

**New Light on the Mutual Omission of Mark 14:51-52  
in Matthew and Luke (Discussion Paper)**

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***1. Presuppose***

This article investigates why Mark 14:51-52 is absent in Matthew and Luke. These verses in question are;

καὶ νεανίσκος τις συνηκολούθει αὐτῷ περιβεβλημένος  
σινδόνα ἐπὶ γυμνοῦ, καὶ κρατοῦσιν αὐτόν. ὁ δὲ καταλιπὼν  
τὴν σινδόνα γυμνὸς ἔφυγεν.

And a certain young man was following Him, wearing *nothing but* a linen sheet over *his* naked *body*; and they seized him. But he left the linen sheet behind, and escaped naked.<sup>1</sup>

For the sake of simplicity, we must start with the premise that Mark is the first Gospel. If that is the case, then the omission of the Marcan passage in question in both Matthew and Luke was a deliberate decision.

Surprisingly, few references have been made to this omission. For example, Howard M. Jackson merely writes about the omission

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, NASB is used for quotations in English.

as follows: “I shall not digress to consider the issue why Matthew and Luke omit them.<sup>2</sup>” Scholars seem to want to avoid mentioning this problem.

Up to the present day there is no satisfactory explanation for the mutual understanding to comment on these verses. But why did Matthew and Luke omit the passage?

## ***2. Flight of the Youth and the Youth of the Empty Tomb in Mark***

Perhaps the possibility of identifying the fleeing youth of 14:51-52 with the youth of the tomb in 16:5 offers the key to this problem. The verse states: “And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right, wearing a white robe; and they were amazed” (Mk. 16:5). Although some studies have been made on this identification, there is little agreement among scholars. In fact, what seems to have been lacking in the discussions to date has been any satisfactory explanation as to why Matthew and Luke have omitted any reference to the youth in the Garden.

If we regard Mark as the first Gospel, we cannot easily identify the announcer of the resurrection of Jesus in the empty tomb as an angel. We can only deduce his identification as an angel

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<sup>2</sup> Howard M. Jackson, “Why The Youth Shed His Cloak and Fled Naked: The Meaning and purpose of Mark 14:51-52,” *JBL* 116/2 (1997): 273.

from the other Gospels and later works. Moreover, we cannot cite with any certainty any specific verses of the Old Testament to justify regarding the youth as an angel. We have no rational foundation for believing that the “youth” of 16:5 is an angel. Therefore, as long as we understand Mark to be the “source” account, we should conclude that the “youth” of the empty tomb in Mk. 16:5 means literally a “youth.” In the later Gospels and other Christian works, the nature of the announcer of Jesus Christ’s resurrection was changed, and each subsequent author changes the character and number of the announcer.

### ***3. The Youth’s Exchanging of the “Sindon” with Jesus***

If the youth is not an angel but a human being, it turns out that he would have been the first person to have known of the resurrection of Jesus, not least because of what he said. If the youth is not an angel but the first human eyewitness, we cannot help regarding the youth as a certain disciple of Jesus. Stephen B. Hatton insists that the youth of 14:51-52 semasiologically implies some disciple of Jesus because the author of Mark depicts the youth as the character who was following (συνηκολούθει) Jesus. He suggests that his following evokes the image of discipleship of Jesus. Hatton also points out that the verb συνακολουθέω appears

only in 5:37 in Mark.<sup>3</sup> It seems that there is much justice in Hatton's theory, because he deduces the basis for his theory only from the existing (i.e. non-supposed) text of Mark. Therefore if the youth of 14:51-52 is one of Jesus' disciples, we should equate the youth of 16:5 with the supposed disciples in 14:51-52.

The identification of two "neaniskoi" will naturally lead us further into a consideration of the difference of their clothes. The youth of 14:51-52 has on a linen cloth (σινδών), while the one in 16:5 has on a white robe (στολή λευκή). This will allow us to interpret that the youth changes his own burial outfit depicted as σινδών into a white robe. We should avoid seeking the intended use of "sindon" into the external and preceding books except Mark. It is most important how the author of Mark uses the term "sindon" in his Gospel. At least, the author of Mark himself determinably expresses the intended use of Jesus' "sindon" as a burial outfit: "And Joseph bought a linen cloth, took Him down, wrapped Him in the linen cloth (σινδών)" (Mk. 15:46). In fact, when the reader reads that far, he can realize in hindsight that the intended use of the youths' "sindon" in the already-read 14:51-52 is a burial outfit in the same way.

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen B. Hatton, "Mark's Naked Disciple: The Semiotics and Comedy of Following." *Neot* 35 (2001): 37-8.

We should notice that the youth exchange the burial outfit with Jesus in context. Even if the events in 14:51-52 and 16:5 was actually occurred, the author of Mark intends to add the story and to arrange it because he appreciates the meta-level significance the historical event conveyed, though we do not need to go that far.

If what the youth left behind in the garden is a burial outfit, the meaning is that the youth left his death. What he was escaping from was not preparation for his death but itself. This distinction is very important. This is the only possible interpretation for the “exchange” of clothes worn by the youth and Jesus. By this exchange, the author intends to express the death-for-salvation of Jesus. Therefore, the youth in the “sindon” has on death itself. In Marcan context, if the youth were arrested, he would have died on the cross with Jesus without doubt. However he ran away. The reason for his flight presents no problem at all. After all, Jesus died so that the youth could live. The youth was escaping from death itself, while Jesus died the death of the youth on his body in context.

#### ***4. On the White Robe***

Next, we should think about what the white robe represents. The adjective λευκός, which means “white,” appears only twice in

the Gospel of Mark. These two verses are the 16:5 and 9:3. The former is used for the color of the youth's robe (στολή), while the latter expresses the condition of Jesus' garments (ἱμάτια) in the transfiguration of Jesus. This "white" in the Jesus' transfiguration implies the resurrection of Jesus, because "and as they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man should rise from the dead" (Mk. 9:9). In other words, the readers infer from the transfiguration of the character into "white" what event is the resurrection story which does not exist in Mark. If it is possible to identify the youth in 14:51-52 and one in 16:5, the resurrection transfiguration of the youth is expressed by the change of his clothes. Therefore, the youth in 16:5 has been resurrected, because it is expressed that he has been transfigured for the change of his robe's color.

##### ***5. Analogy Between Peter and the Two Youths in Mark***

It follows from what has been said that the youth is a disciple who survived the incident of Jesus' arrest, and that he was dead by the time when the author of Mark wrote his Gospel. We must accept that the author of Mark perceived the youth the disciple to be special because it was he who proclaims first the resurrection of

Jesus. As I have already stated, because the youth in 16:5 is not an angel but a human being, he was the first person to have known of the resurrection of Jesus. Interestingly, if Mark is the first Gospel, the fact that the youth is the first witness of Jesus' resurrection corresponds with the testimony that Peter was the person who experienced the first appearance of Jesus in I Cor. Chap. 15. It is likely that Peter died until the first Gospel was written.

Even though the person who announced the Resurrection in Mark is Peter based on regarding the two youths as the same, we have no need to regard the announcers of the other Gospels as the same. There is the announcer's role inherent in Mark as the first Gospel, and the announcers of the sequent Gospels have the role inherent in each respective Gospel. Until now, we have blurred the distinctive roles of the announcers' disregarding the difference in the accounts of the subsequent Gospels. The announcer of Jesus' resurrection in Mark is also associated with the fleeing youth the account of whom is peculiar to Mark. The fact that both Matthew and Luke mutually omits the youth's flight of Mk. 14:51-52 makes it clear that the authors of Matthew and Luke could understand the significance of the youth's flight of Mk. 14:51-52. In fact, these two authors seem to have omitted this particular passage of the precede Mark in order to amend the story of the empty tomb in

Matthew and Luke.

### ***6. The True Nature of the Problem***

Neil Q. Hamilton presupposes that the controversy with the Sadducees (12:18ff.) in order to understand the connection between the fleeing youth and the youth in the empty tomb in Mark.<sup>4</sup> Hamilton regards the two youths as “a witness tying together the arrest and the empty tomb as well as the angelic messenger.”<sup>5</sup> Moreover he insists that Jesus answer in this controversy (i.e. “They neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven”) shows that Mark did not have a materialistic view of the resurrection body which would require the use of the corpse from the tomb, and this controversy in Mark is consistent with I Cor.15.<sup>6</sup>

Hamilton has a sure eye with the exception that Mark did not have materialistic view. However this controversy with Sadducees does not serve to explain the other verses in Mark itself, but rather shows the influence of Mk. 14:51-52 on Matt. 27:51-53, and to Luke 24:13-35. In other words, just like the author of Mark, the

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<sup>4</sup> Neil Q. Hamilton, “Resurrection Tradition and the Composition of Mark,” *JBL*, 86 (1965), 415-21.

<sup>5</sup> *idem* 417.

<sup>6</sup> *idem* 417-18.



authors of both Matthew and Luke presuppose the simile that those who rise from the dead “are like angels in heaven” in the controversy with Sadducees.

The authors of the subsequent Gospels expanded the specific passages, because it is acceptable that the number and action of announcers who conveyed news of Jesus’ resurrection is different; i.e. the author of Matthew expounded on the Resurrection of Saints (Matt. 27:51-53), Luke expounded the Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35). These specific passages are associated with the difference of the announcers’ role and their number in the empty tomb of each gospel.

Accepting this as a premise, we shall discuss it in detail in respect of redactions in the Gospel of Matthew and Luke.

### ***7. Redactions in Matthew***

The author of Matthew understood the connection between the fleeing youth with the youth of the empty tomb in Mark. Then, along the lines of the connection, the author of Matthew omitted the fleeing youth, and rewrote the respect to a youth in Mark’s empty tomb to be “an angel of the Lord” (ἄγγελος κυρίου ; Matt. 28:2).

Ulrich Luz insists that Matt. 27:51-53 is closely connected to

the empty tomb of Matthew (28:1-10). Moreover Luz says that the great earthquake in the empty tomb of Matthew makes the readers remember the Resurrection of the Saints (27:51) by “tomb”(μνημεῖον 27:52,53/ 28:8), “shake/ earthquake”(σειώ 27:51/ σεισμός 28:2, 4), and the root “fear” (φοβ- 27:54/ 28:4,5,8,10).<sup>7</sup> And further, on the Resurrection of Saints, Arai Sasagu says, “according to Matthew, the resurrection of the death begins to coincide with the Jesus’ death.”<sup>8</sup> Those two indications are very critical. Based on those indications, we can understand the omission of the flight youth and the modification of the youth into “an angel of the Lord.”

The author of Matthew seems to understand the Marcan text as follows: Based on the connection between Mk. 14:51-52 and 16:5, the author of Matthew regarded the youth of the empty tomb in Mark as a certain disciple. Anyway, it is unclear whether or not the author recognized the disciple as Peter, based on the connection with Jesus’ transfiguration (9:3). Be that as it may, the author of Matthew interpreted the youth dressed in a white robe as a certain dead disciple who has been resurrected. Therefore, if this dead

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<sup>7</sup> Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21-28: Hermeneia – A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible* (trans. James E. Crouch; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005) 560-61, 595.

<sup>8</sup> Sasagu Arai, *Iesu To Sono Jidai [Jesus and His Age]* (Tokyo: Iwanami, 1974) 191.

disciple already has been resurrected, it must have occurred before Jesus' resurrection. In any event, the resurrection of this disciple occurred at a time before the rising of the sun when the three women came to the tomb (Mk. 16:2). After all, the author of Matthew extended back at the moment of Jesus' death. In order to explain the resurrection of Jesus and disciples in chronological order, the author of Matthew referred to the resurrection of the Saints based on the theory that the deceased saints began to resurrect at the moment of Jesus' death and appeared in public after Jesus resurrection.

It is likely that the author of Matthew does not feel the need to allude to the first witness and announcer of Jesus' resurrection to the death disciple in the empty tomb because he had already referred to the resurrection of the Saints. The author simply omitted the disciple as the first witness in the empty tomb. Instead, the author gave the role of announcing Jesus' resurrection to an angel who was the deputy agency "of the Lord" and who rolled away the extremely large stone. Marcan text does not explicitly explain who rolls away the stone in detail. In Mark, the youth is a character who has entered into the tomb after the stone had been rolled away to serve as a witness to testify that the tomb is empty. Furthermore, in Mk. 16:3, the women speak as follows: "Who will

roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?.” Neither the youth in the empty tomb nor the women roll away the stone. Probably the author of Matthew believed that either Jesus or the God moved the stone. To avoid any confusion for the readers, it is very likely that the author rejected the option that Jesus opened the stone.

### ***8. On the Redactions in Luke***

Like the author of Matthew, the author of Luke understood the connection between a flight youth and a youth of the empty tomb in Mark. Consequently, the author omitted the flight of the youth, and the author of Luke expanded upon the Emmaus story (Luke 24:13-35).

The central characters in this Emmaus story are two travelers, properly speaking “two of them” (δύο ἐξ αὐτῶν ; 24:13). One of the two travelers is called Cleopas (24:18). The name of the other is unknown. Because the personal pronoun “them” indicates “the eleven” or “all the rest” in v. 9, the unknown person can be a reference to either in the Apostles, or to “all the rest” of the Apostles.

Here, we should notice that the terms, which are applied to the two announcers of Jesus’ resurrection, differ between the empty

tomb and the Emmaus story. Although the announcers in Luke's empty tomb are expressed as "two men" (ἄνδρες δύο ; 24:4), the announcers in the Emmaus story are "a vision of angels" (ὄπτασία ἀγγέλων ; 24:23). The difference is very small but very important, for it is the key to explaining the increase in the number of the announcers in the empty tomb excluding a Mark's account.

In traditional interpretation, "a vision of angels" in v. 23 is thought to be the reason that the "two men" in v. 4 means angels. However, in Luke's context, the statement of "a vision of angels" is attributed to the women's acknowledgment. It is obvious that the author of Luke recognized the announcers of Jesus' resurrection as human beings, because the author himself previously writes "two men" in v. 4. In fact, it is clear that the two announcers have the look of angel from the viewpoint of the women as human beings.

It is very understandable that the author of Luke wants the readers to identify two travelers to Emmaus as the two announcers having the look of angels. In Luke's account of the controversy with the Sadducees, "those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead" are defined as "like angels". Moreover "neither can they die anymore" (20:35-36). In fact, the author anticipates that two men traveling to Emmaus believe that the two figures, which appeared to the women, had the

look of Angels. The two of Cleopas and another who will be resurrected in the future transmit the message of Jesus' resurrection to themselves in the present day through the women.

The author of Luke used the way to expressing method that somebody in the future transmits some message to himself in the present day through the other person. In Acts Chap. 16, a certain man of Macedonia appears to Paul in an ὄραμα (vision) (Acts 16:9), and he requests Paul to come over to Macedonia and help the Macedonians. Immediately, Paul goes to Philippi of Macedonia (16:10-12). And then he baptizes Lydia and her household (16:14-15). In addition, Paul baptizes a jailer and his household (16:32-33). It follows that the person who appeared to Paul in the vision requesting that he comes over to Macedonia is one of conveying a message of these Macedonians. It is very likely that the same method has used in the case of the two announcers in the empty tomb and the two travelers to Emmaus.

That means that the author of Luke could understand the connection between the fleeing youth and the youth of the empty tomb in Mark. That enabled him to omit the fleeing youth, the same concept on spiritual association having been used in the Emmaus story. By identifying the two travelers to Emmaus with the two announcers, the author of Luke wants the readers to realize what

kind is the nature of resurrection.