

## **What Is the Point of John's Gospel?**

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### INTRODUCTION

### THE NECESSITY OF USING JOHN FOR DATING JESUS' LIFE AND DEATH

1A. The Synoptics only give a general idea of when Jesus' ministry began.

Lk 3:1–2 starts John the Baptist's ministry in Tiberius' 15<sup>th</sup> year (A.D. 27/28)  
One could guess from this that Jesus' ministry began in A.D. 28 or 29

2A. The Synoptics do not clarify how long Jesus' earthly ministry lasted:

3A. The Synoptics date the cross (John concurs):

During Caiaphas' high-priesthood:                      A.D. 18–36

During Pilate's prefecture:                                      A.D. 26–36

A year in which Passover was a Friday:                      A.D. 27, 30, 33, or 36

Thus, the Synoptics and John allow the cross to be in A.D. 30, 33, or 36.  
[Further evidence from John will allow us to narrow down the date of the crucifixion. If we only had the synoptic, the date of the crucifixion would be more open].

The next page will show how John is essential for narrowing down chronology.

1B-1. John dates the first Passover in Jesus' ministry: April 7, A.D. 30

John 2:13

John 2:20 (corrected translation): *This sanctuary has been built forty-six years.*<sup>1</sup>

The word translated sanctuary (*naos*) refers to the holy place, rather than to the entire Temple (the word *hieron* refers to the whole Temple, including the court of the women and the court of the Gentiles).

Josephus *Antiquities of the Jews* 15.11.1 says that Herod began construction of the Holy Place of the Temple in the eighteenth year of his reign, which would be 20/19 B.C. Josephus says that the Holy Place was completed eighteen months after starting. This would be 18/17 B.C. Passover of A.D. 30 would be the point when people could say that the sanctuary was built forty-six years earlier.

I agree with Harold Hoehner in dating John 2:20 in April A.D. 30.

1B-2. John 1:29–2:12 speaks of Jesus ministering before that first Passover.

Hoehner dates this (the start of Jesus' ministry) as summer/autumn A.D. 29. Context speaks of a delegation from Jerusalem investigating John the Baptist (John 1:19–28) right before John identifies Jesus as the Christ. The timing of such a delegation would likely be when crowds visiting John had been large for a period of time (cf. John 4:1). I doubt that massive crowds braved summer heat to visit John, so I lean towards Jesus' ministry starting in fall A.D. 29.

John dates the start of Jesus' ministry, while the Synoptics do not.

<sup>1</sup> This is an unaccented Greek text in Greek characters, in English transliteration, and with a literal translation. Underlining indicates words that go together (explaining why *and* and *the* do not appear in the final translation). The subscripted numbers (1–4) show Greek word (or phrase) order, to clarify how the English translation results.

<u>1</u> τεσσαρακοντα	<u>και</u>	<u>εξ</u>	<u>2</u> ετεσιν	<u>3</u> οκοδομηθη	<u>4</u> ο	<u>ναος</u>	<u>ουτος</u>
<u>1</u> tessarakonta	<u>kai</u>	<u>hex</u>	<u>2</u> etessin	<u>3</u> ōkodomēthē	<u>4</u> ho	<u>naos</u>	<u>houtos</u>
<u>forty</u>	<u>and</u>	<u>six</u>	<u>2</u> years	<u>3</u> has been built	<u>4</u> the	<u>sanctuary</u>	<u>this</u>
<u>4</u> This sanctuary <u>3</u> has been built <u>1</u> forty-six <u>2</u> years.							

## 2B. John helps us determine the length of Jesus' ministry (the Synoptics do not)

- |  |                     |
|--|---------------------|
| 1. John 2:13 = first Passover of His ministry                | Apr A.D. 30         |
| 2. [_____ = <i>second Passover of His ministry</i>           | <i>Apr A.D. 31]</i> |
| 3. [ <i>John 5:1 = unnamed feast (probably Booths in 31)</i> | <i>Oct A.D. 31]</i> |
| 4. John 6:4 = third Passover of His ministry                 | Apr A.D. 32         |
| 5. John 7:2, 10 = Booths                                     | Sep A.D. 32         |
| 6. John 10:22ff. = Dedication (Hanukkah)                     | Dec A.D. 32         |
| 7. John 13:1 = fourth Passover of His ministry               | Apr A.D. 33         |

John does not mention item 2, and does not name the feast in item 3. However, His ministry's first Passover was in A.D. 30 and His last Passover was in 33. Also, when we consider all the events from Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John that must fit between John 2:13 and John 6:4, it is reasonable to allow two years.

## GEOGRAPHY OF JESUS' MINISTRY IN THE SYNOPTICS & IN JOHN'S GOSPEL

Jesus' public ministry began after His baptism and the Temptation:

Matthew 4:12 is where Matthew starts his account of Jesus' ministry

Mark 1:14 is where Mark starts his account of Jesus' ministry

Luke 4:14 is where Luke starts his account of Jesus' ministry

John 1:35 is where John starts his account of Jesus' ministry

During Jesus' last week before His crucifixion, He spent days in Jerusalem, but spent most nights in Bethany. Essentially, Bethany was a suburb of Jerusalem. All of the Gospels document Jesus being in Jerusalem/Bethany that last week.

Matthew 21:1 begins Matthew's account of Jesus' last visit to Jerusalem/Bethany

Mark 11:1 begins Mark's account of Jesus' last visit to Jerusalem/Bethany

Luke 19:29 begins Luke's account of Jesus' last visit to Jerusalem/Bethany

John 11:55 begins John's account of Jesus' last visit to Jerusalem/Bethany

Consider how much space each writer devotes to Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem between the start of Jesus' ministry and His arrival in Jerusalem a week before the cross.

Matt 4:12–20:34 = 606 verses. Jesus is in Jerusalem/Bethany for 0 of 606 (0%).

Mark 1:14–10:52 = 412 verses. Jesus is in Jerusalem/Bethany for 0 of 412 (0%).

Luke 4:14–19:28 = 683 verses. Jesus is in Jerusalem/Bethany for 5 of 683 (1%).

John 1:35–11:54 = 499 vss. Jesus is in Jerusalem/Bethany for 254 of 499 (51%).

(These follow Thomas and Gundry's identification of Jesus' locales)

## WHY DOES JOHN MENTION THE FEASTS?

The feasts show that Jesus (a resident of Galilee) presented Himself before the authorities entrusted by God to screen out false messiahs and to welcome the true Messiah. Jesus did many signs publicly in Jerusalem, so people would believe or defiantly reject Him.

## PILGRIM FEASTS (Deuteronomy 16:16) AND NON-PILGRIM FEASTS

*Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place which He chooses: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, at the Feast of Weeks, and at the Feast of Tabernacles; and they shall not appear before the LORD empty-handed.*

Jewish males were to make three pilgrimages to the place appointed by the LORD (in Jesus' day, the appointed place was the Temple in Jerusalem).

Passover and Unleavened Bread occurs in March or April.

The Feast of Weeks (Pentecost) occurs in May or June.

The Feast of Tabernacles (Booths) occurs in September or October.

The Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) originated after the Old Testament closed. It is not a pilgrim feast. God never required that it be observed, but Jesus was in Jerusalem at Hanukkah in John 10. It occurs in November or December.

## MAKING SENSE OF CHRONOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY IN THE GOSPELS

Jesus spent most of His time in Galilee. While there, He ministered to people in a variety of ways and trained His disciples. Matthew, Mark, and Luke focus (until the week before His crucifixion) on His ministry in Galilee. The Synoptics also mention brief trips to Phoenicia, the Decapolis, Samaria, Perea, and Judea; but mention no trips to Jerusalem itself (Luke devotes five verses to Bethany, a suburb of Jerusalem).

Each trip to Jerusalem involved about a week in Jerusalem and close to a week for going down and returning. Thus, if Jesus made four trips to Jerusalem in a year, He would have about a month in Jerusalem and about a month in travel. That would allow a maximum of ten months a year to stay in Galilee. The Synoptics focus the most attention upon Galilee, the place where Jesus spent the most time.

By contrast, John 1:35–11:54 devotes 254 verses to Jerusalem/Bethany, 148 to Galilee, and 97 to other places (rural Judea, Samaria, Perea, Batanea, Ephraim). John 1:35–11:54 documents five trips to Jerusalem/Bethany (2:13–3:21; 5:1–47; 7:10–10:21; 10:22–39; 11:17–53). Allowing one week in Jerusalem/Bethany per trip that is about one month (in a 43-month ministry). Why does John devote so much space to Jerusalem/Bethany? One month is about 2% of the time contained by John 1:35–11:54, but he devotes 51% of those verses to the time in Jerusalem. Clearly, John emphasizes Jesus' time in Jerusalem.

### **WHY IS THE TIME IN JERUSALEM SO IMPORTANT?**

Jesus' half brothers urge Him to go to Jerusalem to make Himself known. (John 7:3–5)

He does not argue against their logic, but against their timing (7:6–9)

He delays travel slightly and travels in secret (7:10)

At the middle of the feast, He made Himself known (as His brothers had said) (7:14ff)

He told how they marveled when He healed the lame man (John 5) on a Sabbath (7:21)

Question: What was the purpose for mentioning the sign of the Sabbath healing?

Many (who previously saw His many signs) believed because of His many signs (7:31)

A division arose, with some saying that Jesus is the Christ and others saying that He is a deceiver (7:40–43)

The Temple police said that they did not arrest Him, because no one ever spoke like He did, which caused Pharisees to assert that the police were as deceived as the ignorant crowds, while claiming that the Sanhedrin did not believe in Him (7:45–49)

Nicodemus stopped them from lynching Jesus, urging a proper judicial inquiry to discover the truth, which caused others to call him names (7:50–52)

Jesus did not judge the woman caught in adultery (with the seeing of the eyes or the hearing of the ears), but challenged the qualifications of her would-be judges (8:4–10)

Jesus [the woman being in the midst of those He was teaching] said that He is the light of the world, so His followers do not walk in darkness [as do the Pharisees] (8:12)

Many believed in Him as He said such things as: If you do not believe that I am, you will die in your sins (8:24, 30)

That same day, Jesus escaped those who sought to stone Him [going more than a Sabbath-day's journey near the pool of Siloam] and He healed a man born blind (9:1–7)

The healed man initially identified Jesus as a prophet because of the healing (9:17)

The healed man refused to label Jesus as a sinner, because of the healing (9:25)

The healed man pointed out the irony that the Pharisees did not know where Jesus is from, since no one had ever before healed one born blind (9:29–33)

Jesus asked the healed man if he believed in the Son of God; when Jesus identified Himself as the Son of God, the man acknowledged that he believed (9:35–38)

Jesus then told and explained the parable of the good shepherd to these evil shepherds of Israel (Pharisees) who had sought to destroy the healed blind man (10:1–18)

When Jesus returned to Jerusalem at Hanukkah, Judeans demanded for Him to identify Himself; He said that He had already identified Himself [as Israel's good shepherd] who is One with the Father (10:22–30)

Jesus asked which of His good works caused them to plan to stone Him; they said that it was for the blasphemy that He (a man) was attempting to become God (10:31–33)

(Even under the assumption that He was a mere man) the blasphemy charge would be false, because His works show that He and the Father are One (10:34–38)

When Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, many believed in Him (11:45)

The Sanhedrin feared that (if Jesus did more signs) everyone would believe in Him, causing the Romans to take away their nation and their power (11:47–48)

Caiaphas prophesied that it was expedient for Christ to die for the nation, rather than for the whole nation to perish [but he understood these words differently] (11:49–52)

John summarizes: Although Jesus did so many signs, the nation overwhelmingly disbelieved, but many even among the rulers believed in Him [and many of the common people believed in Him] (12:37–42)

## A CONSIDERATION OF JOHN'S PURPOSE STATEMENT

Jesus actually performed many other miraculous signs (*sēmeia*, neuter plural) in the presence of His disciples which are not written in this book. But these (*tauta*, neuter plural: e.g., *these signs*) are written so that **you** may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, **you** may have life in His name.

The readers are unbelievers (that **you** may believe) who lack life (that **you** may have life).

John says: ***These (signs)*** are written so that you may believe.... He did not write: "This sign is written so that you may believe...."

The 8 signs are: Water to wine (Jn 2); healing from distance (Jn 4); healing lame man (Jn 5); Feeding 5000 (Jn 6); Walking on Sea (Jn 6); Healing one born blind (Jn 9); Raising Lazarus (Jn 11); Cross and Resurrection (Jn 2 & Jn 19–20).

In the Majority Text, the first use of believe is an orist subjunctive (*These are written so that you may believe*). I accept that reading. The critical text has a present subjunctive. Some people claim that the present tense should be rendered: "These are written so that you may keep on believing," but the present subjunctive after *hina* ("that") does not support that view. Consider the following two examples (of many in John) of present subjunctives following *hina*.

*You are not willing to come to Me that you may have life.* (5:40)

These **dead people** need to come to Him in order to **get life**.

*I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.* (10:10b)

He came to **give life** to **dead** & to give abundance to those **lacking abundance**.

John's Gospel does not present signs to prevent people from ceasing to believe. The point of signs is to bring people to believe.

Over and over again in John's Gospel, the point of signs was to bring unbelievers to the point of believing in Jesus as the lifegiving Messianic Son of God.

## CONCLUSION