of these men. This difficulty does not, however, withstand examination.

SUMMARY OF DIFFICULTIES AND RESOLUTIONS

The following table provides a quick-reference overview of the eleven difficulties examined in this section, together with the primary grounds for each response and the principal evidence cited.

Difficulty	Resolution (summary)	Principal evidence
I. ‘Every man went unto to his own house’—impossible during the feast	‘Own house’ means each pilgrim’s booth or temporary lodging, not a permanent dwelling elsewhere	Leviticus 23:42; Russell R2437
II. Scribes and Pharisees would not bring a woman into the Temple	The Gospels and Talmud confirm these men were adulterous and hypocritical; outward fastidiousness and inward immorality are not mutually exclusive	John 7:19; Matthew 23:27; Mishnah <i>Sotah</i> 9:9; Hosea 4:14
III. Jesus would have been obligated to agree to the stoning	Six independent grounds: Roman capital jurisdiction; absent male party; disqualified witnesses; dispensational transition; fulfilment not destruction of Law; parallel of John 4. Also: the proceeding was entrapment, itself contrary to Deuteronomy 19:15–21	John 18:31; Deuteronomy 22:22; 17:7; 19:15–21; Clarke/Kypke on ἀναμάρτητος; John 3:17
IV. ‘Hiding eyes from sin’—does Christ’s response make him complicit?	Christ did not hide his eyes—he applied the Law precisely, disqualified the witnesses, charged the woman directly, and declined to sanction an illegal execution	Deuteronomy 17:7; Gill; Luke 12:13–14
V. The statement ‘without sin’ would logically halt all response to any sin	ἀναμάρτητος means ‘without this kind of sin’—the challenge is addressed to witnesses in a specific legal capacity, not to all humanity in general	Clarke/Kypke; Bengel; Meyer; Romans 2:22; Hosea 4:14
VI. The passage would ‘contradict and destroy the Law’	Christ fulfilled the Law precisely—Deuteronomy 17:7 applied, Roman law observed, witnesses disqualified; moral force of Law upheld more powerfully than a defective stoning could have done	Matthew 5:17; Deuteronomy 17:7; John 18:31
VII. The feast-day chronology creates a contradiction	A ninth day (<i>Shemini Atzeret</i> , ‘Feast of Joy for the Law’) follows the eighth; the events span that transition naturally; removing the pericope creates its own narrative problem	Russell R2437–2438; Tabernacles typology (light/water)
VIII. Jesus could not have written on a paved Temple court	<i>Eis tēn gēn</i> means directed contact with the surface, not carving into stone; limestone paving after eight days of festival accumulates ample surface material; <i>katagraphēin</i> echoes Jeremiah 17:13	Josephus <i>Wars</i> 5.192; Temple Mount Sifting Project; Liddell-Scott; Parker 1997, pp. 99–100
IX. ‘Beginning at the eldest’ is too fictional to be credible	The phrase means from the most honourable to those of least repute—those with most to lose publicly left first; no contrived age-ordering required	Adam Clarke on John 8:9
X. The woman shows no repentance	Same standard applied to John 4 and Luke 7 would disqualify those undisputed passages; ‘go and sin no more’ is itself a call to repentance; she addressed Christ as ‘Lord’	John 5:14; Luke 7:36–50; John 4; Augustine <i>Tractatus</i> 33
XI. The scribes and Pharisees address Jesus as ‘Master’—incongruous	The Pharisees address Christ as ‘Master’ in multiple undisputed passages; the title was a common courtesy used also in hostile contexts	Matthew 12:38; 22:15–16, 24, 36; Mark 12:14

9. A SURVEY OF COMMENTARY WITNESSES

The following commentators, spanning several centuries, are among those who engage positively with the passage or whose observations bear directly on the evidence. It is worth noting how consistently the classical commentators—far from dismissing the passage—find it theologically coherent and legally precise.

JOHN CALVIN (1509–1564)

Calvin is worth noting precisely because his acceptance of the passage is honest and careful—he does not pretend the textual question does not exist, but having weighed it, he accepts the passage for use. His exact words on John 8:3 are: *‘It is plain enough that this passage was unknown anciently to the Greek Churches; and some conjecture that it has been brought from some other place and inserted here. But as it has always been received by the Latin Churches, and is found in many old Greek manuscripts, and contains nothing unworthy of an Apostolic Spirit, there is no reason why we should refuse to apply it to our advantage.’* (Commentary on John, on John 8:3.) This is a measured verdict from a Reformer with no interest in defending spurious texts—and his conclusion is that the passage should be received and used.

ADAM CLARKE (1760–1832)

Clarke’s commentary is among the most legally precise available. His philological analysis of ἀναμάρτητος (*anamartētos*, G361)—drawing on Kypke’s *Observationes Sacrae*—establishes that ‘he that is without sin’ refers specifically to freedom from the same kind of sin, not general sinlessness, and is the cornerstone of the treatment in Section 7 and the resolutions of Difficulties III and V in Section 8. Clarke also clarifies that ‘beginning at the eldest’ means from the most honourable to those of least repute, and identifies the treasury as located in the Court of Women, directly corroborating the plausibility of the setting.

JOHN GILL (1697–1771)

Gill provides the crucial Talmudic evidence about the cessation of the *sotah* trial, confirms the endemic nature of adultery among the religious leadership of that generation, and demonstrates that Christ’s challenge—‘he that is without sin’—refers specifically to freedom from adultery, not from sin in general: *‘meaning, not that was entirely free from sin. . . but that was without any notorious sin, or was not guilty of some scandalous sin, and particularly this of adultery.’* He demonstrates that Christ’s response was a precise application of Deuteronomy 17:7, and concludes that Christ neither connived at the sin nor abrogated the Law, but ‘called her to repentance, and, as the merciful and compassionate Saviour, gave her reason to hope pardon and eternal life.’

JOHANN ALBRECHT BENDEL (1687–1752)

Bengel’s *Gnomon Novi Testamenti*—one of the most respected works of New Testament philology—concur with Clarke’s procedural-legal reading of ἀναμάρτητος (*anamartētos*, G361), confirming that Christ’s challenge is addressed to those acting in a specific judicial and witness capacity, not to all humanity in general. His independent concurrence from within a rigorous German Protestant philological tradition adds weight to the argument.

HEINRICH AUGUST WILHELM MEYER (1800–1873)

Meyer’s *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of John*—a work of exacting philological precision—likewise confirms that ἀναμάρτητος (*anamartētos*, G361) in John 8:7 denotes freedom from the specific sin in question, not from sin in general. Meyer was one of the most rigorous philologists of the nineteenth century, and his concurrence with Clarke and Bengel—from an entirely independent scholarly standpoint—carries particular weight.

ALBERT BARNES (1798–1870)

Barnes explains Christ’s writing in the dust as a deliberate demonstration of his unwillingness to act as a civil judge—a pattern consistent with Luke 12:13–14. His commentary is careful and practically-minded, and is helpful on several of the more practical difficulties identified in the passage.

MATTHEW HENRY (1662–1714)

Henry’s commentary on the Samaritan woman (John 4) demonstrates the pattern of Christ’s gentle but honest engagement with women in morally compromised situations—not accusing directly but pointing to the truth and leaving it to work on the conscience. This pattern is entirely consistent with what is described in the *pericope*, and Henry’s observation that Christ ‘doth not call her strumpet, but tells her, He with whom thou livest is not thy husband: and then leaves it to her own conscience to say the rest’ is instructive.

JAMIESON, FAUSSET AND BROWN

Their commentary on John 8:20 makes the geographical connection explicit: *‘This may confirm the genuineness of John 8:2–11, as the place where the woman was brought.’* This is a straightforward statement from a major reference commentary that the internal evidence of the passage supports its authenticity.

VINCENT’S WORD STUDIES

Vincent identifies the treasury as situated in the Court of Women—providing independent geographical corroboration for the setting of the encounter.

F. B. MEYER (1847–1929)

F. B. Meyer’s verdict is worth restating in full here:

‘This passage has been the subject of much controversy, but there is no possibility of accounting for it except on the supposition that this incident really took place. It reveals in our Lord’s character such tenderness, wisdom, hatred of sin, and insight into the heart of man, that it is impossible to suppose that any evangelist could have invented the story.’

—F. B. Meyer, *Through the Bible Commentary*, on John 8:1–11

That observation—that the passage reveals something about Christ that no forger could have constructed—is, in the end, one of the most compelling arguments of all.

DEAN JOHN WILLIAM BURGON (1813–1888)

Burton’s *The Causes of the Corruption of the Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels* (posthumous, ed. Edward Miller, 1896) remains the most substantial defence of the passage within the Majority Text tradition. His *The Revision Revised* (1881) is equally essential—it provides the most thorough scholarly critique of the two manuscripts (Sinaiticus and Vaticanus) upon which the dismissal of the passage chiefly rests, documenting their internal corruption in statistical detail and characterising the critical elevation of those two manuscripts as a superstition that he described as ‘blind’. Burgon personally collated both manuscripts and knew his subject at first hand. His work is essential reading for anyone wishing to pursue this subject seriously.

10. PASTOR RUSSELL AND THE PASSAGE



For those within the Bible Student tradition, what Pastor Russell made of this passage is directly relevant. In multiple published writings, spanning both the Watch Tower reprints and the canonical volumes of *Studies in the Scriptures*, Russell treats the passage as authentic Scripture without any qualification or caveat whatsoever.

One preliminary observation should be made in the interests of full honesty. In his own published writings of the 1880s, Russell endorsed the Sinaitic, Vatican, and Alexandrine manuscripts as ‘the very best authority’ for the New Testament text (*Zion’s Watch Tower*, R434), and the Watch Tower of the same period published Tischendorf’s extended argument for the priority of these three manuscripts approvingly (R1144). It is therefore accurate to say that Russell’s published position on the manuscript question aligned with the Alexandrian stream rather than the Majority Text tradition. This makes his acceptance of the *pericope* all the more significant: here was a man who regarded Sinaiticus and Vaticanus as the foremost manuscript authorities, and who nevertheless cited John 7:53–8:11 as genuine Scripture without caveat or qualification across decades of published writing. The manuscript question, for Russell, was evidently not decisive on this passage—and that is itself a meaningful observation for those who follow his method.

THE NEW CREATION—VOLUME 6 OF STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES

Perhaps the most significant of all the Russell references is one found not in a Watch Tower article but in Volume 6 of *Studies in the Scriptures*—*The New Creation*—the volume carrying the greatest doctrinal weight of all his writings for Bible Students. In Study IX, ‘The Judgment of the New Creation’ (pages F405–F406), Russell is developing his teaching on the Law of Love and the spirit of the fallen nature that delights in condemning others. He contrasts this with the spirit of the Lord Jesus, and reaches directly for the *Pericope Adulterae* as his primary illustration:

‘As our noble, loving Master declared on one occasion, when asked to condemn a sinner: “Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone.” The person without frailties of his own might be to some extent excusable for assuming unbidden of the Lord the position of executioner of Justice—taking vengeance on wrongdoers, exposing them, etc.; but we find that our Master, who knew no sin, had so much Love in his heart that he was disposed rather to condone and forgive than to punish and expose and berate.’

—Pastor C. T. Russell, *STUDIES IN THE SCRIPTURES*, Vol. 6, *The New Creation*, Study IX, pp. F405–F406

Several things deserve attention here. Firstly, Russell quotes John 8:7 directly and without any caveat, as an authoritative saying of ‘our noble, loving Master’—placing it on precisely the same level as any other authoritative saying of the Lord Jesus in the Gospels. Secondly, he draws a specific theological inference from the incident about the character of Christ: that he ‘who knew no sin’—and who therefore could have cast the first stone had he chosen—deliberately declined to do so, out of love. Russell’s use of the word ‘condone’ here clearly means to show compassion rather than to excuse or approve of sin—the entire passage is about the Law of Love producing mercy rather than harsh condemnation, not about indifference to wrongdoing. The very next sentence in his argument is that Christ was ‘disposed rather to condone and forgive than to punish and expose and berate’—the contrast is with punishment and exposure, not with moral standards. Thirdly, this passage appears in one of the six canonical volumes of *Studies in the Scriptures*—not a periodical article but a work intended as a permanent doctrinal resource. Its appearance there without any textual qualification is a witness of the highest order for this audience.

There is also a specific point here that adds to the response to those who argue Christ would have been ‘obligated to agree to the stoning.’ Russell’s observation is that Christ ‘knew no sin’ and therefore, if anyone could have cast the first stone, it was he—and he chose not to. This is not a failure of legal obligation. It is the supreme expression of the Law of Love by the one person who had every right to apply the Law in full and declined to do so. Russell’s reading of the passage directly resolves the difficulty.

ZION’S WATCH TOWER—R3434

In his article ‘*Sons and Daughters of Consolation—Comfort*’ (R3434, page 291), Russell holds up the account as a primary illustration of the compassionate character of Christ:

‘Note the case of the woman taken in sin, and our Lord’s failure to make any pharisaical tirade against her. Mark his reproof to those who stood by: “He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone.” Mark how, when they were all thus convicted of imperfection in some particular themselves, our Lord said to the woman, “Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more.” (John 8:3–11.)’

—Pastor C. T. Russell, *Zion’s Watch Tower*, R3434, page 291

There is no asterisk here. No note of caution. No suggestion that the passage is textually uncertain. Russell uses John 8:3–11 as a straightforward, authoritative illustration of the character of the Lord Jesus—the very character that his followers are called to emulate. The witness is clear.

R5095—THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST’S MINISTRY

In R5095, Russell summarises the spirit of Christ’s ministry in words that draw unmistakably on John 8:11: ‘*He was not forever blaming them for not keeping the Law, but, on the contrary, He was continually expressing sympathy for them in their weaknesses, and helping them out of them and encouraging them to “go and sin no more.”*’ That phrase—‘*go and sin no more*’—is used as a characterisation of the whole of Christ’s earthly ministry, drawn directly from the language of the *pericope*. Russell plainly regarded it as expressive of who Christ was.

R2437–2438, R5033, R1921, R4130

In R2437–2438, Russell’s detailed account of the Feast of Tabernacles—including his identification of the ninth day, the *Shemini Atzeret*, as a solemn continuation—provides the chronological framework that resolves the feast-day difficulty. In R5033 and R1921, his notes on the sinful woman of Luke 7 establish the theological basis on which Christ could extend forgiveness during his earthly ministry: the ransom price was already effectively on the altar. And in R4130, his discussion of the Samaritan woman demonstrates Christ’s consistent pattern of gentle engagement with those in morally compromised situations—a pattern entirely consistent with what is described in John 8.

In short: Pastor Russell accepted the *pericope* as genuine across multiple works spanning decades of ministry. He used it doctrinally in the canonical volumes of *Studies in the Scriptures*. He used it pastorally in the Watch Tower reprints. He resolved the main chronological difficulty, supplied the theological basis for Christ’s forgiveness, and identified the spirit of the passage as quintessentially expressive of the Law of Love that Christ embodied. Those within the Bible Student tradition who dismiss this passage are, on this point at least, departing from the Pastor’s guidance.

II. CONCLUSION

It is a very serious matter to dismiss any portion of Holy Scripture as spurious. It is a far more serious matter to attribute it to an evil spirit. The evidence assembled in this document—manuscript, patristic, historical, legal, literary, theological, and contextual—does not support the dismissal of John 7:53–8:11 as spurious. It emphatically

does not support the suggestion that it is of diabolical origin. These suggestions were the occasion for this document; it is submitted that the evidence gathered here shows such suggestions to be without foundation, and that those who make them, in respect of John 7:53–8:11, take upon themselves a weight of responsibility the evidence does not justify and that this document has endeavoured to show is not warranted.

The manuscript case against the passage, when examined with precision rather than deference to critical fashion, resolves into this: the passage is absent from the Alexandrian stream—a geographically localised tradition centred in Egypt, represented primarily by two manuscripts whose textual character has been sharply disputed by scholars such as Burgon and Hoskier—and present in the Antiochian stream overwhelmingly, across 90% or more of all surviving Greek manuscripts, the full Byzantine lectionary tradition, the Old Latin versions, and the Latin Vulgate. The theoretical underpinning of the Alexandrian priority—Westcott and Hort’s ‘Neutral text’ hypothesis—has been substantially abandoned by mainstream critical scholarship itself. The modern critical committee that produced the text most widely cited against the passage assigned it a {C} rating: considerable doubt. Even the primary Alexandrian manuscripts contain internal markers—umlauts in both Sinaiticus and Vaticanus, anomalies in P66—showing their scribes were aware of the passage’s existence. The scribe of Sinaiticus was documented to have committed the commonest of all copyist errors—omission—no fewer than 115 times in the New Testament alone.

The difficulties identified in this passage, when examined carefully, each admit of a considered resolution. The feast-day difficulty is resolved by Pastor Russell’s own identification of the ninth day, the Feast of Joy for the Law. The ‘obligated to stone’ difficulty is resolved on six independent grounds—Roman law, the absent male party, disqualified witnesses, the dispensational transition, the fulfilment rather than destruction of the Law, the parallel of John 4—with the further observation that the entire proceeding was an act of entrapment contrary to Deuteronomy 19:15–21, which the accusers had already violated before Christ spoke a single word. The ‘without sin’ difficulty is resolved by Adam Clarke’s citation of Kypke’s classical philological research—ἀναμάρτητος means ‘without sin of this kind’—confirmed by Gill, Bengel, and Meyer. The writing-on-the-ground difficulty is resolved by the physical reality of the Temple courts, the Armenian manuscript tradition, and the scriptural echo of Jeremiah 17:13. The vocabulary difficulty is addressed statistically by Johnson and Punch: John 2:13–17 performs worse than the *pericope* on every metric; John 4 contains eighteen hapax including two absolute New Testament hapax. The ‘no repentance’ difficulty proves too much, disqualifying undisputed passages by its own logic. The Jerome/Roman Catholic origin claim is refuted by Papias, the *Didascalia*, the *Apostolic Constitutions*, Pacian, Ambrose, and Augustine—all independent witnesses predating or contemporary with Jerome. And the manuscript case against the passage rests on a critical theory that Canon Cook—an independent Church of England scholar whose work on the Revised Version was entirely separate from Burgon’s—described as ‘entirely destitute of historical foundation’, and that Scrivener, who sat on the Revision Committee itself, described as ‘*destitute not only of historical foundation but of all probability.*’

The positive evidence is substantial. The Feast of Tabernacles provides not merely a backdrop but an exact typological framework: Christ’s response to the water-pouring ceremony (*‘if any man thirst, come unto me’*) and his response to the lamp-lighting ceremony (*‘I am the light of the world’*) bracket the encounter with the woman precisely—the *pericope* is structurally the enacted fulfilment of the declaration that immediately follows it. Burgon’s narrative rupture argument is unanswerable: John 7:52 ends in the middle of a hostile council chamber debate; John 8:12 opens with Christ teaching again—with no transition, no movement, no account of how he came to be there. The *pericope* supplies exactly that account. Von Soden—who rejected the passage’s authenticity—disposed of the ‘floating tradition’ argument on purely evidential grounds: the passage had a single fixed original

location, and the variant placements are secondary. Hodges and Farstad, approaching the evidence without confessional sympathy for the passage, stated that if it were not original, its composer would have to be regarded as a Johannine imitator of implausible skill, and its placement *‘the shrewdest piece of interpolation in literary history.’* Hilgenfeld and Steck—hostile critical scholars—conceded that deletion through moralistic nervousness was the more credible explanation than scribal insertion. Didymus the Blind knew and cited the passage in Alexandria, in the same century as the manuscripts that omit it—direct evidence that the Alexandrian omission was scribal-liturgical, not a reflection of ignorance. The Harclean Syriac deliberately reintroduced the passage from the Greek Antiochian stream, confirming it was known and recognised as belonging to the authentic text. The Pauline principle that doctrine must be tested against Scripture, not Scripture bent to serve doctrine, applies with equal force to the proposed alternative reading of Revelation 20:7 that underlies one of the key objections—a reading that rests on a corrector’s mark unattested in any other manuscript, in a suffix usage unattested anywhere in the Greek language, which the Codex Sinaiticus Project’s own scholarly edition does not support.

It is also worth noting, in the context of the manuscript argument, what lies behind the critical tradition that has shaped the modern dismissal of this passage. The Greek text underlying the *Emphatic Diaglott*—which played a foundational role in the early Bible Student movement—was that of Griesbach, who could examine Codex Vaticanus only under strict supervision, without writing materials, committing its readings to memory and recording them later from memory. The Westcott-Hort system that subsequently elevated Vaticanus to near-supreme authority was built upon a genealogical theory that Westcott and Hort’s own colleagues on the Revision Committee—including Scrivener—regarded as ‘destitute not only of historical foundation but of all probability.’ These are not peripheral considerations. They bear directly on the authority that has been accorded to the two Egyptian manuscripts whose omission of the passage is the primary basis for its dismissal.

And the pattern of three encounters—Luke 7, John 4, John 8—speaks with one voice. In each case Christ knew the woman’s moral condition, declined to demand legal consequences, gently addressed the sin, and left her with an explicit or implicit call to repentance. That pattern is recognisably, consistently, authentically Christ. A forger would need to have understood the entire Johannine portraiture of Christ’s character, the legal framework of first-century Judaea, the Talmudic history of the *Sotah* trial, the geography of the Temple courts, the Tabernacles typological framework, the nuance of Deuteronomy 17:7, and the echo of Jeremiah 17:13—and to have woven all of these into twelve verses that fit their narrative context more organically than the surrounding text does without them. That is not the profile of a forgery. It is the profile of authentic history.

Above all, the passage is consistent—deeply, naturally consistent—with the dispensational context of Christ’s ministry, with the new administration of mercy, repentance, and grace inaugurated by John the Baptist, with the theological reality that the ransom price was already being laid on the altar, and with the governing principle of the First Advent that Christ himself stated: *‘God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.’* (John 3:17)

Charles Taze Russell—who in his own published writings of the 1880s endorsed Sinaiticus and Vaticanus as ‘the very best authority’ for the New Testament text, and who was therefore no uncritical defender of the Majority Text tradition—nevertheless cited John 7:53–8:11 as genuine Scripture without qualification or caveat across decades of published writing, used it doctrinally in the canonical volumes of *Studies in the Scriptures*, drew from it the governing principle of the Law of Love, and answered questions about the related chronology consistently with the plain reading of the passage. That is not the behaviour of a man who regarded these twelve verses as spurious, still less as diabolically inspired.

Pastor Russell, opening his article *‘Sons and Daughters of Consolation—Comfort’* (*Zion’s Watch Tower*, R3434), reflected on the surname given to Joseph by the Apostles: *‘Barnabas; which is, being interpreted, the son of consolation [comfort] (Acts 4:36)’*—and observed that to bear such a name tells *‘a whole volume in itself respecting the general character of the person.’* From that starting point he drew from Christ’s conduct in John 8 a broader lesson about the spirit that should characterise the Lord’s people: that the measure of growth in grace is the capacity to be sons and daughters of consolation—comforters rather than condemners—and that *‘those who are making greatest progress in this direction, as comforters in Zion, are growing most in grace’* (R3434:293). He drew the same lesson from Christ’s gentle dealings with Peter after the denial—noting that *‘so far as the record shows, our Lord did not once mention to Peter either his profanity or his disloyalty’*, and that the nearest approach to reproof was the quiet inquiry, *‘Lovest thou me?’*—holding both accounts up as illustrations of the one consistent spirit. His closing appeal to the brethren was to unity, peace, and brotherly kindness: *‘Let us more and more be worthy of the name Barnabas—Comforter of the brethren... that we may be all sons and daughters of comfort in Zion, representatives of our Father, and channels of the holy Spirit’* (R3434:296). To attribute the passage that Russell held up as the primary illustration of that principle to diabolical origin is, in the light of his own teaching, a position without foundation. The article repays careful reading in full. In a spirit of genuine fraternal concern, and not of controversy, it is submitted that the wiser and more scripturally consistent course is to receive this passage as what the great majority of the Christian tradition—including Pastor Russell himself, across multiple canonical works—has always regarded it to be: **an authentic and precious portion of the inspired Word of God.**



‘There remained two: the wretched one and mercy.’
—Augustine of Hippo, *In Johannis Evangelium Tractatus*



‘He that is without sin—ἀναμάρτητος (*anamartētos*, G₃₆₁),
meaning the same kind of sin,
adultery, fornication, etc. Kypke has largely
proved that the verb ἁμαρτανεῖν (*hamartanein*, G₂₆₄)
is used in this sense by the best Greek writers.’

—Adam Clarke, *Commentary on the Bible*, on John 8:7

APPENDIX: THE REVELATION 20:7 READING IN *THE KEYS OF REVELATION*—A TEXTUAL NOTE

The Keys of Revelation—a formally published work attributed to Frank Shallieu—advances a specific interpretation of Revelation 20:7 based on what it identifies as a distinctive reading in Codex Sinaiticus. The same volume, as noted in Section 4 of this document, describes Sinaiticus as ‘the oldest and generally most reliable manuscript’ (p. 16, footnote) and applies this assessment in its textual judgements throughout. Since the dismissal of the *Pericope Adulterae* in the *New Testament Studies* rests on the same confidence in Sinaiticus and Vaticanus as the superior manuscript tradition, it is relevant to examine what the Revelation 20:7 reading actually rests on, and whether that reliance on Sinaiticus is as secure as *The Keys* assumes.

Frank Shallieu was evidently a man of serious classical formation—by some accounts, he delivered his valedictory address in Latin. The observations that follow are not offered as a correction of amateurish work. They are offered as a considered scholarly engagement with a position taken by a serious student of Scripture, in a field where serious scholars regularly reach different conclusions from the same evidence. The disagreement is not personal; it is textual.

WHAT THE READING PROPOSES

The Keys of Revelation, commenting on Revelation 20:7 (pp. 521–522), argues that the Sinaitic manuscript preserves a reading that places Satan’s loosing within the Millennium rather than at its very end. The standard text reads: ‘And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed’—the Greek verb at issue being *telesthē* (τελεσθῆ), the aorist passive subjunctive of *teleō*, meaning ‘to end’ or ‘to complete.’ *The Keys* argues that Sinaiticus records a distinctive form—*telesthēse*—which it interprets as meaning ‘toward completion’ or ‘nearing its end,’ thereby placing Satan’s loosing within the Millennium as it approaches its close, rather than after it has fully concluded.

The standard translation of every major version—including the official scholarly edition of Codex Sinaiticus produced by the collaborative project of the British Library, Leipzig University Library, the National Library of Russia, and St Catherine’s Monastery—renders the verse as ‘when the thousand years are finished,’ without qualification or temporal ambiguity.

THE MANUSCRIPT EVIDENCE

The Keys of Revelation itself acknowledges (p. 521) that the suffix in Sinaiticus that produces the proposed reading ‘was added by a later correctionist’ and that dots were subsequently placed above the relevant letters—the standard Sinaitic scribal convention for cancellation or query. In other words: the proposed reading was not present in the original hand of the manuscript; it was added by a later corrector; and that addition was then itself marked as doubtful by a further stage of the manuscript’s own correcting tradition.

The reading appears in no other Greek manuscript of Revelation. H. C. Hoskier—the scholar who produced the most exhaustive independent collation of Revelation manuscripts ever undertaken, examining all available witnesses over three decades and publishing his findings in two volumes (*Concerning the Text of the Apocalypse*, London: Bernard Quaritch, 1929)—concluded that Revelation 20:7 exhibits no meaningful textual variation across the manuscript tradition. Hoskier was not a simple defender of the Received Text; his findings at this verse are those of an independent specialist. The entire weight of the manuscript tradition—including Sinaiticus itself, in its original hand—reads the plain *telesthē*.

THE GRAMMATICAL QUESTION

The interpretation of *telesthēse* as ‘toward completion’ or ‘nearing its end’ depends on reading the appended *-se* as a Greek directional suffix carrying a sense of tendency or approach. The suffix *-se* (alongside *-de* and *-ze*) is a

locative directional suffix, documented in standard Greek reference grammars—including Herbert Weir Smyth’s *Greek Grammar* (Harvard University Press, 1920, §341–342)—as attaching to place nouns and place adverbs to indicate motion toward a place: *allōse* (‘to another place’), *oikade* (‘homeward’), *Athēnaze* (‘to Athens’). These are its documented usages in classical and Koine Greek.

There is no attested example in classical Greek, Koine Greek, or the Greek of the New Testament period of this suffix being appended to a verbal ending to modify its aspect or temporal meaning. The extension of the suffix’s function from directional adverbs to verbal forms would be, in grammatical terms, without precedent in the Greek literature. This does not mean the proposal is impossible—grammatical usage is never perfectly uniform—but it means the argument carries a burden of demonstration that the manuscript evidence does not supply.

WHAT PASTOR RUSSELL CONCLUDED

It is worth noting—not as a point of authority, but as a matter of straightforward historical record—that Pastor Russell himself, when asked directly about the relationship between the thousand years and the Little Season, answered without hesitation: ‘We answer that it will be before. When the thousand years are finished Christ will deliver the kingdom up to the Father’ (Q423:1, 1911). In a separate answer addressing the sequence of Satan’s destruction and the abolition of death, Russell stated equally plainly that ‘in the close of that reign he will be loosed for a little season’ (Q827:2). Both answers place Satan’s loosing at the termination of the Millennial reign, consistent with the standard rendering ‘when the thousand years are expired.’ If the standard text presented a difficulty for Russell’s own chronological framework, he gave no indication of it.

A NOTE ON METHODOLOGICAL CONSISTENCY

The Keys of Revelation at Revelation 20:4 (pp. 514–515) concludes, straightforwardly, that Sinaiticus has ‘apparently incorrectly transcribed’ the expression ‘a thousand years,’ and summons other manuscript witnesses to establish the correct reading. This is sound textual method: a lone Sinaitic reading is weighed against the broader tradition and found wanting. At Revelation 20:7, however, a corrector’s addition in the same manuscript—itsself queried by the manuscript’s own correcting tradition, absent from every other witness, and resting on a suffix usage without grammatical parallel—is treated as a key to the verse’s meaning, overriding the unanimous reading of the entire tradition. The method applied to verse 4 and the method applied to verse 7 are not consistent with each other.

This inconsistency is noted here not to reflect on Frank Shallieu’s scholarship in general, but because it is directly relevant to how the same document’s dismissal of the *Pericope Adulterae* should be weighed. If the manuscript argument for an alternative reading of Revelation 20:7 does not hold up to examination, readers are entitled to apply that finding to the broader confidence in Sinaiticus and Vaticanus that underlies the dismissal of John 7:53–8:11. The two questions are connected. The argument is with the manuscript methodology, not the man.

NOTES AND SUPPLEMENTARY REFERENCES

The following notes provide supplementary references, biographical identifications, and definitional information for terms and persons mentioned in the document. They are gathered here as a separate reference section rather than as individually cited footnotes in the body text. Readers who wish to verify the identity of a person, manuscript, or technical term mentioned in the main argument may consult the relevant entry here by subject. The notes are arranged in the order in which their subjects first appear in the document.

Note 1. On Greek grammatical terminology used in this document: *aorist*—a tense denoting a completed action viewed as a whole; *subjunctive*—a mood expressing contingency or future reference, used in temporal clauses introduced by conjunctions such as *hotan* (‘when/whenever’); *homoioteleuton*—a scribal error in which the eye slips from one phrase to a later phrase with a similar ending, omitting all intervening text. See Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*, 3rd ed. (Zondervan, 2009); Metzger, *Manuscripts of the Greek Bible* (Oxford University Press, 1981).

Note 2. Codex Sinaiticus Project—online scholarly edition confirming the standard rendering of Revelation 20:7: <https://www.codexsinaiticus.org>

In Defence of John 7:53–8:11

- Note 3.** Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲁ): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Sinaiticus
- Note 4.** Codex Vaticanus (B): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Vaticanus
- Note 5.** Papyrus 66 (P66): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papyrus_66
- Note 6.** Papyrus 75 (P75): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papyrus_75
- Note 7.** F. H. A. Scrivener (1813–1891): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederick_Henry_Ambrose_Scrivener
- Note 8.** B. H. Streeter (1874–1937): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B._H._Streeter
- Note 9.** Kurt Aland (1915–1994): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kurt_Aland
- Note 10.** Barbara Aland (b. 1937): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barbara_Aland
- Note 11.** Codex Bezae (D): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Bezae
- Note 12.** Byzantine text-type: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Byzantine_text-type
- Note 13.** Dean John William Burgon (1813–1888): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Burgon
- Note 14.** Philip Mauro (1859–1952): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Philip_Mauro
- Note 15.** Brooke Foss Westcott (1825–1901): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brooke_Foss_Westcott
- Note 16.** Fenton John Anthony Hort (1828–1892): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/F._J._A._Hort
- Note 17.** Kirsopp Lake (1872–1946): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kirsopp_Lake
- Note 18.** Caesarean text-type: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caesarean_text-type
- Note 19.** *Homoioteleuton* (Greek: 'similar ending'): a scribal copying error in which the eye slips from one word or phrase to a later word or phrase with the same or similar ending, causing the intervening text to be omitted. See: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homeoteleuton>
- Note 20.** Jerome (c. 347–420 AD): <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jerome>
- Note 21.** The Vulgate: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vulgate>
- Note 22.** *Vetus Latina* (Old Latin versions): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vetus_Latina
- Note 23.** Papias of Hierapolis (c. 60–130 AD): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Papias_of_Hierapolis
- Note 24.** Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260–339 AD): <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eusebius>
- Note 25.** *Didascalia Apostolorum* (third century): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Didascalia_Apostolorum
- Note 26.** Ambrose of Milan (c. 339–397 AD): <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambrose>
- Note 27.** Augustine of Hippo (354–430 AD): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustine_of_Hippo
- Note 28.** Council of Trent (1545–1563): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Council_of_Trent
- Note 29.** Martin Luther (1483–1546): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Luther
- Note 30.** William Tyndale (c. 1494–1536): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Tyndale
- Note 31.** Geneva Bible (1560): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geneva_Bible
- Note 32.** King James Version (1611): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_James_Version
- Note 33.** Harclean Syriac version: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harklean_version
- Note 34.** Peshitta: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peshitta>
- Note 35.** Thomas of Harqel (d. 616 AD): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_of_Harqel
- Note 36.** Ferrar Group (Family 13): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Family_13
- Note 37.** J. Rendel Harris (1852–1941): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/J._Rendel_Harris
- Note 38.** Montanism: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montanism>
- Note 39.** Adolf Hilgenfeld (1823–1907): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adolf_Bernhard_Christoph_Hilgenfeld
- Note 40.** Rudolf Steck (1842–1924): https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rudolf_Steck
- Note 41.** Lectionary: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lectionary>
- Note 42.** Will Kinney, 'The Character of Sinaiticus and Vaticanus Texts': https://textus-receptus.com/wiki/Article:_The_character_of_Sinaiticus_and_Vaticanus_texts_by_Will_Kinney
- Note 43.** Canon Frederic Charles Cook (1810–1889): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Frederic_Charles_Cook
- Note 44.** Codex Sinaiticus (Ⲁ) is conventionally designated with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, assigned by its discoverer Constantin von Tischendorf. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Sinaiticus
- Note 45.** Constantine Simonides (1820–1867): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constantine_Simonides ; https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Konstantinos_Simonides
- Note 46.** St Panteleimon Monastery, Mount Athos: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Panteleimon_Monastery
- Note 47.** James Begg Society, 'From Their Own Mouths: Westcott and Hort': <https://neshchristianresources.org/JBS/TTS/TTS5.html>

In Defence of John 7:53–8:11

- Note 48.** Charles John Ellicott (1819–1905), Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol, chairman of the New Testament Revision Committee (1870–1881): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Ellicott
- Note 49.** Carlo Maria Martini (1927–2012), cardinal and textual scholar, member of the UBS Greek New Testament committee: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carlo_Maria_Martini
- Note 50.** Douai-Rheims Bible: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Douai-Reims-Bible>
- Note 51.** Emphatic Diaglott (Benjamin Wilson, 1864): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emphatic_Diaglott
- Note 52.** Johann Jakob Griesbach (1745–1812): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Jakob_Griesbach
- Note 53.** Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (1813–1875): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Prideaux_Tregelles
- Note 54.** Herman C. Hoskier (1864–1938): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Herman_C._Hoskier
- Note 55.** Paulus Bombasius (1476–1527), Vatican librarian: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paulus_Bombasius
- Note 56.** Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda (1489–1573): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan_Gin%C3%A9s_de_Sep%C3%BAveda
- Note 57.** Henk Jan de Jonge (b. 1943), Dutch New Testament scholar: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henk_Jan_de_Jonge
- Note 58.** Origen of Alexandria (c. 184–253 AD): <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Origen>
- Note 59.** John Chrysostom (c. 347–407 AD): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Chrysostom
- Note 60.** Cyril of Alexandria (c. 376–444 AD): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyril_of_Alexandria
- Note 61.** Apollinaris of Laodicea (c. 310–390 AD): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apollinaris_of_Laodicea
- Note 62.** Theodore of Mopsuestia (c. 350–428 AD): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theodore_of_Mopsuestia
- Note 63.** Cyprian of Carthage (c. 200–258 AD): <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyprian>
- Note 64.** Tertullian (c. 155–220 AD): <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tertullian>
- Note 65.** Eusebius of Caesarea and the Eusebian Canons: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eusebius> ; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eusebian_Canons
- Note 66.** Apostolic Constitutions: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostolic_Constitutions
- Note 67.** Pacian of Barcelona (c. 310–391 AD): <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacian>
- Note 68.** Novatianism: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novatianism>
- Note 69.** Ambrosiaster: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ambrosiaster>
- Note 70.** Didymus the Blind (c. 313–398 AD): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Didymus_the_Blind
- Note 71.** Wikipedia overview of the passage: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus_and_the_woman_taken_in_adultery
- Note 72.** The *sotah* (ordeal of the bitter water): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ordeal_of_the_bitter_water
- Note 73.** Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yohanan_ben_Zakkai
- Note 74.** Karl von Soden (1852–1914): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hermann_Freiherr_von_Soden
- Note 75.** J. P. Heil—scholarly profile: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=wndoRIMAAA&hl=en>
- Note 76.** George T. Zervos—author page: <https://www.bloomsbury.com/au/author/george-t-zervos/>
- Note 77.** Daniel B. Wallace: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_B._Wallace
- Note 78.** Zane C. Hodges (1932–2008): https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zane_C._Hodges
- Note 79.** Arthur Farstad (1935–1998): https://textus-receptus.com/wiki/Arthur_Farstad

[¹]: F. H. A. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell and Co., 1861), p. 386. Available at [archive.org](https://archive.org/details/plainintroductionoooscri/page/386/mode/1up): <https://archive.org/details/plainintroductionoooscri/page/386/mode/1up>

Codex Sinaiticus is conventionally designated Ⲁ (Aleph, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet), assigned by its discoverer Constantin von Tischendorf. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codex_Sinaiticus.

[³]: Their private correspondence is preserved in Arthur Westcott, *Life and Letters of Brooke Foss Westcott*, 2 vols. (Macmillan, 1903), available at archive.org; and Arthur Hort, *Life and Letters of Fenton John Anthony Hort*, 2 vols. (Macmillan, 1896), available at archive.org.

Charles John Ellicott (1819–1905), Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol, chairman of the New Testament Revision Committee (1870–1881). See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Ellicott.

[¹⁰]: Kyle R. Hughes, ‘The Lukan Special Material and the Tradition History of the Pericope Adulterae’, *Novum Testamentum* 55:3 (2013), pp. 232–251, at p. 247. Article available at <https://kylerhughes.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/the-lukan-special-material-and-the-tradition-history-of-the-pericope-adulterae.pdf>. Summarised by Daniel B. Wallace at <https://danielbwallace.com/2013/06/26/where-is-the-story-of-the-woman-caught-in-adultery-really-from/>. Building on Bart D. Ehrman, ‘Jesus and the Adulteress’, *New Testament Studies* 34 (1988), pp. 24–44.

see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jesus_and_the_woman_taken_in_adultery

Principal Sources Consulted.

Adam Clarke, *Commentary on the Bible*; J. G. Kypke, *Observationes Sacrae* (1755), cited in Clarke; J. A. Bengel, *Gnomon Novi Testamenti*; H. A. W. Meyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of John*; John Gill, *Exposition of the Entire Bible*; Albert Barnes, *Notes on the New Testament*; Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*; Vincent's *Word Studies in the New Testament*; F. B. Meyer, *Through the Bible Commentary*, on John 8:1–11 (available at bibleportal.com); John Calvin, *Commentary on John*, on John 8:3; Dean J. W. Burgon, *The Revision Revised* (1881)—'blind superstition' quotation at p. 11, other quotations in Article I ('The New Greek Text') and Article III ('The Revisers and the Greek Text of the New Testament'); and *The Causes of the Corruption of the Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels* (posthumous, ed. Edward Miller, 1896); Canon Frederic Charles Cook, *The Revised Version of the First Three Gospels* (1882)—on the role of Sinaiticus and Vaticanus in the Revision, and his assessment that 'Dr. Hort's system is entirely destitute of historical foundation'; Philip Mauro, *Which Version? Authorized or Revised?* (1924)—on the errors of omission principle, the 99% manuscript testimony figure, the Revision Committee procedure, and Scrivener's verdict on Hort's system; Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended* (1956; 4th ed. 1984)—on the Pericope Adulterae (Chapter 6, Section 4), the Montanist question, the Pentecostal lesson argument, von Soden's concession, and the Sahidic influence on Papyrus 75; H. C. Hoskier, *Codex B and Its Allies* (London: Quaritch, 1914)—on the Egyptian affinities of the Alexandrian textual tradition; Karl von Soden, *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1902–10)—demonstrating the fixed original location of the pericope; Kirsopp Lake, 'The Caesarean Text of the Gospel of Mark', *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 21 (1928)—on scribal destruction of exemplars; J. Rendel Harris, 'Codex Bezae', *Texts and Studies*, vol. 2 (1891)—on the Acts 5:18 gloss and Montanist knowledge of the pericope; A. Hilgenfeld, *Historisch-Kritische Einleitung* (Leipzig, 1875)—on deletion rather than addition as explanation; R. Steck, *Theologische Zeitschrift aus der Schweiz*, vol. 4 (1893)—concurring with the moralistic deletion hypothesis; John David Punch, *The Pericope Adulterae: Theories of Insertion and Omission* (PhD dissertation, Radboud University Nijmegen, 2010; published LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2012)—on the geographical narrowness of the omission evidence, the Moses typology, the vocabulary comparison with John 2:13–17, the statistical table (Johnson's Diagram 2.0), the John 4:4–16 comparison, the Wallace/Heil dispute over the Johannine aside, and the Protoevangelion dependency question; Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad, *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text* (Thomas Nelson, 1985)—on contextual and stylistic compatibility, and the 'shrewdest piece of interpolation in literary history' formulation; J. P. Heil, 'The Story of Jesus and the Adulteress (John 7:53–8:11) Reconsidered', *Biblica* 72 (1991), and 'A Rejoinder', *Église et théologie* 25 (1994)—on the Johannine aside and the rebuttal of Wallace's challenge; Alan Johnson, 'A Stylistic Trait of the Fourth Gospel in the Pericope Adulterae?' *Bulletin of the Evangelical Theological Society* 9.2 (1966)—on vocabulary comparison and the Johannine aside; available at https://etsjets.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/files_JETS-PDFs_9_2_91-96_Johnson.pdf; Bart D. Ehrman, 'Jesus and the Adulteress', *New Testament Studies* 34 (1988), pp. 24–44—on the two-source hypothesis for the Pericope Adulterae and the Didascalia as the primary surviving evidence for the earliest form of the account; Kyle R. Hughes, 'The Lukan Special Material and the Tradition History of the Pericope Adulterae', *Novum Testamentum* 55.3 (2013), pp. 232–251—on the identification of the Didascalia form with Luke's special source material and the concession that the event is essentially historical; available at <https://kylerhughes.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/the-lukan-special-material-and-the-tradition-history-of-the-pericope-adulterae.pdf>; summarised by Daniel B. Wallace at <https://danielbwallace.com/2013/06/26/where-is-the-story-of-the-woman-caught-in-adultery-really-from/>; David Blunt (compiler), 'From Their Own Mouths: Westcott and Hort', *James Begg Society Traditional Text Pamphlets* (<https://nesherchristianresources.org/JBS/TTS/TS5.html>); Arthur Westcott, *Life and Letters of Brooke Foss Westcott*, 2 vols. (Macmillan, 1903), available at archive.org; Arthur Hort, *Life and Letters of Fenton John Anthony Hort*, 2 vols. (Macmillan, 1896), available at archive.org—primary source for the Westcott and Hort quotations on biblical authority and the Textus Receptus; F. H. A. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament*, 1st ed. (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell and Co., 1861), p. 386—on Alexandrian corruption, available at archive.org; <https://archive.org/details/plainintroductionooscri/page/386/mode/1up>; 3rd ed. (1883), p. 537—on Hort's hypothesis being 'destitute not only of historical foundation but of all probability', as cited in Philip Mauro; H. G. Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, 1843; 9th ed. 1940); Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Harvard University Press, 1920), §341–342—on the locative directional suffix *-se/-de/-ze* in Greek; A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research* (Broadman Press, 1934)—on the tenses of the subjunctive mood and the non-existence of a 'future subjunctive' in Greek (pp. 848–849); unfoldingWord *Greek Grammar* (online edition, ugg.readthedocs.io, chapter on the Subjunctive Mood)—on tense in the subjunctive as aspect rather than time reference; H. C. Hoskier, *Concerning the Text of the Apocalypse*, 2 vols. (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1929)—on the textual stability of Revelation 20:7 across all manuscript traditions; Codex Sinaiticus Project (British Library, Leipzig University Library, National Library of Russia, and St Catherine's Monastery, Sinai)—online scholarly edition confirming the standard rendering of Revelation 20:7; D. A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate* (Baker, 1979); J. A. Farrer, *Literary Forgeries* (1907), pp. 39–66; Benjamin Wilson, *The Emphatic Diaglott* (Fowler & Wells, 1864; Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1902); *Old Theology Quarterly*, April 1893; C. J. Woodworth, *Berean Scripture Study Manual* (1909); Flavius Josephus, *Wars of the Jews* 5.192 (on the paving of the open Temple courts); Frankie Snyder, Gabriel Barkay, and Zachi Dvira, 'What the Temple Mount Floor Looked Like', *Biblical Archaeology Review*, November/December 2016, available at <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/temple-at-jerusalem/what-the-temple-mount-floor-looked-like/>—on the recovery of over a hundred Herodian opus sectile tiles by the Temple Mount Sifting Project; Leen Ritmeyer, 'Flooring from the Temple Mount in Jerusalem', *Ritmeyer Archaeological Design* (12 September 2016), available at <https://www.ritmeyer.com/2016/09/12/flooring-from-the-temple-mount-in-jerusalem/>—on the limestone paving of the open courts; Mishnah, *Sukkah* 5:2–4, available at https://www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Sukkah.5.2—on the four golden menorot of the Water Drawing Ceremony; Augustine of Hippo, *De Adulterinis Conjugiis* II.7 and *In Johannis Evangelium Tractatus* 33.5–6; Didymus the Blind, *Commentarii in Ecclesiasten* 223.6–13 (*Tura papyrus*); Jerome, *Adversus Pelagianos* 2.17; Pacian of Barcelona, *Letter 3*, *Against the Novatians*, c. 370 A.D., cited in E. F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended*; Didascalia Apostolorum, 2.24 (Funk ed., I, 93); *Apostolic Constitutions*, Book II.24; Mishnah, *Sotah* 9:9; Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.17; Pastor C. T. Russell, *Studies in the Scriptures*, Vol. 6, *The New Creation*, Study IX, pp. F405–F406; *Zion's Watch Tower* R2437–2438, R3434, R4130, R5033:168, R5095, R1921, and February 1880; *Zion's Watch Tower* R434—Russell's own endorsement of Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, and the Alexandrine as 'the very best authority' for the New Testament text, noted in Section 10; *Zion's Watch Tower* R1144—Russell's publication of Tischendorf's extended argument for the priority of the three oldest manuscripts, noted in Section 10; Pastor C. T. Russell, *What Pastor Russell Said* (compiled question-and-answer volumes), Q423:1 (1911)—Russell's answer placing the handing over of the Kingdom to the Father before the Little Season, cited in the note on Shallieu's handling of Revelation 20:7; Q827:2—Russell's answer placing Satan's loosing 'in the close of' the Millennial reign, cited in the same note; Frank Shallieu, *New Testament Studies* (John 4; John 7–8; John 20:31; John 21:25); Frank Shallieu, *The Keys of Revelation* (pp. 514–516, 521–522)—on the Sinaitic manuscript readings at Revelation 20:4 and 20:7, discussed in Appendix of this document; David C. Parker, *The Living Text of the Gospels* (Cambridge University Press, 1997)—on the Armenian manuscript tradition's rendering of the writing-on-the-ground passage, pp. 99–100; Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (United Bible Societies, 1971; 2nd ed. 1994)—on the {C} rating assigned to the pericope by the UBS committee; B. H. Streeter, *The Four Gospels: A Study of Origins* (Macmillan, 1924)—on the geographical taxonomy of the two manuscript streams (Alexandrian and Antiochian/Byzantine) and the dismantling of the Westcott-Hort 'Neutral text' hypothesis (pp. 26–76); Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament* (Eerdmans, 2nd ed. 1989)—the standard modern reference on manuscript text-types, identifying the Alexandrian and Antiochian (Byzantine) streams as the two dominant families (pp. 48–71); Philip Comfort, *Encountering the Manuscripts: An Introduction to New Testament Paleography and Textual Criticism* (Broadman & Holman, 2005)—on P66 scribal indicators at the relevant point in John; the *Vetus Latina* (Old Latin) manuscript tradition—as an independent pre-Jerome Latin witness to the passage predating the Vulgate by one to two centuries; T. H. Horne, ed. S. P. Tregelles, *An Introduction to the Critical Study and Knowledge of the Holy Scriptures* (London, 1856), Vol. IV, pp. xv–xvi—on the Erasmus-Sepúlveda correspondence and the supply of Vaticanus readings to Erasmus; H. J. de Jonge, 'Erasmus and the Comma Johanneum', *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 56 (1980), p. 385—on Erasmus' assessment of Codex Vaticanus as influenced by the Vulgate and therefore inferior; An-Ting Yi, 'The Changing Fortunes of Codex Vaticanus', *Text and Canon* (7 September 2024), <https://textandcanon.org/the-changing-fortunes-of-codex-vaticanus/>—on Erasmus' Latinization theory and the subsequent reception of Vaticanus; S. P. Tregelles, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament* (London: Bagster, 1854), p. 83—on Griesbach's restricted access to Codex Vaticanus; Alister E. McGrath, *Reformation Thought: An Introduction*, 4th ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), pp. 87–92—on the ad fontes principle of the Protestant Reformation; *United Bible Societies and Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity* (Roman Catholic Church), 'Guiding Principles for Interconfessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible' (2 June 1968; revised edition, Rome, 16 November 1987), available at <https://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/documenti/altri-testi/en.html>; Thomas P. Johnston, Ph.D., 'Worldwide Bible Translation and Original Language Texts' (16 January 2009).