

CHAPTER 6

THE BEGINNING OF JESUS' PUBLIC MINISTRY

[*Harmony*, Parts 4-5, pp. 42-54]

Part 4: The Public Ministry of John the Baptist

Sec. 20: His ministry launched

Luke identifies the secular rulers of the time when John began his preaching and baptizing. This is one of the important chronological markers in the gospels.

Sec. 21: His person, proclamation, and baptism

The Synoptics treat of John's early ministry especially, and Matthew and Luke contain his dialog with the Jewish leaders. At this point John was preaching by the Jordan River in the wilderness of Judea. His was a baptism of repentance (distinct from Christian baptism, ordained by Jesus after his resurrection).

As far as his manner of life was concerned John was a prophet in the tradition of Elijah; and as far as his message was concerned, he was in the tradition of Isaiah—a voice crying: make in the wilderness a path for the Lord.

Sec. 22: His messages to the Pharisees, Sadducees, crowds, tax collectors, and soldiers

John's message was a vigorous call to national and personal repentance. This included personal faith, and following the moral law of God.

Sec. 23: His description of the Christ

John predicted that the Messiah was coming, who would bring judgment with him. John's baptism with water was only a prelude to the approaching baptism by fire and judgment.

Part 5: The End of John's Ministry and the Beginning of Christ's Public Ministry

Sec. 24: Jesus' baptism by John

The three Synoptics include Jesus' baptism by John, while John's gospel relates other events associated with it. At this time all the Trinity is seen—the Father speaking from heaven, the Son being baptized, and the Spirit descending upon him. This was a sign to John that, indeed, Jesus was the promised Messiah.

Sec. 25: Jesus' temptation in the desert

By comparing the temptation account (in the Synoptics, Matthew and Luke especially) with the Scripture portions Jesus quotes in it (all from Deut 6-8), we see that Jesus, being compelled by the Holy Spirit, consciously duplicated the experience of Israel in the wilderness. Yet whereas they fell into sin and unbelief, Jesus remained firm in his righteousness and faith in the Father. He perfectly fulfilled God's righteous will. Note especially the parallel between Jesus and Israel in Deut 8:2-3, compared to Matt 4:1-2 = Mark 1:12-13 = Luke 4:1-2: "lead/drive," "desert," "forty," "test," "hunger."

Jesus probably would not have survived, except that God supported him by the ministry of angels.

Harmonistic Problem #3: Temptation of Jesus

[Thomas & Gundry, *Harmony*, 46-47]

The problem

There is only a general statement about Jesus' temptation in Mark 1:12-13, but it does mention wild animals, which the other accounts do not. The major problem is resolving the difference in order between Matt 4:1-11 and Luke 4:1-13.

Matthew

1. Stones to bread
2. Cast self down from temple
3. Worship Satan

Luke

1. Stones to bread
2. Worship Satan
3. Cast self down from temple

The solution

This problem is typical of many, and is chosen as a good example of this type of difficulty.

In cases of this kind, it is important to closely observe the Greek terms used to express sequence.

Matt: #1 + τότε *tote* (“then” v. 5) #2 + παλίν *palin* (“again” v. 8) #3

Luke: #1 + καί *kai* (“and” v. 5) #2 + δέ *de* (“and” v. 9) #3

The only term requiring sequence in time is *tote* in Matt 4:5. The *palin* in Matt 4:8 goes with παραλαμβάνω *paralambano* (“takes along”), and implies sequence after the second temptation. Thus Matthew seems to teach a definite order.

On the other hand, Luke uses only *kai* and *de*, which do not require the stated order.

We may conclude that Matthew preserves the actual order of events, which Luke does not specifically contradict. We should also note that these events may have been repeated, or even simultaneous in the consciousness of Jesus, thus making their order in the report inconsequential.

Sec. 26: John’s testimony about himself to the priests and Levites

John tells of this interview between John and the representatives of the Pharisees. The Bethany here is beyond and near the Jordan, not the Bethany near Jerusalem, where Mary and Martha and Lazarus lived.

Sec. 27: John's testimony to Jesus as the Son of God

John's gospel records this statement of the Baptist. John testifies that he saw the dove coming on Jesus at his baptism, and that this sign was predicted by God to identify the Messiah. He calls Jesus the Lamb of God, indicating Jesus' sacrificial purpose.

Sec. 28: Jesus' first followers

John's gospel alone records these early disciples, chosen before the rest of the 12 apostles. There are five of them, at first followers of John the Baptist.

- First two: John the apostle (not named in the book of John) and Andrew
- Next: Simon Peter (Andrew's brother)
- Next: Philip
- Finally: Nathanael

These five men, along with Thomas and James (John's brother), seem to be the same men that were with Jesus after his resurrection by the Lake of Galilee (John 21:2). According to John, even at this early time at least some of the disciples knew Jesus was the Messiah.

Sec. 29: Jesus' first miracle: water becomes wine

After being baptized (probably in the fall of A.D. 26) Jesus returned with his new disciples to Galilee. This now is the third day since John's testimony to him (John 2:1).

John organizes his gospel around seven "signs" or miracles, which show Jesus' person and office. This is the first one, showing Jesus to be the source of life and the creator of all (cf. John 1:10-11).

Sec. 30: Jesus' first stay in Capernaum with his relatives and early disciples

Capernaum, on the northern shore of the Lake of Galilee, was later to become Jesus' base of operations and household home in Galilee. It was about 20 miles from his boyhood home of Nazareth.

We note that from here on in the Gospel accounts Joseph, Jesus' adopted father, is not mentioned. We may assume therefore that he had died by this time, before Jesus was 30 years old.

Sec. 31: First clearing of the temple at the Passover

After his brief stay in Capernaum, Jesus and his disciples traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover (probably in the spring of A.D. 27). Here he performed miracles (not emphasized in John, but only mentioned briefly, John 2:23; 3:2; 4:45), and cleared the temple, driving out the money-changers and sellers of animals. He emphasized the importance of the temple as the house of his Father (as in Luke as a boy).

He tells the temple officials that he will destroy this temple (of his body) and raise it up in three days. They misunderstand, saying the temple was in its 46th year of building (dating this incident at A.D. 27). Later, this charge was made against him at his trial before the Sanhedrin (Section 155; Matt 26:61 = Mark 14:57-58).

Harmonistic Problem #4: Clearing the Temple

[Thomas & Gundry, *Harmony*, 50, 173-74]

The problem

The Synoptic Gospels clearly place the clearing of the temple at the end of Jesus' ministry, Matt 21:12-13 = Mark 11:15-17 = Luke 19:45-46. But John does not record a clearing at this point (cf. John 12:19ff). However, John does report a clearing of the temple—with similar details—at the beginning of his ministry (John 2:13-17).

Nearly all critics believe that John is mistaken, or else deliberately changed the context to make a theological point. Strauss and others have expanded this argument to show that the whole early Judean ministry of Jesus is fictitious. Strauss held that the Synoptics are incomprehensible if Jesus had ministered earlier in Jerusalem. Compare C. H. Dodd's statement, quoted by Leon Morris in the *NIC* on John, p. 190, n. 49:

The suggestion that the temple was twice cleansed is the last resort of a desperate determination to harmonize Mark and John at all costs. The only legitimate question is whether the (single) cleansing is to be placed early or late in the Ministry.

Even many conservatives have given ground at this point; e.g., F. F. Bruce, *New Testament History*, p. 190; E. F. Harrison, *Short Life of Christ*, p. 170.

The solution

John normally does not repeat the Synoptic tradition; 92% of John is unique. He does not repeat most of it even for the last week in Jerusalem. Therefore, it is not surprising that the final clearing of the temple is not mentioned in John.

John was concerned about dates and chronology, and was an eyewitness of the early ministry of Jesus. These facts make a chronological misplacement by him unlikely.

That there were two clearings of the temple is entirely possible. There is a natural tendency to make money. The moneychangers easily could have returned to their business in the temple after Jesus had cleared it the first time. Compare the repeated troubles of Ezra and Nehemiah in Jerusalem.

There are many similarities between the accounts, which is to be expected with similar events. Yet there are differences of detail in the accounts, which also support the fact of two clearings:

| <u>Synoptics</u> | <u>John</u> |
|--------------------|-----------------------------|
| Doves | Oxen, sheep, doves |
| — | Whip (probably of rushes) |
| — | Pour out money |
| — | “Take these (doves) away” |
| Quote Isa. 56:7 | — |
| “Den of robbers” | “House of trade” |
| — | Disciples remember Ps. 69:9 |
| No demand for sign | Demand for sign |

For further discussion, see B. F. Westcott, *John*, pp. 43-44 (good comparison of accounts); Leon Morris, NIC on John, pp. 188-91; D. Guthrie, *NT Introduction*, pp. 293-94 (compromise).

Sec. 32: Early response to Jesus' miracles, and Nicodemus' interview with Jesus

John's gospel shows the early acceptance of Jesus by many, but the increasing hostility as his ministry progressed; this is the same pattern seen in the Synoptics. Jesus did not trust himself to these early "believers," because he knew their hearts.

The nighttime interview with Nicodemus is justly famous. Nicodemus eventually became a public believer (cf. John 7:50; 19:39). Being born again is the promise of the new covenant in Jer 31 and Ezek 36—a new heart. The new covenant gives the new life necessary for acceptance into God's promised kingdom.

The place where the direct quotation from Jesus stops and the words of John begin is not clear. Some end the quotation with v. 15, others with v. 21.

Sec. 33: John superseded by Jesus

After the Passover, before returning to Galilee, Jesus and his early disciples went to other places in Judea. Jesus' disciples were baptizing as John was, but more people now came to Jesus. This baptism was related to the purifications of the Jews (cf. John 3:25; these were normally by sprinkling). John shows tremendous humility and graciousness as his popularity was waning compared to that of Jesus. John's speech may end with v. 30 or with v. 36.

Sec. 34: Jesus' departure from Judea

Two things are stated as motivating Jesus' return at this time to Galilee: (1) people were noticing that he was surpassing John in popularity, and (2) John was arrested by Herod Antipas. (Regarding the second reason, note that Jesus was still in Herod's territory when in Galilee.) Luke, as his custom, emphasizes that the Holy Spirit was mighty in Jesus at this time.

Sec. 35: Discussion with a Samaritan woman, challenge of a spiritual harvest, and evangelization of Sychar

Jesus' interview with the Samaritan woman in John 4 is one of the most famous portions of the gospels. He did not overlook her sin, but pointed it out most forcefully. Also, he maintained the Jewish position as opposed to that of the Samaritans regarding the temple. But most important, he showed her the way of life and true spiritual worship. The Samaritans were more interested in salvation than many of the Jews, a point emphasized in John as well as in Luke. John was interested in the salvation of "the whole world," not just the Jews.

Sec. 36: Arrival in Galilee

Jesus and his early disciples returned to Galilee, having spent several days in Samaria. At this point Jesus was popular there, but John prepares us for the coming letdown (John 4:44).