How Long Did Christ Minister?

Searching the Scriptures for the Length of His Ministry

A study of God's appointed times and the Gospel record, weighing what is said and what can be verified about the length of the ministry of Jesus Christ.

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Introduction

A. The Question

How long was the public ministry of Jesus Christ, from his baptism by John to the cross?

Most Christians have heard an answer: three and a half years. It is repeated in sermons, printed in study Bibles, and drawn on charts. Others have heard one year, or two, or a little over three. The answers differ because the Gospels never state the length in so many words. No verse says, "he ministered so many years." Every answer is built from something else: the feasts the Gospels mention, the seasons they describe, the rulers they name, and the prophecies of the Old Testament.

God's times are not careless. He set the feasts on fixed days (Leviticus 23). He counted Israel's captivity in years (Jeremiah 25:11-12). He gave Daniel a count of weeks that ran to "Messiah the Prince" (Daniel 9:25). It is reasonable to ask whether he also set the length of his Son's ministry, and whether it can be found by searching the scriptures.

This study searches. It sets out what is said and what can be verified, it weighs every argument in the open, and it is willing to end with "scripture does not say" if that is where the evidence leads.

In short: no verse states the length of the ministry, so every answer is built from other evidence, and this study examines that evidence.

Weighing it: Method, not argument.

B. Does It Matter?

The length of the ministry is not a matter of salvation. Nothing in the gospel of grace depends on it. Christ died for our sins, was raised, and ascended to the right hand of God, whether he taught for one year or for four.

But it matters in three lesser ways. It bears on whether scripture's own prophecies of the Messiah were fulfilled on time, which is a witness to the accuracy of God's word. It bears on how the four Gospels fit together, which affects how their events are read in sequence. And it bears on the date of the crucifixion, which bears in turn on other studies of chronology. So it is worth getting right, as far as scripture allows.

In short: not a matter of salvation, but a matter of reading God's times and the Gospels accurately.

Weighing it: Method, not argument.

C. How This Study Is Built

The study begins with the Old Testament, because God's appointed times are set there first.

- **Part One: The Old Testament Timepieces** (Chapters 1 to 3). Daniel's seventy weeks, read two ways and set side by side; Isaiah's "acceptable year of the LORD," which Jesus read in his first recorded sermon; and other patterns: Elijah's three years and six months, the fruit tree of Leviticus 19, the age of priestly service, and the Passover lamb.

- **Part Two: The Gospel Record** (Chapters 4 to 6). The feasts John names, the two disputed verses in John (5:1 and 6:4), and the seasons the other Gospels describe.
- **Part Three: Fixing the Dates** (Chapters 7 to 9). The rulers and dates Luke and John give, the day of the crucifixion, and what the earliest Christian writers said, as history only.
- **Chapter 10** gives the verdict: what is certain, what is probable, and what remains open.

The appendices hold the tables: every feast and season marker (Appendix A), the arithmetic of Daniel 9 (Appendix B), the date of 14 Nisan for each year from A.D. 26 to 36 (Appendix C), the evidence for the sabbatical years (Appendix D), and every argument in the study with its weight (Appendix E).

Every verse is quoted from the King James Version. Where a verse carries weight, it is quoted in full.

In short: the Old Testament first, then the Gospels, then the dates, then the verdict.

Weighing it: Method, not argument.

D. The Claims This Study Tests

The study tests seven claims. Each weighing note names the claim it bears on.

- **Claim M (Minimum):** the Gospels require a ministry of more than one year, and, if John 6:4 stands, more than two.
- **Claim P (Passovers):** the number of Passovers between the baptism and the cross can be settled from the text.
- **Claim D (Daniel):** Daniel 9 sets the length of the ministry.
- **Claim Y (Year):** "the acceptable year of the LORD" (Isaiah 61:2; Luke 4:19) limits the ministry to one year.
- **Claim T (Types):** other Old Testament patterns (Elijah's three and a half years, the fruit tree, the Passover lamb) indicate the length.
- **Claim A (Anchors):** the dates Luke and John give fix the year of the baptism and of the cross.
- **Claim X (The Cross):** the day of the week of the crucifixion narrows the possible years.

In short: seven claims, named once, so that each can be followed through the study.

Weighing it: Method, not argument.

E. How to Read the Weighing Notes

Every section ends with a note beginning **Weighing it**, which says how strong the point is and which way it points, and then what a careful reader on the other side could fairly answer. Five words are used for strength:

- **Direct statement:** scripture says it in so many words.
- **Strong inference:** it follows closely from what scripture says, and the other reading has to strain.
- **Reasonable inference:** the more natural reading, but an honest reader can take it otherwise.
- **Corroboration only:** consistent with the position, but about as consistent with the opposite. Stated, not leaned on.
- **Neutral:** often cited, but settles nothing.

Sections that argue nothing are marked *Narrative*, *Method, not argument*, or *Opposing case, stated*.

In short: every point carries its weight openly.

Weighing it: Method, not argument.

F. What Changed in This Edition

The first edition left the length of the ministry evenly balanced between about two and a half years and about three and a half, and made the choice turn on whether the unnamed feast of John 5:1 was a Passover. In building a harmony of the four Gospels on the dates of this study, a second line of evidence came to light: the grain fields of the early Galilean ministry. They came after a Passover and before the feeding of the five thousand, and that requires a Passover between the first Passover of John 2:13 and the Passover of John 6:4. This edition adds that evidence in a new Chapter 6 C, adjusts Chapters 5 C and 8 C to match, and revises the verdict in Chapter 10, where three and a half years is now stated as the probable length. The identity of the feast of John 5:1 remains open. The arguments added and revised are listed in Appendix E.

In short: a new line of evidence from the grain fields moves the verdict from an even balance to about three and a half years as the probable length.

Weighing it: Method, not argument.

In Short: Scripture does not state the length of Christ's ministry. This study searches God's appointed times in the Old Testament and the record of the Gospels to see what can be known, and says plainly where the evidence stops.

Part One: The Old Testament Timepieces

Chapter 1: Daniel's Seventy Weeks

A. The Prophecy

> **Daniel 9:24** *Seventy weeks are determined upon thy people and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most Holy. 9:25 Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks: the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times. 9:26 And after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself: and the people of the prince that shall come shall destroy the city and the sanctuary; and the end thereof shall be with a flood, and unto the end of the war desolations are determined. 9:27 And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.*

No passage in the Old Testament gives a more exact count toward the Messiah. "Seventy weeks" are "sevens," periods of seven. They are generally understood as sevens of years, 490 years in all. The pattern was already set in the Law: the land kept a sabbath every seventh year (Leviticus 25:2-4), and seven sabbaths of years made the forty-nine-year cycle that led to the jubilee (Leviticus 25:8). Daniel had just been reading Jeremiah's seventy years of captivity (Daniel 9:2), which scripture ties to the land's unkept sabbaths (2 Chronicles 36:21). The angel answers seventy years with seventy sevens of years.

The prophecy divides the seventy weeks into three parts:

1. **Seven weeks** (49 years), in which "the street shall be built again, and the wall, even in troublous times."
2. **Threescore and two weeks** (434 years), bringing the total to 69 weeks (483 years) "unto the Messiah the Prince."
3. **One week** (7 years), in the midst of which "he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease."

And between the 69th week and the 70th stands the statement that matters most to this study: **"after threescore and two weeks shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself" (Daniel 9:26)**.

In short: Daniel counts 69 weeks of years to "Messiah the Prince," says that after them the Messiah is cut off, and puts something decisive "in the midst" of a final week.

Weighing it: Direct statement — for the divisions of the seventy weeks; Strong inference — for weeks of years. The other reading can fairly answer that "weeks" are not explicitly defined in the passage. But Daniel's setting (Jeremiah's seventy years, 9:2) and the sabbatical-year pattern of the Law make weeks of years the natural reading, and almost all readers take it so.

B. Where the Count Begins

"From the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem." Four royal commands are candidates:

- **Cyrus, 538/537 B.C. "he hath charged me to build him an house at Jerusalem" (Ezra 1:2)**. This command concerned the temple. Counting 483 years from it reaches about 55 B.C., long before Christ.
- **Darius, about 520 B.C.** (Ezra 6:1-12). This confirmed Cyrus's command about the temple.
- **Artaxerxes, his seventh year, 458 or 457 B.C.** (Ezra 7:11-26). This commission gave Ezra authority to beautify the temple, appoint magistrates and judges, and enforce God's law "and the law of the king" (Ezra 7:25-26). Ezra **"began he to go up from Babylon" on "the first day of the first month" (Ezra 7:9)**. Ezra later gives thanks that God had given the returned exiles **"a wall in Judah and in Jerusalem" (Ezra 9:9)**.
- **Artaxerxes, his twentieth year, 445 or 444 B.C. "And it came to pass in the month Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king" (Nehemiah 2:1)**. Nehemiah was sent explicitly to rebuild the city and its walls (Nehemiah 2:5-8).

The command of the seventh year and the command of the twentieth are the two strongest candidates. Each has a real claim: the seventh-year command was the first to grant civil authority over Jerusalem; the twentieth-year command was the first to speak in so many words of building the walls.

In short: the two strongest starting points are Artaxerxes' seventh year (458/457 B.C.) and his twentieth (445/444 B.C.).

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — that the starting point is one of the two Artaxerxes commands (Claim D). The other reading can fairly answer that Cyrus's decree is the only one scripture calls a decree of God's own anointed (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1). That is true; but counted in ordinary years from Cyrus, the 483 years end far too early, so a Cyrus start forces a different way of counting.

C. How the Years Are Counted

Two ways of counting are in use.

Ordinary (lunisolar) years. Israel's calendar kept pace with the sun, adding a month when needed so that the spring feasts fell in spring. The sabbatical years and jubilees of Leviticus 25, on which Daniel's weeks are modelled, were counted in these years.

Years of 360 days. Some count 483 years of 360 days each (173,880 days). The basis offered is that scripture equates three and a half "times" with 1,260 days and 42 months (Daniel 7:25; Revelation 11:2-3; 12:6, 14), which gives months of 30 days and years of 360.

The results:

Starting point	Ordinary years: 483 years end in	360-day years: 483 years end in
458 B.C. (seventh year)	A.D. 26	—
457 B.C. (seventh year)	A.D. 27	—
445/444 B.C. (twentieth year)	A.D. 39/40 (too late)	A.D. 32/33

(There is no year zero, so 457 B.C. plus 483 years is A.D. 27.)

Two schemes, then, reach the time of Christ. **The seventh-year command, in ordinary years, reaches A.D. 26/27.** That falls at or near the beginning of his ministry. **The twentieth-year command, in 360-day years, reaches A.D. 32/33.** That falls at or near its end.

In short: counted in ordinary years from the seventh-year command, the 69 weeks reach about A.D. 27; counted in 360-day years from the twentieth-year command, they reach about A.D. 32/33.

Weighing it: Direct statement — for the arithmetic; Reasonable inference — for each method (Claim D). Both schemes are internally consistent. The other reading can fairly answer, against the 360-day year, that Israel never kept a 360-day calendar, and that the sabbatical cycles Daniel's weeks are modelled on were counted in ordinary years; and, against the seventh-year start, that Ezra's commission speaks of the temple and the law, not in so many words of rebuilding the city.

D. What "Messiah the Prince" Marks

"Unto the Messiah the Prince." "Messiah" is *mashiach*, "anointed." The two schemes read the end of the 69 weeks differently.

- On the **seventh-year scheme** (A.D. 27), the 69 weeks end at the anointing: the beginning of the ministry, when **"God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power" (Acts 10:38)** at his baptism. Jesus himself read at Nazareth, soon after, **"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me" (Luke 4:18)**.
- On the **twentieth-year scheme** (A.D. 32/33), the 69 weeks end at his public presentation as Prince and King, the entry into Jerusalem (Luke 19:38; Zechariah 9:9), days before the cross.

Either way, Daniel 9:26 then says that "after" the 69 weeks the Messiah is "cut off." The word *karath* is used of being cut off in death (Genesis 9:11; compare Isaiah 53:8, **"he was cut off out of the land of the living"**, where a different Hebrew verb carries the same sense). On the second scheme the cutting off follows within days. On the first, "after" the 69 weeks leaves room for the ministry itself.

In short: on one scheme the 69 weeks end at his anointing, on the other at his entry into Jerusalem.

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — for each identification (Claim D). Neither is stated. The anointing reading has the advantage that "Messiah" means "anointed," and Acts 10:38 and Luke 4:18 tie his anointing to the baptism. The entry reading has the advantage that "Prince" (*nagid*) suits a public presentation as king.

E. The Seventieth Week: Two Readings Side by Side

Everything now turns on verse 27:

> **Daniel 9:27** *And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.*

The two readings are set out here side by side, each at its strongest.

Reading One: the seventieth week follows the sixty-ninth without a break.

- Seventy weeks are "determined" as one block (verse 24). Nothing in the text announces a gap between the 69th week and the 70th.
- "He" who "shall confirm the covenant" is the Messiah, the last person named as acting in the passage's chief line of thought. Christ said of the cup, **"this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many" (Matthew 26:28)**, and Daniel says the covenant is confirmed "with many."
- "In the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease." Christ's one offering ended the need for the sacrifices of the Law: **"he taketh away the first, that he may establish the second" (Hebrews 10:9)**; **"where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin" (Hebrews 10:18)**.
- **What this reading yields:** if the 69 weeks end at the anointing (A.D. 27, on the seventh-year scheme) and the sacrifice is caused to cease "in the midst" of the next week, the ministry lasted **three and a half years**. For the cross to fall at Passover, in spring, the anointing must have been in autumn; an anointing in autumn A.D. 27 puts the cross at Passover A.D. 31.

Reading Two: the seventieth week is still future.

- The nearest antecedent of "he" in verse 27 is "the prince that shall come" (verse 26), whose "people" destroy the city and the sanctuary. That prince is not the Messiah.
- The six things listed in verse 24 ("to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins ... to bring in everlasting righteousness") concern Daniel's people and city, and they have not yet been completed for Israel as a nation.
- The destruction of the city and sanctuary (verse 26), fulfilled in A.D. 70, already lies outside a continuous seventieth week that would have ended about A.D. 34. Something in the prophecy stands outside the 70 weeks either way.
- Scripture elsewhere speaks of the same three-and-a-half-year period as future: "a time, and times, and the dividing of time" (Daniel 7:25; 12:7), 42 months and 1,260 days (Revelation 11:2-3; 13:5).
- **What this reading yields:** Daniel fixes when the Messiah would appear (or be presented), and that he would be cut off after the 69 weeks. It says **nothing** about how long his ministry lasted.

In short: on Reading One, Daniel sets the ministry at three and a half years; on Reading Two, Daniel dates the Messiah's coming and death but not the length of his ministry.

Weighing it: Opposing case, stated — the two readings side by side (Claim D). Reading One gives Daniel 9:27 a fulfilled, Christ-centred meaning and a precise ministry length, but must take "he" as the Messiah although "the prince that shall come" stands nearer, and must account for the A.D. 70 destruction falling outside the week. Reading Two keeps the nearest antecedent and the future three-and-a-half-year periods of Daniel 7 and Revelation, but must accept an unstated gap between the 69th and 70th weeks. Neither reading is forced by the text alone. This study does not choose between them here; Chapter 10 records what each would mean for the verdict.

F. What Is Certain from Daniel

Whichever reading is taken, three things stand:

1. A count of years, given centuries in advance, ran to the time of the Messiah. On both strong schemes it ends in the A.D. 20s or early 30s, the very time of Jesus' ministry.
2. The Messiah would be "cut off, but not for himself," after the 69 weeks: his death was foretold, and foretold as being for others.

3. The prophecy is precise enough that its fulfilment can be tested against history. That is itself a witness to the God who gave it.

In short: Daniel certainly dates the Messiah's coming and death to the right generation; whether it also sets the length of his ministry depends on how verse 27 is read.

Weighing it: Strong inference — for the general fulfilment (Claim D). The other reading can fairly answer that the exact year depends on choices of start and method. That is why this study does not build its verdict on Daniel alone.

In Short: Daniel's 69 weeks bring the Messiah to the stage of history in the right generation, counted from either Artaxerxes command. If the 70th week follows at once, "the midst of the week" sets the ministry at three and a half years. If the 70th week is future, Daniel dates the Messiah's coming and death but not the length of his ministry.

Chapter 2: "The Acceptable Year of the LORD"

A. The First Sermon

> **Luke 4:16** *And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. 4:17 And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, 4:18 The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, 4:19 To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. 4:20 And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. 4:21 And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.*

Luke records this as Jesus' first sermon in his home town, soon after his baptism and the temptation (Luke 4:1, 14). He chose, or was given, Isaiah 61, and declared: "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears."

> **Isaiah 61:1** *The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; 61:2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn;*

Notice where he stopped. Isaiah continues without a break, "and the day of vengeance of our God." Jesus read "the acceptable year of the LORD" and **"closed the book" (Luke 4:20)**. He proclaimed the year of favour, and left the day of vengeance unread. The day of vengeance belongs to a later time: the Lord himself speaks of it when he foretells the destruction of Jerusalem, **"For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled" (Luke 21:22)**.

In short: Jesus read "the acceptable year" and stopped before "the day of vengeance."

Weighing it: Direct statement — that he stopped at "the acceptable year of the Lord" (Claim Y). Luke 4:19-20 says so.

B. The Language of Jubilee

Isaiah's words are the words of the Law's year of release. "Proclaim liberty" in Isaiah 61:1 is *qara deror*, the same phrase as the jubilee command:

> **Leviticus 25:10** *And ye shall hallow the fiftieth year, and proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof: it shall be a jubile unto you; and ye shall return every man unto his possession, and ye shall return every man unto his family.*

The word *deror*, "liberty," is used in scripture only for this kind of release: the jubilee (Leviticus 25:10), the release of Hebrew slaves (Jeremiah 34:8, 15, 17), "the year of liberty" (Ezekiel 46:17), and here. Isaiah 61 is a jubilee proclamation: debts released, captives freed, every man returned to his inheritance. Jesus announced that it was being fulfilled in him.

In short: Isaiah 61 uses the jubilee word for liberty, and Jesus proclaimed its fulfilment.

Weighing it: Direct statement — for the shared phrase qara deror (Claim Y). The link between Isaiah 61 and Leviticus 25 is in the Hebrew text itself.

C. Was It a Sabbatical Year?

The sabbatical year, every seventh year, was also a year of release (Deuteronomy 15:1-2, "the LORD's release"). Can we know whether Jesus' first sermon fell in one?

The sabbatical cycle can be reconstructed from a few fixed points recorded in history: a sabbatical year during the Maccabean wars (1 Maccabees 6:49, 53), another when Herod besieged Jerusalem (Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.475; 15.7), a deed from Wadi Murabba'at dated to a "year of release" in Nero's second year, and the Jewish tradition that the temple fell in a sabbatical year (Seder Olam 30). Two reconstructions result, one year apart. One places a sabbatical year in **A.D. 26/27**, the other in **A.D. 27/28** (each running from autumn to autumn). Appendix D gives the data.

On either reconstruction, a sabbatical year fell at or very near the opening of Jesus' ministry. If his Nazareth sermon was preached in that year, his hearers would have been living in a year of release when he read "to preach deliverance to the captives." That would give the words a sharp, present force.

This is suggestive. It is not proven: Luke does not say the year was sabbatical, and neither reconstruction is certain.

In short: a sabbatical year very probably fell at the opening of the ministry, which may give "the acceptable year" an immediate meaning to its first hearers.

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — that a sabbatical year fell in A.D. 26/27 or 27/28; Corroboration only — that the Nazareth sermon fell in it (Claim A). The other reading can fairly answer that the reconstructions rest on a handful of data points, some disputed, and that Luke gives no hint of a sabbatical year. Both answers are fair.

D. Does "Year" Mean Twelve Months?

Some have held that "the acceptable year" means the ministry lasted exactly one year. Three things in the text weigh against that.

1. **The "year" is paired with a "day."** "The acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God." If "year" means twelve months, "day" must mean twenty-four hours, which no one holds. The pairing is a figure: a long season of favour set against a short, sharp time of judgment. Isaiah uses the same contrast elsewhere: **"For the day of vengeance is in mine heart, and the year of my redeemed is come" (Isaiah 63:4)**.
2. **Jesus stopped before the day of vengeance.** If the "acceptable year" were his ministry's twelve months, the day of vengeance should have followed at its end. It did not. The season of favour he proclaimed continued; Paul, writing years after the cross, still says **"behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2)**, quoting Isaiah 49:8.
3. **The Gospels themselves name more than one Passover.** Chapter 4 shows that the record cannot be fitted into twelve months.

In short: the "acceptable year" is a season of God's favour, paired with a "day" of vengeance, not a twelve-month limit on the ministry.

Weighing it: Strong inference — against a literal one-year limit (Claim Y). The year/day pairing, Isaiah 63:4, and 2 Corinthians 6:2 together make the figurative reading the natural one. The other reading can fairly answer that a figure can still rest on a literal year, especially if the sermon fell in a real sabbatical year. That is possible, but it would make the year the occasion of the sermon, not the measure of the ministry.

In Short: Jesus opened his ministry by proclaiming the jubilee of Isaiah 61, very possibly in a real sabbatical year, and closed the book before the day of vengeance. "The acceptable year" is a season of favour, not a measure of twelve months.

Chapter 3: Other Patterns in the Law and the Prophets

A. Elijah: Three Years and Six Months

In the same Nazareth sermon, Jesus spoke of Elijah:

> **Luke 4:25** *But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land;*

James gives the same figure:

> **James 5:17** *Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.*

The Old Testament account says the word of the LORD came to Elijah "in the third year" (1 Kings 18:1); the New Testament gives the full length of the drought, three years and six months. The same period, under other names, marks prophetic witness elsewhere: "a time and times and the dividing of time"

(Daniel 7:25), and the two witnesses who **"shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days" (Revelation 11:3)**.

Is three and a half years, then, the measure of a prophet's ministry, and of Christ's? It is striking that Jesus named the figure in the sermon that opened his own ministry. But scripture never applies it to him. Elijah's three and a half years measured a drought, a judgment, not a ministry of teaching; and the periods in Daniel and Revelation concern times still future.

In short: three and a half years is a recurring prophetic period, and Jesus named it at Nazareth, but scripture never applies it to the length of his own ministry.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — for a three-and-a-half-year ministry (Claim T). The pattern is real and the coincidence of setting is notable. The other reading can fairly answer that the figure in Luke 4:25 describes a famine and is used to make a point about God's grace to Gentiles (Luke 4:26-27), not about time.

B. The Fruit Tree and the Fig Tree

The Law gives a rule for new fruit trees:

> **Leviticus 19:23** *And when ye shall come into the land, and shall have planted all manner of trees for food, then ye shall count the fruit thereof as uncircumcised: three years shall it be as uncircumcised unto you: it shall not be eaten of. 19:24 But in the fourth year all the fruit thereof shall be holy to praise the LORD withal. 19:25 And in the fifth year shall ye eat of the fruit thereof, that it may yield unto you the increase thereof: I am the LORD your God.*

Three years the fruit is "uncircumcised" and not eaten. In the fourth year it is holy, given to the LORD. In the fifth it is eaten.

Late in his ministry, on his way to Jerusalem (Luke 13:22), Jesus told this parable:

> **Luke 13:6** *He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. 13:7 Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? 13:8 And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: 13:9 And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.*

"These three years I come seeking fruit ... let it alone this year also." The numbers echo the Law: three years of waiting, then a further year. The fig tree is a familiar picture of Israel (Hosea 9:10; Joel 1:7), and the owner seeks fruit from it, as God sought it from his people through his Son. Read as a pattern, the parable suggests a ministry that had already run about three years when it was told, with a final year of grace remaining.

But it is a parable. Its numbers may belong to the story, not to the calendar: a tree that bears nothing in three years is plainly barren, whatever ministry is in view.

In short: the parable's "three years ... this year also" echoes the Law's three years and a holy fourth, and may reflect the ministry's length, but a parable's numbers cannot be pressed.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — for a ministry of three-plus years (Claim T). The echo of Leviticus 19 is real. The other reading can fairly answer that parables use round, natural numbers, and that drawing chronology from a parable is the weakest kind of evidence.

C. The Age of Service

> **Numbers 4:3** *From thirty years old and upward even until fifty years old, all that enter into the host, to do the work in the tabernacle of the congregation.*

The Levites entered the full service of the tabernacle at thirty. Joseph stood before Pharaoh at thirty (Genesis 41:46); David began to reign at thirty (2 Samuel 5:4). Jesus **"began to be about thirty years of age" (Luke 3:23)**. These passages speak to the age at which a ministry begins. They say nothing about how long it lasts.

In short: thirty is scripture's age for beginning a public service; it does not measure the service's length.

Weighing it: Neutral — on the length of the ministry (Claim T).

D. The Passover Lamb

> **Exodus 12:3** *Speak ye unto all the congregation of Israel, saying, In the tenth day of this month they shall take to them every man a lamb, according to the house of their fathers, a lamb for an house:*
>
> **Exodus 12:5** *Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year: ye shall take it out from the sheep, or from the goats: 12:6 And ye shall keep it up until the fourteenth day of the same month: and the whole assembly of the congregation of Israel shall kill it in the evening.*

Some have read "a male of the first year" as a pattern for a one-year ministry. But "of the first year" is *ben shanah*, "son of a year," the ordinary Hebrew way of giving an animal's age: a yearling. The same phrase is used of many sacrifices (Exodus 29:38; Leviticus 9:3; 23:12; Numbers 28:3), always for the animal's age, never for a span of time.

The time interval the type does give is four days: the lamb was taken on the tenth day and killed on the fourteenth. That interval matches the days between Jesus' coming to Jerusalem and the cross (John 12:1, 12), not the length of his ministry.

In short: "of the first year" gives the lamb's age, not the length of the ministry; the lamb's own interval is four days.

Weighing it: Strong inference — against reading Exodus 12:5 as a ministry length (Claim T). The phrase *ben shanah* is used for age throughout the Law.

E. The Feasts of the LORD

Leviticus 23 sets out the feasts in the order of the year: Passover, unleavened bread, firstfruits, Pentecost in spring; trumpets, atonement, and tabernacles in autumn. Christ died at Passover (1 Corinthians 5:7), rose as the firstfruits (1 Corinthians 15:20), and, exalted at God's right hand, poured out the gift of holy spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2:1, 33). The spring feasts, then, mark the end of his ministry and what followed. They are precise as to the season of his death and resurrection. They do not count the years before them.

In short: the feasts fix the season of the cross, resurrection and Pentecost, but not the number of years before it.

Weighing it: Direct statement — that the cross fell at Passover; Neutral — on the length of the ministry (Claim T).

In Short: Elijah's three and a half years and the fig tree's "three years ... this year also" point toward a ministry of three or more years, but only as patterns. The age of thirty marks the beginning, not the length. The Passover lamb's "first year" is its age. The feasts fix the season of the cross, not the count of the years.

Part Two: The Gospel Record

Chapter 4: The Feasts in John

A. Why John

Matthew, Mark and Luke name only one Passover in Jesus' ministry, the last. They follow his work in Galilee and bring him to Jerusalem once, for the cross. John records his visits to Jerusalem at the feasts. So John supplies most of what can be counted.

In short: the other Gospels name one Passover; John names the feasts that make counting possible.

Weighing it: Direct statement — that the Synoptic Gospels name only the final Passover. This can be checked in a concordance.

B. The Feasts in Order

John names these, in this order:

1. **A Passover. "And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem" (John 2:13)**; **"Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast day, many believed in his name" (John 2:23)**.
2. **A harvest saying in Samaria. "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest" (John 4:35)**.
3. **An unnamed feast. "After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem" (John 5:1)**.
4. **A Passover near. "And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh" (John 6:4)**, at the feeding of the five thousand in Galilee.
5. **Tabernacles. "Now the Jews' feast of tabernacles was at hand" (John 7:2)**.
6. **Dedication, in winter. "And it was at Jerusalem the feast of the dedication, and it was winter" (John 10:22)**.
7. **The final Passover. "And the Jews' passover was nigh at hand" (John 11:55)**; **"Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany" (John 12:1)**; **"Now before the feast of the passover" (John 13:1)**.

John names at least three Passovers (2:13, 6:4, and the last). Two more items in the list could add time: the harvest saying (4:35) and the unnamed feast (5:1).

In short: John names three Passovers, a Tabernacles and a Dedication, with an unnamed feast and a harvest saying between them.

Weighing it: Direct statement — for the feasts John names in sequence (Claim P). The order is the order of John's narrative, which moves forward through time.

C. What Three Passovers Require

If the Passovers of 2:13, 6:4, and 11:55 are three different years, and the baptism came some weeks or months before the first (John 1:29-2:13 covers at least the forty days in the wilderness that the other Gospels describe, plus the days John records), then the ministry lasted **at least two years and some months**.

If the Passover of 6:4 is set aside, two Passovers remain, and the ministry need be no longer than a year and some months. Chapter 5 examines whether 6:4 can be set aside.

In short: three Passovers require more than two years; two Passovers require more than one.

Weighing it: Strong inference — for a ministry of more than two years if 6:4 stands (Claim M). The arithmetic follows from the feasts. The other reading can fairly answer that John need not mention every Passover, which could make the ministry longer, but cannot make it shorter.

D. The Harvest Saying (John 4:35)

"There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest." If this tells the season, the visit to Samaria came four months before harvest. Barley harvest began at Passover, so four months before it would be about December or January. On that reading, the time from the Passover of 2:13 to the Samaria visit was most of a year: Jesus stayed in Judea baptizing (John 3:22) through spring, summer and autumn.

But it may be a saying, a proverb about patience: sowing to harvest takes about four months. Jesus' own point is the contrast: "behold … the fields … are white already." Some read "white already" as the real season: the fields were ripe, so it was spring or summer.

Either way, the saying cannot shorten the ministry. At most it confirms that a considerable time passed between the first Passover and the unnamed feast of 5:1.

In short: the harvest saying may place the Samaria visit in winter, or may be a proverb; it cannot shorten the ministry.

Weighing it: Neutral — on the length of the ministry (Claim P). Both readings of 4:35 are held by careful readers, and neither settles the count of years.

In Short: John names three Passovers, which require a ministry of more than two years, provided that the Passover of John 6:4 is genuine.

Chapter 5: The Two Disputed Verses

A. John 6:4: "And the Passover ... Was Nigh"

> **John 6:4** *And the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh.*

This verse is the hinge of the count. With it, John names three Passovers. Without it, John names two, and a ministry of a little over a year becomes possible.

The manuscript evidence. Every surviving Greek manuscript of John 6 contains the verse. This includes the two oldest papyri of John's Gospel, written about A.D. 200, as well as the great fourth-century codices and the whole later tradition. A small number of later manuscripts carry a marginal mark of doubt beside the verse, and one scholar of the nineteenth century suggested it might have been added early, before any surviving copy. But no manuscript omits it.

The internal evidence. The verse fits its setting:

- **The grass.** At the feeding of the five thousand Jesus **"commanded them to make all sit down by companies upon the green grass" (Mark 6:39)**, and **"there was much grass in the place" (John 6:10)**. In Galilee the grass is green from the winter rains into spring and is burned brown by summer. Green grass points to spring, the season of Passover.
- **The crowds.** The great crowds on the move (John 6:2, 5; Mark 6:31-33) suit the weeks before a pilgrim feast.
- **The discourse.** The teaching that follows, on the bread of life, his flesh and his blood (John 6:32-58), speaks in the language of Passover and the manna.

The early writers. One writer of the late second century, counting the Passovers in John against those who held a one-year ministry, listed John 2, John 5 and the final Passover, and did not mention 6:4. His silence does not show that his copy lacked the verse; he may simply have counted 5:1 as a Passover and passed over 6:4. Other writers from the third century on read the verse.

In short: John 6:4 is in every surviving manuscript, and the green grass of the feeding points to spring, as the verse says.

Weighing it: Strong inference — that John 6:4 is genuine (Claims M and P). The manuscript evidence is unanimous, and Mark 6:39 and John 6:10 independently fit the season. The other reading can fairly answer that marginal marks of doubt in a few manuscripts, and one early writer's silence, show that some in the early church questioned the verse. That is true. But no copy omits it, and to remove it requires conjecture against every witness.

B. John 5:1: "A Feast of the Jews"

> **John 5:1** *After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.*

John does not say which feast this was. The manuscripts differ on one small word. Some read "a feast"; some read "the feast." "The feast," standing alone, would most naturally mean the chief feast, Passover (or, in some usage, Tabernacles). "A feast" leaves it open.

The candidates:

- **Passover.** If so, John names four Passovers (2:13; 5:1; 6:4; the last), and the ministry ran about three years and some months. One second-century writer took it so.
- **Purim** (in the twelfth month, about a month before Passover). This fits a close sequence: winter in Samaria (4:35, if read as a date), Purim (5:1), then the Passover of 6:4 a month later. But Purim was not a feast at which men were commanded to go up to Jerusalem.
- **Pentecost or Tabernacles.** Both were pilgrim feasts (Deuteronomy 16:16). Either would place 5:1 in the same year as the first Passover or the year after.

Weighing the candidates. The text gives no decisive clue. The reading "a feast" is somewhat better supported, which tells against a deliberate reference to Passover; John names Passover plainly everywhere else (2:13; 6:4; 11:55), and it would be strange for him to leave it unnamed here. That favours a feast other than Passover, but cannot prove it.

In short: John does not name the feast of 5:1; it is probably not a Passover, but the text does not settle it.

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — that John 5:1 is not a Passover (Claim P). The other reading can fairly answer that one early writer counted it a Passover, and that "the feast" is read in a number of manuscripts. That is fair. On this verse the question of three Passovers or four, and so of two-and-a-half years or three-and-a-half, remains open.

C. What the Disputed Verses Decide

Reading	Passovers in John	Minimum ministry
6:4 removed; 5:1 not a Passover	2	a little over 1 year
6:4 genuine; 5:1 not a Passover, and no Passover passed over	3	a little over 2 years
6:4 genuine; 5:1 a Passover, or a Passover John does not name	4	a little over 3 years

The first line requires removing a verse every manuscript contains. The second and third remain.

This chapter asks the question of John 5:1 alone, and on that verse alone it cannot be settled. But the number of Passovers does not depend on John 5:1 alone, because John need not have named every Passover (Chapter 4 C). Chapter 6 C brings a second line of evidence to the same question, from the grain fields of the other Gospels, and it points to four.

In short: the evidence leaves two live options: three Passovers (about two and a half years) or four (about three and a half).

Weighing it: Strong inference — that the choice lies between three Passovers and four (Claims M and P).

In Short: John 6:4 stands on unanimous manuscript evidence and on the season the other Gospels describe. John 5:1 is unnamed and probably not a Passover, but cannot be proved either way. On these two verses alone the ministry lasted either about two and a half years or about three and a half; Chapter 6 C carries the question further.

Chapter 6: The Seasons in the Other Gospels

A. The Grain Fields

> **Mark 2:23** *And it came to pass, that he went through the corn fields on the sabbath day; and his disciples began, as they went, to pluck the ears of corn.*
>
> **Luke 6:1** *And it came to pass on the second sabbath after the first, that he went through the corn fields; and his disciples plucked the ears of corn, and did eat, rubbing them in their hands.*

The disciples plucked ripe ears of grain. That places the event in spring or early summer, between Passover (barley) and Pentecost (wheat). Matthew, Mark and Luke all place it in the early Galilean ministry, before the choosing of the Twelve (Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-16) and well before the feeding of the five thousand.

Luke's "second sabbath after the first" (*deuteroprōton*) is a puzzle. The word occurs nowhere else in Greek, and several of the oldest manuscripts omit it. If original, it may mark the second sabbath of the seven counted from Passover to Pentecost (Leviticus 23:15-16), which again fixes spring.

So the Synoptic Gospels show a spring in the early Galilean ministry, and a later spring at the feeding (the green grass). Unless the grain fields and the feeding fell in the same spring, which the order of events in all three Gospels makes hard, the Synoptics too require at least one full year between those two springs, and a further year to the final Passover.

In short: the grain fields and the green grass are two different springs in the Galilean ministry, before the final Passover.

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — that the Synoptic season markers require more than one year (Claim M). The other reading can fairly answer that the Synoptic Gospels do not always narrate in strict time order. But all three place the grain fields before the sending of the Twelve and the feeding, and the feeding with its "green grass" cannot be in the same spring if the intervening ministry (the Twelve chosen and sent out, their return, Mark 6:7-30) took months.

B. The Synoptic Shape

The Synoptic Gospels follow a long ministry in Galilee, then a journey to Jerusalem (Luke 9:51), then the final week. They do not name the feasts of John, but they leave room for them: Luke's long journey section (9:51-19:28) moves through many places over a considerable time. Nothing in them requires a short ministry, and their season markers point to more than one year.

In short: the Synoptic Gospels leave room for John's feasts and point to more than one year.

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — that the Synoptic Gospels agree with John's longer count (Claim M).

C. The Grain Fields and the Count of Passovers

Section A showed that the grain fields and the green grass of the feeding are probably two different springs. This section follows that finding to its end, because it bears directly on the question Chapter 5 left open: three Passovers or four. Chapter 5 asked that question of one verse, John 5:1. The grain fields

answer it from a different direction, and the answer does not depend on identifying the feast of John 5:1.

Three fixed points. Three things about the grain fields can be stated from the text.

1. **They fell after a Passover.** The disciples **"plucked the ears of corn, and did eat" (Luke 6:1)**. The law forbade eating any of the new harvest until the first sheaf had been waved before the LORD in the feast of unleavened bread:

   > **Leviticus 23:14** *And ye shall eat neither bread, nor parched corn, nor green ears, until the selfsame day that ye have brought an offering unto your God: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations in all your dwellings.*

The Pharisees objected only that it was the sabbath (Mark 2:24). They raised no objection that the new grain had not yet been offered, which they surely would have raised if it had not. So the grain fields came after the Passover of that year, in the weeks between Passover and the end of the wheat harvest. Luke's "second sabbath after the first" (Section A), if original, points the same way: a sabbath soon after Passover.

2. **They fell in the Galilean ministry, after John the Baptist was in prison.** All three Gospels place the grain fields in the ministry in Galilee (Matthew 12:1; Mark 2:23; Luke 6:1), and Mark says that ministry began **"after that John was put in prison" (Mark 1:14)**. John's Gospel shows that after the first Passover Jesus stayed for a time in Judea, baptizing, **"For John was not yet cast into prison" (John 3:24)**. So the grain fields came after the first Passover of John 2:13, after the time in Judea, and after the journey through Samaria.

3. **They fell before the feeding of the five thousand.** All three Gospels tell the grain fields well before the feeding: Matthew in chapter 12, the feeding in chapter 14; Mark in chapter 2, the feeding in chapter 6; Luke in chapter 6, the feeding in chapter 9. The feeding took place when **"the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh" (John 6:4)**, that is, shortly before that Passover.

Which spring? Three springs are possible, and each can be tested against those three points.

Possible spring	What it requires	Result
The spring of the first Passover (John 2:13)	The stay in Judea, the Pharisees' hearing that Jesus made more disciples than John (John 4:1), the journey through Samaria, the return to Galilee, the call of the fishermen, the sabbath at Capernaum, a preaching tour **"throughout all Galilee"** (Mark 1:39), the leper, the paralytic and the call of Levi, all within a few weeks of the Passover	Possible only if every one of these was brief, and if John's **"there he tarried with them" (John 3:22)** means a short stay. If Luke's "second sabbath after the first" is original, it leaves about two weeks, which is not enough.
The spring of the feeding (John 6:4)	The grain fields after that Passover (point 1), and the feeding before it (point 3)	Not possible as the text stands. It would require all three Gospels to tell the grain fields before the feeding when in fact they came after it.
A spring between the two	A Passover between John 2:13 and John 6:4	Fits all three points without strain. The Galilean ministry begins in the year after the first Passover; the grain fields come in the following spring; the feeding comes a year later still.

The third is the only reading that fits all three points comfortably. The first is not impossible, but it presses many events into a few weeks and strains John 3:22. The second is excluded by the text.

What that means for the count. If a spring came between John 2:13 and John 6:4, a Passover came with it. Then there were four Passovers in the ministry: the first (John 2:13), the one before the grain fields, the one at the feeding (John 6:4), and the last. Four Passovers mean a ministry of about three and a half years.

The fourth Passover and John 5:1. The grain fields argue for the number of Passovers, not for which verse names the fourth. John need not have named every Passover (Chapter 4 C). So two readings remain:

- **John 5:1 was the fourth Passover.** It stands at the right place in John's account, between the return to Galilee (John 4:43-54) and the Passover of the feeding (John 6:4). Jesus went up to Jerusalem for it, as every man was required to go up at Passover (Deuteronomy 16:16). And what follows it is a dispute over healing on the sabbath (John 5:9-18). The grain fields and the withered hand, which come soon after in the other Gospels (Mark 2:23-3:6), are two more disputes over the sabbath. On this reading, John 5 and Mark 2-3 describe the same season of conflict after one Passover.
- **John 5:1 was another feast, and John did not mention the fourth Passover.** Chapter 5 B gave the reason for thinking 5:1 was not a Passover: John names the Passover plainly everywhere else. That reason still stands, and it is not answered by the grain fields.

So the grain fields make four Passovers probable, while the identity of the feast in John 5:1 remains open. They also make the first reading above more attractive than it seemed in Chapter 5, since a Passover is now expected at about the place where John 5:1 stands.

In short: the grain fields came after a Passover, after the Galilean ministry began, and before the feeding; only a spring between the first Passover and the Passover of John 6:4 fits all three, which means four Passovers and about three and a half years, whether or not John 5:1 names the fourth.

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — for four Passovers, and so about three and a half years (Claims M and P). It rests on Leviticus 23:14 (a direct statement), on John 3:24 and Mark 1:14 (direct statements), and on the agreement of all three Gospels that the grain fields came before the feeding. The other reading can fairly answer two things. First, the Gospels sometimes arrange events by subject: Mark's five disputes in Mark 2:1-3:6 may be grouped together for that reason, and Matthew tells the grain fields after the sending of the twelve, not before the choosing of them. But all three, in their different arrangements, still place the grain fields before the feeding, and the second row of the table needs them all to be out of order in the same direction. Second, the stay in Judea and the beginning in Galilee may have been short enough to fit into the spring of the first Passover. That is the strongest answer for three Passovers, and it is possible; it is weaker only because it must shorten every event between John 3:22 and Mark 2:23 to fit. **Corroboration only — that John 5:1 was the fourth Passover (Claim P),** from its position and the season of sabbath disputes that follows it; about as consistent with a Passover that John passes over.

In Short: The grain fields of the early Galilean ministry and the green grass of the feeding are two springs before the final Passover. The grain fields came after a Passover and before the feeding, and the only spring that fits lies between the first Passover and the Passover of John 6:4. That requires four Passovers and makes a ministry of about three and a half years the more probable of the two lengths.

Part Three: Fixing the Dates

Chapter 7: The Rulers and the Dates

A. The Fifteenth Year of Tiberius

> **Luke 3:1** *Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judæa, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituraea and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias the tetrarch of Abilene, 3:2 Annas and Caiaphas being the high priests, the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness.*

Luke dates the beginning of John the Baptist's ministry by six rulers. The most exact is "the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar."

Tiberius succeeded Augustus, who died on 19 August A.D. 14. Counting his reign from that date, as the Roman historians, coins and inscriptions do, his fifteenth year ran from August A.D. 28 to August A.D. 29. If Luke counted in the Jewish manner, from autumn to autumn and treating the months before the first autumn as the first year, the fifteenth year could fall a year earlier, in A.D. 27/28. A third view counts from about A.D. 12, when Tiberius was given joint authority over the provinces with Augustus, making the fifteenth year A.D. 26/27; but no ancient writer, coin or inscription is known to count Tiberius' years that way.

The other rulers fit all of these dates. Pontius Pilate governed Judea from about A.D. 26 to 36. Herod Antipas ruled Galilee from 4 B.C. to A.D. 39. Caiaphas was high priest from about A.D. 18 to 36, with Annas, his father-in-law, still honoured as high priest though no longer in office (John 18:13).

John the Baptist began first; Jesus came to him to be baptized after John's ministry was under way (Luke 3:21). So Jesus' baptism fell in or after the fifteenth year: on the common reckoning A.D. 28 or 29; on the Jewish reckoning possibly A.D. 27 or 28.

In short: Luke's fifteenth year of Tiberius is A.D. 28/29 on the common reckoning, possibly A.D. 27/28 on a Jewish reckoning; Jesus was baptized in or after it.

Weighing it: Direct statement — for Luke's date; Reasonable inference — for the reckoning (Claim A). The other reading can fairly answer that the joint-rule reckoning (A.D. 26/27) would fit an earlier ministry. It would; but the documentary evidence for it is lacking, and this study does not lean on it.

B. "About Thirty Years of Age"

> **Luke 3:23** *And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age, being (as was supposed) the son of Joseph, which was the son of Heli,*

"About" is *hōsei*. The same word gives **"about five thousand men" (Luke 9:14)**, **"about the sixth hour" (Luke 23:44)**, and **"about three thousand souls" (Acts 2:41)**. It means "about," "approximately." Luke gives Jesus' age roughly, not exactly. Born shortly before the death of Herod (Matthew 2:1, 19), Jesus would be "about thirty" anywhere in the late A.D. 20s, whichever of the proposed dates for Herod's death is taken. Luke 3:23 confirms the general period. It cannot fix the year.

In short: "about thirty" is approximate and fits the late A.D. 20s; it does not fix the year.

Weighing it: Direct statement — that hōsei means "about" (Claim A). Its twenty New Testament uses all bear this sense or the related sense "as, like."

C. "Forty and Six Years Was This Temple in Building"

> **John 2:19** *Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. 2:20 Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?*

This was said at the first Passover of the ministry (John 2:13). The Jewish historian Josephus records that Herod began rebuilding the temple in the eighteenth year of his reign, about 20/19 B.C. (*Antiquities* 15.380). Forty-six years from that point reach about A.D. 27/28. The first Passover of the ministry, then, fell in A.D. 27 or 28.

There is a second way of reading the figure. The Greek can mean that the sanctuary had stood forty-six years since it was built. Josephus says the priests completed the sanctuary itself in a year and six months (*Antiquities* 15.421). Counted from that completion, forty-six years would reach about A.D. 28/29.

Either way, John 2:20 places the first Passover of the ministry in A.D. 27, 28, or at the latest 29.

In short: the forty-six years place the first Passover of the ministry about A.D. 27/28 (possibly 28/29).

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — for A.D. 27/28 as the first Passover (Claim A). The other reading can fairly answer that Josephus gives a different year for the start of the work in another place (*Wars*

1.401, Herod's fifteenth year), which would move the date earlier. The *Antiquities* figure is the more detailed and is generally preferred, but the uncertainty is real.

D. Putting the Anchors Together

- The baptism: in or after Tiberius' fifteenth year, A.D. 27/28 or 28/29.
- The first Passover of the ministry (John 2:13, 20): A.D. 27/28 or 28/29.
- The cross: during Pilate's governorship and Caiaphas' high priesthood, so no later than A.D. 36.

If the first Passover was A.D. 28, then three Passovers put the cross at A.D. 30, and four put it at A.D. 31. If the first Passover was A.D. 29, three put it at A.D. 31, and four at A.D. 32.

In short: the anchors place the first Passover about A.D. 28 or 29 and the cross between A.D. 30 and 32.

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — for the range A.D. 30-32 (Claim A).

In Short: Luke's fifteenth year of Tiberius and John's forty-six years agree in placing the opening of the ministry about A.D. 27-29. Combined with three or four Passovers, they place the cross between A.D. 30 and 32.

Chapter 8: The Day of the Cross

A. Three Days and Three Nights

> **Matthew 12:40** *For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*

Jesus gave one sign of his identity: he would be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights. Read as a full three days and three nights, the sign requires that he was buried at the close of one day and rose at the close of the third day after. The Gospels record that he was buried before a sabbath began (John 19:31, 42), and that the tomb was already empty at dawn on the first day of the week (Matthew 28:1-6; John 20:1). They also record that the sabbath following the crucifixion was **"an high day" (John 19:31)**, the first day of unleavened bread, which could fall on any day of the week. A full three days and three nights before the close of the weekly sabbath places the burial on the afternoon of the fourth day of the week, a Wednesday, the 14th of Nisan.

This reading, a Wednesday 14 Nisan, is the one this study tests. It is not the only reading: many take "three days and three nights" as an inclusive Hebrew expression for parts of three days, which allows a Friday. That reading is set out here, and the test that follows applies only to the Wednesday reading.

In short: a full three days and three nights, ending before dawn on the first day, places the crucifixion on a Wednesday, 14 Nisan.

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — for a Wednesday crucifixion (Claim X). The other reading can fairly answer that "the third day" (Matthew 16:21; Luke 24:21, 46) is said more often than "three days and three nights," and that inclusive counting allows a Friday. This study tests the Wednesday reading and states the Friday reading, without resolving the question here.

B. Which Years Allow a Wednesday Passover?

The Jewish month began at the first sighting of the new crescent after the new moon. Using the astronomical new moons for A.D. 26-36 and the usual allowance for first sighting at Jerusalem, the 14th of Nisan can be calculated for each year, to within about a day. Appendix C gives the table. The method reproduces the well-known Friday dates for A.D. 30 (7 April) and A.D. 33 (3 April), which is a check on its accuracy.

On that table, the years in which 14 Nisan could fall on a Wednesday are **A.D. 28, 31 and 34**. In A.D. 29, 30, 32 and 33 it could not.

In short: allowing a day's margin, 14 Nisan could fall on a Wednesday only in A.D. 28, 31 or 34.

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — for the table (Claim X). The other reading can fairly answer that first sighting can vary by a day, and that Jewish authorities sometimes added a thirteenth month, which shifts Passover by a month. Appendix C shows both months for each year. The conclusion holds within those margins.

C. Testing the Schemes

Combine Chapter 7's range (the cross between A.D. 30 and 32) with the Wednesday years (28, 31, 34):

- **A.D. 28** is too early for any ministry that began in or after the fifteenth year of Tiberius and included more than one Passover.
- **A.D. 34** would require the first Passover about A.D. 30 or 31 and five or more Passovers, which no reading of John supplies, or a late start that John 2:20 does not allow.
- **A.D. 31** fits. With the first Passover in A.D. 28, four Passovers (Chapter 6 C) reach A.D. 31, a ministry of about three and a half years. With the first Passover in A.D. 29, three Passovers reach A.D. 31, a ministry of about two and a half years.

So on the Wednesday reading, the cross falls in **A.D. 31**, and the ministry lasted either about two and a half or about three and a half years, depending on whether there were three Passovers or four. Chapter 6 C finds four the more probable, which gives a first Passover in A.D. 28 and about three and a half years.

In short: on the Wednesday reading, only A.D. 31 fits all the anchors, with a ministry of two and a half or three and a half years.

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — for A.D. 31 on the Wednesday reading (Claims A and X). The result depends on the Wednesday reading, the table, and the anchors; each is reasonable, none is certain. On the Friday reading, A.D. 30 or 33 would be the candidates instead.

In Short: If the crucifixion was on a Wednesday, 14 Nisan, the only year that fits the dates of Luke and John is A.D. 31, and the ministry lasted about two and a half or three and a half years.

Chapter 9: What the Early Writers Said

This chapter is history, not proof. The early writers had no access to anything we do not have in scripture, and they disagreed. Their value is to show that the question is old, and what reasons were given.

A. The One-Year View

In the second century some taught that Christ preached for one year only. A teacher of the school of Valentinus held that he suffered "in the twelfth month" after his baptism. Clement of Alexandria wrote that "it was necessary for Him to preach only a year," citing "He hath sent Me to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (*Stromata* 1.21). Origen, in one early work, gave the length as "a year and a few months" (*De Principiis* 4.1.5). The reason given was Isaiah 61:2 read literally.

B. The Answer from John

About A.D. 180, Irenaeus answered the one-year view from John's Gospel. He counted three Passovers: John 2, the feast of John 5 (which he took to be a Passover), and the final Passover, and concluded that "these three occasions of the passover are not included within one year" (*Against Heresies* 2.22.3). He also answered the literal reading of Isaiah 61:2 by pointing out that the "year" was paired with a "day of retribution" that had not come.

C. Later Writers

Tertullian, early in the third century, dated the passion to the consulship of the two Gemini, that is, A.D. 29 (*Against the Jews* 8). Eusebius, in the fourth century, reasoned from the high priests named in Luke and John that the ministry lasted "not quite four years" (*Church History* 1.10), though his argument rested on a misreading of how long the high priests held office. Later writers generally held three years or more.

In short: the one-year view rested on a literal reading of Isaiah 61:2; the earliest answer to it came from counting John's Passovers.

Weighing it: Corroboration only — on every side. The early writers show that the question was debated from the second century, and that both sides argued from the same scriptures we have. Their dates do not add evidence beyond those scriptures.

In Short: The question is as old as the second century. Those who held one year read Isaiah's "acceptable year" literally; those who answered them counted the Passovers in John.

Chapter 10: The Verdict

A. What Is Certain

1. **Scripture does not state the length of Christ's ministry.** No verse gives it.

2. **The ministry lasted more than one year.** John names at least two Passovers between the baptism and the cross (2:13; 11:55), and, on the unanimous testimony of the manuscripts, a third between them (6:4).
3. **The Messiah's coming and death were foretold to the very generation.** Daniel's 69 weeks, counted from either Artaxerxes command, end in the A.D. 20s or early 30s.
4. **"The acceptable year of the LORD" is a season of favour, not a twelve-month limit.** Jesus read it and closed the book before "the day of vengeance."

In short: no verse states the length; the ministry was longer than a year; Daniel dates its generation; "the acceptable year" is not a limit.

Weighing it: Direct statement to strong inference — for each point (Claims M, D, Y).

B. What Is Probable

"Probable" here means the more natural reading of the evidence: what the evidence points to when it is weighed together, though a careful reader could still take it another way. Three things are probable.

1. The ministry lasted more than two years.

John names three Passovers: the first (John 2:13), the one at the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:4), and the last (John 11:55). Three Passovers cannot fit into less than two years. The middle one, John 6:4, is in every manuscript of John, and the **"green grass"** of the feeding (Mark 6:39) confirms its spring season (Chapter 5 A). So the ministry ran more than two years.

2. There were four Passovers, not three, and the ministry lasted about three and a half years, not two and a half.

This is the finding that changes the verdict of the first edition, and it rests on the grain fields (Chapter 6 C). In plain steps:

- The disciples ate the new grain on a sabbath (Luke 6:1). The law forbade eating new grain until the first sheaf was offered at Passover (Leviticus 23:14), and the Pharisees made no complaint on that score. So the grain fields came **after a Passover**.
- The grain fields came in the Galilean ministry, which began **after John the Baptist was imprisoned** (Mark 1:14). John's Gospel shows that after the first Passover Jesus first spent time in Judea, while John was **"not yet cast into prison" (John 3:24)**. So the grain fields came **after the first Passover and the time in Judea**.
- All three Gospels tell the grain fields **before the feeding of the five thousand**, and the feeding came shortly **before** the Passover of John 6:4.
- The grain fields cannot be in the spring of John 6:4: they came after a Passover, and the feeding came before one. They can be in the spring of the first Passover only if the stay in Judea, the journey through Samaria and the opening of the Galilean ministry were all pressed into a few weeks. The reading that fits without strain is a spring **between** the first Passover and the Passover of John 6:4.
- A spring between them means a Passover between them. That makes **four Passovers**: John 2:13, the Passover before the grain fields, John 6:4, and the last. Four Passovers give a ministry of **about three and a half years**.

What remains open is not the number but the name: whether the feast of John 5:1 was that fourth Passover, or whether John passed over it without naming it (Section C).

3. It began about A.D. 27-28, and the first Passover of the ministry fell about A.D. 27 or 28.

Luke's fifteenth year of Tiberius and John's forty-six years both point to about A.D. 27-28 for the opening of the ministry (Chapter 7). With four Passovers, a first Passover in A.D. 28 brings the cross to A.D. 31; a first Passover in A.D. 27 brings it to A.D. 30. The year of the cross itself remains open (Section C), because it depends on the day of the week.

The probable picture in one table:

Question	Probable answer	Weight	Rests on
More than one year?	Yes	Direct statement to strong inference	John's Passovers (2:13; 11:55) and 6:4
More than two years?	Yes	Strong inference	John 6:4 in every manuscript; the green grass
Three Passovers or four?	Four	Reasonable inference	The grain fields: after a Passover, after the Galilean ministry began, before the feeding (Chapter 6 C)
How long?	About three and a half years	Reasonable inference	Four Passovers
When did it begin?	About A.D. 27-28	Reasonable inference	Tiberius' fifteenth year; the forty-six years of John 2:20

In short: the ministry very probably lasted more than two years; it probably included four Passovers and so lasted about three and a half years; and it began about A.D. 27-28.

Weighing it: Strong inference — that the ministry lasted more than two years (Claim M). Reasonable inference — that it included four Passovers and lasted about three and a half years (Claims M and P). Reasonable inference — that it began about A.D. 27-28 (Claim A). The other reading can fairly answer that the stay in Judea and the beginning in Galilee may have been short enough to fit into the spring of the first Passover, which would allow three Passovers and about two and a half years. That is possible. It is the less likely reading because it must shorten every event from John 3:22 to Mark 2:23 into a few weeks, and it fails altogether if Luke's "second sabbath after the first" is original.

C. What Remains Open

1. **Whether Daniel 9 sets the length.** If the seventieth week follows the sixty-ninth without a break, "the midst of the week" sets the ministry at three and a half years, and the anointing in autumn A.D. 27 (from the seventh-year command, 457 B.C.) puts the cross at Passover A.D. 31. If the seventieth week is future, Daniel dates the Messiah's coming and death but not the length of the ministry. The text alone does not decide between these readings. What has changed is that Daniel no longer stands alone: the Gospel evidence of Section B now points to the same length on its own.

2. **Which verse names the fourth Passover.** The grain fields make four Passovers probable, but they do not say whether the feast of John 5:1 was the fourth. Its position in John's account, and the sabbath dispute that follows it, fit a Passover; John's habit of naming the Passover plainly elsewhere does not (Chapters 5 B and 6 C).
3. **The day and year of the cross.** On the Wednesday reading of "three days and three nights," the only year that fits the anchors is A.D. 31. On the Friday reading, A.D. 30 or 33. With four Passovers from a first Passover in A.D. 27 or 28, the cross falls in A.D. 30 or 31, which agrees with either reading except A.D. 33.

In short: Daniel's seventieth week, the name of the fourth Passover, and the day of the cross remain open.

Weighing it: Method, not argument.

D. One Line of Convergence

One combination deserves to be stated plainly, because several independent lines meet in it, though each line is only reasonable, not certain:

- Daniel's 69 weeks, counted in ordinary years from Artaxerxes' seventh-year command (457 B.C.), reach A.D. 27, the year of the anointing.
- A sabbatical year (A.D. 26/27 or 27/28) fell at that time, and Jesus opened his ministry by proclaiming Isaiah's year of release.
- John's forty-six years place the first Passover of the ministry in A.D. 27/28.
- If the seventieth week follows at once, "the midst of the week" falls three and a half years later, at Passover A.D. 31.
- Four Passovers, which the grain fields now make probable (Chapter 6 C), give a ministry of the same length from the first Passover in A.D. 28.
- A.D. 31 is one of the few years in which 14 Nisan could fall on a Wednesday, as a full three days and three nights requires.
- Jesus himself, at the opening of that ministry, named Elijah's "three years and six months" (Luke 4:25), and in its later months told of a fig tree sought "these three years" and spared "this year also" (Luke 13:7-8).

If every one of these choices is right, the ministry lasted three and a half years, from an anointing in autumn A.D. 27 to the cross at Passover A.D. 31. In the first edition this result depended on four choices the text does not force. One of them, the fourth Passover, is now probable on its own evidence (Section B). Three remain unforced: the seventh-year command as the start of Daniel's count, an unbroken seventieth week, and a Wednesday crucifixion. The length, three and a half years, is now the probable reading of the Gospels themselves; the exact dates, autumn A.D. 27 to Passover A.D. 31, remain a convergence worth recording, not a conclusion this study can declare.

In short: one combination of readings yields three and a half years, A.D. 27 to 31; the length is now probable on the Gospel evidence, while the exact dates still rest on three choices the text does not force.

Weighing it: Reasonable inference — for the combination as a whole, no stronger than its weakest link (Claims D, P, A, X). The other reading can fairly answer that a chain of reasonable choices is weaker

than any one of them, and that other combinations (a two-and-a-half-year ministry, A.D. 29 to 31; or a Friday crucifixion in A.D. 30 or 33) are also consistent with the evidence.

E. What Would Change These Conclusions

1. **A manuscript of John without 6:4**, or evidence that the feeding took place in another season, would reopen the possibility of a ministry of little more than a year.
2. **Evidence that the grain fields fell in the spring of the first Passover** (that the stay in Judea and the beginning in Galilee all fitted within a few weeks), or that all three Gospels tell the grain fields before the feeding out of their time order, would make two and a half years as likely as three and a half. **A clear identification of the feast of John 5:1** would settle which verse names the fourth Passover.
3. **A decisive reading of the subject of Daniel 9:27** ("he" as the Messiah, or as "the prince that shall come") would settle whether Daniel sets the length.
4. **Firmer evidence for how Luke reckoned Tiberius' years** would narrow the starting year.

In short: four specific findings would change these conclusions.

Weighing it: Method, not argument.

In Short: Scripture does not state the length of Christ's ministry, but it gives enough to say that it was more than one year and very probably more than two. The grain fields of the Galilean ministry, which came after a Passover and before the feeding of the five thousand, require a Passover between the first Passover and the Passover of John 6:4. That gives four Passovers and makes a ministry of about three and a half years the probable reading, beginning about A.D. 27-28. Whether John 5:1 names the fourth Passover, whether Daniel's seventieth week sets the same length, and the day and year of the cross remain open. One line of convergence runs from an anointing in autumn A.D. 27 to the cross at Passover A.D. 31; its length is now probable, and its exact dates are recorded as a possibility to be tested.

Appendix A: Feasts and Seasons in the Gospels

Reference	Feast or season	Notes
John 1:29-2:12	After the baptism and the forty days	The days after the temptation; Cana
John 2:13, 23	Passover (1)	First Passover of the ministry; "forty and six years" (2:20)
John 3:22	Judean ministry	Jesus baptizing in Judea
John 4:35	"Four months, and then cometh harvest"	A date (winter) or a proverb
Mark 2:23; Luke 6:1	Grain ripe	Spring, after a Passover (Leviticus 23:14); early Galilean ministry; a spring between John 2:13 and 6:4 (Ch 6 C)
John 5:1	"A feast of the Jews"	Unnamed; Passover, Purim, Pentecost or Tabernacles proposed
John 6:4; Mark 6:39; John 6:10	Passover (2) near; "green grass"	Spring; feeding of the five thousand
John 7:2	Tabernacles	Autumn
John 10:22	Dedication, "it was winter"	Ninth month (Kislev)
John 11:55; 12:1; 13:1	Passover (3)	The final Passover

Appendix B: The Arithmetic of Daniel 9

Ordinary years (no year zero; 1 B.C. is followed by A.D. 1):

Start	+49 years (7 weeks)	+483 years (69 weeks)	+486½ (midst of 70th)	+490 (70 weeks)
538 B.C. (Cyrus)	489 B.C.	55 B.C.	52 B.C.	48 B.C.
458 B.C. (Artaxerxes, 7th year)	409 B.C.	A.D. 26	A.D. 29/30	A.D. 33
457 B.C. (Artaxerxes, 7th year)	408 B.C.	A.D. 27	A.D. 30/31	A.D. 34
445 B.C. (Artaxerxes, 20th year)	396 B.C.	A.D. 39	A.D. 42/43	A.D. 46
444 B.C. (Artaxerxes, 20th year)	395 B.C.	A.D. 40	A.D. 43/44	A.D. 47

Years of 360 days (483 × 360 = 173,880 days = about 476 solar years):

Start	+173,880 days
445 B.C. (Nisan)	A.D. 32
444 B.C. (Nisan)	A.D. 33

The seventh year of Artaxerxes is reckoned 458 or 457 B.C. depending on how his accession year and the start of the regnal year (spring or autumn) are counted. The departure from Babylon was on the first day of the first month (Ezra 7:9), and the arrival in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month.

Appendix C: The 14th of Nisan, A.D. 26-36

Calculated from the astronomical new moons, with first visibility of the crescent at Jerusalem about a day and a quarter after conjunction. Margin: about one day. Where the year could begin a month later (by adding a thirteenth month), both are shown.

Year	14 Nisan (Julian calendar)	Weekday	Wednesday possible?
A.D. 26	23 March / 21 April	Sat / Sun	No
A.D. 27	11 April / 10 May	Fri / Sat	No
A.D. 28	30 March / 29 April	Tue / Thu	Yes (if sighting a day later)
A.D. 29	19 March / 18 April	Sat / Mon	No
A.D. 30	7 April	Fri	No
A.D. 31	27 March / 26 April	Tue / Thu	Yes (within a day, either month)
A.D. 32	14 April	Mon	No
A.D. 33	3 April	Fri	No
A.D. 34	24 March / 23 April	Wed / Fri	Yes
A.D. 35	12 April	Tue	No (unless sighting a day later)
A.D. 36	1 April / 30 April	Sun / Mon	No

The well-known Friday dates for A.D. 30 and 33 are reproduced, which checks the method.

Appendix D: The Sabbatical Years

Fixed points used to reconstruct the cycle:

Event	Source
A sabbatical year during the siege of Beth-zur (163/162 B.C.)	1 Maccabees 6:49, 53
A sabbatical year when Herod took Jerusalem (38/37 or 37/36 B.C.)	Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.475; 15.7
A "year of release" in Nero's second year (A.D. 55/56)	Wadi Murabba'at document 18
The temple destroyed in a sabbatical or post-sabbatical year (A.D. 68/69 or 69/70)	Seder Olam 30

Two reconstructions, one year apart:

Reconstruction	Sabbatical years nearest the ministry (autumn to autumn)
First (earlier by one year)	A.D. 19/20, **26/27**, 33/34
Second (later by one year)	A.D. 20/21, **27/28**, 34/35

Appendix E: Every Argument Weighed

#	Argument	Where	Claim	Weight	What the other reading fairly answers
1	"Weeks" in Daniel 9 are weeks of years	Ch 1 A	D	Strong inference	"Weeks" is not defined in the passage
2	The count starts from one of the two Artaxerxes commands	Ch 1 B	D	Reasonable inference	Only Cyrus is called God's anointed (Isaiah 44:28)
3	457 B.C. in ordinary years reaches A.D. 27	Ch 1 C	D	Direct statement (arithmetic)	Ezra's commission does not name the walls
4	444 B.C. in 360-day years reaches A.D. 33	Ch 1 C	D	Direct statement (arithmetic)	Israel never kept a 360-day calendar
5	"Messiah the Prince" marks the anointing (baptism)	Ch 1 D	D	Reasonable inference	"Prince" suits his entry as king
6	The 70th week follows at once; "he" is the Messiah	Ch 1 E	D	Opposing case, stated	The nearest antecedent is "the prince that shall come"
7	The 70th week is future; "he" is the coming prince	Ch 1 E	D	Opposing case, stated	The text announces no gap
8	Daniel dates the Messiah's generation	Ch 1 F	D	Strong inference	The exact year depends on choices
9	Jesus stopped before "the day of vengeance"	Ch 2 A	Y	Direct statement	None
10	Isaiah 61 uses the jubilee word *deror*	Ch 2 B	Y	Direct statement	None
11	A sabbatical year fell in A.D. 26/27 or 27/28	Ch 2 C	A	Reasonable inference	Few data points, some disputed
12	The Nazareth sermon fell in a sabbatical year	Ch 2 C	A	Corroboration only	Luke gives no hint
13	"Acceptable year" is not a twelve-month limit	Ch 2 D	Y	Strong inference	A figure can rest on a literal year
14	Elijah's 3½ years patterns the ministry	Ch 3 A	T	Corroboration only	It measures a famine, not a ministry
15	The fig tree parable reflects 3+ years	Ch 3 B	T	Corroboration only	A parable's numbers cannot be pressed
16	Age thirty bears on the length	Ch 3 C	T	Neutral	It bears on the start only
17	"Of the first year" does not mean a one-year ministry	Ch 3 D	T	Strong inference	None of substance
18	The feasts fix the season of the cross	Ch 3 E	T	Direct statement	They do not count years
19	John names feasts in time order	Ch 4 B	P	Direct statement	None
20	Three Passovers require more than two years	Ch 4 C	M	Strong inference	John may omit Passovers (lengthening only)

21	John 4:35 cannot shorten the ministry	Ch 4 D	P	Neutral	Read as date or proverb
22	John 6:4 is genuine	Ch 5 A	M, P	Strong inference	A few manuscripts mark doubt; one early writer is silent
23	The feast of John 5:1 is not a Passover	Ch 5 B	P	Reasonable inference	One early writer counted it a Passover
24	The choice is between three and four Passovers	Ch 5 C	M, P	Strong inference	None of substance (Revised in pod-V2: the choice is not decided by John 5:1 alone; see rows 35-38)
25	The grain fields and the green grass are two springs	Ch 6 A	M	Reasonable inference	The Synoptic order is not always chronological
26	Tiberius' fifteenth year is A.D. 28/29 (or 27/28)	Ch 7 A	A	Reasonable inference	A co-regency reckoning gives 26/27
27	*Hōsei* means "about"	Ch 7 B	A	Direct statement	None
28	The forty-six years place the first Passover about A.D. 27/28	Ch 7 C	A	Reasonable inference	Josephus gives another start in *Wars* 1.401
29	The cross falls between A.D. 30 and 32	Ch 7 D	A	Reasonable inference	Depends on the count of Passovers
30	A full three days and three nights requires a Wednesday	Ch 8 A	X	Reasonable inference	"The third day" allows inclusive counting
31	14 Nisan on a Wednesday only in A.D. 28, 31, 34	Ch 8 B	X	Reasonable inference	Sighting and intercalation can shift by a day or a month
32	On the Wednesday reading only A.D. 31 fits	Ch 8 C	A, X	Reasonable inference	On the Friday reading A.D. 30 or 33
33	The early writers add history, not evidence	Ch 9	—	Corroboration only	None
34	The convergence on A.D. 27-31, three and a half years	Ch 10 D	D, P, A, X	Reasonable inference, no stronger than its weakest link	Other combinations also fit (Revised in pod-V2: the length is now probable on rows 35-37; the dates still rest on three unforced choices)
35	The grain fields came after a Passover (new grain not eaten before the first sheaf)	Ch 6 C	P	Direct statement (Leviticus 23:14) with strong inference	The Pharisees' silence is an argument from silence, though they objected to the lesser charge
36	The grain fields came after the first Passover and the stay in Judea, and before the feeding	Ch 6 C	P	Strong inference	The Synoptic Gospels sometimes arrange by subject, but all three place the grain fields before the feeding
37	Only a spring between John 2:13 and 6:4 fits; so four Passovers, about three and a half years	Ch 6 C; Ch 10 B	M, P	Reasonable inference	The Judean stay and the start in Galilee may have fitted into the spring of the first Passover

38	John 5:1 was the fourth Passover	Ch 6 C	P	Corroboration only	John names the Passover plainly elsewhere; he may have passed over the fourth

Sources Consulted

Scripture. The King James Version is quoted throughout, and every quotation has been checked against it. Greek word forms and counts were checked against the Greek New Testament by a full-text lemma search. Hebrew words were checked against Strong's concordance.

Lexicons. James Strong, *Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, with its Hebrew and Greek dictionaries (1890).

Reference works. E. W. Bullinger, *The Companion Bible* (1909-1922), notes on John and Appendix 91 on the seventy weeks.

History. Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* (14.475; 15.7; 15.380; 15.421) and *The Jewish War* (1.401). 1 Maccabees 6. Seder Olam 30. Wadi Murabba'at document 18.

Studies of chronology. Andrew E. Steinmann, "Reckoning Tiberius's Reign and Jesus's Baptism," *Tyndale Bulletin* 73 (2022), on the reckoning of Tiberius' fifteenth year. Rodger C. Young, "The Theological Problem Presented by the Exactness of Daniel's 70 Weeks," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 65.3 (2022), on the seventh-year command and lunisolar reckoning. Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, on the twentieth-year command and 360-day years. The sabbatical-year reconstructions of B. Zuckermann and B. Z. Wacholder.

Early writers. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.3; 2.22. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 1.21. Origen, *De Principiis* 4.1.5. Tertullian, *Against the Jews* 8. Eusebius, *Church History* 1.10.

Astronomy. The new moons of A.D. 26-36 were computed by the standard astronomical algorithms (Meeus), with the customary allowance for first visibility of the crescent at Jerusalem.

None of these sources carries scriptural weight. Each is a tool or a witness to history. Every doctrinal claim has been tested against the text of scripture.

Scripture Index

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