

Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: February 15, 2009

The Missing First Year of Jesus' Ministry

by Dan Trygg

“And after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, ¹⁵ and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.’” Mark 1:14-15

Thank God that we have *four* gospel accounts. They each add to a fuller understanding of Jesus' life and ministry. None are superfluous. Each serves a particular purpose, and has a different emphasis. **It is important that we understand the nature of these writings, as intended by the authors, so that we can correctly understand and appreciate each one, ...as well as the power of their joint testimony when taken together.** If we impose on them the format and expectations of our 21st century historical reporting, we will misunderstand what they are attempting to do, and will judge them harshly. If, however, we allow them to speak for themselves, and recognize the editorial intent and limited scope of each record, we will find the differences and similarities to be a great asset. For example, Mark's gospel appears to have been the first one written, and both Matthew and Luke seem to have followed Mark's outline as they wrote, editing and adding more information designed to suit the different audiences they had in mind. **John wrote his gospel almost a generation later**, at the end of a very long life. The other accounts had been written and widely distributed for decades before John even put his pen to the parchment on which he wrote. **He filled in a great deal that was skipped over by the other three writers**, supplying names and details that had been left out by them.

We are at such a place in the gospel of Mark where he skips over a very large chunk of time, almost an entire year, because it did not suit his purpose in writing. Matthew and Luke, following the basic skeleton of events as recorded by Mark, also skipped over the same segment of time. **This gap is exposed and filled in by John**, who gives us information crucial to correctly understand not only the sequence of events, but also the background for what the writers of the first three gospels present as the next part of the story they tell. In Mark's gospel, this missing year seems to have occurred between verses 13 and 14 of chapter one. In Matthew, this gap would be between 4:11 and 4:12. Luke jumps over it after 4:13. **How do we know? The key indicator in Mark and Matthew is when they pick up the story of Jesus' life after John the Baptist had been taken into custody.** Luke mentions John's imprisonment in 3:19,20, summarizing the future end of his ministry. Then, in verses 21,22, he mentions that *when* all the other people were being baptized by John, Jesus was among them. Obviously, then, the comment regarding John's imprisonment is not meant to be understood as placed chronologically. Rather it was a glimpse into the future. Luke does not tell us exactly when this imprisonment took place, but the other gospels seem to place it at least *after* the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness (Lk. 4:1-13). By contrast, John records that Jesus' ministry was active, and growing, for at least a year, while John the Baptist remained free and active in his ministry at this same time.

What happened during that “missing year”, and why is it so significant? Nearly everything in the first four chapters of John seems to have occurred during this time. John sent the first disciples to Jesus, and, after just a couple of days, they were with Him when He performed His first miraculous sign (Jn. 1:29-2:12). On His visit to Jerusalem for Passover, Jesus cleansed the temple, while these initial disciples looked on (2:13-22). That was a very **bold and dramatic action** to take. It not only provoked the angry challenges of the religious leaders, but also probably made Jesus the talk of Jerusalem. If the disciples hadn't run for cover then, they would have had the opportunity to see Him perform more *miraculous signs*, and watch while *many* people began to believe in Him (2:23,24). He obviously was teaching, as well, because, when Nicodemus sought Him out, he called Him, “Rabbi” (Teacher), and referred to that aspect of His ministry (3:2). **Teaching** must have been a major component of His ministry activity. We learn from 3:22 that **His disciples were traveling with Him**, and He was “*spending time with them* and baptizing”. The word translated as “spending time with” literally means to “rub away, rub hard, wear away”. It implies spending a lot of time with someone and influencing them through extended conversation and interaction. It is like the OT passage, “Iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens the countenance of his friend” (Prov. 27:17). **The interaction of Jesus with His disciples was more than just “hanging out”. The discussions were serious and life-changing.** It was during this year that Jesus' ministry began to eclipse that of John's (3:25-30). **Jesus began making disciples, and baptizing people**, even more than John. We find out from 4:2 that Jesus was not doing the baptizing, but He had **recruited His disciples to share in the ministry** in this manner. Toward the end of this missing year, the disciples were with Jesus when He shared the good news with an entire village of Samaritans (4:3-42). **He taught them to look at things spiritually**, and to take note of the spiritual need and readiness of people who were coming to Him, no matter what their background,

social status or gender. They were able to observe how the excited testimony of one person pricked the curiosity of an entire village, and led to an opportunities to share with many. He showed them by His example that *spiritual conversations and investments take priority* over everyday events and even personal comforts. **Take care of the spiritual business first, while the time is opportune.** There will be time later for the mundane things. Jesus even had them adjust their travel plans, so that they could more fully make use of the door of opportunity God made available. He also taught them that some sow the spiritual seeds, and often others will have the opportunity to harvest the results of their labors. When people come to faith, however, it is appropriate for both sowers and reapers to rejoice together.

The significance of an understanding of “the missing year” is that we get a clearer picture of what it took for Jesus to get His ministry up and running. Sometimes we think that things were “easy” for Jesus, because He was the Son of God. As we carefully examine the record, however, it becomes evident that the success of His ministry involved some very key ingredients, not the least of which was *hard work*. **We must remember that Jesus was not just a human being, living out His life from birth to death on this planet.** He was the eternal Word of God, who had existed before time itself, and had created this world, and even the people He now came to redeem. His purpose in coming was primarily to deliver a one-two punch to the kingdom of Satan. He came to break the powerbase of the enemy through His sacrificial death and resurrection, and He also set in motion a resistance and occupation movement, whose purpose was to make disciples of all nations, setting people free from slavery to Satan to serve Him until He returns. **Jesus’ identity and existence never centered on planet earth. He was sent here on a mission.** He never intended to live a full life span, raise a family or have children. He lived among us just long enough to accomplish His task, and then went back to glory from which He came. When we understand this, we can begin to appreciate the preparation and “staging” that God put together in order to propel Him into prominence so quickly. **Like a well-planned and executed spy mission you might see in a movie, God had planned and prepared for Jesus’ birth for centuries.** At the right time in history, God sent part of His own self to be miraculously conceived in a virgin’s womb in Nazareth. He was born as a human baby, like us in every way except for the fallen twistedness that leads toward sin. He grew up as a child, learning to read, write, and follow instructions. He was reared by godly parents to learn the Scriptures, and to come to know His heavenly Father. Certainly, by age 12, He knew who He was, and had some sense of His call. **He was to start His ministry at age 30, and had to complete His work in three and a half years** (Num. 4:3 [cf. Gen 41:46; I Sam. 13:1; II Sam. 5:4]; Dan.9:27) He had to fulfill a number of prophetic signs, gather disciples, appoint apostles and prepare them for His departure. He had to proclaim the coming Kingdom of God, reveal its power, and permanently establish its foothold on the planet. He came to assault the kingdom of darkness with a *firestorm of activity*, all designed to show the superiority of His power and goodness over the power of the enemy. **Furthermore, He somehow had to credibly be both the Messiah, the King of peace, and also become the ambushed, betrayed suffering servant, the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world.**

What we learn from the “missing year” is that God did, indeed, have things prepared and set in motion, so that when Jesus was ready, He was rapidly propelled onto the public scene.

John the Baptist was already set in place. He had captured the attention of the Jewish people, so that many had identified with His message, and were looking for the deliverance of Israel. Remember that he had been speaking of the “One who would come after” him? **More than just preparing the imagination of the Jewish people for the coming of the Messiah, John went so far as to personally point Jesus out and even referred His own disciples to the Lord** (Jn. 1:35-37). This active recommendation and sending people over to Jesus had to have a huge impact on the growth of Jesus’ popularity. Since their ministries overlapped for almost an entire year, John served to actively promote Jesus and bear witness to what he saw for that entire first year.

God prompted Jesus to do some very bold, dramatic and powerful things which strongly drew attention to Him and the work of God through Him. These acts included strongly confronting corrupt religious practices, ...in love clearly reaching out past social prejudices, ...and powerfully demonstrating God’s Kingdom through miracles.

From the beginning of His public ministry, Jesus was training disciples. *Everywhere He went He was teaching people.* He became known as a “Teacher sent from God”. *That was not enough, however.* He was always looking for those who were serious minded, committed people. He recruited them, spent quantity and quality time with them, and gave them increasing levels of both intimacy and responsibility. **This was the most important part of His ministry work, a commission He later would pass on to us** (Matt. 28:18-20). By the time three and a half years were over, He had successfully trained up enough people who could oversee the explosive growth of the early church. It is important for us to see that Jesus knew that *this training process did not happen overnight*. It took Jesus the entire three and a half years to get His disciples ready to take over the leadership of the movement He was leaving behind.