

Did Jesus Ride Two Donkeys? An Exegetical Study of Matthew 21:2

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Abstract

There has been a challenge regarding the number of donkeys ridden by Jesus during the triumphant entry into Jerusalem. This is exacerbated by the notion that Matthew was unaware of Hebrew poetic parallelism in his allusion to Zechariah's prophecy and portrayed Jesus as riding two donkeys. Matthew's gospel contrasts the other three evangelists, who report only one donkey in their accounts. In this article, an exegetical analysis of Matthew 21:2 reveals grammatical and lexical considerations that clarify Matthew's apparent divergence. It has been established that Jesus mounted a young male donkey that had never been ridden before. The final personal plural pronoun $\alpha\upsilon\tau\omega\nu$ in Matthew 21:7, read together with the final coordinating conjunction $\kappa\alpha\iota$, has been shown that it relates to the garments upon which Jesus sat, not on the two donkeys. The study also shows that when the final $\kappa\alpha\iota$ in Matthew 21:5 is read epexegetically as an adverb or ascensive conjunction and translated as "even," the allusion to Zechariah's prophecy proves that Matthew was aware of Hebraic poetic parallelism. The same holds for the Hebrew text in Zechariah 9:9, where the *waw* conjunction is considered epexegetical.

Keywords: Epexegetical Conjunction, Personal Pronoun, Hebraic Parallelism, Male Donkey, Triumphant Entry

Introduction

Matthew 21:2 has been understood differently by many Bible scholars and interpreters. The triumphant entry was one of the rare occasions recorded by all four evangelists.¹ Matthew departs from

¹ Matthew 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-40; John 12:12-19. Matthew is the only one who reports that there were two donkeys while the other three Gospels report only one.

the other three evangelists on the number of donkeys associated with the triumphant entry of Jesus into Jerusalem. While the other evangelists reported only one donkey, Matthew reported two donkeys.

Bible translators have grappled with this issue, and some have tried to smoothen Matthew's apparent disparity by rendering the text in a manner that projects only one donkey. For example, the *Living Bible* translates Matthew 21:2 as "on a donkey's colt," thereby conflating the two animals into one. The *Living Bible* does the same in verse 7, where it says they "threw their coats over the colt" and adds a footnote 'Implied' to explain its translation. The *Living Bible* completely departs from Matthew's Greek text that mentions two animals. Perhaps the challenge faced by *Living Bible* translators was dealing with the idea of Jesus riding two animals and further harmonizing Matthew with the other gospels that indicate only one animal.

Scholars have wrestled with the text for many years and developed several propositions.² John P. Meier suggests that since Matthew references a prophecy of Zechariah, he was unaware of Hebrew poetic parallelism and was more excited with the literal fulfillment of Zechariah's prophecy than the historicity of the event (Matt 21:4-5 cf. Zech 9:9). The second phrase of Zechariah's prophecy must be taken as a further explanation of the first phrase. This is how Hebraic poetic parallelism is structured. Meier also disputes the *Revised Standard Version* translation "and he sat *thereon*," contending that it should read "and he sat on them (both

² Davies and Allison offer a helpful summary of seven possible interpretations of Matthew's two donkeys: (i) The evangelist simply misread the OT (MT or LXX): he was 'unfamiliar with the nature of Hebrew poetry;' (ii) He knew (because he was there or learned from one who was) that in fact there were two asses, or at least he had non-Markan tradition to that effect; (iii) The Matthean tradition had already made the literal misapplication of Zech 9:9 to the entry story (cf. the testimony hypothesis); (iv) The newness of the colt (Mk 11:2) implied the presence of its mother (v) 21:5 is part of a wider phenomenon, Matthew's tendency to multiply by two; (vi) Matthew was thinking of an oriental throne supported by two animals; (vii) Menken suggests that Matthew read Zech 9:9 in the light of 2 Sam 16:1-4, where two asses are for David's household to ride upon. W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew*, Libronix Digital Library (London: T&T Clark International, 2004).

animals),” so that there is concord between Jesus’ command to the disciples and his actual riding of the two beasts (vv. 2, 7). Based on the theory that Matthew used Mark as his literary source, Matthew’s narrative of two animals is somewhat mistaken since Mark only reports one.³

Furthermore, Meier wonders how a seasoned Jewish scholar could blatantly misread commonplace parallelism and concludes that Matthew must have been a Gentile Christian writer and not a Jew, as is commonly believed.⁴ W. C. Allen also supports that Matthew carelessly modified the Markan passage and did not harmonize ideas. His report of placing the garments on both animals was unnecessary because Jesus could not sit on two beasts.⁵ While Allen agrees with Meier on Mark as the literary source of Matthew’s gospel, he does not consent to the concept of Jesus riding two beasts. D. R. A. Hare disagrees with Meier on the idea that Matthew was unaware of Hebrew poetic parallelism but agrees that since the coats were thrown on both beasts, Jesus sat on both animals simultaneously.⁶ Hare does not explain whether Jesus could have ridden them one after another or simultaneously.

Donald Hagner agrees with Hare that Matthew, being a Hebrew, must have understood the prophecy of Zechariah and its intended synonymous poetic parallelism. He posits that Matthew most likely adopted a contemporary rabbinic method of interpretation that tended to ignore scriptural poetry with elaborate literal readings. However, Hagner doubts whether Matthew meant two animals to fulfill the Zechariah prophecy. He submits that Matthew might have only been excited by the literal fulfillment of the prophecy that unfolded before him.⁷

³ John P. Meier, *Matthew* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 1980), 232.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ W. C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to S. Matthew - International Critical Commentary*, Libronix Digital Library (London: T&T Clark, 1907).

⁶ D. R. A. Hare, *Matthew*, Interpretation, a Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1993), 239.

⁷ D.A. Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14-28. Word Biblical Commentary*, Libronix Digital Library, vol. 33B, 61 vols. (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002).

U. Luz and H. Koester questioned whether Matthew knew that the prophecy he inserted into the narrative to show its fulfillment was from Zechariah. This is because Matthew does not mention the prophet's name.⁸ They do not dispute the fact that the prophecy comes from Zechariah. Their doubt is only occasioned by Matthew's not mentioning Zechariah's name and, therefore, might have been ignorant about the prophet.

Based on the foregoing, this study aims to achieve two goals. Firstly, how many donkeys are recorded in Matthew's gospel, and how many does Jesus mount? Secondly, how does Matthew's account relate to the other three evangelists regarding the number of donkeys?

Exegetical Analysis of Matthew 21:2

The procedure used in this study was an exegetical analysis of the passage. The first part deals with the grammatical analysis of the text, including a comparative analysis of the Masoretic Text (MT) of Zechariah 9:9 and the Septuagint (LXX) since they bear on Matthew's witness. The second part is a lexical analysis of keywords that was undertaken to offer contextual meanings and their implications for understanding the passage. Finally, intertextual considerations were briefly explored with parallel gospel accounts, especially the number reported to have been ridden by Jesus.

⁸ U. Luz and H. Koester, *Matthew: A Commentary. Translation of: Das Evangelium Nach Matthaus*, ed. H Koester, trans. James E. Crouch, Libronix Digital Library, vol. 2 (Minneapolis: Augsburg: Fortress Press, 2001).

Greek Text

λέγων αὐτοῖς· πορεύεσθε⁹ εἰς τὴν κώμην τὴν κατέναντι¹⁰ ὑμῶν, καὶ εὐθέως εὐρήσετε ὄνον δεδεμένην καὶ πῶλον μετ’ αὐτῆς· λύσαντες ἀγάγετέ¹¹ μοι.

Personal Translation

Saying to them, “Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied with her colt. Loose them and bring them to me.”

Grammatical Analysis

Since much of the discussion surrounding Matthew 21:2 hinges on Matthew’s understanding of the Zechariah text in the MT and LXX, the two versions have been put in parallel with the Greek New Testament (GNT) for analysis in Table 1:

⁹ There are two variants noted here. The first is an aorist subjunctive passive form πορευθήτε. The reading does have the support of C K N Γ W Δ f¹ and the majority text. Notably, the earliest and best manuscripts such as ℵ and B are missing. The second variant reading is an aorist passive participle πορευθέντες (after going) with the support of ℵ B D and some minuscules. This reading has strong support. However, on the basis of internal evidence, the shorter reading is most likely the original form.

¹⁰ There is one variant reading here of an improper preposition ἀπέναντι with the support of K N W ΓΔ f¹ ¹³ and some minuscules as well as the majority text. This variant also appears in two other places in Matthew (27:24, 61). In Matt 27:24, there is a variant of κατέναντι. The second occurrence has no variant. Κατέναντι is also the word used in Mark 11:2 and Luke 19:30 in the parallel passages. The meaning of these two improper prepositions is basically the same when followed by a genitive, as it is in this case. It seems the choice for κατέναντι has more to do with harmonization with the other parallel passages in the Synoptics. It is also doubtful if κατέναντι is Matthew’s style since it only appears once in Matthew 21:2. Otherwise, the prepositions themselves have no significant bearing on the meaning of the text.

¹¹ There is a variant here for a present imperative ἄγετε instead of the aorist imperative ἀγάγετέ adopted in the text. ἄγετε has the support of only two good witnesses B D and is not widely attested. While this variant reading is shorter, the adopted aorist imperative reading ἀγάγετέ is in concord with the aorist participle λύσαντες in the instruction Jesus gave to the disciples. Stylistically, the sameness of the tense in the predicate reads better.

Table 1. Zechariah’s Text in the MT, GNT, and LXX¹²

MT (Zech 9:9)	GNT (Matt 21:5)	LXX (Zech 9:9)
<p>גִּילֵי מְאֹד greatly Rejoice בַּת־צִיּוֹן daughter-of Zion הֲרִיעֵי בַת daughter-of shout! יְרִשְׁלָיִם. הִגָּה מִלְכֶּךָ your king sec! Jerusalem צַדִּיק לְךָ יָבֹא. righteous to you he comes וְנוֹשָׁע and having salvation הֵא עֲנִי וְרִכָּב and riding gentle he עַל הַחֲמֹר וְעַל־עֵר colt even-on donkey on בְּרִי אֲתָנוֹת׃ a donkey foal of</p>	<p>εἶπατε τῇ θυγατρὶ Say to the daughter Σιὼν· ἰδοὺ ὁ βασιλεὺς of Zion, Behold the king σου ἔρχεται σοι your he comes to you πραῦς καὶ ἐπιβεβηκὼς humble and mounted ἐπὶ ὄνον καὶ ἐπὶ on a donkey even on πῶλον υἱὸν ὑποζυγίου. a coat the foal of a donkey</p>	<p>Χαίρε σφοδρά, Rejoice greatly θυγάτερ Σιὼν· O daughter of Zion κήρυσσε, θυγάτερ proclaim, O daughter Ἰερουσαλὴμ· ἰδοὺ of Jerusalem! Behold ὁ βασιλεὺς σου ἔρχεται the king your he comes σοι δίκαιος καὶ to you righteous and σώζων αὐτός, πραῦς salvation he (is), humble καὶ ἐπιβεβηκὼς ἐπὶ and mounted on ὑποζύγιον καὶ πῶλον a donkey even a foal νέον. young.</p>

The first line in Matthew, εἶπατε τῇ θυγατρὶ Σιὼν (say to the daughter of Zion), is not found in Zechariah but is believed to be a direct quotation from Isaiah 62:11 which also mentions the appearance of a savior, just as Zechariah does.¹³ The MT and LXX begin their address with a clarion call to rejoice. The one invited to rejoice is the daughter of Zion. There is also the daughter of Jerusalem in both texts, which is missing in the GNT. The two phrases, daughter of Zion and daughter of Jerusalem are parallel phrases used to designate the inhabitants of Jerusalem. The GNT also omits the phrase δίκαιος καὶ σώζων αὐτός (righteous and salvation is he) found in the LXX and MT (עֲשֵׂהוּן קִדְדִּיק). Matthew skips those words and instead focuses on the humility of Christ. For the last clause, Matthew’s reading seems closer to the Hebrew, where it reads, “Riding on a donkey, even a colt, the foal of a donkey.” The LXX rendition is much simpler and reads “a donkey and/or even a young foal.”

¹² The Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT); The Greek New Testament (GNT) NA28; and The Septuagint (LXX) by Swete.
¹³ Hagner, *Libronix Digital Library*.

Many Bible translators of the Old Testament do not translate the plural form of תֹּנִיָּה, which is at the end of Zechariah 9:9. If it were translated, it would read “the foal of donkeys.” This would suggest that the young donkey had more than one mother. Stephen C. Carlson highlights the plurality of the feminine noun and indicates that the word is used in a general sense “since a foal can only have one mother.”¹⁴ Keil and Delitzsch also submit that “תֹּנִיָּה (is) the plural of the species, (as in תוֹרֵךְ רִיפָּ, Judg 14:5; מִיִּזְעָה רִיעָה, Gen 37:31, Lev 4:23).”¹⁵ If the plural is translated, it should be understood that the author did not intend a plurality of mothers, but species from which the young are born. Keil and Delitzsch reference other passages where plural nouns are usually translated in the singular sense. Due to this reason, most translators have rendered the plural noun as singular to avoid any ambiguity in the reading of the text.

Matthew 21:2, which is usually read together with verses 5 and 7, opens with Jesus commanding two of His disciples to go (πορεύεσθε) into the next village. The previous text informs the reader that Jesus and the disciples, including the crowd that had trailed Him (Matt 20:29), reached Bethpage, which was located in the area of Mount Olives (Matt 21:1). This was after having left Jericho, which was at a lower elevation than Jerusalem. R. T. France states that Jerusalem is located at an altitude of 3,000 feet above Jericho. Bethpage was considered part of Jerusalem and situated on the ridge of Mount Olives, from which Jerusalem would be in view.¹⁶

The adverb of place, κατέναντι (in front of), has been understood differently by translators. Some have rendered it as “opposite,”¹⁷

¹⁴ Stephen C. Carlson, “‘The Jenny and the Colt’ in Matthew’s Messianic Entry, Part 1: Matthew 21:5 as a Reading of Zechariah 9:9 in Light of Mark 11:1-10,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 81, (2019): 82.

¹⁵ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Accordance electronic ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), paragraph 31368.

¹⁶ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew: The New International Commentary on the New Testament*. epub. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 2007.

¹⁷ BDAG, Louw and Nida, NASB.

“ahead of,”¹⁸ “next,”¹⁹ and “in front of,”²⁰ among other renderings. A. T. Robertson, in his grammar, adopts two possible readings whenever the adverb is used with a genitive as either “before” or “opposite.”²¹ Most likely, the adverb sought to communicate to the two disciples that they needed to go to another place near Bethpage. Some scholars have suggested that since the two places are mentioned within the immediate context, Jesus must have been thinking about Bethany. Conversely, when the parallel account of Mark is considered, Bethpage is also a possible destination (Matt 21:1, 17 cf. Mark 11:1). Both locations lay east of Jerusalem. They were well within the vicinity of the city.²²

The command of Jesus to the two disciples has raised some doubt as to whether Jesus used divine foreknowledge or knew the donkeys’ owner and made prior arrangements. France believes that the arrangement of the command to the disciples suggests that Jesus had made prior arrangements to loan animals from someone who was a supporter. He does not envisage a situation where a stranger would convince a villager if such an owner had no prior knowledge of the request.²³ Leon Morris agrees with France’s assertions and submits that even though no evangelist identifies the owners of the animals, Jesus had pre-arranged with the owners what He wanted to do. The statement ‘the Lord has need of them’ was a pre-arranged password.²⁴ Hendriksen and Kistemaker also agree with France and posit that the owners of the animals seemingly knew Jesus and must have been His followers.²⁵

¹⁸ BECNT, NET, NIV, NRSV.

¹⁹ CEV.

²⁰ ESV.

²¹ A. T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 3rd ed. (London: Broadman Press, 1934), 643.

²² Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and David S. Dockery, vol. 22 of *The New American Commentary*. Accordance electronic ed. (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 311.

²³ France, *epub*.

²⁴ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1992), 520.

²⁵ W. Hendriksen and S. J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew*, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1953-2001), 760.

However, Luz and Koester dispute the assertion that Jesus had previously made arrangements with the owner. If He had done so, He would not have anticipated any objections from the owner. Instead, the text demonstrates His divine foreknowledge. In so doing, Jesus as king appropriated for himself another person's property in the same manner kings appropriated the property of subjects.²⁶ Craig Keener adds that the text proves Jesus' foreknowledge and aptly portrays the donkeys' owner as a dignified man who recognized and respected rulers.²⁷ Hagner also supports the concept of divine foreknowledge and adds that God ordered these events, as is shown by the word 'immediately' and the future tense verb 'you will find.'²⁸ Additionally, divine foreknowledge was part of Jesus' nature as demonstrated elsewhere within Matthew's gospel (see for example, Matt 17:27; 20:17-19). Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that Jesus employed his divine foresight to appropriate Himself donkeys from the owner without any prior arrangements.

Some scholars have accused Matthew of not having a knowledge of the Hebrew poetic idiom when he quoted from Zechariah and employed the final καὶ, which is usually translated as "and" in most English translations (Matt 21:5). One obtains the impression that Matthew missed the parallelism intended in Hebrew, and alluded to two animals instead of one. However, if other options for rendering the final καὶ are considered, Matthew may have kept the spirit of the Hebraic parallelism intended in Zechariah's prophecy.

According to Daniel B. Wallace, καὶ may also be employed as an ascensive conjunction and translated as "even." He submits that "this use expresses a *final addition* or *point of focus*."²⁹ This would mean that Matthew does not introduce a second donkey in his allusion to Zechariah's prophecy but remains in sync with the Hebraic poetic parallelism. Employing καὶ in its ascensive sense would mean that what follows explains what is preceding it. As

²⁶ U. Luz and H. Koester, *Libronix Digital Library*.

²⁷ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, epub (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999).

²⁸ Hagner, *Libronix Digital Library*.

²⁹ Daniel B. Wallace, *The Basics of New Testament Syntax: An Intermediate Greek Grammar*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2000), 296.

such, the translation would read “and mounted on a donkey, *even* on a colt, the foal of a donkey (Matt 21:5).” The rendering of καὶ as “even” could also be adopted for the LXX, and it would have the same implications.

Similarly, Kermit Titrud submits that there has been an undermining of the role that καὶ plays in the New Testament. He says the word has received little or no attention in establishing its New Testament usage. Yet, it appears approximately 9,000 times in the New Testament corpus of literature, almost in every verse. Some translators have even considered it pleonastic (redundant, not needed). As a result, some do not even translate it, as they perceive it to be irrelevant. He contends that an author’s choice of its usage counts for something. The challenge has been to limit its usage as a conjunctive, yet the word also has an adverbial function. Titrud refers to Matthew 21:5 as one of the texts that challenged him on how Jesus could ride two donkeys simultaneously or one after the other until he considered the alternative. He submits that καὶ should equally be regarded as adverbial depending on the context and specific grammatical considerations. If so, it serves the purpose of intensifying what follows.³⁰ Francis D. Nichol also supports the rendering of the final καὶ as “even” instead of “and” in this instance.³¹

Perhaps this is why the NASB³² and HCSB³³ translators opted to translate the last καὶ in verse 5 as “even” instead of “and” due to this syntactical consideration.³⁴ Such a rendering would not conflict with the gender of the nouns involved because the first word translated as “donkey” is ὄνον which is a common gender noun and is not governed by any article in the text to particularize it.

³⁰ Kermit Titrud, “The Function of καὶ in the Greek New Testament and an Application to 2 Peter,” in David Alan Black, ed., *Linguistics and New Testament Interpretation: Essays on Discourse Analysis* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 240-255.

³¹ “And a Colt” [Matt 21:5], *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (SDABC)*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1978; 2002), 5:469.

³² New American Standard Bible in all the editions: 1977, 1995 and 2020.

³³ Holman Christian Standard Bible, 2003.

³⁴ See also David L. Turner, *Matthew: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 494.

The second word, translated as “colt,” is πῶλον which is masculine and is in apposition with υἴον “foal,” which is equally masculine. The last word translated as “donkey” is ὑποζυγίου, a neuter noun.

In addition, Matthew’s background as a Hebrew makes it plausible for his familiarity with Hebraic parallelism about Zechariah’s prophecy. However, this understanding does not eliminate the fact that the donkeys Matthew reported on the day of the triumphant entry were two instead of one. Based on the event itself, the other two texts, verses 2 and 7, have two donkeys. However, the Zechariah allusion in verse 5 appears to have had one donkey in keeping with the original Hebrew text and the LXX if a different reading of καὶ is adopted. This idea is supported by Keil and Delitzsch, who submit on the Hebrew rendering that “the (ו) before וַיַּעַל לֵךְ is expegetical (cf. 1 Sam 17:40), describing the ass as a young animal, not yet ridden...”³⁵

The (ו) *waw* particle conjunction expegetical idea in the Zechariah text would be similar to the καὶ expegetical idea in the allusion of Matthew 21:5 wherein Matthew alludes to the prophecy of Zechariah. Therefore, this means that although Matthew reported two donkeys witnessed during the historical event (Matt 21:2, 7), Jesus only rode the πῶλον (young male unriden donkey) in keeping with the messianic prophecy of Zechariah. That is why Matthew alluded to it to demonstrate its fulfilment. The rendering of the final καὶ in Matthew 21:5 as “even” proves that Matthew does not introduce a second donkey in his reference to Zechariah. As a bonafide Jew, Matthew understood the poetic parallelism in the Hebrew text, and just as the final *waw* conjunction in the Hebrew text of Zechariah 9:9 is understood expegetically, the final καὶ of Matthew 21:5 should also be understood expegetically.

Lexical Analysis

The study analyzes the number of donkeys Matthew reported and whether Jesus rode both or one by analyzing keywords. The first time Matthew recorded the number of animals was when

³⁵ Keil and Delitzsch, paragraph 31368.

preparations for the triumphant entry were being done (v. 2). When Matthew discussed the number for the second time, he referred to Zechariah's prophecy (v. 5). The third and final time was when the two disciples returned from their assignment, and the procession into Jerusalem had commenced (v. 7). Matthew recorded two animals (vv. 2, 7).

Accordingly, the first instance records the words of Christ himself, wherein He used two different nouns to describe the beasts (v. 2). The first noun is ὄνον and is mostly translated as "donkey" or "ass" and appears about five times in the New Testament corpus of literature.³⁶ According to Bauer, this is a common gender noun modified by the accompanying article.³⁷ While any article does not accompany the noun in the text, there is a feminine personal pronoun accompanied by a preposition, μετ' αὐτῆς (with her), thereby functioning as a complement in the clause. This means that the first donkey in the text was female.

The second word for donkey mentioned in Matthew 21:2 employs the Greek masculine noun πῶλον, which appears twelve times in the New Testament.³⁸ According to Bauer, the noun πῶλον refers to a young animal. Sometimes, it can refer to an animal of any age if it is not qualified.³⁹ In almost all of its occurrences in the New Testament, the word is rendered as "colt" to refer to a young animal. The LXX employed the same word in its text. The gender distinction between the two donkeys makes it reasonable to assume that Matthew meant two donkeys instead of one: a female mother and a young male donkey old enough to be ridden. The plurality is further augmented at the end of the verse by the aorist participle λύσαντες (loose them) with a force of an imperative and the aorist imperative verb ἀγάγετέ (bring or lead).

The other indicator that supports a plurality of two donkeys is verse 7a, ἤγαγον τὴν ὄνον καὶ τὸν πῶλον (they brought the

³⁶ Matthew 21:2, 5, 7; Luke 13:15; John 12:15.

³⁷ Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature, 3rd Edition (BDAG)*, ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed., Libronix Digital Library (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

³⁸ Matthew 21:2, 5, 7; Mark 11:2, 4-5, 7; Luke 19:30, 33, 35; John 12:15.

³⁹ BDAG, *Libronix Digital Library*.

donkey and the colt). Matthew has two animals in mind. This is supported by the following clause in verse 7b, which has a verb and its modifiers, ἐπέθηκαν ἐπ' αὐτῶν τὰ ἱμάτια (they placed their garments on them), preceded by the conjunction καὶ. The genitive personal plural pronoun αὐτῶν (them) refers to τὴν ὄνον καὶ τὸν πῶλον (the donkey and the colt) indicated in 7a. The last clause in 7c also contains a verb and its modifiers, ἐπεκάθισεν ἐπάνω αὐτῶν (he sat upon them), preceded by the final conjunction καὶ. Here, there is also another genitive personal plural pronoun αὐτῶν (them), whose antecedent is τὰ ἱμάτια (the garments). Jesus did not sit on both donkeys as some scholars seem to suggest,⁴⁰ but the second αὐτῶν refers to His act of sitting on the garments.⁴¹

Consequently, sitting on the garments as opposed to both animals appears more plausible given that the final coordinating conjunction καὶ functions to connect two objects next to each other, that is, the final clause to the preceding clause referring to the garments. The idea of Jesus sitting on the garments is syntactically closer to the final αὐτῶν than the idea of Jesus sitting on both donkeys in 7a, which are further removed from the final καὶ and αὐτῶν.

Matthew did not catalogue the number of garments placed upon the donkeys. The assumption was that the two disciples placed the garments. This is based on the immediate context in verse 6 and the earlier commissioning text (v. 2). Given that the opening verb in verse 7, ἤγαγον (they brought), looks back to verse 6 where the two disciples are in view, what difference would it make? Would this mean that each donkey had one coat? Suppose the disciples

⁴⁰ See Donald Hagner in *Word Biblical Commentary* on Matthew and John Nolland, *New International Greek Commentary: The Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2005).

⁴¹ See Hendriksen and Kistemaker in *New Testament Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, Heinrich August Wilhelm MyMeyer, *Critical and Exegetical Handbook to the Gospel of Matthew* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1884); Floyd V. Filson, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 2nd ed., Black's New Testament Commentary (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1971); Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and David S. Dockery, vol. 22 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992); A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 6 vols. (New York: Harper, 1930); G. R. Gundry, *Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 410.

laid their coats across both donkeys as Gundry suggests; would it not suffice?⁴² What if each had more than one coat? Whatever conclusion is drawn would not matter since the exact number of garments is unknown. Even if the donkey ridden by Jesus only had one coat, it would still not make any difference because τὰ ἱμάτια (the garments) is plural. This is why the number of garments is not a crucial syntactical factor. The crux of the matter concerns the semantic function of where Jesus sat, whether on donkeys or garments. As earlier shown, τὰ ἱμάτια is closer to ἐπεκάθισεν (he sat) than to the donkeys.

Of course, the garments were placed on the donkeys, and the article does not suggest that Jesus rode on the garments devoid of a donkey. Since it has been demonstrated that Jesus sat on the garments, relying on the second and final αὐτῶν in verse 7 cannot hold as the basis for Jesus riding both donkeys. The referent for the final αὐτῶν read together with the final καὶ is τὰ ἱμάτια and not the two donkeys. Since He sat on the “garments” and Matthew alludes to the Zechariah prophecy wherein he has one donkey upon which Jesus rides, the study resolves that Jesus did not mount both donkeys. He rode on the πῶλον (colt), which was with its ὄνον (mother donkey).

Intertextuality

This section briefly explores literary relationships among the four gospels in response to the second aim of this study. As earlier submitted, this is one of those uncommon accounts that appears in all four gospels (Matt 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-40; John 12:12-19). Interestingly, the other three gospels report only one donkey instead of Matthew’s two donkeys. This has led to

⁴² “It is doubtful that he intends his readers to visualize a trick rider balancing himself on two animals at the same time. Therefore we are to think that the garments were draped over both animals, just as in modern Palestine both mother donkeys and their unriden colts trotting after them have garments put across their backs (see E. F. F. Bishop, *Jesus of Palestine* [London: Lutterworth, 1955] 212). Though Jesus sat on top of the garments only on the colt, the association of the garmented mother makes a kind of wide throne.” G. R. Gundry, *Matthew*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 410.

doubts about Matthew's record, especially by those who believe Matthew depended on Mark as his literary source and misquoted him. The critics do not mention that Matthew was an eyewitness to the events as opposed to Mark, who wrote his gospel based on Peter's testimony. Notwithstanding, the tension emerges in the proposition that Matthew portrays Jesus as riding both donkeys in his gospel. This idea has been rejected in this study based on established findings.

Subsequently, it is interesting to note that all four gospels use the word *πῶλον*⁴³ to describe the donkey mounted by Jesus. The other vocabulary employed by Matthew in his passage has already been analyzed. It is significant to note that Matthew uses *πῶλον* three times for the donkey Jesus mounted and is therefore in agreement with the other evangelists. The fact that other evangelists do not mention a second donkey does not invalidate his account.

It also suffices to mention that John's account is the only other gospel that employs two other words⁴⁴ apart from *πῶλον*. The first is *ὄναριον* which is a neuter for a young donkey (John 12:14).⁴⁵ In the following verse, he parallels *ὄναριον* with *πῶλον* in an apparent echo of Zechariah 9:9. The other word John uses is *ὄνου* (12:15) which is syntactically employed as a genitive of possession. In this instance, *πῶλον* (the young donkey) belongs to the mother donkey *ὄνου*. This echoes Matthew's gospel, where *ὄνος* is presented as the mother of *πῶλον*.⁴⁶ Therefore, no literary disunity exists among the four evangelists that merits Matthew's account to be regarded as untenable.

Conclusion

In response to the first question on the number of donkeys in Matthew, it has been established that Matthew reports two donkeys. The first personal plural pronoun *αὐτῶν* in verse 7b proves that Matthew witnessed two donkeys during the procession, as can

⁴³ Matthew 21:2, 5, 7; Mark 11:2, 4, 5, 7; Luke 19:30, 33, 35; John 12:15.

⁴⁴ John 12:14.

⁴⁵ BDAG, *Libronix Digital Library*.

⁴⁶ Matthew 21:2, 7.

be established from Jesus' commissioning of the two disciples in verses 2, 6, and 7a. However, Jesus mounted only one young male donkey (πῶλον), which had never been ridden before, as alluded to in the Zechariah text. Contrary suggestions that Jesus mounted two donkeys, one after the other or simultaneously, are without merit. To suggest that Jesus mounted both donkeys is to ignore simple logic and force the text to communicate what it does not intend to. The final personal plural pronoun αὐτῶν in 7c, read together with the final coordinating conjunction καὶ has been shown to indicate that it relates to the garments upon which Jesus sat, not on the two donkeys. The idea of riding two donkeys seems unwarranted as it serves no purpose.

The study has also shown that when the final καὶ in Matthew 21:5 is considered expegetically as an adverb or ascensive conjunction and translated as "even," the allusion to Zechariah's prophecy proves that Matthew was aware of Hebraic poetic parallelism. He did not introduce a second donkey to his Zechariah quotation. The same applies to the Hebrew expegetical consideration of the *waw* conjunction in Zechariah 9:9. Those who criticize and doubt Matthew's credentials as a witness must re-evaluate their position.

In response to the second aim, this study has affirmed that Matthew reported two donkeys, but Jesus rode only one unbroken male donkey, which is in tandem with the reports of the other three evangelists. The intertextuality has revealed that there is literary unity among all four evangelists who employ πῶλον as the donkey Jesus mounted. The accounts of the other three evangelists do not conflict with Matthew but are in harmony. The extra details of the mother donkey in Matthew do not invalidate his version but add to the reliability of the historical event.

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