

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

*THE HISTORICAL VALUE OF THE FOURTH
GOSPEL.*

X. THE PROBABILITY OF A MINISTRY IN JERUSALEM.

WE have now considered in some detail those sections of the Fourth Gospel which cover ground common to it and the Synoptists. We claim to have shown that there is nothing in these parts of the Gospel seriously at variance with the Synoptic account of the same events. The only difference of any importance concerns the date of the Crucifixion, but in regard to this we have seen reasons for thinking that the Fourth Evangelist is right, and the Marcan account incorrect. While we do not deny that our Evangelist was in all probability acquainted with the other three Gospels, which every one acknowledges to be earlier than the Fourth Gospel in point of time, there is a marked independence in his treatment of his subject. Moreover the independence which the writer shows is suggestive of first-hand information concerning the things he has to tell of. The narrative cannot, in my opinion, be explained as an embellishment, with a purpose, of the Synoptic narrative. If these portions of the Fourth Gospel which we have had under our consideration in the preceding papers of this series had stood alone and the Judæan ministry had found no place in the Gospel, I hardly think that any one would have doubted their independent historical value.

But we have yet to consider those parts of the Gospel in which the ministry of Jesus is presented from a wholly different point of view from that which the Synoptists take. And here of course we cannot judge of the historical value of our document on the same principles as those which have served us hitherto, for thus far we have been able to make a comparison between a part of a document,

whose historicity we are seeking to establish, with other documents whose historicity is, speaking generally, admitted, inasmuch as the same events, or, in some cases, closely connected events, are found detailed in both the one and the other. I think it ought to be allowed that if our Evangelist has shown up well in the comparison we have made of his work with the Synoptic writings, so far as a comparison could be made, there is a presumption in favour of the historicity of the other parts of his Gospel. Some of my readers may not allow that I have proved my case up to the present point of the inquiry. Such will not of course allow that we have any right to approach the remaining sections of the Gospel with any prejudice in their favour. I contend, however, that the parts of the Gospel already considered are certainly not in themselves of such a nature as to create prejudice *against* the remainder.

Speaking broadly, this remainder consists of an account of a ministry of Jesus at different times in or near Jerusalem. It is true that our Evangelist tells of events in Galilee as to which the Synoptists are silent, and these will demand our consideration in due course. In the present paper, however, I do not propose to go into them, nor indeed is it my intention yet to consider *in detail* our Evangelist's account even of the activity of Jesus in Jerusalem. It seems desirable first of all to inquire whether a Jerusalem ministry has historical probability in its favour, without troubling ourselves yet with the question whether, if it has, that recorded in the Fourth Gospel is likely to be historical.

I propose then to argue for the two following propositions :

A. It is antecedently probable that Jesus visited Jerusalem during His ministry and before the Passover visit when He was crucified.

B. Certain points in the Synoptic narratives are rendered more intelligible if Jesus had thus previously visited Jerusalem and taught there.

(A.)

It will not be necessary to dwell long on the first of these two propositions. It is true that the impression created by the Synoptic narratives may well be that only one Passover Feast occurred during the public ministry of Jesus, namely that one at which He was crucified. According to the Fourth Gospel there were at any rate three Passovers, at two of which Jesus was present in Jerusalem. For the third, the middle of the three, He seems not to have gone up to the capital, for the reason that the authorities there were bent on His death (St. John vii. 1), the time for which had not, however, yet come. It is easily to be understood that Jesus might have absented Himself from the capital even during "a Feast of obligation" for reasons of personal safety if His hour had not yet come, but it seems highly improbable that He should have kept away from Jerusalem altogether. Even if there were no Passover Feast during His Galilæan ministry, there must have occurred some Feast, attendance at which was obligatory. Even if it be possible to date the various stages of the Galilæan Ministry, as told by the Synoptists, so that no Passover Feast fell within it, there must have been one Feast of Pentecost, for the incident of the plucking of the ears of corn on the Sabbath day (Mark ii. 23) gives a clear indication that it can only have happened somewhere about the time of harvest. And then, before the next Passover Feast occurred, there would be the Feast of Tabernacles on the fifteenth day of the seventh month. Now attendance at these three Feasts—the Passover, Pentecost and the Feast of Tabernacles—was obligatory, and it

is difficult to believe that Jesus would have absented Himself from two successive Feasts of obligation falling within His Galilaeen ministry unless indeed there were special reasons why He did not wish to come into conflict with the authorities in Jerusalem. It may be said, of course, that He absented Himself because He knew of the hostility towards Him of the religious leaders there, this having become clear to Him from the attitude of the Scribes and Pharisees who had come down from Jerusalem to Galilee to question and oppose Him. But it is surely far more easy to explain their advent in Galilee if, as the Fourth Evangelist tells us, Jesus had already visited Jerusalem and they had there fallen out with Him.

I claim, then, that it is antecedently probable that Jesus visited Jerusalem during His ministry and before the Passover visit when He was crucified. By using the word 'antecedently' here I do not mean that the probability is independent of the Synoptic story of the ministry of Jesus, but what I contend for is that it does not depend on the particular statements of the Fourth Gospel. At least two Feasts of obligation must have occurred during the Galilaeen ministry, and the absence of Jesus from both of these, if He had not previously tested the attitude of Jerusalem towards Him, is highly improbable. Such a test could only properly be made by a personal visit.

(B.)

Further, we can argue that certain points in the Synoptic narratives are rendered more intelligible if Jesus had visited Jerusalem during His ministry and before the fatal Pass-over Feast.

For consider first St. Mark xiv. 57 f. Jesus is on His trial before the high priest, who, with the Sanhedrin, desires to find some cause why He should be put to death. They

invited witness against Him. And many bore false witness against Him, but agreed not together. Then, we read, there stood up certain, and bare false witness against Him, saying, "We heard him say, I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands." The same incident is recorded in St. Matthew xxvi. 60. Now it is true that in Matthew the witnesses are not represented as saying, "We heard Him say" but "This man said." It is clear, however, that the evidence would be worthless unless they could give personal testimony to having heard Jesus thus speak. These witnesses—two in number according to Matthew—are testifying to having heard Jesus say certain blasphemous words against the temple. We are not told who the witnesses were nor whence they came, but it is most natural to suppose that they were men of Jerusalem, and that they are referring to words which Jesus had spoken in Jerusalem. This supposition is confirmed by the words used in Mark: I will destroy *this* temple. Now when did Jesus use these words, or words like them which could be twisted so as to be turned against Himself? There is no evidence of any words like them having been spoken by Him in those few days at Jerusalem before the fatal Passover Feast, for what He said about the coming destruction of the Temple to His disciples (Mark xiii. 2) had been said privately; and further, there is nothing at all in His words which in any way corresponds with the statement testified against Him: "In three days I will build another, made without hands."

Further, the fact that the witnesses did not agree in the evidence they gave suggests that the words to which they were referring had been spoken some time before, and their recollection of them was therefore confused and their testimony conflicting.

The conclusion, then, is obvious. Jesus had spoken in Jerusalem words which these witnesses now tried to use against Him. That He had used words capable of being misunderstood or misinterpreted after this manner is stated by the Fourth Evangelist (ii. 19). We have then an argument in favour of the historicity of the Fourth Gospel in regard to this particular statement. It is, however, open to an objector to say that the Evangelist put the words into the mouth of Jesus in consequence of what he found written in Mark and Matthew respecting the false witness against Jesus. But even if this were so, which I do not for a moment allow to be probable, it would be an argument in favour of the proposition which we are at present seeking to establish. As has been said, we are not yet specially concerned with the proof that the particular narrative of the Fourth Gospel relating to the visits of Jesus to Jerusalem is historical. We are arguing that certain points in the Synoptic narratives are rendered more intelligible if Jesus had during His public ministry visited Jerusalem and taught there. If the Fourth Evangelist invented this saying of Jesus in ii. 19 because of what he found in the first two Synoptists, it would be a proof that to him some explanation of the accusation brought against Jesus by these false witnesses was necessary. And that explanation, on this hypothesis, is that Jesus had uttered words capable of this misconstruction *on a previous visit to Jerusalem*.

We will next consider the reference to Joseph of Arimathaea in connexion with the burial of Jesus. The site of Arimathaea, so far as I know, has not yet been identified. St. Luke, however, calls it "a city of the Jews," which implies that it was in Judaea. Moreover the fact that in Mark (and St. Luke repeats the statement) Joseph is called a "councillor" would seem to suggest that he lived in or

near Jerusalem. In Matthew he is called a disciple of Jesus. Parenthetically we may remark that the Fourth Evangelist so indicates him likewise, and adds that he was only a disciple *secretly*, for fear of the Jews. It may be objected that the statement in Matthew that Joseph was a disciple cannot be pressed, as Mark does not so speak of him, but describes him as one "who was looking for the kingdom of God." I can see, however, no reason, except prejudice, for rejecting the description in Matthew. And we ask: How came this man to be a disciple of Jesus? The answer is simple enough if Jesus had during His ministry visited, and taught in, Jerusalem. Moreover—but this again only parenthetically—the use of the word "boldly" in Mark's description of Joseph's approach to Pilate seems to me a confirmation of the statement in the Fourth Gospel that Joseph had been only a *secret* disciple. The appropriateness of the word "boldly" is at once apparent if, until now, Joseph's discipleship had been a secret thing. It is hardly conceivable that the Fourth Evangelist concluded that Joseph was a secret disciple by arguing from the boldness of his approach to Pilate as Mark represents it. He may well have had independent knowledge of the fact.

Next let us reflect on our Lord's lament over Jerusalem as St. Luke records it (xix. 41 ff.). Is it conceivable that Jesus would have thus lamented over the city if He had as yet made no direct appeal to its inhabitants? What meaning otherwise have such words as: "O that thou hadst known in this day, even thou, the things which belong unto peace!"? It is an utterance devoid of all significance unless a refusal had already been made. But it is perfectly explicable on the hypothesis that there had already been a Jerusalem ministry, and a rejection, as according to the Fourth Gospel there had been.

Similar to this lament of Jesus over the holy city is that other which St. Luke gives, and which finds a place in Matthew too (Matt. xxiii. 37; Luke xiii. 34); "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killeth the prophets and stoneth them that are sent unto her! how often would I have gathered thy children together even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!"

Schmiedel has proved to his own satisfaction¹ that these words are not words of Jesus at all, but that they are an utterance of "Wisdom" quoted from some literature not now extant. He points out that in Matthew they follow immediately upon the words: "Therefore behold, I send unto you prophets, and wise men, and scribes: some of them shall ye kill and crucify; and some of them shall ye scourge in your synagogues, and persecute from city to city: that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel the righteous unto the blood of Zechariah, son of Barachiah, whom ye slew between the sanctuary and the altar. Verily I say unto you, all these things shall come upon this generation." Now words like these, but with the third person instead of the second, occur also in St. Luke (xi. 49 ff.) and they are prefaced by the words: "Therefore also said the wisdom of God," which mark them out as a quotation. The quotation, according to Schmiedel, does not stop at Matthew xxiii. 36, but continues in the following words already cited: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, etc.," though it is to be noticed that in St. Luke this lament is placed in another connexion altogether (Luke xiii. 34). It is unfortunate for Schmiedel's argument that the connexion in St. Luke is so entirely different. Still he is right in drawing attention to the fact that the correct reading gives: "O Jerusalem,

¹ *The Johannine Writings*, pp. 57 ff. The reference in the original German is p. 45, *Das vierte Evangelium*.

Jerusalem, which killeth the prophets and stoneth them that are sent unto *her*," and not, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto *thee*." So that in these words something is said *about* Jerusalem rather than *to* her, and Jerusalem is only addressed in the words which follow: "How often would I have gathered thy children together, etc."

It does not, however, appear to me that Schmiedel has satisfactorily proved that these last words are not original words of Jesus. There may well be mingled with His words a quotation, as Schmiedel supposes; but it seems clear that both the First Evangelist and St. Luke regard the lamentation as one proceeding from the heart of Jesus Himself. Whatever former utterance He may be making use of, He is giving expression to the bitter sorrow of His own soul that Jerusalem had refused to heed His message and that her children would not be gathered to Himself. But even if we were to give away, as Schmiedel would have us do, this apostrophe addressed to Jerusalem, I venture to say that the lamentation over the city in St. Luke xix. 41 f. remains unintelligible unless Jesus had already suffered rejection from her. It is only explained if He had already visited Jerusalem and taught there.

Indeed the final rejection and murder of Jesus at the fatal Passover stands unexplained in the Synoptic narrative. We may well ask whether it is historically probable that Jesus should have confined His ministry to Galilee and the north, only presenting Himself to Jerusalem at last to be immediately taken and crucified. Surely the whole attitude of the religious authorities at Jerusalem towards Jesus, as this is set before us by the Synoptists, demands some explanation beyond what they give! Whether the *details* of the Fourth Gospel respecting the Jerusalem ministry be correct or not, some such ministry

there must have been if the Synoptic narrative itself is to be believed.

And, again, there are traces in St. Luke's Gospel of visits to Jerusalem before the final one. The parable of the Pharisee and the publican would find its appropriate setting in the holy city. That of the Good Samaritan suggests that it was delivered somewhere in the neighbourhood of the scene mentioned in the parable itself. In close proximity to this parable there stands in St. Luke's Gospel the visit of Jesus to the house of Martha and Mary in some unnamed village. The Fourth Gospel, if historical, determines this village as Bethany, near to Jerusalem. It is extremely difficult to construct from St. Luke's Gospel an outline of the journeyings of Jesus. But we may gather from it that a wider sphere of activity was embraced than that which the Marcan story mentions or suggests. The Synoptic narrative, if by this term we understand not merely the Marcan account but all that is contained in the other two Synoptists as well, and especially the matter peculiarly Lucan, is not unfavourable to the theory that the ministry of Jesus extended even to Jerusalem itself; on the contrary, it seems to demand this extension. But whether or no the Fourth Gospel is to be accounted historical in its description of the mission of Jesus to the Jews in Jerusalem is a question which must be separately considered. This will form the subject of our next paper.

E. H. ASKWITH.