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Detailed Outline of Chronology of Jesus' Ministry

Part Two of this book presents a chronology of Jesus' ministry. Chronologies are seldom explicit among contemporary New Testament scholars. Most agree that events reported in the New Testament are authentic, but do not organize them into a chronology. John's gospel provides the basis for such a chronology.

The gospels agree that Jesus' ministry begins with John the Baptist in Judea, possibly after a feast-day celebration in Jerusalem which Jesus attended. They concur that Jesus returns to Galilee to take up his ministry. The next Passover reported in Matthew, Mark, and Luke (called the Synoptic Gospels because Matthew and Luke use Mark's basic outline for events in Jesus' life) culminates in Jesus' death and resurrection. That chronology in the Synoptic Gospels gives Jesus a ministry of well less than a year.

John's gospel alone, as seen below, reports that Jesus went back and forth between Galilee and Jerusalem during two Passover seasons in addition to his final one. This gives Jesus a ministry of nearly three years instead of less than one (as reported in the Synoptics). We believe John's Gospel is accurate in these reports.

An important demonstration in this chronology is that, in John’s Gospel, Jesus was in Jerusalem often enough and for long enough to gather several group of followers there—from Hellenist Jews, Hebrew Jews (Brethren), and, possibly, newly arrived Hellenist Jews (Apostles) who were not known to those in Galilee until after Jesus’ resurrection. Certain events become clearer using this thesis. The brief titles added to the sub-sections of Part Two, below, show how, with a few exceptions, key events in Jesus’ ministry fit together into a single timeline.

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in the other three Gospels. The Apostles struggled with both Hebrews and Hellenists in Diaspora cities and also with Hellenist Gentiles as shown in Paul's letter to the Galatians and in our 2011 book. Luke was a colleague of Paul, the Apostle (Acts 16:9-10, *passim*). Since the parties' constituencies differed geographically and ethnically, their Gospels reflect these differences.

All four Gospels focus on Jesus of Nazareth as, in Greek, the *Christos*, the Christ, the "Anointed of God," what he said, what he did, and why he said or did certain things. The Gospels differ largely in explaining Jesus' beliefs and actions so their constituencies could understand the Christ more adequately. We will demonstrate many of these differences in this book.

Six Tasks for this Book

Based on the dynamics underlying what was happening to and in the four parties in the early Jesus movement, six tasks emerge.

First, to describe in some detail the social, economic, political, and religious conditions where Jesus undertook his ministry, in Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. This description includes certain issues in what was happening within Judaism, especially in Jerusalem, as well as among the rulers of the area, the Sanhedrin, Herodians, and Romans. The Romans were the ultimate authorities and had final "say" on things. But they decentralized certain decisions to the Herodians and the Sanhedrin, sometimes with disastrous consequences for ordinary people. The next chapter addresses these issues.

Second, to develop a comprehensive chronology of Jesus' ministry based primarily on the Gospels of Mark and John. The parties agreed that Jesus ministered in both Galilee and Judea. Most scholars also agree that Mark was written first, probably in Rome, probably based on memories of one or more of his remaining Galilean disciples or their close asso-

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ciates, and probably just after the halfway point of the first centuryCE. Mark's Gospel depicts Jesus' ministry as taking place within a duration of less than one year. Matthew and Luke depend heavily on Mark's writings for their chronologies, each adding or subtracting certain details. John's Gospel differs considerably. John's Gospel posits that Jesus' ministry was spread over several years, alternated locations between Judea and Galilee, and celebrated not one but three Passovers. To comprehend these differences among the Gospels requires a new overall chronology for Jesus' ministry. This chronology is presented in Part Two.

Third, to recognize dangers Jesus faced during his ministry. Because of what he said and did, Jesus can be seen as under close surveillance by those who had status and power in Judea and Galilee (the Sadducees, Sanhedrin, Pharisees, Herodians, and Romans). The Gospels explicitly report on Jesus' conflicts with these powerful groups. Questioning of him by Scribes and Pharisees was a form of surveillance. These men reported Jesus' beliefs and actions to the Sanhedrin, Sadducees, and high priests in Jerusalem (Caiaphas and Ananias). On the basis of such reports, powerful leaders of these groups came to consider Jesus dangerous, especially because the beliefs espoused by Jesus and his followers threatened the beliefs, privileges, and prerogatives of these high-status groups. From the moment Jesus emerged from the shadow of John the Baptist and especially after he "*cleansed the Temple*," he was a man marked for punishment and eventual execution. Such dangers to Jesus are noted in the chronology.

Fourth, to examine each Gospel (and its underlying oral tradition) in its uniqueness—how each one represents a party's geographic and socio-political-religious environment. Although each Gospel presents similar features in Jesus' life and work, each differs in certain details that both complement and occasionally contradict one another. These details usually stem from a party's basic concerns. Part Three examines these details.

Fifth, to deal with the most important question posed by the New Testament—who is the Jesus of the Early Jesus Movement? The four Gospels (and various Letters in the New Testament) provide a wide range of sometimes inconsistent materials through which to understand Jesus as a central historical figure who affected so many cultures, especially in Western Europe. In Part Four, we will sort through the Gospels' contents to determine where they converge. From this analysis a reasonably complete picture of Jesus, the central figure of the early Jesus movement, emerges.

Sixth, based on perspectives presented in this book, we conclude with an Afterword that addresses some of the glaring issues facing contemporary Christians today.

Year Two of Jesus' Ministry

(John 6:1–10:42)

In Galilee: The Meal for 5,000 by the Seaside (John 6:1-13)

Danger: Very high

Following this sharp discussion, Jesus and his disciples left Judea and journeyed back to the “*other side of the Sea of Galilee*” (the Gospel writer John used the Roman name “*Sea of Tiberias*”). A multitude of people followed him, more than 5,000 men. This year Jesus did not go to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover but instead ate a meal with 5,000 men, some of whom were perhaps Passover pilgrims, on the east side of the Sea of Galilee.

When Jesus saw the crowd was hungry, Jesus asked Philip, “*How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?*” Philip had no answer. “*Two hundred denarii,*” he said in despair, “*would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little.*” A denarius was a day’s wage for a peasant’s work. Jesus and his followers did not have this much money. Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, made a quick survey of the crowd and told Jesus, “*There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish.*” This seemed hopeful but then Andrew

added, “*What are they among so many?*” Jesus said, “*Make the people sit down.*” Now, says the Gospel, there was much grass in the place, so everyone sat down.

The “lad,” *paidarion*, was a child or youth, or possibly a young slave. The word is used no place else in the New Testament. The denarius, a common Roman silver coin first issued around 19CE, was a typical day’s wage. It pictured Emperor Tiberius (14BCE–37CE) and read “Tiberius Caesar, son of the Deified Augustus and himself Augustus.” The reverse side showed Livia, Tiberius’ mother, represented as Pax, the goddess of peace. A denarius was mentioned at least eight times in the Gospels (Mt 20:2, 22:19; Mk 6:37, 12:15, 14:5; Lk 7:41, 10:35; and Jn 12:5). The word used for “fish,” *opsaria* (plural), meant specifically “fish boiled or roasted to be eaten with bread” (Culpepper, 2005).

Jesus took the fish and loaves and, when he had given thanks, distributed them to the crowd. The people ate as much as they wanted. After they ate their fill, Jesus told his disciples to gather up the left-overs so nothing would be lost. When gathered, the leftovers filled twelve baskets from the original five barley loaves and two fish.

What did this episode signify? Dodd (1963) and Barrett (1978) see this event as John’s rendering of the Lord’s Supper that became a usual part of a Hellenist-Christian fellowship meal after the Resurrection. In the Synoptic Gospels, the Last Supper happened during Passover season when Jesus had a last meal with his disciples, which became the Lord’s Supper in many churches. Jesus also performed a ritual in taking the loaves and fish, giving thanks for them, and distributing them to those assembled. These things were also associated with the Lord’s Supper.

Compared to descriptions in the Synoptic Gospels, if it would be the Lord’s Supper, John omitted several things from his account.

- He omits “looking up to heaven.”
- He omits “the breaking of the bread.”

- He describes the bread as “barley loaves,” the poorest form of bread.
- He distributes fish rather than wine.
- Jesus distributes the food rather than his disciples doing so.

Despite these differences from the Synoptic Gospels, John's account could reflect a communal supper held by Hellenist Christians. At the time John's Gospel was written, life in the Jesus movement had no standard requirements for a specified ritual during a meal—elements in a fellowship meal were flexible. Hellenist Christians could use poorer bread than the kosher bread used during Hebrews' sacred meals and fish could be substituted for another element—bread, or fish, or wine, or all three. Rather than strict ritual, the thing that mattered most to Hellenist Christians was the sense that Jesus was presiding over the fellowship meal and personally distributing food to his followers.

This story certainly continues the theme of abundance from God that comes to people through Christ. Sometimes the abundance is wine, as in the wedding at Cana; sometimes abundance is water as with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well; sometimes abundance is spirit, as in the conversation with Nicodemus; sometimes abundance is life, as when Jesus healed the official's son. Here abundance is of bread and fish. John's Gospel indicates the abundant life is offered by God to all people.

The “feeding of the 5,000” also brought in themes not previously considered. Since it was Passover season, this gathering of Jewish men might not have been from Galilee alone but perhaps from the entire Mediterranean world. The east side of the Sea of Galilee would have been an appropriate place for pilgrims to congregate before proceeding down the safer side of the Jordan River into Jerusalem for Passover.

Another distinctive mark in this account was the number of men involved—five thousand. Such a large meeting with a man like Jesus was forbidden by Roman law. The Herods,

with their spies and informers all over Judea and Galilee, were certain to find out that many men met with Jesus in Galilee in this openly clandestine way. With their routine fear of insurrection, the Herods would want to question many of these men and its leader, Jesus. By this meeting, Roman nails were sharpened to pound into Jesus' hands and feet.

In Galilee: Jesus Invited to be King (John 6:14-15)

Danger: Potentially very high

When the people saw the sign Jesus had done in feeding the 5,000, they said, *"This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!"* Certain people in Galilee and Judea, especially the Zealots, were always hunting a strong, charismatic man to lead an armed rebellion against the Romans. Apparently after Jesus successfully fed 5,000 men and especially because so many people had come to him there, they wanted to make Jesus leader for an uprising. That some people wanted such a leader depicts the volatile character of the social conditions during Jesus life. But Jesus was not to be a political messiah. *"Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the hills by himself"* (Jn 6:15). He refused the kingly role and departed from them.

This event showed Jesus as a magnetic, charismatic leader drawing others to him—"star quality" some might say today. People recognized his confidence in his abilities to accomplish tasks he set for himself and his enormous courage, fearlessness, and outspokenness in a way that challenged them to move beyond their present mundane lives to something better. Why not make this dramatic, articulate man their leader?

But it was not to happen. Jesus' hour to bring in a kingdom had not yet come. When the hour came, it would not be as leader of a violent guerilla band. It would come in a show of power. But the power was of love not war. His life and death would benefit not Jewish people alone but all human-

kind. As a lone man on a cross, others would look up to him as they looked to the bronze serpent in the wilderness. He would bear their grief, carry their sorrows; by his sufferings sins would be forgiven and healing would come. Jesus recognized these things and rejected people's entreaties to be their mundane king. In the next episode of his life, he would show the people who he really is.

In Galilee: Who Jesus Really Is (John 6:16-21)

Danger: Low from the Herods, high from the priests

Jesus had been alone on the mountain for a number of hours and his disciples were searching for him. When dusk came, his despairing disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started rowing across the sea to Capernaum. A strong wind was blowing and waves arose. When the disciples rowed three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea, drawing near the boat.

Barrett (1978), among others, pointed out that Jesus may not have miraculously walked on the water. He may have simply been walking on the beach either in the lapping water or beside it—as soon as the disciples' boat reached him, it also reached shore. Translating the Greek word *epi* could be either “on” or “near.” Barrett's translation is, “*They wished to take him into the boat, but found...that they had reached the shore.*” When Mark's Gospel reported the same incident, it left less doubt that Jesus walked on and not by the sea (Mk 6:43-51).

The disciples were frightened, but Jesus said to them, “*It is I; do not be afraid*” (Jn 6:20). The phrase in Greek is “*ego eimi*,” “I am.” This key phrase shows that Jesus identified himself with God. In the Septuagint, the Hebrew Bible's Greek translation, “*ego eimi*” are the exact words God used in identifying himself to Moses in the wilderness after he left Egypt (Exodus 3:13-14). Hellenists routinely heard these words when reading from the Septuagint in their synagogues. In later chapters of John's Gospel, Jesus used these same words to