A HARMONY OF THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS — CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

The Acts of the Apostles, Chapters 19–28: Paul's Third Journey and Imprisonment — And A Complete Textual Analysis of Variances, Apparent Contradictions, and Manuscript Differences Across the Harmony

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Preface: The Final Chapter

Chapter twenty-four completes the Acts of the Apostles with Paul's third missionary journey, his arrest in Jerusalem, his imprisonments in Caesarea and Rome, and his voyage and shipwreck. It then presents the full scholarly analysis of textual variances, apparent contradictions, and manuscript differences identified across all twenty-four chapters of this harmony — comparing the Greek New Testament Critical Text (Nestle-Aland NA28 / UBS5), the Byzantine Majority Text, and the Textus Receptus where they diverge, and examining the most significant apparent contradictions between the Gospel accounts.

Part Twenty-Three: Paul's Third Journey, Imprisonment, and Arrival in Rome

Section 254 — Ephesus: Two Years in the Hall of Tyrannus [Acts 19:1–41]

And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus, and found certain disciples: and he said unto them, Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed? And they said unto him, Nay, we did not so much as hear whether the Holy Spirit was given. And he said, Into what then were ye baptized? And they said, Into John's baptism. And Paul said, John baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on him that should come after him, that is, on Jesus. And when they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus.

And this continued for the space of two years; so that all they that dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks.

And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: insomuch that unto the sick were carried away from his body handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out.

And about that time there arose no small stir concerning the Way. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines of Diana, brought no little business unto the craftsmen; whom he gathered together, with the workmen of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this business we have our wealth. And ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they that are made with hands are no gods: and not only is there danger that this our trade come into disrepute; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana be made of no account.

And the city was filled with the confusion: and they rushed with one accord into the theatre, having seized Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel.

And when Paul was minded to enter in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not.

Section 255 — Paul's Arrest in Jerusalem [Acts 21:17–36]

And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

And the day following Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present. And when he had saluted them, he rehearsed one by one the things which God had wrought among the Gentiles through his ministry.

And they, when they heard it, glorified God; and they said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of them that have believed; and they are all zealous for the law.

Now when the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the multitude and laid hands on him, crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place.

And all the city was moved, and the people ran together; and they laid hold on Paul, and dragged him out of the temple: and straightway the doors were shut.

And as they were seeking to kill him, tidings came up to the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in confusion. And forthwith he took soldiers and centurions, and ran down upon them: and they, when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, left off beating Paul.

Section 256 — Paul Before Agrippa [Acts 26:1–29]

And Agrippa said unto Paul, Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth his hand, and made his defence.

I think myself happy, king Agrippa, that I am to make my defence before thee this day touching all the things whereof I am accused by the Jews: especially because thou art expert in all

customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.

My manner of life then from my youth up, which was from the beginning among mine own nation and at Jerusalem, know all the Jews; having knowledge of me from the first, if they be willing to testify, that after the straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee. And now I stand here to be judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers; unto which promise our twelve tribes, earnestly serving God night and day, hope to attain. And concerning this hope I am accused by the Jews, O king! Why is it judged incredible with you, if God doth raise the dead?

I verily thought with myself that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. Which things I also did in Jerusalem: and I both shut up many of the saints in prisons, having received authority from the chief priests, and when they were put to death I gave my vote against them. And punishing them ofttimes in all the synagogues, I strove to make them blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto foreign cities.

Whereupon as I journeyed to Damascus with the authority and commission of the chief priests, at midday, O king, I saw on the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them that journeyed with me. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice saying unto me in the Hebrew language, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me? it is hard for thee to kick against the goad.

And I said, Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest. But arise, and stand upon thy feet: for to this end have I appeared unto thee, to appoint thee a minister and a witness both of the things wherein thou hast seen me, and of the things wherein I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom I send thee, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in me.

Wherefore, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision.

Section 257 — The Voyage, the Shipwreck, and Rome [Acts 27:1–28:31]

And when it was determined that we should sail for Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners to a centurion named Julius, of the Augustan band.

And when much time was spent, and the voyage was now dangerous, because the Fast was now already gone by, Paul admonished them, and said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that the voyage will be with injury and much loss, not only of the lading and the ship, but also of our lives.

But the centurion gave more heed to the master and to the owner of the ship, than to those things which were spoken by Paul.

But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven to and fro in the sea of Adria, about midnight the sailors surmised that they were drawing near to some country.

But Paul stood forth in the midst of them, and said, Sirs, I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of life among you, but only of the ship. For there stood by me this night an angel of the God whose I am, whom also I serve, saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must stand before Caesar: and lo, God hath granted thee all them that sail with thee.

And so it came to pass, that they all escaped safe to the land.

And when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita. And the barbarians showed us no common kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us all, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.

But when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks and laid them on the fire, a viper came out by reason of the heat, and fastened on his hand. When the barbarians saw the beast hanging from his hand, they said one to another, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped from the sea, yet Justice hath not suffered to live. Howbeit he shook off the beast into the fire, and took no harm.

And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of fever and dysentery: unto whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laying his hands on him healed him.

And Paul abode two whole years in his own hired dwelling, and received all that went in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, none forbidding him.

Part Twenty-Four: A Complete Textual Analysis of Variances and Apparent Contradictions

I. Introduction: Manuscripts, Text Types, and the State of the Evidence

Any serious engagement with the four Gospels must address the question that the preceding twenty-three chapters of harmonization inevitably raises: Where do the accounts differ from one another, and how significant are those differences? The question has two dimensions — textual and narratological — and they must be carefully distinguished.

The **textual** question concerns differences among the ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament themselves. No original autographs of any New Testament book survive. What exists are approximately 5,800 Greek manuscripts ranging from tiny papyrus fragments to large vellum codices, spanning from the second to the fifteenth century. These manuscripts differ from one another in thousands of places, ranging from trivial spelling variations to occasional substantive differences in wording or content.

The **narratological** question concerns differences between the accounts of the evangelists themselves as they wrote — cases where Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John describes the same event differently, presents events in a different order, or includes or omits details that create apparent tension with one another.

The Major Text Traditions

Three manuscript traditions are relevant to this analysis:

The Critical Text (CT) — represented by the Nestle-Aland 28th edition (NA28) and the United Bible Societies 5th edition (UBS5) — is the scholarly reconstruction of the earliest attainable Greek text, based primarily on the oldest manuscripts: Papyri 45, 46, 47, 66, 75; Codex Sinaiticus (ℵ, 4th century); Codex Vaticanus (B, 4th century); Codex Alexandrinus (A, 5th century); and others. The Critical Text forms the basis of most modern translations: ESV, NASB, NIV, NLT, NRSV, RSV.

The Byzantine Majority Text (MT/BYZ) — represented by the work of Maurice Robinson and William Pierpont (*The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Textform*, 2005) — reflects the text preserved in the majority of surviving Greek manuscripts, which are predominantly Byzantine in character and date from the 5th century onward. The Majority Text forms the basis of the King James Bible's underlying Greek text (the Textus Receptus) and is preferred by scholars including Wilbur Pickering and Harry Sturz.

The Textus Receptus (TR) — the printed Greek text compiled by Erasmus (1516), Stephanus (1550), and Beza (1598), and used by the KJV translators. It is largely Byzantine in character but contains some readings found in no Greek manuscript, apparently back-translated from the Latin Vulgate.

The ASV used throughout this harmony was based on the Westcott-Hort critical text (1881), which is closely related to the modern Critical Text. Where the ASV's wording differs from what the Majority Text would produce, this analysis notes the difference.

II. Major Textual Variants Between the Critical Text and Majority Text

The Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:13)

The Variant: The CT omits the doxology "For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen" (*hoti sou estin hē basileia kai hē dynamis kai hē doxa eis tous aiōnas, amēn*). The MT includes it.

The Evidence: The doxology is absent from the oldest manuscripts (ℵ, B, D, the Latin Vulgate, Origen, and Tertullian). It appears in the Didache (c. 50–120 C.E.) and in the majority of later Byzantine manuscripts. Most scholars regard it as a liturgical addition drawn from 1 Chronicles 29:11–13 that entered the manuscript tradition through liturgical use. Luke's version of the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:2–4) lacks the doxology in all manuscripts.

Verdict: The CT reading (omitting the doxology) has stronger manuscript support. The doxology is early (attested in the Didache) but was likely added to the text of Matthew from liturgical practice rather than being original to Matthew's Gospel.

Significance for the Harmony: Section 55 of this harmony (Chapter 6) presents the ASV text without the doxology, consistent with the CT. Readers using KJV or NKJV will find the doxology present.

Mark 16:9–20 (The Long Ending of Mark)

The Variant: The CT marks Mark 16:9–20 as non-original. The MT includes it as part of the canonical text. The ASV includes it with a marginal note.

The Evidence: Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Vaticanus — the two oldest and most complete Greek New Testament manuscripts — both end Mark's Gospel at 16:8 with the words *"for they were afraid"* (*ephobounto gar*). Clement of Alexandria and Origen show no knowledge of verses 9–20. Eusebius and Jerome both note that the verses are absent from nearly all Greek manuscripts known to them. A shorter ending (a single sentence summarizing the resurrection proclamation) appears in some manuscripts between verse 8 and the longer ending.

The internal evidence is also significant: verses 9–20 introduce eleven words and phrases not found elsewhere in Mark's Gospel and several that appear inconsistent with Mark's style. The transition from verse 8 to verse 9 is grammatically awkward, with Mary Magdalene re-introduced as if she had not been mentioned in verse 1.

Verdict: The majority of textual critics regard Mark 16:9–20 as a later addition to Mark's Gospel, composed from materials in the other Gospels and early tradition, to provide a more complete ending than the abrupt verse 8. The ending was likely in circulation by the mid-second century, since Irenaeus appears to cite it.

Significance for the Harmony: Chapter 16 of this harmony (Section 185 and the Great Commission) draws on Matthew 28 and Luke 24 for the resurrection narratives rather than Mark 16:9–20, consistent with treating the Markan ending as secondary. The parallel Great Commission language in Mark 16:15–18, included in Section 185, should be read with awareness of its textual status.

Luke 22:43–44 (The Angel and the Sweat of Blood)

The Variant: Luke 22:43–44 — *"And there appeared unto him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became as it were great drops of blood falling down upon the ground"* — is omitted by Papyrus 75, Codex Vaticanus, and a number of other significant witnesses. It is included in Sinaiticus and the Majority Text.

The Evidence: The passage's textual status is genuinely uncertain — more uncertain than the Mark 16 and Matthew 6:13 variants. Several considerations favor its authenticity: it is entirely consistent with Luke's distinctive interest in Jesus's prayer life and with his medical vocabulary (the term *thromboi*, clots); it was known to Justin Martyr (c. 155 C.E.); and its omission may be explained as theologically motivated (some scribes may have found the angel's strengthening of Jesus or the intensity of his anguish theologically difficult). On the other hand, the quality of manuscripts that omit it is high.

Verdict: Genuinely uncertain. The NA28 includes the verses but brackets them to indicate their disputed status. Most scholars tentatively regard them as authentic Lukan material, possibly omitted early from some manuscript streams due to theological concerns.

Significance for the Harmony: Section 171 (Chapter 15) includes the angel and the sweat as the ASV does, consistent with the majority of manuscript evidence.

John 7:53–8:11 (The Woman Taken in Adultery)

The Variant: The entire *Pericope Adulterae* (John 7:53–8:11) is absent from the oldest and most reliable manuscripts (Papyrus 66, Papyrus 75, Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus, and many others). It appears in the Majority Text and in the Byzantine tradition but in various locations in different manuscripts.

The Evidence: This is the most extensively documented textual variant in the New Testament. The passage was discussed in Chapter 19 of this harmony (Section 203). The evidence against its Johannine origin is very strong: absent from early papyri, oldest vellum codices, early versions (Syriac Peshitta, early Coptic), and early fathers (Origen, Tertullian, Cyprian, Chrysostom). Its floating position in the manuscript tradition (it appears after John 7:36 in some manuscripts, after John 21:25 in others, and after Luke 21:38 in yet others) further suggests secondary insertion.

Verdict: The passage was almost certainly not part of John's original Gospel. It nevertheless preserves a genuine early tradition about Jesus (probably pre-Johannine, possibly even pre-canonical) and was included in Section 203 of this harmony for that reason, consistent with the practice of A.T. Robertson and most harmonists.

The Two Genealogies (Matthew 1 and Luke 3)

The Variant: Matthew traces Jesus's descent from Abraham through David and Solomon to Joseph. Luke traces descent from Joseph backward through David's son Nathan, then backward to Adam and God. Both name Joseph as Jesus's father (Matthew directly; Luke with the qualification "as was supposed").

This is a narratological variance, not a textual one — both texts are well-attested in their respective forms. The differences are:

1. Matthew follows the royal Davidic line through Solomon (1 Kings 1); Luke follows a different Davidic branch through Nathan (2 Samuel 5:14). This is not a contradiction if, as most harmonists from Julius Africanus onward have proposed, Matthew traces Joseph's legal ancestry and Luke traces Mary's biological descent (reckoned through Joseph as her husband per Jewish genealogical convention).

2. The names in the post-Davidic sections diverge almost entirely, sharing only Shealtiel and Zerubbabel. Two explanations have been offered: (a) the Julius Africanus theory of levirate marriage producing two legal lines; (b) the Mary's genealogy interpretation. Neither is demonstrable from the texts alone.

3. Matthew has three groups of fourteen generations; Luke has seventy-seven (or seventy-eight) names. The number of generations in Matthew has clearly been compressed (some names are demonstrably omitted from the Old Testament record, e.g., between Joram and Uzziah three kings are skipped: Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah).

Verdict: The two genealogies cannot be harmonized into a single unbroken line. They represent two different genealogical traditions, probably reflecting two different purposes: Matthew establishes Jesus's legal claim to the Davidic throne through Joseph's royal line; Luke establishes his biological connection to David (most likely through Mary) going back to Adam. Neither evangelist presents his genealogy as exhaustive; both are selective and purposeful.

III. Apparent Contradictions Between the Gospel Accounts

The Temptation Sequence (Matthew 4 vs. Luke 4)

The Variance: Matthew (4:1–11) presents the temptations in the order: (1) stones to bread, (2) pinnacle of the Temple, (3) all the kingdoms of the world. Luke (4:1–13) presents them in the order: (1) stones to bread, (2) all the kingdoms, (3) pinnacle of the Temple.

Analysis: Both Matthew and Luke agree on the first temptation; they reverse the order of the second and third. This is one of the clearest examples of a narratological variance in the Synoptic tradition and has been noted by commentators since antiquity. Several explanations have been proposed:

The most commonly accepted is that Luke has rearranged the sequence to end with the Jerusalem/Temple temptation, which serves his theological purpose of orienting the entire Gospel narrative toward Jerusalem (the city where Jesus will ultimately die). Matthew's sequence may be the original order, ending with the climactic mountain vision and the decisive command "Get thee hence, Satan." Neither evangelist claims to present a chronological order; the Greek *tote* (then) in Matthew and *kai* (and) in Luke are not strict temporal markers. The Critical Text and Majority Text agree on the reading of both accounts; this is purely a narratological difference between two evangelists.

Verdict: Not a contradiction in the strict sense, but a deliberate authorial rearrangement by one evangelist (almost certainly Luke) for theological-literary purposes. Luke's arrangement serves his Jerusalem-centered narrative structure; Matthew's may reflect the historical sequence.

The Healing of the Centurion's Servant (Matthew 8 vs. Luke 7)

The Variance: In Matthew (8:5–13), the centurion approaches Jesus directly and speaks with him in person. In Luke (7:1–10), the centurion sends Jewish elders first, then a delegation of friends, and never appears himself.

Analysis: This is the most frequently cited Synoptic "contradiction" in introductory textbooks. The Critical Text and Majority Text are consistent within each Gospel account; the difference is between evangelists, not within manuscript traditions.

The standard harmonistic resolution is that Matthew compresses the account by attributing the centurion's words directly to him (since they were his words, expressed through intermediaries), following the common ancient convention of authorial attribution. The same convention is found in the Old Testament (compare 2 Samuel 12:27 with 2 Samuel 12:26, where Joab sends a message to David that is attributed directly to Joab rather than through a messenger). Matthew is not claiming the centurion was physically present; he is summarizing the centurion's communication.

The more critical alternative reading is that Matthew and Luke are drawing on the same Q-source account but have each shaped it independently, and the "contradictions" reflect their distinct editorial hands rather than eyewitness discrepancy.

Verdict: The difference is real but does not constitute a logical contradiction. An ancient author attributing words spoken through intermediaries directly to their speaker was standard historiographical practice. Luke's fuller account supplies the detail of intermediaries that Matthew omits in his compression.

The Cursing of the Fig Tree (Matthew 21 vs. Mark 11)

The Variance: In Matthew (21:18–22), Jesus curses the fig tree and it withers immediately (*"straightway the fig tree withered away"*), the disciples see it wither immediately, and they express amazement immediately. In Mark (11:12–14, 20–24), Jesus curses the fig tree on Monday morning; the disciples find it withered on Tuesday morning. The discovery and the teaching on faith follow the next morning.

Analysis: This is Mark's characteristic intercalation technique (the "Markan sandwich") — he places the Temple cleansing between the cursing of the tree (Monday) and the disciples' discovery of the withered tree (Tuesday). Matthew compresses the two events into a single scene. Wilbur Pickering and other Majority Text advocates do not find a different reading in the Byzantine tradition; the difference exists equally in both text types.

The Greek of Matthew 21:20 — *"and when the disciples saw it, they marvelled"* — does not require that they saw it wither at the moment of the curse; it can mean they saw the withered tree (the following morning) and marvelled. Matthew has compressed two mornings into a single pericope by omitting the intervening Temple cleansing, which he narrates separately (21:12–17, before the fig tree episode).

Verdict: A clear instance of Matthean compression. Mark's two-day sequence is historically more detailed; Matthew's single-scene narration sacrifices chronological precision for narrative economy. Not a genuine contradiction.

Peter's Denial: How Many Cock Crows? (Mark 14 vs. Matthew, Luke, John)

The Variance: Mark 14:30 and 14:72 specifically mention the cock crowing *twice* (*dis*): *"before the cock crow twice, thou shalt deny me thrice"*, and *"the cock crew the second time."* Matthew 26:34, 74; Luke 22:34, 60; and John 13:38; 18:27 all refer simply to the cock crowing, without specifying "twice."

The Textual Dimension: The Critical Text (NA28) retains *dis* (twice) in Mark 14:30 and 14:72. The Majority Text also retains *dis* in both verses. However, some manuscripts of Mark 14:68 — particularly Codex Sinaiticus, Codex Vaticanus, and Papyrus 45 — omit the phrase *"and the cock crew"* after Peter's first denial. The TR includes it. This creates an internal tension within Mark: if the cock crows after the first denial (14:68) and again after the third (14:72), the sequence of "twice" is coherent. If 14:68's crowing is omitted (as in the oldest manuscripts), the internal Markan sequence is harder to reconstruct.

The Narratological Dimension: The simplest explanation is that Mark — consistently the most detailed and most eyewitness-flavored of the Synoptics — preserves the specific detail of two cock-crows that the other evangelists omit. The tradition of Petrine source material behind Mark (attested by Papias, c. 130 C.E.) makes it plausible that Peter himself remembered the detail of two crows as particularly significant — perhaps because the first crow, which Matthew, Luke, and John do not mention, gave him a warning he failed to heed.

Verdict: No genuine contradiction between the evangelists. Mark specifies "twice"; the others simply say "the cock crew," which is consistent with a cock having crowed twice (one crow is the minimum implied). The textual variant within Mark 14:68 is the more technically interesting problem; the CT omission of the first crow in 14:68 creates a modest internal Markan tension.

The Inscription on the Cross

The Variance: All four Gospels record that an inscription was placed on the cross identifying Jesus. The wording differs:

Matthew 27:37: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS

Mark 15:26: THE KING OF THE JEWS

Luke 23:38: THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS

John 19:19: JESUS OF NAZARETH THE KING OF THE JEWS

John 19:20 notes that the inscription was written in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek. The variations across the four Gospels may reflect (a) different translations of the trilingual inscription, each evangelist translating the Latin or Hebrew version into Greek slightly differently; (b) summarizing paraphrase by different evangelists; or (c) the natural variation of eyewitness recall of a brief text seen from a distance.

Textual note: The Critical Text and Majority Text are consistent within each Gospel; the differences are between evangelists, not within manuscript traditions.

Verdict: The core content is identical across all four: the charge is "King of the Jews," and the name Jesus is connected to it. The variations in phrasing are fully explicable as differing Greek renderings of a multilingual inscription and as characteristic authorial summaries. Augustine addressed this apparent discrepancy in the fourth century, noting that each evangelist

preserved the substance without needing to report the exact wording of a text that existed in three languages.

The Women at the Tomb

The Variance: The accounts of the women who visit the tomb on the first day of the week differ across the Synoptics and John:

Matthew 28:1: Mary Magdalene and the other Mary

Mark 16:1: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome

Luke 24:10: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and others

John 20:1: Mary Magdalene (alone is mentioned; plural implied in "we know not" v.2)

The number and manner of the angels also varies:

Matthew 28:2–5: One angel, sitting on the rolled-away stone outside

Mark 16:5: A young man in white, sitting inside the tomb on the right side

Luke 24:4: Two men in dazzling apparel, standing inside

John 20:12: Two angels in white, sitting (one at the head, one at the foot)

Analysis: The women accounts are not contradictory but additive: each evangelist names the women he knows or chooses to emphasize. The women mentioned in one list are not said to be the only women present. Luke explicitly acknowledges "others" beyond those he names.

The angel/messenger accounts represent the most complex variance in the resurrection narratives. The Critical Text and Majority Text are consistent within each Gospel; the differences are between evangelists. Several observations:

1. An "angel" described as appearing like lightning (Matthew) and a "young man… clothed in a long white garment" (Mark) may be the same figure described through different but compatible lenses. Angelic beings in the Old Testament frequently appear in human form; "two men in dazzling apparel" (Luke) is consistent with two angelic beings appearing as men.

2. The different positions — one outside on the stone (Matthew), one inside on the right (Mark), two standing inside (Luke), two sitting at head and foot (John) — may reflect different moments in a sequence, different women's experiences, or different aspects of what was a complex and overwhelming event recalled with different emphases.

3. Matthew's account focuses on the angel who rolled away the stone and spoke to the women; Mark's and Luke's focus on what was seen and heard inside the tomb. John focuses on Mary's private experience after the others have left.

Verdict: The variations are real and do not dissolve into easy harmonization. They are, however, the kind of variation that characterizes multiple independent witnesses to the same complex event rather than the kind of flat contradiction that would make both accounts impossible simultaneously. No account explicitly denies the content of another. The variation is analogous to what one finds in multiple eyewitness accounts of any significant historical event.

The Post-Resurrection Appearances: Galilee vs. Jerusalem

The Variance: Matthew (28:7, 10, 16) directs the disciples to Galilee for the resurrection appearances; the great commission is given on a mountain in Galilee. Luke (24:49) and Acts 1:4 explicitly command the disciples to remain in Jerusalem and not depart until clothed with the Spirit. Luke's resurrection appearances all take place in or near Jerusalem: Emmaus, the upper room, the Mount of Olives (for the Ascension).

Analysis: This is frequently described as the most significant geographical tension in the resurrection narratives. Several reconciling observations:

1. Matthew does not say the appearances in Jerusalem did not occur; he emphasizes the Galilee appearances and the Galilean great commission. Luke emphasizes Jerusalem because his Gospel is structured around Jerusalem and because Acts opens in Jerusalem.

2. The appearances need not be mutually exclusive. The forty days of resurrection appearances described in Acts 1:3 are ample time for appearances both in Jerusalem and in Galilee. Paul's summary in 1 Corinthians 15:5–8 lists multiple appearances without specifying their locations.

3. Luke 24:49 — "tarry ye in the city" — may refer to the period after the Galilean appearances, consistent with Acts 1, rather than to an absolute prohibition on leaving Jerusalem immediately after the resurrection.

Verdict: The tension is real and reflects the different narrative priorities and sources of Matthew and Luke. Both accounts preserve genuine tradition; neither is invented. The most historically satisfying reconstruction is a sequence of appearances: Jerusalem (the women, Peter, the Emmaus disciples, the eleven), then Galilee (the mountain, the Sea of Tiberias appearance in John 21), then Jerusalem again for the Ascension. Luke, writing his Gospel with Jerusalem as the theological center, selects the Jerusalem-centered appearances; Matthew, writing for a Galilean Jewish audience, emphasizes the Galilean great commission.

IV. Variances Between the Critical Text and Majority Text: A Summary Table

Passage	CT Reading	MT Reading	Significance
Matthew 6:13	Omits doxology	Includes doxology	Lord’s Prayer; liturgical addition likely
Matthew 17:21			

Omits verse (“this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting”)

Includes verse

Assimilation from Mark 9:29

Matthew 18:11

Omits verse (“For the Son of man came to save that which was lost”)

Includes verse

Assimilation from Luke 19:10

Matthew 23:14

Omits verse (“Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows’ houses…”)

Includes verse

Assimilation from Mark 12:40 / Luke 20:47

Mark 1:2

“In Isaiah the prophet”

“In the prophets”

CT is likely original; MT corrects apparent error (Malachi is also cited)

Mark 9:44, 46

Omits repeated refrain (“where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched”)

Includes both refrains

Scribal assimilation to Mark 9:48

Mark 16:9–20

Brackets as later addition

Includes as canonical

Long ending of Mark — see Section II above

Luke 22:19b–20

Includes

Includes

No significant variant here

Luke 22:43–44

Brackets (angel and blood)

Includes

Genuinely uncertain — see Section II above

Luke 23:34a

“Father, forgive them” — omitted in some CT witnesses

Generally included

Internally disputed in CT; probably authentic

John 5:3b–4

Omits “waiting for the moving of the water… an angel… troubled the water”

Includes

Likely explanatory gloss added to John’s text

John 7:53–8:11

Brackets as non-Johannine

Includes

Pericope Adulterae — see Section II above

V. On the Charge of “Contradiction” in the Gospel Accounts

The variances documented above — both textual and narratological — are real. They cannot be dissolved by harmonistic ingenuity alone, nor should the attempt be made where the evidence does not support it. Honest engagement with the Gospel texts requires acknowledging that:

The evangelists were not stenographers. They were ancient historians writing selective, purposeful accounts of the life of Jesus for specific audiences and with specific theological emphases. Ancient historical writing did not require the kind of word-for-word precision that modern citation standards demand. Paraphrase, compression, expansion, and reordering for literary or theological purpose were standard and accepted practices.

The variations are mostly explicable. The differences catalogued above — in genealogies, temptation order, centurion’s approach, fig tree timing, cock crows, cross inscription, women at the tomb, and resurrection geography — are all the kind of variation that characterizes multiple

independent witnesses to real events. They are not the variations one would expect if the accounts were fabricated and coordinating their stories.

The Critical Text and Majority Text agree on the vast majority of the text. The two major Greek text traditions differ in approximately 1,500 places, of which roughly 500 are of any significance for translation or interpretation, and very few are theologically consequential. The major doctrines of the New Testament are not affected by the manuscript variants.

No variant changes the core narrative. The resurrection of Jesus is attested in all four Gospels and all manuscript traditions. The virgin birth, the baptism, the Sermon on the Mount, the crucifixion, the empty tomb — none of these is affected by any known textual variant. The variants documented above are real but marginal to the central claims of the Gospel tradition.

The strongest evidence for the Gospel narratives' historical reliability is the pattern of variation itself. Documents fabricated to coordinate and deceive tend to agree more perfectly than authentic accounts. The roughness, the variation, the occasional tension — these are the signature of multiple genuine witnesses reporting from their own perspectives and with their own emphases, not the signature of a well-edited forgery.

VI. Conclusion: The Harmony Assessed

This harmony of the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles has covered 24 chapters and 257 sections, from the Prologue of John ("In the beginning was the Word") and the genealogy of Matthew ("The book of the generation of Jesus Christ") through the missionary journeys of Paul and the final word of Acts: "preaching the kingdom of God… with all boldness, none forbidding him."

The Greek New Testament, examined in both its Critical Text and Majority Text forms, presents a tradition that is:

Multiply attested. The core events of Jesus's ministry, death, and resurrection are documented in at least three independent witnesses (Matthew, Mark, Luke), four when John is included, and five when Paul's letters are considered (1 Corinthians 15:3–8 contains a creedal statement that most scholars date to within five years of the crucifixion).

Internally coherent. The variances documented above are real but do not destroy the coherence of the overall narrative. The trajectory from the baptism of John through the ministry in Galilee, the turn toward Jerusalem, the passion, and the resurrection is consistent across all four Gospels and corroborated by Acts.

Textually reliable. The New Testament is the best-attested document of the ancient world by any measure of manuscript quantity, manuscript age, and proximity to the events described. No classical document approaches its manuscript attestation. The differences between the major text traditions are minor relative to the vast agreement between them.

Theologically demanding. The harmonization of these texts has required engagement with some of the most profound theological claims in human literature: the pre-existence of the Logos, the incarnation, the Sermon on the Mount's radicalization of ethics, the parables of grace,

the passion and resurrection, the commission to make disciples of all nations. The variances between the accounts do not diminish these claims; they authenticate the human witnesses through whom the claims have been transmitted.

The final verse of Acts — *"preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness, none forbidding him"* — is not an ending. It is an open conclusion, a sentence without a period, because the story Acts narrates has not concluded. The harmony ends where Acts ends: with the gospel loose in the world, moving toward the uttermost part of the earth, none forbidding it.

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