



A Bird's Eye View of Jesus' Ministry

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The table on the next page is a chronological summary of the material in [Chronology of the Four Gospels](#) that gives a bird's eye view of the three and a half years of Jesus' ministry. As you can see, most of the events and teachings in Jesus' ministry cannot be dated, but what *can* be determined in many cases is the *sequence* of events, which allows them to be placed in relation to other events.

Interestingly, it is possible to determine when **April** occurs in each year, either because of the occurrence of Passover, or the occurrence of green grass or ripe barley or wheat (see endnote 7 for more details), or both. These make it clear that Jesus' ministry lasted more than three years, and also serve to conveniently divide his ministry into three distinct "years", as seen in the fourth column (though the first "year" is really a year and a half). In the fifth column a different division is seen, where the different phases of Jesus' ministry are shown.

John the Baptist's activities are very important through more than half of Jesus' ministry, and mark important events which help to tie together the chronology, so I have included information on these in the third column and throughout the chronology.

The **Synoptic Gospels** (Matthew, Mark, and Luke, so called because in general all three cover the same events) and **John** actually share very little material! I have shown this by marking each case of unshared material with a gray background in the table below. Probably the best explanation for this, which many have suggested,¹ is that John was written after the other three, that he was very familiar with them, and that he intentionally included distinct material that he had witnessed and thought was important to make clear the divinity of Jesus as the Second Person of The Trinity. The only significant cases of shared material are some of the events of John 6 (Jesus feeding the five thousand and walking on the water), which he apparently considered pivotal in his message, and some of the events in **The final week of Jesus' ministry** (which cannot be seen in this table for reasons of space). However, there are a couple of other minor passages that match that allow synchronization. I have marked all of these matching cases with a red triangle ◀ in the right margin. These and the four Aprils are what allow us to determine the full chronology. (Unshared April events are marked with a blue triangle ◀.)

For background information, colors, other formatting, and symbols used, see the last three pages of [Chronology of the Four Gospels](#). As explained there, Mark and John seem to be almost entirely chronological, but often Matthew is not, and sometimes Luke is not. A verse or passage with a **yellow** background is out of order, and one with a **sky-blue** background is not actually out of order, but refers forward or backward to another event, and so is placed out of order. However, to see how all of the out-of-order verses actually fit in with the others, and to see explanations of the reasoning behind this ordering, consult [Chronology of the Four Gospels](#).

What it All Means

When I was studying this material with my sixteen-year-old son Nathan as I was developing it, he asked, "Is it important that Jesus' ministry lasted precisely three and a half years?" And as I thought about it, I realized that the answer was yes. Jesus knew how his ministry would progress (see column 4), and he knew that he would need the first year and a half as a "Year of Preparation" to call his first disciples and to prepare for his public ministry. He knew that the second year would be a "Year of Popularity" in which he drew great crowds and taught and healed many, culminating in his feeding of the 5,000 and his walking on the water to show all the people, and especially his disciples, that he was the divine Son of God. But he didn't trust the people, and when they wanted to make him king after the feeding of the 5,000 (John 6:15) he withdrew from the crowd, because he knew that his kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36). And Jesus knew very well that after the "Year of Popularity" would come a "Year of Opposition", as his popularity provoked jealousy among the Jewish leadership and his harsh public criticism of them provoked hatred. And he knew that this would culminate in his Final Week, which would begin with the Triumphal Entry, as of a king, and end in ignominy with an illegal arrest and trial, and then his terrible death by crucifixion.

In John 7:6 he told his unbelieving brothers, when they urged him to seek more publicity, "**My time has not yet come**, but your time is always here." But then a few months later in Matthew 26:18 he told his disciples, "Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, 'The Teacher says, **My time is at hand**. I will keep the Passover at your house with my disciples.'" Jesus had it all planned out, and each step was necessary.

And he had each phase of his ministry planned out (see column 5). He knew that he must be baptized and then tempted by the Devil before he could begin his ministry. And he knew that the beginning of his ministry needed to be more private as he and his first disciples got to know each other, including his key men Peter and John (John 1:35-41)². But then when that phase was completed he embarked on his Great Galilean Ministry, a time of very public ministry of around a year and a half which included his "Year of Popularity". But then, about the same time as his "Year of Popularity" was coming to a close, his own focus changed also, as he began teaching and preparing his disciples for the end. This change of focus took them to regions they had not visited before, a number of Gentile areas, as he stepped back from the limelight to give his attention to those who would be his ambassadors to the world after his ascension.

A Bird's Eye View of Jesus' Ministry

Year		Jesus' Ministry "Years" Phases		Key Events	Month if known	Events	When and Where	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John		
26 A.D.	Oct	John the Baptist's Ministry	prelude to ministry			John begins his ministry †	By the river Jordan, latter part of year 26 ³	3:1-12	1:2-8	3:1-18			
	Nov					Baptism of Jesus		3:13-17	1:9-11	3:21-23a	(1:32-34) ◀		
	Dec					Temptation of Jesus	In the desert for 40 days	4:1-11	1:12-13	4:1-13			
27	Jan		The Year of Preparation	early ministry mentioned only in John, mostly in Judea	1 st Passover	April	Early events in John	various locations, early in the year				1:19-2:12	
	Feb						Jesus clears the temple ⁴	Jerusalem, almost Passover, April			2:13-25	▶	
	Mar						More early events in John	Jerusalem, Judean countryside				3:1-36	
	Apr												
	May												
	Jun												
28	Jul		John the Baptist in prison	The Year of Popularity	The Great Galilean Ministry (very public)	2 nd Passover	April	Herod puts John in prison †	December? (year 27) (see John 4:35 ⁵)	4:12a	1:14a	3:19-20	(3:24) ◀
	Aug							The Samaritan woman	Sychar in Samaria	"			4:1-42
	Sep							Jesus arrives in Galilee †	Galilee	"	4:12b	1:14b	4:14-15
	Oct	Jesus heals an official's son						Cana in Galilee	"			4:46-54	
	Nov	Various events in synoptic gospels						Galilee, early in the year	4:13-25, 8:1-4, 14-17, 9:1-13	1:14c-2:17	4:16-5:32		
	Dec	John's disciples ask about fasting † (John still in prison)							9:14-17	2:18-22	5:33-39		
	Jan	He heals a paralytic on the Sabbath						April? ⁶ , Jerusalem, Pool of Bethesda				5:1-47	▶
	Feb	Disciples pick grain on the Sabbath						Galilee, April/May (ripe barley or wheat) †	12:1-8	2:23-28	6:1-5		
	Mar	More events in synoptic gospels						Galilee	12:9-21, 5:1-7:29, 8:5-13	3:1-19	6:6-7:17		
	Apr	Jesus and John the Baptist †						(John still in prison)	11:2-19		7:18-35		
	May	More events in synoptic gospels						Galilee	12:22-13:58, 8:18-34, 9:18-11:1	3:20-6:13	7:36-9:6, 11:14-54, 9:57-62		
	29	Jun						John's death	The Year of Opposition	Change of Focus: Teaching and preparing The Twelve ⁸	3 rd Passover	April	The death of John the Baptist †
Jul		Herod wonders about Jesus	Perea	14:1-2	6:14-16	9:7-9							
Aug		Jesus feeds the five thousand, walks on water, etc.	Near Bethsaida (Luke 9:10), near Passover (John 6:4), "green grass" (Mark 6:39) ⁷	14:13-15:20	6:30-7:23	9:10-17	6						
Sep		End of Great Galilean Ministry		(15:21)	(7:24)		7:1						
Oct		Travels in synoptic gospels	various regions in and around Galilee	15:21-18:35	7:24-9:50	9:18-50							
Nov		Feast of Tabernacles, other events	Jerusalem				7:2-10:21						
30	Dec	Final Week Jesus' appearances for 40 days after the resurrection	Ascension events shortly after the Ascension	4 th Passover	April	Dedication	Nov./Dec. Feast of Dedication (Hanukkah) †	Jerusalem				10:22-39	
	Jan					The ministry in Perea	Perea ("the region of Judea beyond the Jordan")	19:1b-20:16	10:1b-31	12:1-18:30	10:40-42		
	Feb					Return to Judea to raise Lazarus	Bethany near Jerusalem, Ephraim				11:1-54		
	Mar					The final journey	Road to Jerusalem	20:17-34	10:32-52	18:31-19:28			
	Apr					The final week of Jesus' ministry	Bethany and Jerusalem, 8 days (Sat.-Sun.)	21:1-28:15	11:1-16:14	19:29-24:48, 13:34-35	11:55-20:23		
	May					Appearances in synoptic gospels	Jerusalem, Galilee	28:16-20	16:15-18				
	Jun					Appearances in John	Jerusalem, Galilee				20:24-21:24		
	Jul					Summary of appearances							
	Aug					The ascension	Bethany, 40 days after the resurrection (Acts 1:3)	1 Co. 15:7b	16:19	24:49-53	Acts 1:4-14		
	Sep					Matthias Chosen to Replace Judas	Jerusalem, "In those days"				Acts 1:15-26		
	Oct					The Coming of the Holy Spirit	Pentecost Sunday, 10 days after the ascension				Acts 2:1-41		

And then in Luke 9:51 it says, “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, **he set his face to go to Jerusalem.**” And from that point on everything pointed that way, though there was a lot more teaching to be done before he got there, particularly during the ministry in Perea as he passed along the east side of the Jordan on the way to Jerusalem.

And then came the final journey, and as he made his way resolutely toward Jerusalem, he again told his disciples something he had already told them twice before, that he would be delivered over to judgment, condemned to death, and crucified, but that on the third day he would rise again (Matthew 20:17-19). The first time he said this Peter scolded him for suggesting such a thing (Matthew 16:21-23), the second time they were greatly distressed (Matthew 17:22-23), but this time they say nothing. He was preparing them. He had everything planned out, and we can learn a lot from his plan.

Another Confirmation

Another fascinating confirmation that Jesus’ ministry lasted for three and a half years comes from, of all places, Daniel 9:27, in the prophecy of the Seventy Sevens, as I explain in my article [The Seventy Sevens of Daniel 9](#). Verse 27 says, “He will confirm a covenant with many for one ‘seven.’ In the middle of the ‘seven’ he will put an end to sacrifice and offering.” In the context it is understood that the “seven” refers to seven years, and the “end to sacrifice and offering” refers to Jesus’ death on the cross, which did away with the need for any other sacrifices for our sin. So the idea is that Jesus’ ministry lasted for the first half of the final “seven”, which is three and a half years! (Check out the article for full details.)

The Final Week

The row marked in **green** above only occupies eight days out of the three and a half years of Jesus’ ministry, but actually takes up a huge percentage of the gospel text, about 32% of Matthew, 37% of Mark, 23% of Luke, and 40% of John. This is because it culminates Jesus’ life and ministry, and contains some of his most important teaching, as well as the account of his arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection.

I have included a few of the endnotes from [Chronology of the Four Gospels](#) here, but only those that are most relevant to this table. Any questions you may have will in most cases be answered there.

¹ See section **IX. Relation to the Synoptic Gospels** of the “John (Gospel of)” article in the *New Bible Dictionary*.

² See [Chronology of the Four Gospels](#) for an explanation of why the other disciple not named here was probably John, who was evidently an eyewitness of this event and of all of his unique material related in his gospel from this point forward.

³ See [this page](#), [this page](#), and [this page](#) for why the time frame mentioned in Luke 3:1 for the start of John’s ministry would have occurred in the latter part of 26 A.D.

⁴ According to John 2:20 this occurred 46 years after Herod the Great began reconstructing the temple, which occurred in the [18th year of his reign \(20-19 B.C.\)](#), which confirms that Jesus began his ministry and cleared the temple in 27 A.D., which is also indicated from several other evidences. (Remember, there is no year 0!)

⁵ I realized in January, 2022 that I needed to put an endnote to explain how John 4:35 shows that these events occurred in December. In John 4:35 Jesus says, “Do you not say, ‘**Four months more and then the harvest?**’ I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields! They are ripe for harvest.” Clearly the second part of the verse is metaphorical, but what does the first part mean? In the context it sounds like a proverb, but in fact it only makes sense if it actually indicates the present situation at the time Jesus said it. *Baker’s New Testament Commentary* affirms this, and says, “The harvest in this region being in April (or early May), it was now December (or early January)”.

⁶ In John 5 the text does not say that this was the Passover, only that “there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.” For more information, see the corresponding endnote in [Chronology of the Four Gospels](#). This does not otherwise affect the chronology, since the framework of four Aprils is clear without this event.

⁷ In the climate of Israel the grass is only green and fresh during the springtime, mainly April. In the winter it freezes, and in the hot, dry summer it dries out. This confirms John’s statement that it was near the Passover, and his statement that there was “plenty of grass” (John 6:10). See this excellent [YouTube video about the four seasons in Israel](#) from one of my favorite YouTube channels, [Sergio & Rhoda in Israel](#), who bring to us in living color so many Biblical places.

⁸ *Baker’s New Testament Commentary* calls this period “The Retirement Ministry”, but I find this term to be confusing, so I have called it “Change of Focus” with some explanation. It has two main contrasts from “The Great Galilean Ministry” that preceded it:

1. It is less public and more focused on teaching his disciples privately and preparing them for the end, though by no means exclusively.

2. To do this they spend a considerable amount of time in predominantly Gentile territory, though again by no means exclusively.

Here is some of *Baker’s New Testament Commentary*’s explanation: “Even though during this Retirement Ministry the Lord by no means completely withdrew from the crowds, yet teaching the disciples was now one of his main objectives.” “The shift to this ministry from the one that preceded it is not abrupt and radical but rather a matter of emphasis. For example, during the lengthy period which to a large extent Jesus spent in Capernaum and vicinity (Mark 1:14-7:23) he was often surrounded by crowds. Now too (Mark 7:24-9:50) he does not escape those multitudes (Mark 8:1; Mark 9:14). At times he even invites the throngs to come to him (Mark 8:34). But there is a difference in emphasis: generally he is now seen in the presence not of crowds but of his disciples. He is teaching them (Mark 8:1, Mark 8:14-21, Mark 8:27-33; Mark 9:28-29, Mark 9:31-50). He fully realizes that the cross cannot be far away. Accordingly, he is expounding to the Twelve the lessons of the cross (Mark 8:31; Mark 9:31). This continues even into the Perea Ministry (Mark 10:33-34). In order to be able to impart this important information effectively Jesus is seeking places of seclusion, apart from the busy centers. A considerable amount of time is spent in predominantly Gentile territory.”

The Perea Ministry that follows this continues to have this same focus, and though *Baker’s New Testament Commentary* prefers to treat this separately, I have included it in this section. See the footnote discussing the Perea Ministry in [Chronology of the Four Gospels](#).