



Was the Pericope Adulterae (Woman Caught in Adultery) Original or Added?

Description



“Forgive” by Yongsung Kim

In John chapter 8, there’s a story of a woman who was caught in adultery and brought before Jesus. Her accusers want to trap Jesus, who writes in the dust and then says the man with no sin should throw the first stone (*to stone her, the penalty for adultery in the Mosaic Law*). After all her accusers leave, Jesus tells the woman to “go and sin no more”.

It’s an often repeated story about Jesus’s mercy, and even has its own name: the “**Pericope Adulterae**”. (“*Pericope*” means a story pulled from a larger document, and “*Adulterae*” obviously references adultery.)

However, did the Apostle John write this passage?

There’s a debate which rages on this topic, and we’ll examine the debate in this article. We’ll start by looking at possible reasons for its inclusion/non-inclusion, then look at the external evidence from manuscripts and the early church fathers, and then look at the internal evidence in the text itself.

We’ll also look at an iron-clad argument pertaining to this verse, which I’ve literally **never** seen someone else mention.

I don’t know why no one talks about this, but it’s powerful evidence all by itself. In my mind, it solves

the debate all by itself with no other evidence needed... and again no one talks about it.

Here we go.

Reasons it might've been added/removed

Before we discuss the evidence, we'll take a look at the possible reasons for its addition/removal.

1. If it **is** original, why was it removed?
2. If it **isn't** original, why was it added?

Possible Reasons for Removal

Nearly every resource I can find says that the most likely reason for its removal (*if it's original*) is because the church felt it made Jesus too "soft" on the topic of adultery. While I agree that this the most likely reason for removal, it would mean the earliest copyists were wicked men. As we discuss in my article on [What's the Best Bible Translation? And More Importantly, Why?](#), God commanded that we not change His words.

For them to have intentionally done so strains credulity. It's not impossible, but it seems extremely unlikely.

Possible Reasons for Addition

The most common explanation I can find for its addition (*if it wasn't original*) is that it was an oral tradition that circulated in the early church. That is, they believed it was an accurate historical account of something that Jesus actually did, but it wasn't originally in the text of scripture.

The theory goes that eventually it was added because they believed it was authentic.

This seems much more likely, because it doesn't make the early copyists out to be wicked men. There's a vast gulf between removing something you don't like, and adding something that many believed was accurate history.

One man even has a [long-ish article arguing for this exact thing](#). He points out there there are actually three versions of the story; two shorter ones with different details, plus the third, longer version that we know today which combines the two shorter narratives. (*He suggests that one of the shorter versions might've been written by Luke, who then decided not to include it his gospel. The evidence is quite interesting, even compelling in places.*)

Now we'll turn to manuscript evidence.

External (Manuscript) Evidence

If you ask most scholars, the external evidence is absolutely iron-clad again its inclusion... but then there's a lot of scholars on the other side who argue the opposite. I did a lot of research, and found no shortage of scholarly articles on both sides arguing that evidence for their side was conclusive.

There's a complicated set of evidence with many layers to unpack. We'll give the external evidence a cursory look, but not an exhaustive one because there's much stronger evidence in the text itself. For those who wish to read more, I'll link to longer articles.

Omission from many manuscripts, and nearly all early ones

The following quote is from an article by Daniel Wallace, one of the most respected textual scholars in the world. The article is entitled "[My Favorite Passage that's Not in the Bible](#)".

The great majority of Greek manuscripts through the first eight centuries lack this pericope. And except for Bezae (or codex D), virtually all of the most important Greek witnesses through the first eight centuries do not have the verses. Of the three most important early versions of the New Testament (Coptic, Latin, Syriac), two of them lack the story in their earliest and best witnesses. The Latin alone has the story in its best early witnesses.

...

It is an important point to note that although the story of the woman caught in adultery is found in most of our printed Bibles today, the evidence suggests that the majority of Bibles during the first eight centuries of the Christian faith did not contain the story. Externally, most scholars would say that the evidence for it not being an authentic part of John's Gospel is rock solid.

That's pretty strong evidence.

To repeat: only 1 single Greek manuscript contains the story of the woman caught in adultery until the 8th century.

Just one.

(Further, that manuscript is of dubious quality. It belongs to the western family of texts, and displays that textual family's usual tendency to have strange readings. For more information, see [my article on Textual criticism](#).)

There's an interesting logical conclusion from this:

The **odds** are that until the 8th century, the majority – perhaps the vast majority – of Greek manuscripts did not contain the story

We can't know for sure of course, but it seems likely.

Now, if you include late manuscripts this reverses dramatically. The following quote is from James Snapp Jr.'s (*excellent*) website on textual Criticism: The Text of the Gospels. He believes the Pericope Adulterae is original to John and says:

More recently, Dr. Maurice Robinson has confirmed that although 270 manuscripts do not include these verses, they are supported by 1,500 manuscripts. That is a ratio of 85 to 15, in favor of the inclusion of the passage.

It should be noted that the *vast majority* of the manuscripts from that 1,500 number are **late manuscripts**. However, the sheer volume of late manuscripts mean you can't simply dismiss them out of hand. Further, while the late manuscripts are nearly unanimous for its inclusion, the early manuscripts argue strongly for non-inclusion.

However, a lot of early manuscripts don't have any part of John's gospel, so the sample size is rather small. Again, [the Text of the Gospels has an article on this topic](#) which concludes:

- First: **the evidence strongly supports the view that the text of John used in Egypt in the 200's did not contain the passage after John 7:52.**
- Second: codices L and ? should be considered witnesses for non-inclusion **and for inclusion.**
- Third: the testimony of most of the major Greek manuscripts that support the non-inclusion of the *pericope adulterae* in chapters 7 and 8 is not nearly as clear or one-sided when they are asked to testify about the passage's presence or absence following John 21; **on this question, most of the early Greek manuscript-evidence is open to interpretation.**

Like I said, the evidence is multi-layered, though I would argue it definitely leans towards non-inclusion.

Patristic (*Early Church fathers*) Evidence

Here again we find a mixed bag.

Nearly all the quotes which would argue for the Pericope's inclusion are from the 9th century or later. There are some earlier quotes, but rarely before the 4th century, still hundreds of years after it was written. You can find many of these quotes in [this article](#). (*by someone who believes the Pericope Adulterae should be included*) The quote by Jerome is especially interesting.

In *Contra Pelagius* 17.4 (384 AD) Jerome writes:

“Next in the Gospel of John in **many** codices both Greek and Latin is found the (story) of the Adulteress Woman, who was accused before the Lord”

Obviously this refers to the Pericope, but how many is “many”? A majority? A minority, but still “many”? If most manuscripts included it, then why not say “most” instead of “many”?

Actually, I see this as evidence against the pericope.

Why?

Because he says “many”, not a “great many”, or “most”, or even “a majority”. He didn’t say “most”, which would indicate a great majority. He didn’t say “a majority” or “a great many” which would indicate more than half. He said “many”, which in this context would certainly seem to indicate less than half.

Jerome didn’t specify how many is “many”.

(Note: As I was proofreading this article, I realized that I had used “Omission from many manuscripts” as a headline earlier. According to my usage there, “many” is about 15%. The word “many” is truly an ambiguous word.)

There’s also a quote by Augustine:

Some hostile to true faith, fearing, as I suppose, that liberty to sin with impunity is granted their wives, **remove from their Scriptural texts the account of our Lord’s pardon of the adulteress**, as though He who said: ‘From now on, sin no more,’ granted permission to sin.

So Augustine obviously thought it was original...

...but he was a Latin church father. ([His dislike of Greek was legendary](#)) So while the Greek and other major translations lacked the story, the Latin had it (see the quote by Wallace above), and Augustine was primarily a Latin reader.

That begs the question: **Why do so few non-Latin church fathers mention the story?** True, this is an argument from silence, but occasionally the silence is deafening since you’d expect them to comment on this story occasionally if they considered it scripture.

Some notable figures who excluded the passage include **Origen, who transitions from John 7:52 to verse 8:12 uninterrupted in his commentary on John’s Gospel. Even more significant is the fact that Tertullian does not mention this passage of Scripture.** Tertullian wrote De Pudicitia c. 220 C.E., which sought to answer the question of how a church should deal with the blatant sins committed by its members and at what point the church should excommunicate those guilty of sin. **In this work, Tertullian gave clear judicial instruction in cases dealing with adultery yet does not make reference to Jesus’ dealing with the adulterous woman**

Source.

Origen clearly didn't consider the pericope scripture because he didn't comment on it. Likewise, it's almost impossible to imagine Tertullian writing a serious treatment of adultery without mentioning the pericope... unless both men didn't consider it scripture.

Then it makes perfect sense.

File those two examples under: "deafening silence".

Origen died in 253 AD, and Tertullian died in 220 AD; **both men died ~100 years before Augustine and Jerome were born.** Tertullian especially died 150+ years before either Jerome or Augustine wrote anything notable. **That's 150+ years closer to the source.**

Consider: if the gospels were written by ~70 AD, then it takes 150 years to get 220 (*Tertullian's death*), then 150 years again to get to Augustine and Jerome's day.

Thus Tertullian was half as far from the source as Jerome and Augustine, and Origen was 100+ years closer to the source.

That seems like very strong evidence against the pericope.

As already mentioned, [one article](#) points out there were a few different versions of the story according to the early church fathers, and they were likely combined into the version we're familiar with now. I think the article is well worth a read, and you can tell because this is the second time I'm linking to it in this article.

By the fourth century there were actually three extant versions of the PA: **(1)** the entrapment story which Jesus freely pardons a sinful woman, known to Papias and the author of the Didascalia, **(2)** the story of Jesus' intervention in an execution proceeding, preserved in the Gospel according to the Hebrews and retold by Didymus in his Ecclesiastes commentary, and **(3)** the popular version found in MSS of the Gospel of John, a version which represents a conflation of the two earliest stories."

So here's the important question about the church father quotes: which version of the story were they referencing?

Since we can't know in most cases, I'm personally less inclined to use quotes by the fathers as evidence because we can't know which version of the story they were referring to. (*That's my own opinion though, and it's worth every penny you paid for it. ?*)

"Floating" Text

The text of the Pericope Adulterae is found in several locations. From that article by Dan Wallace:

One of the remarkable things about this passage, in fact, is that it is found in multiple locations. Most manuscripts that have it place it in its now traditional location: between John 7:52 and 8:12. But an entire family of manuscripts has the passage at the end of Luke 21, while another family places it at the end of John's Gospel. Other manuscripts place it at the end of Luke or in various places in John 7.

The pericope adulterae has all the earmarks of a pericope that was looking for a home. It took up permanent residence, in the ninth century, in the middle of the fourth gospel.

[Source](#).

Many have cited this as evidence it wasn't original to John, but was added later and different scribes added it in different places. [Dr. James White sees this as absolute proof that it's not original](#), and I completely understand that position. There is literally no other passage that does this, so why this one if it's original? Now, if it's not original then it makes perfect sense, as Dan Wallace says it "*all the earmarks of a pericope that was looking for a home.*"

There are explanations from those who believe the story belongs though.

Now, it is true that the *Pericope Adulterae* is found in different places in some manuscripts. In fact, a total of fifty-eight manuscripts have the *Pericope Adulterae* in other locations – which means that an overwhelming majority of 95.9% have it at the standard location after John 7:52.[67] Furthermore, based on the manuscript and Patristic evidence, the standard location is both the overwhelmingly attested location and the earliest recorded location.[68]

[Source](#). (*emphasis original*)

Note: that 95.9% consists almost entirely of **late** manuscripts.

Opinions vary on how reasonable all these locations are. James Snapp Jr.'s (*excellent*) website "[The Text of the Gospels](#)" has a four-part article series dealing with this in detail. ([Part 1](#), [part 2](#), [part 3](#), [part 4](#))

However, the fact that an explanation is required at all seems a bit... suspect. That's not to say that the "floating text" is proof it was added, but it is... odd. (*Even if there's a reasonable explanation.*)

One explanation is in [this article that I linked to earlier](#). It argues that some portion of the Pericope Adulterae was originally written by Luke, but ended up not being included in his gospel. If this was the case, it would help explain the floating text aspect. Further, as the article points out, it fits much better with Luke than John from a grammar/style standpoint. This is especially interesting considering that a few manuscripts do place it in Luke's gospel.

External Evidence Conclusion

Like I said, the external evidence isn't *quite* ironclad, but I would say it strongly leans towards non-inclusion based on the manuscript evidence and church fathers. Fortunately, the evidence from the text itself is stronger.

That said, there's one more piece of external evidence we'll examine just before the conclusion. It fits better there, since the internal evidence debate lends some necessary context. This piece of external evidence seems much stronger than what we've examined so far.

We'll look at it just before the conclusion of this article.

Internal Evidence

While the external evidence isn't iron-clad, *some* of the internal evidence is absolutely conclusive in my opinion... but only some. We'll briefly touch the inconclusive evidence first, then move to the conclusive evidence, where we'll spend the rest of this article.

Stylistic considerations

Some contend that the grammar and style of the Pericope Adulterae is unlike the rest of John, adding evidence that it was added. They say that the style, form, and words used are very unlike the apostle John.

A first-year Greek student will find the writings of John to be much easier to follow than someone like Paul or Peter because John used a more simple selection of vocabulary. *When the first year Greek student reads through the Gospel of John and comes to the PA, they will see for the first time verbs, nouns, and conjunctions that John does not use anywhere else in his writings (which would include: 1 John, 2 John, 3 John, and Revelation)*. In certain places of the PA, they will see words that are never used in any part of the New Testament.

[Source](#).

That's... strange.

Not *necessarily* conclusive, but you must concede that it's very strange. There are other things too, like this is the only place that John mentions the 'scribes', and also the only places where features common to the other gospels (*but not to John*) are used. Again, [this article](#) under the heading "Is there internal evidence for John writing the PA?" has an excellent discussion of this. (*And for those who are counting, this is the 5th of 6 times that I've linked to that article; it's worth your time.*)

However, as already mentioned, there's some interesting evidence that Luke might've written part of this story...

Textual Variants

Just an aside: If the story is original, then why are there so many textual variants in the story? I noticed this as [I was translating this passage](#). (*I'm currently translating the entire New Testament from Greek to English, which you can read [here](#) if you're interested.*) This tiny piece of text (*just 12 verses*) has an insane number of significant textual variants. The last 3 verses (9-11) alone have 8 textual variants, 6 of which are significant.

That's a lot.

it's significantly more than other places, which makes sense if it was added later than if it was original to John. Again, this isn't proof of anything, but it is interesting.

Convincing Evidence: holes in the story created by inclusion/exclusion

This has been cited by both sides as evidence for their respective positions. **However there's one hole I've seen that literally no one else mentions.** That's not to say no has ever mentioned it, just that I haven't seen anyone mention it. Oddly, it seems to be the most obvious and convincing hole that's right there in the **English** text – no Greek required (*though it helps*) – yet no one ever talks about it.

I have no idea why.

We'll look at both sides, starting with the holes created by excluding the Pericope first, then the holes created by including it. (*And no, I won't tell you which has the bigger hole upfront. You'll just have to read and see, and totally not skip down to the article's conclusion where I give it away. ?*)

Because this is such a large variant, we'll need to back up a bit to get enough context fully understand it. **Thus, I highly recommend you read all of John chapters 7 and 8.** You don't need to, but more context is almost never a bad thing.

Holes created by NOT including the Pericope Adulterae

Relevant verses for context first.

John 7:32 & 37

32 The Pharisees heard the crowd muttering these things about Him, and the chief priests and the Pharisees **sent officers to seize Him**.

...

37 **Now on the last day, the great day of the feast**, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink."

Now, it's important to notice that the officers were sent on one day, but they didn't approach Jesus that day. There's no record of them approaching Jesus until the last day of the feast.

Verses 37-44 record Jesus saying something controversial, plus the crowd's reaction to it. I've added an indent to show a relevant section, and notice the jump from 7:52 to 8:12.

John 7:44-52 & 8:12-13 (*the passage without including the Pericope Adulterae*)

44 Some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him.

45 **The officers then came to the chief priests and Pharisees**, and they said to them, "Why did you not bring Him?"

46 The officers answered, "Never has a man spoken the way this man speaks."

47 The Pharisees then answered them, "You have not also been led astray, have you?"

48 "No one of the rulers or Pharisees has believed in Him, has he?"

49 "But this crowd which does not know the Law is accursed."

50 Nicodemus (he who came to Him before, being one of them) said to them,

51 "Our Law does not judge a man unless it first hears from him and knows what he is doing, does it?"

52 They answered him, "You are not also from Galilee, are you? Search, and see that no prophet arises out of Galilee."

<The Pericope Adulterae goes here>

12 Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

13 So the Pharisees said to Him, "You are testifying about Yourself; Your testimony is not true."

(NASB '95)

Notice the abrupt change from 7:52 to 8:12 without the Pericope present.

Many have argued that this means it should be included. Now, they are 100% correct about it being an abrupt jump. It's a somewhat jarring change from where we last left Jesus in 7:38 to where we meet Him again in 8:12.

However, one explanation I've heard is that the section from verse 45 to verse 52 with the pharisees should be taken as parenthetical. That is, John departs from Jesus in verses 45-52 to tell us what's happening with the pharisees, then returns to Jesus afterward.

Removing that section and not including the Pericope Adulterae would look like this:

John 7:37-43 & 8:12-13

37 Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink.

38 "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'"

39 But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

40 Some of the people therefore, when they heard these words, were saying, "This certainly is the Prophet."

41 Others were saying, "This is the Christ." Still others were saying, "Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He?"

42 "Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?"

43 So a division occurred in the crowd because of Him.

44 Some of them wanted to seize Him, but no one laid hands on Him.

<The Pharisee interlude and Pericope Adulterae go here>

12 Then Jesus again spoke to them, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

13 So the Pharisees said to Him, "You are testifying about Yourself; Your testimony is not true."

That makes perfect sense to me.

Jesus makes a controversial statement in verses 37-38. Then we see the crowd react in verses 40-44, mostly being divided about Him. Then – after the parenthetical with the pharisees – we see Jesus'

response to the crowd's reaction in chapter 8 verse 12. (*The response that Jesus gives is pretty typical of Him too, responding to skepticism with something even harder to believe.*)

The Gospel of Mark does this kind of thing regularly.

In fact, Mark does it so often that it has a name: the "Markan sandwich".

Readers of the Gospel of Mark are familiar with the Second Evangelist's convention of **breaking up a story or pericope by inserting a second, seemingly unrelated, story into the middle of it**. A good example occurs in chapter 5 where Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, importunes Jesus to heal his daughter (vv 21-24). A woman with a hemorrhage interrupts Jesus enroute to Jairus' house (vv 25-34), and only after recording the woman's healing does Mark resume with the raising of Jairus' daughter, who had died in the meantime (vv 35-43). Another example occurs in chapter 11 where Mark separates the cursing of the fig tree (vv 12-14) and its subsequent withering (vv 20-21) with Jesus' clearing of the temple (vv 15-19). This technique occurs some nine times in the Gospel:

Mark begins story A, introduces story B, then returns to and completes story A.

[Source](#).

There's no reason John couldn't be doing something similar.

If you take the section with the pharisees in verses 45-52 as a parenthetical interlude, the passage makes perfect sense without the Pericope Adulterae.

Now, this isn't evidence that the Pericope doesn't belong.

Not at all.

It only means that the passage makes perfect sense with the Pericope absent. That's neither evidence for its inclusion or its non-inclusion. However, it does mean the Pericope Adulterae's non-inclusion does fit with the text, and fit well.

Now we'll look at its inclusion.

Holes created by INCLUDING the Pericope Adulterae

We'll look at the whole Pericope to get the context, plus a couple verses afterward which are relevant.

John 7:53 – 8:13

7:53 [Everyone went to his home.

8:1 But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

2 Early in the morning He came again into the temple, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and began to teach them.

3 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman caught in adultery, and having set her in the center of the court,

4 they said to Him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in adultery, in the very act.

5 "Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women; what then do You say?"

6 They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground.

7 But when they persisted in asking Him, He straightened up, and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her."

8 Again He stooped down and wrote on the ground.

9 When they heard it, **they began to go out one by one, beginning with the older ones, and He was left alone, and the woman**, where she was, in the center of the court.

10 Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?"

11 She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."]

<The Pericope Adulterae ends here>

12 **Then** Jesus again spoke to **them**, saying, "I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life."

13 So the **Pharisees** said to Him, "You are testifying about Yourself; Your testimony is not true."

Before we get to the reason those words above are highlighted in red, let's look at two words in verse 12: "Then" and "Them".

"Then"

The Greek word translated "Then" in verse 12 is the word "???" ([oun](#)). It means:

3767 *oun* (a conjunction) – **therefore**, now then, accordingly so. 3767 (*oun*) occurs 526 times in the NT and is typically translated "therefore" which means, "By extension, **here's how the dots connect**"

.”

Our English word “then” occasionally has this connotation – for example “*if ABC, then XYZ*” – but it more commonly means “then” in the sense of time, meaning “afterward”. Therefore, it should be translated “therefore” in this passage.

“Them”

The Greek word translated “them” in verse 12 is the word “?????” ([autos](#)), and it is the Greek 3rd person pronoun. (*he/she/it/they/them*).

Definition: (1) self (emphatic) (2) he, she, it (**used for the third person pronoun**) (3) the same

Usage: **he, she, it, they, them**, same.

It does mean “them” in this verse, but what’s important is the form. The endings of some Greek words will change to tell you the number and gender of the word. (*If you want a short, fun explanation, you can read my article: [A Few Fun Things About Biblical \(Koine\) Greek](#)*).

The important part is this:

The word “them” in verse 12 is both masculine and plural.

That is very important.

In verse 12, Jesus “spoke to them”; “them” being a word that’s both plural and masculine, meaning Jesus was speaking to at least two males.

But which males was he speaking to?

Verse 13 makes it clear that at least the Pharisees were there. You know, the ones who were trying to trap Jesus and who left the room in verse 9.

What this means:

We’ll look at the passage again and I’ll highlight a few words. Notice what those words mean when they’re all put together.

9 When they heard it, **they began to go out one by one**, beginning with the older ones, **and He was left alone, and the woman**, where she was, in the center of the court.

10 Straightening up, Jesus said to her, “Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?”

11 She said, “No one, Lord.” And Jesus said, “I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more.”]

<The Pericope Adulterae ends here>

12 ~~Then~~ **Therefore Jesus again spoke to them**, saying, “I am the Light of the world; he who follows Me will not walk in the darkness, but will have the Light of life.”

Remember the word “them” in verse 12 is both plural and masculine, meaning Jesus was speaking to multiple **males**. Keep that in your head and ask yourself this:

What males were in the room?

According to verse 9, didn’t they all leave? Doesn’t verse 9 say that Jesus and the woman were completely alone? That being the case, which males was Jesus speaking to? (*For hadn’t they all left?*) If all the males had departed and only Jesus and the woman were there, which males could He speak to?

We know from verse 13 that it includes the Pharisees, but where did they come from? Hadn’t they just left?

Don’t forget that verse 12 begins with “therefore” (*not “then”*) so we aren’t talking about some time later. The word “therefore” seems to indicate this was immediately after.

Also notice the word “again” in verse 12

Whoever Jesus spoke to in verse 12, it wasn’t the first time He’d spoken to them because He was speaking to them “again”. The Greek word translated “again” is “?????” ([palin](#)) and it’s perfectly translated; it means “again”. So this is the same crowd He was speaking to earlier.

Let me repeat that: it’s the same crowd.

The only way this could make sense with the Pericope Adulterae included is if the men – including the Pharisees – left the room long enough for Jesus to tell the woman to sin no more, and then they all came back into the room immediately afterward.

Does that make sense?

I suppose it’s possible, but it’s certainly not stated in the text. It’s not even hinted at.

As we’ve already seen, the passage makes sense without the Pericope Adulterae included. Further, starting verse 12 with “*Therefore Jesus again spoke to them*” also makes sense. It makes even more sense if you consider the chunk with the pharisees as parenthetical (*a interlude in a larger story*).

But with the Pericope included...

Hmm...

I see a major problem.

In fact, it looks like including the Pericope actually introduces an error into the Bible.

No joke.

By saying "*Therefore Jesus again spoke to them*", you're directly contradicting verse 9 which specifically says there was no "them" (*multiple males*) for Jesus to speak to. All the males (*except Jesus*) had just left the room, so there were no males ("*them*") for Jesus to speak to.

Jesus can't have "them" (*multiple males*) to speak to because ever single male except Jesus had just left the room!

It's not possible...

...so wouldn't that be a error?

This is the reason why I don't consider the Pericope Adulterae to be scripture: because **it introduces an error so blatant that I'm not sure how anyone – much less a brilliant writer like John – could've missed it**. And we haven't even talked about the inerrancy of scripture...

I don't see the Pericope as original.

Not at all.

The error is just too big.

Another piece of Internal evidence

I noticed this as I was translating John 8 from Greek to English. Look at the following verses:

John 8:2, 8:6, and 8:8

2 Early in the morning He came again **into the temple**, and all the people were coming to Him; and He sat down and began to teach them.

...

6 They were saying this, testing Him, so that they might have grounds for accusing Him. But Jesus stooped down and **with His finger wrote on the ground**.

...

8 Again **He stooped down and wrote on the ground**.

This event takes place in the Temple, which is important. We'll come back to that in a moment, but for now we need to look at the Greek word "???" (gḗ, pronounced "ghay"). It's translated "ground" in the passage and means:

Strong's Concordance:

Definition: the **earth, land**

Usage: **the earth, soil**, land, region, country, inhabitants of a region.

HELPS Word Studies:

g? – properly, **the physical earth**; (figuratively) the "*arena*" we live in which operates in *space and time* which God uses to prepare us for *eternity*.

NAS Exhaustive Concordance**Definition**

the earth, land

Notice what it means: **dirt/earth/land**.

However, remember that they were in the temple.

Do we think the temple had dirt floors? There's conclusive proof to the contrary. From [an article on BiblicalArcheology.org](https://www.biblicalarcheology.org):

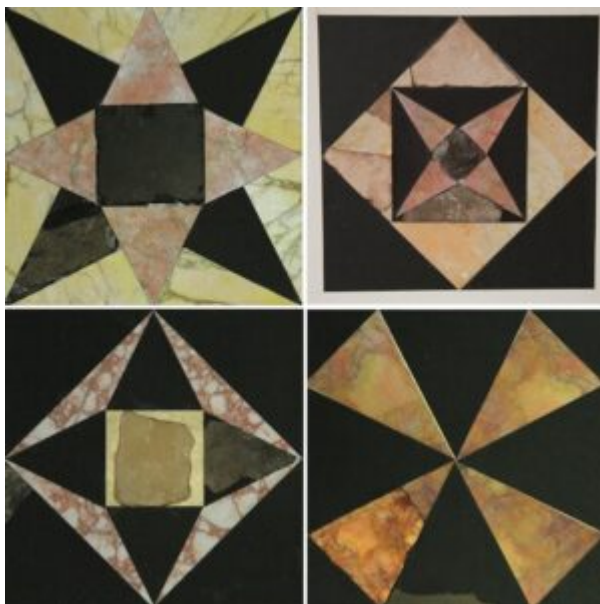
The Temple Mount Sifting Project has recovered more than a hundred geometrically cut and polished stone tiles known as *opus sectile*, from which we learn how Jerusalem's majestic Herodian Temple Mount was paved.

Opus sectile—Latin for "cut work"—is a technique for paving floors and walls in geometric

patterns or figurative scenes using meticulously cut and polished polychrome stone tiles.

These tiles were crafted and laid with such precision that there was hardly space to insert a knife-blade between them. *Opus sectile* floors were more prestigious than mosaic ones and were typically used in more important areas of buildings.

Here's a picture of the reconstructed tile sections:



[Image Source](#)

Now – since these were tile – I have a question: how was Jesus writing in/on them with His finger?

Was He crushing the tile?

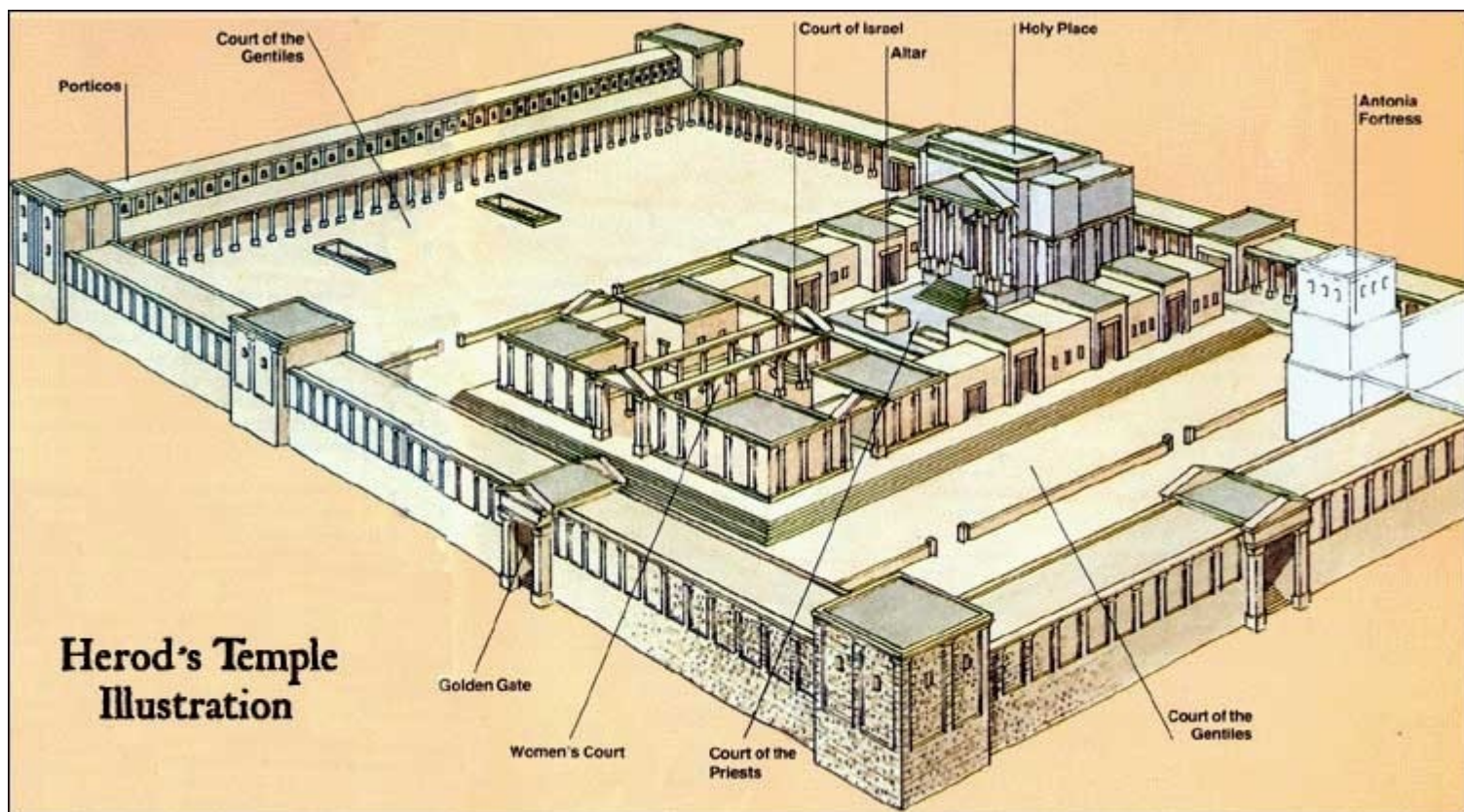
Anyone?

I can't think of a way to write on tile that wouldn't cause a huge uproar. Plus, the Bible seems to clearly indicate that Jesus was writing on earth/dirt. Unless you think the dirt in the temple was so thick that you could write in/on it, that's a problem. That means we have a terrible historical error in the Bible if the Pericope belongs.

Now, you might say that perhaps this event took place in a part of the temple that had a dirt floor.

That's actually impossible, which we'll look at in a moment. However, it's entirely possible that Jesus was teaching in the outer courts which didn't have the ornate and expensive tile flooring. However, the floor was still stone.

Let's look at [an illustration of Herod's temple from bible-history.com](#), because that's the temple we were talking about.



Notice the Women's Court just behind the Golden gate (*near center of the picture*). Now we'll hear about the Gentiles Court from [an article on the temple from Bible-history.com](https://www.bible-history.com/temple/):

If you were to approach the Temple in Jerusalem in the first century A.D. you would pass through the eastern gate where Jesus made His triumphal entry. Then you would come to **the Court of the Gentiles which was a large court paved with stones** of various colors.

The Gentile's Court was paved, and you can clearly see that outside the Gentile's court wouldn't be considered inside the temple anymore. We know from verse 2 that Jesus was inside the temple. Now, notice that the women's court was raised higher and **was also paved**.

Thus, no dirt for Jesus to write on in the temple.

Even the court of the Gentiles was paved, and thus there simply wasn't any dirt for Jesus to write on. I'm sure there was some dirt because people would track it in. However, brooms aren't exactly a new invention and they are mentioned in the Bible in a few places. An obvious one is this:

Luke 15:8

“Or what woman, if she has ten silver coins and loses one coin, does not light a lamp and **sweep the house** and search carefully until she finds it?

The Greek word for sweep is “?????” ([saroó](#)) and according to Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance means:

From a derivative of sairo (to brush off; akin to suro); **meaning a broom**; to sweep — sweep.

So while I’m sure there was dust/dirt, I’m also sure there wasn’t enough dust to be writing things down.

Now, dirt floors were uncommon in temples in the 1st century, and they were especially common in a synagogue. It’s easy to see how someone could’ve assumed the same about Herod’s temple if the story was added later and not original to John. It’s nearly impossible to think how John could’ve made this error since he actually walked in the temple personally.

One more thing:

While doing research, I’ve found several people who don’t consider the Pericope Adulterae scripture, but do consider it historical. That is, they believe it should be taught because they believe its something Jesus actually did, but don’t believe it’s scripture. **The trouble with that is two fold: First, writing in the stone is impossible as we’ve just seen. Second, it becomes a several hundred year old “telephone game”.** That is, a story repeated through word of mouth tends to change over time, and hundreds of years is a lot of time.

Further, there are actually three different versions according to noted textual scholar Bart Ehrman:

“By the fourth century there were actually three extant versions of the PA: (1) the entrapment story which Jesus freely pardons a sinful woman, known to Papias and the author of the Didascalia, (2) the story of Jesus’ intervention in an execution proceeding, preserved in the Gospel according to the Hebrews and retold by Didymus in his Ecclesiastes commentary, and (3) **the popular version found in MSS of the Gospel of John, a version which represents a conflation of the two earliest stories.**”

Source: “Jesus and the Adulteress,” pg 37

Again, I recommend you read [this article](#) for more information.

However, since there are several versions of the story, we can’t know which version is original/historical/accurate, or even if **any** of them are. We don’t know; we can’t know. Since we can’t know, I see **no reason whatsoever** to take this story as authoritative in any way. I would not teach

from it, and I would ignore any teaching that springs from it.

I would give this story no more weight than the apocryphal books that the Catholics include in their Old Testament, which neither the Jews nor Protestants accept. I might even give the Pericope less weight, because at least there's a long transmission history with those books, whereas we don't know where this story came from. (*And if you want more information on those books, [I have an article on why they shouldn't be included in the Bible](#).*)

Conclusion

While the external/manuscript evidence isn't firmly conclusive, the text itself seems decisive. With the Pericope Adulterae not included, everything makes perfect sense. There's one jump that's a tad jarring, but even that completely smooths out if you take the bit with the Pharisees as parenthetical.

However, if you include the Pericope, a blatant and obvious error is created.

In verse 9 with the Pericope included, we're told that Jesus and the woman were alone. Yet without any explanation, Jesus is addressing "them" (*multiple males in Greek*) in verse 12, even though Jesus is explicitly stated to be the only male in the room according to verse 9. Further, He's addressing them "again", meaning they were the same people as before. Even more problematic, we know from verse 13 that the Pharisees – who had just left after failing to trap Jesus – were there.

This error is so large, it's hard to imagine an absolutely brilliant writer like John making it.

It's just too big.

Further, this error would completely destroy the concept of the inerrancy of scripture, because then it would have a clear and obvious error. Obviously, something with an error can't be inerrant.

Further still, it's impossible for Jesus to have written "into" the stone of the temple with His finger (*without Superman-level strength*). Additionally, we know the temple floors were stone or tile, while the Pericope specifies dirt. That would be a major historical error that the apostle John simply wouldn't have made because he had actually been in the temple.

Therefore:

Admitting the Pericope Adulterae into the text of scripture means admitting that the scriptures are not inerrant, and that they have at least one error

Further, there's evidence that two other, shorter versions of the story were combined to create the current version. This story might've happened – its extremely doubtful, but I suppose not completely impossible – but there's simply no evidence for it whatsoever. Further, it's actually a conflation of two other shorter stories.

It's a nice-sounding story, but nothing else and it's certainly not scripture.

It almost certainly was introduced into the text of scripture after having been written by men. Like

everything else written by men, it's prone to error.

I would treat it as such.

(And if you're interested in textual variants, you might be interested in [my article on the Johannine Comma](#), or my article: [Majority Text vs. Critical Text vs. Textus Receptus – Textual Criticism 101](#))