

CHAPTER 9

JESUS' LATER JUDEAN MINISTRY

Part 8: The Later Judean Ministry of Christ

[*Harmony*, pp. 130-148]

Jesus had just traveled with his disciples through Samaria, arriving secretly in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles, held in the fall of A.D. 29 (cf. Luke 9:51-56; John 7:2-10; Sec. 94-95). At this point the gospels of John and Luke provide all our information. John relates Jesus' ministry in the city of Jerusalem, while Luke tells of his ministry in the Judean country around the city.

From this point on, Jesus concentrated on areas other than Galilee. Several times he traveled to Jerusalem, for the feasts of Tabernacles, Dedication, and Passover. He also spent much time in the Judean countryside and across the Jordan River in the area of Perea.

Harmonistic Problem #8: Journeys to Jerusalem

The problem

John records several journeys to Jerusalem during Jesus' ministry. The Synoptics specifically mention only one, the final Passover.

The final journey to Jerusalem in Luke is especially difficult to follow. The main difficulty centers around the chronology of Luke's account of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51 - 19:27). Four times Luke mentions Jesus as going to Jerusalem:

- 9:51, going into Samaria
 - [10:38, Bethany]
- 13:22, cities and villages (probably in Perea)
- 17:11, between Samaria and Galilee
- 18:31, on way to Jerusalem, coming to Jericho (cf. Matt 19:1; Mark 10:1)

In addition, Strauss and others have maintained that the Passion events in Jerusalem described by the Synoptics could not have taken place if Jesus had conducted his ministry there before, as recorded in John.

The solution

The Jerusalem visits in John can provide a structure for Jesus' ministry in the Synoptics. Note Aland's outline:

John 2:13, Passover feast (A.D. 27)

then, Matt 4:12 - ch. 13; Mark 1:14 - 6:6a; Luke 4:14 - ch. 8

John 5:1, unnamed feast (Passover, A.D. 28 ?)

then, Matt 14:1-12; Mark 6:6b-31; Luke 9:1-10a

John 6:4, Passover (A.D. 29 ?), Jesus stays in Galilee, feeds 5000, walks on water (also in Synoptics)

then (acc. to Guthrie's outline), Matt 15-18; Mark 7-9; Luke 9:18 - ch. 13

John 7:2, Tabernacles, A.D. 29

then, Matt 19 - 20:16; Mark 10:1-31; (Guthrie) Luke 14 - 18:30

John 10:20, Dedication, A.D. 29

then, Matt 20:17-34; Mark 10:32-52; Luke 18:31-43

John 12:12, Passover, A.D. 30, Jesus' triumphal entry (also in Synoptics)

then, Matt 21ff; Mark 11ff; Luke 19ff

Actually, these references may correspond to Jesus' last three visits to Jerusalem mentioned in John 7:2, 10:22, and 11:55. Cf. Robertson, *Harmony*, pp. 276-79; Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, 2:126-27. Of course, the absence of time statements in Luke makes chronological dogmatism impossible.

One interesting parallel could be Luke 13:31-33 and 16:19-31 with John 11, the story of the raising of Lazarus. Note the time element of the third day in Luke 13 and John 11:6-7, 17. Also note the same name used in both sections, Lazarus. Luke can provide helpful background for John's outline.

It is possible, even though Jesus earlier had ministered in Jerusalem several times, as recorded in John, that the events of the Passion week could still have taken place, as recorded in the Synoptics. These factors should be taken into account:

- (1) Different people were there at different times.
- (2) Not all the people were together at any one time.
- (3) Many earlier disciples had turned away (cf. John 6)
- (4) Many did not understand Jesus' Messianic claim.

Ministry Beginning at the Feast of Tabernacles

Sec. 96: Mixed reaction to Jesus' teaching and miracles, Frustrated attempt to arrest Jesus

Jesus had arrived secretly at the Feast of Tabernacles (John 7:10); the Jewish leaders already had determined to seize him and put him to death. This feast, held in the autumn of the year, commemorated the deliverance of the children of Israel from Egypt and God's care for them in the wilderness (Lev 23:33-43). Half way through the festival week Jesus appeared in the temple and began teaching. Immediately controversy broke out; he was attacked for healing on the Sabbath (cf. John 5; and other Sabbath healings recorded in Luke). His authority was challenged. There was a wide variety of responses—from belief to hatred.

The Pharisees and Sadducee chief priests sent temple guards to arrest Jesus, but they were unsuccessful (John 7:45-47). Probably the crowds prevented this action.

The last day of the feast Jesus invited those who were thirsty to “come to me and drink.” This appeal is related to the custom at the feast of pouring out a libation of water each day, remembering how the Israelites were able to drink from the rock in the wilderness (see *Harmony*, 131, n. *h*; cf. 1 Cor 10:4). There were more mixed reactions, some calling him the Prophet, some the Christ, and others denying either. Notice how Nicodemus tried to stand up for Jesus in the Sanhedrin (John 7:50-51).

Sec. 97: Jesus’ forgiveness of a woman caught in adultery

This section is not found in the early papyri NT manuscripts, nor in many other early textual witnesses. The UBS edition omits it with an {A} rating. Other manuscripts do have the section, but in another location in John or in Luke; others have the section, but with asterisks or obeli indicating that the text is doubtful. Most textual scholars believe the section is not originally a part of John’s gospel but does show evidence of being a very early tradition which is historically accurate (cf. the note in *Harmony*, 132, n. *i*).

In the OT law both the woman and the man would have been guilty and deserving of the death penalty (Lev 20:10; Deut 22:22). It is interesting that they confronted Jesus only with the woman. In the NT the civil law is not tied to the theocracy, but to the general rule of nations in the world, with laws agreeing with the “general equity” of the OT civil laws. Jesus simply said the one without sin should stone her first. Their sins were well known to themselves and others. Adulterers are not to be executed in the NT (1 Cor 6:9-11).

Note that Jesus did not forgive her without condition. She was to demonstrate true repentance by a changed life.

Sec. 98: Conflict over Jesus’ claim to be the light of the world

Apparently still during the Feast of Tabernacles, Jesus claimed to the crowd to be the Light of the World (John 8:12). This is another “I am” saying in John. It may refer to the lighting of the golden lamp stand on the first night of the feast.

The “treasury” where he spoke was the place in the court of the women where offerings were collected.

Sec. 99: Jesus’ relationship to God the Father, Jesus’ relationship to Abraham and attempted stoning

This section (John 8:21-59) contains some of the strongest language in the gospels declaring Jesus to be equal in substance and glory with God the Father. He claimed to be sent by the Father to do his work and be “lifted up,” referring to his crucifixion. He claimed to be the truth, and to reveal the truth from God.

While the Jewish leaders compared him to Abraham, questioning Jesus’ legitimacy. Jesus countered by declaring that “before Abraham was, I am.” This prompted them to try to stone him on the spot, but Jesus slipped away before they could kill him.

Sec. 100: Healing of a man born blind, Response of the blind man’s neighbors, Examination and excommunication of the blind man by the Pharisees

The events of Sections 100-101 are placed in our *Harmony* at or near the time of the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall of A.D. 29. Notice that the editors of the *Harmony* would prefer to place the events of John 9:1 – 10:21 at the later Feast of Dedication. However, their editorial policy is to retain the order used in A. T. Robertson’s harmony (see their footnote and reasons on p. 134, n. o).

The healing of the man born blind in Jerusalem is the sixth of John’s seven great signs given by Jesus. The reason for his blindness is not his sin or his parents’ sin in particular, but rather the use he would be to bring glory to God (John 9:3). God’s glory motivates him to make his own plan as he does.

Jesus healed the man by making clay with his saliva, applying it to his eyes, and having him wash in the Pool of Siloam. All were amazed at the miracle. The actual Pool of Siloam from the time of Jesus has just been discovered in Jerusalem, in the summer of 2005. It matches the description given it in John’s Gospel.

Controversy followed as the Pharisees denounced the miracle since it was performed on the Sabbath. The blind man refused to attribute his healing to the devil, and eventually was excommunicated from the Jewish public worship. Jesus found him and revealed his messiahship to him and received his worship (this is an excellent passage showing the deity of Jesus Christ). He used this miracle to illustrate the depth of spiritual blindness in the Pharisees.

Sec. 101: Allegory of the good shepherd and the thief, Further division among the Jews

This section contains two more “I am” sayings (“I am the gate [door]” and “I am the good shepherd”). This section is the only allegory of Jesus recorded in the gospels. The “other sheep” (John 10:16) refer to the Gentiles; this is one place in the gospels when the expansion of the

kingdom privileges to the Gentiles is foretold. This theme is more explicit a little later, as recorded in Matthew 21:43.

Again the reaction to Jesus is mixed. John's gospel especially traces the growing lines of loyalty and of opposition to Jesus, leading to the climax of the Passion and resurrection.

Private Lessons on Loving Service and Prayer

Now from John's gospel the narrative is picked up by Luke, who records events between the feasts of Tabernacles and of Dedication, a period of about three months. Jesus spent this time in Judea, traveling around various towns and villages. He engaged in a last attempt to evangelize Judea, just as he had previously evangelized Galilee.

Sec. 102: Commissioning of the seventy, Return of the seventy

Just as Jesus had sent out his twelve apostles to preach throughout Galilee, giving them careful instructions and entrusting them with miraculous powers (cf. Matt 10), so now he sent out seventy-two disciples, a much larger number, to evangelize around Jerusalem and Judea and probably in Perea.

There is a textual variant regarding the number sent out. At both Luke 10:1 and 17, several early Alexandrian and Western texts have 72, while most other texts have 70. The UBS has 72, with a {C} rating. The NIV reads 72 also. The editors of the Harmony, however, prefer the reading 70, noting that Moses had appointed 70 elders to assist him (Num. 11; cf. *Harmony*, p. 138, n. y); also, 70 elders represented Israel on Matt Sinai (Exod 24).

Jesus gave instructions to these witnesses, somewhat similar to those given to the apostles in Matthew 10. They were to announce the coming of Jesus in the words, "The kingdom of God is near you" (Luke 10:9).

Jesus at this time pronounced woes on the towns of Galilee, which earlier had rejected his emissaries and his ministry.

When the 72 returned, they rejoiced how God had empowered them to do miracles, even casting out demons. Jesus reminded them that their place in the kingdom was an even greater privilege.

Jesus' sudden prayer to his Father (Luke 10:21-22) and his declaration to the disciples (vv. 23-24) are quite remarkable. He is truly grateful for God's sovereign election of those to be saved, and his leading in the outworking of their redemption in his own life.

Sec. 103: Story of the good Samaritan

When asked by an expert in the law which was the greatest commandment, Jesus answered with the two great commandments (Deut 6:5 and Lev 19:18). He then delivered his famous parable of the good Samaritan to answer the question, "Who is my neighbor?" Our neighbor is the one whom we meet and who is in need of our help.

Sec. 104: Jesus' visit with Mary and Martha

Bethany was a small town on the outskirts of Jerusalem about two miles to the east, over the shoulder of the Mount of Olives. Mary, Martha, and Lazarus lived there, two sisters and their brother; they were good friends of Jesus and his disciples (cf. John 11). This Mary is not the same as Mary Magdalene, who lived in Galilee.

Jesus was at this time sharing with his disciples his coming passion and death, along with other teachings. The time was precious to him and to them. Mary appreciated this, but Martha did not, being concerned with the serving. Jesus properly rebuked her, in a loving manner, and commended Mary for her spiritual insight.

Sec. 105: Lesson on how to pray and parable of the bold friend

Jesus, asked how to pray, repeated his Lord's Prayer, in a shortened form from that given in the Sermon on the Mount.

His parable of the persistent friend and his other figures encouraged persistent prayer. Notable is the promise to provide the Holy Spirit to those who ask him (Luke 11:13).

Second Debate with the Teachers of the Law and the Pharisees

Luke continues with his account of Jesus' activity in and around Judea between the feasts of Tabernacles and Dedication at the end of A.D. 29. After the teachings given among friends recorded above, Luke gives a series of confrontations that occurred during these months.

Sec. 106: A third blasphemous accusation and a second debate

Note the similarities and differences between this section and the earlier events of Section 61 which took place about a year earlier (*Harmony*, p. 141, n. g).

Having cast out a demon that caused muteness, Jesus was accused of driving out demons by Beelzebub (Greek, Beelzeboul). He answered the charge as he had previously, showing that Satan does not cast out Satan, but rather that he is demonstrating the power of the kingdom of God. His comments about Nineveh and Sheba show that there are degrees of sinfulness and of punishment in hell. He warned about the spiritual blindness of the Jews of his day.

Sec. 107: Woes against the Pharisees and the teachers of the law while eating with a Pharisee

This Pharisee host was more hostile to Jesus than the previous Pharisee host in Galilee had been (Sec. 59); he was trying to trap Jesus. Jesus strongly denounced the Pharisees—with the exception of the later Matthew 23, this was his strongest denunciation. The lawyers also came in for a verbal blast. Jesus accused them, among other things, of “taking away the key to knowledge,” apparently by their false interpretations of the OT law (see *Harmony*, p. 142, n. i). Their resulting increased hostility is understandable as a sinful reaction.

Sec. 108: Warning the disciples about hypocrisy, Warning about greed and trust in wealth, Warning against being unprepared for the Son of Man’s coming, Warning about the coming division, Warning against failing to discern the present time

By this time Jesus was causing a great commotion in Judea. Thousands of people were gathered around him (Luke 12:1). His teachings and warnings are similar to those already delivered in Galilee; however, first priority is given to warning against hypocrisy, the chief sin of the Pharisees.

Jesus also warned against greed, with the famous parable of the rich fool, and the figures of the ravens and the lilies. We are to seek treasure in heaven.

The parable of the faithful and wise servants waiting for their master’s return reminded his disciples to be prepared for Jesus’ second coming. In the mean time, following him would require divisions in families and households. The present time was very significant, being a watershed to determine what the future would hold for the nation.

Sec. 109: Two alternatives: repent or perish

Jesus was told about a recent event: Pilate had killed some Galileans visiting Jerusalem, and their blood had mingled with the blood of the sacrifices in the temple. This probably happened during the Feast of Tabernacles in the temple precincts.

“There is no record of this massacre in any other source. But the turbulent character of the Galileans, and the severity of Pilate and other Roman governors, make the incident more than credible. Horrible massacres are recorded by Josephus (*Ant.* 17:9:3; 18:3:1; 20:5:3; *B.J.* 2:3:3; 2:9:4; 5:1:5). The fact that such things were common accounts for the absence of other records; and possibly not very many were slain. But such an outrage on Galileans may have been one of the causes of the enmity between Herod and Pilate (Luke 23:12).” (Alfred Plummer, *Luke, ICC*, p. 337)

Jesus adds to their inquiry another incident, of a tower in Jerusalem near the Siloam pool that fell, killing eighteen people. These events did not occur because of the particular sins of the people killed, rather because of sin in general and God’s judgment on the sinful nation.

With the parable of the unproductive fig tree, Jesus warned them that time was running out before God’s judgment would fall on the unrepentant nation.

Sec. 110: Opposition from a synagogue ruler for healing a woman on the Sabbath

Sometime during these three months Jesus healed a woman in a synagogue who was crippled and bent over for 18 years. He answered the criticism of the synagogue leader by proving that works of mercy were acceptable on the Sabbath. This is one of six such Sabbath controversies in the life of Jesus, recorded in the gospels:

- Christ healing invalid by pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-15)
- Disciples picking grain (Matt 12:1-8 = Mark 2:23-28 = Luke 6:1-5)
- Christ healing man with withered hand (Matt 12:9-14 = Mark 3:1-6 = Luke 6:6-11)
- Christ healing man born blind (John 9)
- Christ healing crippled woman (Luke 13:10-17)
- Christ healing man with dropsy (Luke 14:1-6)

By these events and teachings, the Lord showed his approval of works of necessity and mercy on the Sabbath day (WSC 60).

*[Note: The editors of the Harmony believe that Sections 100-101 (John 9 – 10:21) belong here, at the Feast of Dedication, rather than at the earlier Feast of Tabernacles.]

Sec. 111: Another attempt to stone or arrest Jesus for blasphemy at the Feast of Dedication

The Feast of Dedication, or Hanukkah, was a festival begun in 165 B.C., when Judas Maccabaeus freed Jerusalem from Syrian domination and rededicated the temple. John says it was “winter,” and this agrees with the date of the festival, usually in December. This would probably have been December, A.D. 29. It was also called the Festival of Lights, because the Jews received deliverance when all seemed darkest. This theme is what Jesus appealed to when he spoke of delivering his sheep so that they would not perish.

Note Jesus’ claim that the sheep never perish (John 10:30). By claiming equality with God, he aroused the Jewish leaders again to try to stone him. But again he escaped.