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George Ogg

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PART ONE

THE DURATION OF THE
MINISTRY

CHAPTERS I–VI



CHAPTER I

THE DURATION OF THE MINISTRY

INTRODUCTORY

SYNOPSIS

The problem which the Gospels present.

The inadequacy of general considerations.

The calculations of Hans Windisch.

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CHAPTER I

THE DURATION OF THE MINISTRY

Introductory

FOR how long did Jesus exercise his public ministry? If we may judge from the titles of a considerable number of monographs and contributions to theological journals, that is a question which in recent years has come to be reckoned one of some importance. From the time of Eusebius throughout the Middle Ages down to our modern time the prevailing belief has been that the public ministry of Jesus, while it may not much have exceeded three, was certainly over two years in duration. The theory of a one-year ministry is not entirely new: it has emerged from time to time in the course of the last three hundred years. To-day, however, it is being urged as never before and has already won for itself the approval even of some who at first vigorously opposed it.

Our four Evangelists nowhere provide us with an answer to our question. That is scarcely surprising. Their aim in writing was to meet the religious needs of the world of their time and not, after the manner of Plutarch or Suetonius, to provide it with a biography of Jesus. Supremely their aim was to give a true conception of his person, to record his sayings, and to make plain what was the spirit which he had manifested. With them chronological and topographical matters were a secondary concern. In making transitions they are content in many places with vague, general phrases: εὐθύς (very characteristic of Mk.), καί, πάλιν, τότε (characteristic of Mt. and virtually equivalent to *waw* consecutive), ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις, ἐν ἐκείνῳ τῷ καιρῷ, etc. Definitions of time which appear to be more precise, as e.g. καί μεθ' ἡμέρας ἕξ (Mt. xvii, 1) and

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τῆ ἐπαύριον (Jn. i, 43), are frequently not really so because of the general indefiniteness. This indifference of our Evangelists as to time and place is further indicated in a tendency on their part, much emphasised by the modern *formgeschichtliche* School, to group incidents according to community of subject and to string sayings upon mere phrases and catchwords.

Of the Synoptists Lk. appears to be the one who took most pains to set his narrative in relation to general history; nevertheless he gives the same general sketch of the ministry of Jesus as do the other two, and he nowhere, any more than they, expressly says what was its duration. In their record of that ministry all three Synoptists mention one Passover, that at the time of which Jesus was arrested, tried, and crucified. Besides this they refer to no other Passover, nor do they report any other visit paid by Jesus to Jerusalem within this period. They thus appear to include all the events of his ministry within a single year.

That Jn. desires to set forth the ministry of Jesus in its historical sequence is manifest. Chronological details are more abundant in his Gospel than in any of the Synoptics. What help they can be to us depends, however, on our conception of this Gospel. If we are satisfied that its author wrote after the manner of an Alexandrian philosopher, that it is a work historical only in outward seeming but to be interpreted allegorically and so purely theological, then we shall be disposed to regard its chronological details as but an artifice. In that case they can afford us no help at all. If on the other hand we take the more generally accepted view that this Gospel has historical value, it cannot be claimed that these details afford us all the help we need. The time note μετὰ τοῦτο occurs in four places.¹ While it implies a short interval, it leaves its exact length indeterminate. μετὰ ταῦτα, which occurs much more frequently, implies a considerably longer break in time, but is equally lacking in precision. In one place (v, 1) a feast

¹ ii, 12; xi, 7, 11; xix, 28.

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of the Jews is mentioned but not named. In all there are references to three Passovers; but, while it is a principal aim of this writer to treat of the visits paid by Jesus to Jerusalem, there is nothing to indicate that he has recorded all such visits falling within the period of the public ministry. That in its duration this ministry was not less than two years and some months is all that the chronological details of the Fourth Gospel, for all their abundance, enable us to conclude.

That, however, is sufficient to constitute a problem. The *prima facie* inference from the first three Gospels is that the public ministry of Jesus lasted but a year: according to the Fourth Gospel its duration cannot have been less than two years and some months. Is there here an actual chronological inconsistency, or is a reconciliation possible? That is the question which emerges.

For how long then did Jesus exercise his public ministry? The question is one in the answering of which general considerations afford little help. It has indeed been said repeatedly that the more extended chronology of the Fourth Gospel has the greater historic probability. Such teachers as Socrates, Gautama, and Mohammed taught for a considerable time. The Athenian philosopher was at least 70 years old at his death. It was when aged about 40 and at Benares that the Buddha first preached or, in the consecrated phrase, "turned the wheel of the law". For some 40 years thereafter until his death at Kusinagara he traversed a large part of Northern India preaching his strange gospel. The ministry of the prophet of Islam was likewise an extended one dating from his "experience", somewhere on a lower slope of Mt Hira, *c.* A.D. 610 to his death in A.H. 11, A.D. 632. The inference, however, that Jesus, like these other teachers, can have made his influence felt only after a fairly long period of preaching and teaching is one that many will not make. Rather they will set the shortness of his ministry in contrast with the length

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of theirs and will see in that yet another indication that he was not such an one as they. The historic improbability of the Synoptic chronology of the ministry of Jesus is, it may be urged, but a part of the remarkableness of that ministry.

It serves equally little purpose to think of the ministries of the prophets of O.T. times. On the one hand, it may be argued that, for all the severity with which these prophets denounced the evils of their day, never before had the Jewish religious authorities been confronted by one who so uncompromisingly insisted that the true province of religion is the realm of spirit and personality, who in consequence so completely unmasked the hypocrisy of their lives or so utterly undermined their position. The resulting struggle, it may be argued, was so bitter that Jesus himself could not but have foreseen, as he did foresee, that it would end, as indeed it did end, in his own speedy destruction. On the other hand, it may be urged that these authorities, chafing under the yoke of Roman domination, may not have been unwilling to allow to this new and popular movement initiated by Jesus time to develop somewhat if haply it might prove to be such a political, anti-Roman movement as they would gladly welcome. That ultimately Jesus failed the authorities in this expectation, that in time it became increasingly clear to them and to a larger circle that the kingdom of which he spoke was non-political and universal was—it may be—part of the underlying reason why “the year of public favour”¹ was followed by “the year of opposition”¹ culminating in the resolution of the Sanhedrin to put him to death and the demand of the multitude that he should be crucified. It was from the time when he denied them opportunity to make him a king that many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him.

Help has been sought in yet another way and equally without result. The attempt has been made to determine what time the events recorded in the Synoptic Gospels

¹ Stalker, *The Life of Jesus Christ*, chs. v and vi.

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actually necessitate. This is the purpose of Hans Windisch in a contribution "Die Dauer der öffentlichen Wirksamkeit Jesu nach den vier Evangelisten" to the *Zeitsch. f. d. N.T. Wissen.* xii (1911), pp. 141-175. An Evangelist, he recognises, may have had an idea of the course of the Gospel history different from that which arises out of his actual presentation of it. It is with this latter that Windisch concerns himself. Assuming the events of the public ministry of Jesus to be, as they stand in the several Synoptic Gospels, in chronological order, he assigns to each its appropriate time requirement and sums. The following are his figures:

Mk.

(a) Erster Tag in Kapernaum i, 21-34	1 Tag
(b) Erste Predigtreise des messianischen Herolds in der Nachbarschaft von Kapernaum i, 38-45	3 Wochen
(c) Zweiter Besuch in Kapernaum ii, 1-v, 43	2 „
(d) Ausflug über den See iv, 35-v, 21	½ Tag
(e) Besuch in Nazareth und Aussendung der Jünger vi, 1-13	4 Wochen
(f) Zweiter Ausflug über den See und erneute Reise des Wunderarztes durch das Land vi, 30-vii, 23	1 Woche
(g) Ausflug nach Phönizien vii, 24-30	2 Wochen
(h) Wanderung um die Ufer des Sees vii, 31-viii, 26	1 Woche
(i) Wanderung in das Reich des Philippus viii, 27-ix, 29	2 Wochen
(j) Letzter Aufenthalt in Galiläa ix, 30-50	1 Woche
(k) Wanderung nach Jerusalem x, 1-xi, 11	1 „
(l) Aufenthalt in Jerusalem bis zur Kreuzigung xi, 12-xv, 39	1 „

Dauer der öffentlichen Wirksamkeit Jesu 18 Wochen
= 4½ Monate.

Mt.

(a) Erste Predigtreise durch ganz Galiläa iv, 23-viii, 4	1 Monat
(b) Erster Aufenthalt in Kapernaum viii, 5-ix, 34	2 Tage
(c) Zweite Predigtreise durch Galiläa ix, 35-xiv, 13	2 Monate
(d) Fahrten über den See xiv, 14-xv, 21	2 Tage
(e) Rückzug nach Syrien xv, 21-28	2 Wochen
(f) Aufenthalt am See xv, 29-xvi, 12	3 Tage
(g) Aufenthalt im Nordbezirk xvi, 13-xvii, 20	2 Wochen
(h) Letztes Verweilen in Galiläa xvii, 21-xviii, 35	1 Woche
(i) Wanderung nach Jerusalem xix, 1-xx, 34	1 „
(j) Die Jerusalemer Zeit xxi, 1-xxvii, 61	5 Tage

Dauer der Wirksamkeit 3 Monate 6 Wochen 12 Tage
= knapp 5 Monate.

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Lk.

(a) Anfänge der Predigtwirksamkeit iv, 15	1 Monat
(b) Reise über Nazareth nach Kapernaum iv, 16–31	1 Woche
(c) Fortsetzung der Wanderschaft iv, 43–vi, 6	2 Wochen
(d) Reden und Wunder in Kapernaum, Nain, und Umgebung vi, 6–viii, 1	2 „
(e) Fortsetzung der Wanderung viii, 1–ix, 1	2 „
(f) Aussendung der Jünger ix, 1–6	1 Monat
(g) Rückzug und Andrang ix, 10–17	1 Tag
(h) Letzte Erlebnisse und Gespräche in galiläischer Gegend ix, 18–50	2 Wochen

2 Monate 9 Wochen 1 Tag = $4\frac{1}{4}$ Monate.

- A. Erste Wanderperiode iv, 15–ix, 50 etwas über 4 Monate.
 B. Reise nach Jerusalem ix, 51–xix, 28 knapp 2 Monate.
 C. Aufenthalt in Jerusalem xix, 45–xxiii, 56 etwa 2 Wochen.

In Summa $6\frac{1}{2}$ Monate.

From these it appears that the ministry of Jesus, assumed to have had the sequence given it in any one of these three Gospels, may well have been fulfilled in the brief space of $4\frac{1}{2}$ to $6\frac{1}{2}$ months. This does not mean that Windisch agrees with Maurenbrecher who, we gather,¹ puts the Baptism of Jesus in the autumn of A.D. 28, his Passion at the Passover of A.D. 29. It does mean that he finds the way open for the suggestion that Jesus, after having laboured for some six months in Galilee and the far north, proceeded at the time of a Feast of Tabernacles to Jerusalem, in which city and in Judaea he then laboured for a further six months until the Passion Passover. Here, however, our concern is not with this suggestion which Windisch makes, but with his time allowances as tabulated above.

In places the Evangelists give sufficient indications of what was the time occupied by the events of which they write. Windisch has noted these: and so far well. But there are many places in the Gospels where no such indications are provided, and where in consequence there is room for considerable difference of opinion as to the time allowances

¹ In a work *Von Nazareth nach Golgotha*, pp. 215 ff., Guignebert (*Jesus*, p. 211) thinks it very likely that the public ministry of Jesus had a duration of not more than three or four months.

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that ought to be made. In the absence of such indications it is extremely difficult to say for what intervals, when he withdrew north and north-east beyond the borders of Galilee, Jesus remained there. So also it is extremely difficult to say how long were the circuits of preaching on which he went out from Capernaum; and the fact that certain of these are referred to in the most summary fashion increases the difficulty.

He who pleases will find it easy to make out that the time allowances of Windisch are unduly short. There may indeed be a certain measure of exaggeration in the statement that 'Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching . . . and preaching . . . and healing' (Mt. iv, 23). Nevertheless what undoubtedly is suggested, it may be claimed, is an extensive mission embracing most of that province. Now Galilee in the time of Jesus—a land of great beauty, fertility, and richness—was densely populated. Josephus¹ states that it contained 204 cities and villages the smallest of which numbered above 15,000 inhabitants, and this is confirmed by Dio Cassius, who in his *Roman History*² reports that in the days of the Bar-cochba rebellion the rebels were in possession of 50 strong castles and 985 villages in all Judaea. A mission throughout a province thus dotted all over with places of considerable size may well have occupied not weeks, but months and seasons.

The investigations made by Windisch might not have proved fruitless. Had the sum total of the time allowances about the sufficient accuracy of which there could be no question exceeded a year, the hurt to a one-year theory of the ministry of Jesus would have been irremediable. But it comes considerably short of that, and the time allowances about which there can be no unanimity are by far the more numerous. Quite obviously it is not possible to determine what length of time all the events of Jesus' ministry, as the Synoptics present it, make necessary.

¹ *Vita*, XLV and *Bell. Jud.* III, iii, 2.

² LXIX, 14.

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Some may say that for the contents of these Gospels a place can be found without difficulty within the limits of a single year, and that the material is insufficient to fill out a longer period. Others again may say that it is only by a forced and unnatural process that the whole development recorded there can be crowded into so short a space. These statements, however, if they do not merely express general impressions, can be based only upon investigations wherein a considerable subjective element is involved. To establish either of them in a strictly scientific way is not possible.