

REVISED EDITION

Handbook OF Biblical Chronology



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with 20 B.C. it is realized that this explanation will not work. It remains only to suppose that the fifteenth year is a mistake, unless it might possibly refer to a time of preparation before the actual construction.

594. In the foregoing (§593) we have encountered the word περιβόλος, which means something thrown around, hence an enclosure, precinct, or court. The same word is used by Josephus in *Ant.* 15.417–420 as he describes the general layout of the temple. He tells of the first court into which all might come, the second into which foreigners were forbidden to come, and the third into which only the priests might enter and in which stood the altar of burnt offerings and the temple edifice proper. Then he explains that Herod could not go into the third court and the place of the altar and sanctuary, which meant that the temple edifice proper had to be built by the priests. Herod did, however, take care of the porticoes and the outer courts (τὰ περι τὰς στοὰς καὶ τοὺς ἔξω περιβόλους), and these he built in eight years. Then Josephus says: (*Ant.* 15.421):

Τοῦ δὲ ναοῦ διὰ τῶν ἱερέων οἰκοδομηθέντος ἐνιαυτῷ καὶ μηνὶν ἕξ.

But the temple itself was built by the priests in a year and six months (variant: five months).

The word ὁ ναός (Ionic) or νεώς (Attic), “the temple,” is used regularly in Greek for a temple in general, and also in particular for the inner part of a temple and, in paganism, for the shrine in which the image of the god was placed. In *Ant.* 15.380 (§592) and *War* 1.401 (§593) Josephus evidently used the word in its general sense in saying that Herod built the temple. In the present passage (*Ant.* 15.421), however, he obviously uses it in its more restricted sense for the inner part, the temple edifice proper. Later in *Ant.* 16.132 when he describes Herod as making a speech to the people in the temple (ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ), which would necessarily have been in the outer courts, he uses a different word, τὸ ἱερόν, which was commonly used for a whole temple precinct. Precisely the same distinction is made in the Gospels: τὸ ἱερόν, the entire area, Mark 11:11, etc.; ὁ ναός, the temple edifice proper, Mark 15:38, etc. If, then, the priests, acting under Herod’s directive, began their work on the temple proper in 20/19 B.C. (§592) and built it in one year and six months, they must have finished the “temple itself” in 18/17 B.C.

595. Now we return to John 2:20 (§590). This is often translated in somewhat the fashion of the RSV, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple,” apparently implying that the work was still going on, a point that is made explicit in the Berkeley Version, “This temple has been in process of building for forty-six years.” If the reference were to the ἱερόν, i.e., the entire temple precinct, this could be true enough for, in fact, such work was still going on until the time of the procurator Albinus (A.D. 62–64), only a few years before the final destruction. The reference in John 2:20 is, however, specifically to the ναός, i.e., the temple edifice proper, and in John there is no mistaking the clear distinction between the two terms. Ἱερόν is used in the following passages: John 2:14—“In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep . . .”; 5:14—Jesus found the healed man “in the temple”; 7:28—“as he taught in the temple”; 8:20—“he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple”; 18:20—“I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in synagogues

and in the temple.” Every passage suggests the more open and public outer courts; in every passage John uses ἱερόν, the word meaning the entire temple area. Only in John 2:19–20 is the word ναός employed. Therefore, this reference is to the temple proper, completed by the priests in 18/17 B.C. (§590). Furthermore, the crucial verb in John 2:20 is οἰκοδομήθη (§590), which is an aorist indicative passive, meaning literally “was built,” and is surely best understood as referring not to a building enterprise that was still going on, as it had been for forty-six years, but to a building enterprise that had been completed long before so that it could be said that the building had stood for forty-six years. Therefore, the Jews, in effect, ask Jesus, “How can you possibly raise up in three days a temple that has stood for forty-six years?” After 18/17 B.C., forty-six years brings us to A.D. 29/30. The conversation in question between Jesus and the Jews took place at the Passover described in John 2:13–21, and this Passover is therefore to be dated in the spring of the year A.D. 30.¹⁹⁰

(2) The Duration of the Ministry

596. In the course of the Jewish religious year several annual feasts and one fast were held, as shown in Table 172. The Day of Atonement (cf. §12) is a fast, the other observances are feasts. As 1 Kgs 8:2 and other references show, the Feast of Tabernacles was probably often referred to simply as “the Feast.” In the Gospels as they stand there are references to some of these festivals, from which it may be possible to gather some information about the probable length of Jesus’ ministry.

TABLE 172. Annual Observances in the Jewish Religious Year

Name	Date	Scripture Reference
Passover	14th day of the 1st month = Nisan (Mar/Apr)	Exod 12:6
Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost	50 days after the ceremony of the barley sheaf at Passover time	Lev 23:16 Deut 16:10
Day of Atonement	10th day of the 7th month = Tishri (Sept/Oct)	Lev 23:27
Tabernacles	15th day of the 7th month = Tishri (Sept/Oct), for 7 days	Lev 23:24; 1 Kgs 8:2
Dedication	25th day of the 9th month = Chislew (Nov/Dec)	1 Macc 4:59
Purim	14th and 15th days of the 12th month = Adar (Feb/Mar)	Est 9:17–18

¹⁹⁰In contrast with our dating William Hendriksen (*John* [NTC 1; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953], 126) counts from 20/19 B.C. when Herod launched the temple project (§592) rather than a year and six months later (18/17 B.C.) when the priests completed the temple building proper (§594) and thus the forty-six years come to A.D. 26/27, a year which Strobel and Blosser make a Sabbatical year. For this entire analysis see Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects*, 38–43.

(a) The Synoptic Gospels

597. In their account of the ministry of Jesus, the Synoptic Gospels mention only one Passover, namely, the final one at which time Jesus was put to death (Mark 14:12; Matt 26:17; Luke 22:7). Since this was an annual feast and only one occurrence of it is mentioned, as far as the evidence goes, the ministry could have comprised as little as one year or even less. In the second book of *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus writes against the school of Valentinus¹⁹¹ in general, and against Ptolemy in particular, the latter being a chief follower of Valentinus who was still alive at the time of Irenaeus. Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 2.22.5) states that the Valentinians taught that Jesus conducted his ministry of preaching for only a single year, reckoning from his baptism.

They, however, that they may establish their false opinion regarding that which is written, "to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord," maintain that he preached for one year only, and then suffered in the twelfth month.

Against this position Irenaeus himself argues in the same section that at his baptism Jesus "was beginning to be about thirty years of age" (Luke 3:23), that if he had only completed this thirtieth year when he died he was still a young man, and that he had therefore never reached the more advanced age of a Master qualified to teach others. Irenaeus explains, not with complete clarity:

The first stage of early life embraces thirty years, and that this extends onwards to the fortieth year, every one will admit; but from the fortieth and fiftieth year a man begins to decline towards old age, which our Lord possessed while he still fulfilled the office of Teacher, even as the Gospel and all the elders testify; those who were conversant in Asia with John, the disciple of the Lord, [affirming] that John conveyed to them that information.

On the basis of John 8:57, however, Irenaeus is sure that Jesus had not reached his fiftieth year (§589). He was, then, between forty and fifty, Irenaeus holds, and thus (counting from baptism at about thirty) must have had a ministry of between ten and twenty years. Thus Irenaeus argues against the Valentinian view of a one-year ministry.

598. The final Passover in the Synoptic record came, of course, in the springtime. But another Synoptic passage (Mark 2:23; Matt 12:1; Luke 6:1) appears plainly to refer to a springtime prior to that final one, for it tells how the disciples plucked ears of grain, and thus it implies the spring harvest time, perhaps Apr/May (§58). Since the baptism (Mark 1:9) was obviously prior to that, perhaps in the preceding fall, the total ministry was at least somewhat over one year in length. As we have already seen (§552), Clement of Alexandria states that the followers of Basilides put the baptism in the fifteenth year of Tiberius, on the eleventh or fifteenth of Tybi (= Jan 6 or 10), and the passion in the sixteenth year of Tiberius, on the twenty-fifth of Phamenoth (= Mar 21) or on the nineteenth or twenty-fifth of Pharmuthi (= Apr 14 or 20). In Egypt, the first regnal year of Tiberius

¹⁹¹This famous Gnostic was educated at Alexandria and taught at Rome about A.D. 136–155.

presumably began on Thoth 1 = Aug 29, A.D. 14, and the fifteenth regnal year was accordingly from Aug 29, A.D. 28, to Aug 28, A.D. 29 (Table 134). Jan 6 or 10 in the year 29 is therefore the indicated date of the baptism. Likewise, the sixteenth year of Tiberius extended from Aug 29, A.D. 29, to Aug 28, A.D. 30. So May 21 or Apr 14 or 20 in the year 30 is the indicated date of the passion. From baptism to passion is one year plus a few months, a period of time with which the Synoptic record by itself could be considered at least roughly consonant.

599. The Synoptic record does not necessarily, however, require as brief a ministry as that just indicated. A springtime is indicated (Mark 2:23, etc.) without mention of a corresponding Passover. Other Passovers could have gone unmentioned. Or the Synoptic record could cover only a part—perhaps the part deemed most important—of a longer ministry. Along this line Ethelbert Stauffer remarks that it is not possible to fit the chronological structure of the Gospel according to John within the narrow span of the Synoptic account, but it is possible to fit the Synoptic framework into John's structure, and he judges this to be important evidence for the correctness of the Johannine chronology.¹⁹²

(b) The Fourth Gospel

600. The Fourth Gospel refers to more Jewish feasts than the Synoptic Gospels and thereby suggests a longer ministry. As far as Passover is concerned, three observances of this festival are specifically mentioned: (1) John 2:13—"The Passover of the Jews was at hand" (also verse 23); at this time Jesus cleanses the temple; (2) John 6:4—"Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand"; at this time the feeding of the five thousand took place; (3) John 11:55—"Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand"; this was the final Passover at which time Jesus was put to death (it is mentioned by name also in 12:1; 18:28, 39; 19:14). In the Synoptic Gospels the cleansing of the temple occurs on the final visit of Jesus to Jerusalem and near the time of the final Passover (Mark 11:15ff., etc.). It is possible that John transposed this event to a place near the beginning of the ministry for some symbolic reason. In that event there would be but two Passovers in John's record: (1) that of John 6:4; and (2) that described in two different places, John 2:13 and 11:55ff. In this way John might be thought to fit the pattern of the ministry of one year and some months, even as perhaps the Synoptics indicate (§598).

601. But taking the Fourth Gospel as it stands, there are not only three Passovers mentioned but also certain other notes of time. These are: (1) John 2:13, 23—the first Passover; (2) 4:35—"yet four months, then comes the harvest"; with harvest probably in Apr/May (§58), this saying should belong in Jan/Feb and a second and unmentioned Passover should fall in Mar/Apr; (3) 5:1—according to Codex Vaticanus and other manuscripts "a feast of the Jews" was at hand, according to Codex Sinaiticus and other manuscripts it was "the feast of the Jews"; if it was "a feast" it was hardly Passover which is otherwise mentioned by name, but it could have been the Feast of Weeks; if it

¹⁹²Ethelbert Stauffer, *Jesus and His Story* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), 7.

was "the feast" it was probably Tabernacles, often (§596) referred to simply in this way (cf. John 7:2, 10, 14, 37); (4) 6:4—a third Passover is at hand; (5) 7:2—the Feast of Tabernacles is at hand; (6) 10:22f.—it was the Feast of Dedication, and winter; (7) 11:55ff.—the final Passover. This provides the outline shown in Table 173.¹⁹³ Since the baptism and beginning of the public ministry preceded the first Passover in the outline, with the baptism perhaps coming in the preceding fall, it seems that a total ministry of three years plus a number of months is indicated.

TABLE 173. Notes of Time in the Fourth Gospel

Year and Month	Feast	Reference
<i>1st Year</i>		
Nisan (Mar/Apr)	1st Passover	2:13, 23
Shebat (Jan/Feb)	"four months to harvest"	4:35
<i>2d Year</i>		
Nisan (Mar/Apr)	2d Passover	Unmentioned
Tishri (Sept/Oct)	"the feast," i.e., Tabernacles	5:1, Codex Sinaiticus
<i>3d Year</i>		
Nisan (Mar/Apr)	3d Passover	6:4
Tishri (Sept/Oct)	Tabernacles	7:2
Chislev (Nov/Dec)	Dedication	10:22
Nisan (Mar/Apr)	4th and final Passover	11:55ff.

602. As we have seen (Table 149), Epiphanius likewise considered that the ministry of Jesus covered three years plus several months. In the *Chronicle* of Eusebius as translated by Jerome, the preaching of John the Baptist is placed in the fifteenth year of Tiberius (= A.D. 28) and the death of Jesus in the eighteenth year (= A.D. 31), and thus the ministry appears to cover two years and a portion of a third (Table 94). But in the Armenian version,¹⁹⁴ the death of Jesus is placed in the nineteenth year of Tiberius, which may allow an additional year. Actually, a ministry of three years and a portion of a fourth appears to be the real view of Eusebius. In the *Church History* (1.10) he says (presumably thinking of Luke 3:2; John 11:49, 51; 18:13) that Jesus passed his entire ministry under the high priests Annas and Caiaphas. It is ordinarily assumed that Annas (who was actually high priest in A.D. 6–15) is mentioned in Luke 3:2 and John 18:13 along with his son-in-law Caiaphas (who held the office in A.D. 18–36) because he was still influential in the time of the latter. As known from Josephus and with approximate dates the high priests between Annas and Caiaphas were: Ishmael (A.D. 15–16), Eleazar (16–17), and Simon (17–18). Although he also cites Josephus, Eusebius evidently assumes that these men constituted a series of high priests who held office during the ministry of Jesus, each for a one-year term. Eusebius writes:

¹⁹³HDB 1: 407 n. a.

¹⁹⁴Karst 213.

Accordingly the whole time of our Savior's ministry is shown to have been not quite four full years, four high priests, from Annas to the accession of Caiaphas, having held office a year each.

603. As far as the evidence in the Gospels goes, therefore, we appear to have two chief possibilities as to the duration of the public ministry of Jesus. On the basis of the Synoptic Gospels taken by themselves (§598) the ministry could have been one year and some months in length. With a critical rearrangement, the Fourth Gospel might possibly be brought into harmony with such a length of ministry (§600), and there is some support for such a figure in the tradition of the followers of Basilides reported by Clement of Alexandria (§598). Taken as it stands, however, the Fourth Gospel appears to require a ministry of three years plus a number of months (§601), and there is some support for a duration of some such magnitude in Epiphanius and Eusebius (§602). It is the conclusion of the present book that the chronology of the Fourth Gospel is convincingly detailed.

3. The Death of Jesus

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