

Notes on Gospel Chronology

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THE New Testament has but one author who writes in the style and with the purpose of a historian, and but one date even in this author fully reckoned out according to prevailing methods by synchronisms. It is apparent, therefore, that the date so elaborately fixed in Lk. 3 1 is to the author the all-important date; and this it is, not of course because of the appearance of John the Baptist, a subordinate figure, but because it determines the baptism of Jesus and therewith the beginning of the drama of redemption. The Lucan reckoning becomes, therefore, the necessary starting point for modern discussion, as it would seem to have been for patristic chronography.

To its own detriment Gospel chronology has heretofore been made dependent on harmonization, a method now condemned on principles of historical criticism. The first postulate was: All the sources must rest upon the same substantial datings. In the present discussion the aim will be to ascertain and appraise independently all systems of dating presented or implied in the sources considered separately, to note the extent of agreement, and to draw conclusions upon comparison of their differences.

A. THE LUCAN SYSTEM

1. **The Baptism.** We have six synchronisms in Lk. 3 1, "the fifteenth year of Tiberius" and the administrations respectively of Pilate (deposed early in 36), Antipas (deposed in 38), Philip (*ob.* 33-34), Lysanias (unknown), and Annas and Caiaphas. Of these the last is incorrectly stated, only

Caiaphas having been high priest A.D. 18–35. All after the first are indeterminate. Tib. xv, if the practice of writers later than Nerva (A.D. 95) was followed, might mean the year beginning Jan. 1, A.D. 28. More probably the years were counted as beginning with the accession, Aug. 19, A.D. 14, in which case Tib. xv would mean the year *ending* Aug. 19, A.D. 29. More probably still Luke reckons, like Josephus, from Passover (*cf.* Ac. 27 9); *i.e.* Tib. xv = Apr. A.D. 28–Apr. A.D. 29. reckonings from Tiberius' co-regency (*ca.* 11–12 A.D.) are scarcely admissible. The Baptism, accordingly, is dated by Luke in the twelvemonth beginning somewhere from Apr. A.D. 28 to Aug. A.D. 29. The crucifixion might be in either 29 or 30. Patristic chronographers date it accordingly sometimes as Tib. xv, sometimes Tib. xvi. In either case they probably mean the same, *viz.* the "year of the two Gemini," *i.e.* of the consuls L. Rubellius Geminus and C. Fufius (*var.* Rufius, Rufus, Furius) Geminus = A.D. 29. For the year of the crucifixion was the starting point in all early reckonings, not that of the beginning of the ministry, still less that of the nativity. "The year of the two Gemini" as that of Jesus' death and resurrection was a constant of primitive Christian chronology which Turner gives good ground for regarding as having antedated even our third gospel itself.¹

2. **The Nativity.** Lk. 3 23 gives us a relative dating for Jesus' birth; for this is said to have taken place "about" 30 years before the baptism, *i.e.* B.C. 2–1. This is not seriously out of harmony with 1 5, where the opening scenes of the gospel story — not merely of the birth of the Baptist — are laid "in the days of Herod the king" (*ob.* B.C. 4; see

¹ *S.e.* "Chronology of the N. T." in Hastings' *BD*, I. pp. 403 ff. On p. 414 *b* Turner rightly emphasizes the fact that the primary chronological interest was in the date of the Passion and Resurrection, other dates all representing mere inferences from this: "Here was to every Christian eye from the first the turning point of the world's evolution"; and the Church's Confession had always put in the forefront the historical setting "under Pontius Pilate" (1 Tim. 6 13). Turner might well have added a reference to the annual commemoration of the Redemption by Quartodecimans since apostolic times.

under 7 on the agreement of Luke's *sources* with Mt. 2 16); it conflicts seriously, however, with Lk. 2 2, where the census at the time of Jesus' birth is declared to be the famous one again referred to in Ac. 5 37, "the first census, the one made when Quirinius was governor of Syria" (Greek). All expedients for identifying this census with some statistical measure "in the days of Herod the king" are futile, since the census in question was for the Jewish world the epoch-making event of the century, when Judæa lost the last semblance of independence. This measure of incorporation into the empire was carried out according to Josephus by Quirinius,² after the deposition of Archelaus in A.D. 6-7. It was remembered not only for the desperate revolt it provoked (referred to in Ac. 5 37), but for the bone of perpetual contention it furnished thenceforth to Jewish casuistry. "Is it lawful to pay the *census* to Cæsar?"³ To suggest a possible employment of Quirinius in Syria in some other capacity than "governor," since his predecessors, M. Titius, C. Sestius Saturninus, and P. Quintilius Varus, cover by their tenures the whole period from before B.C. 9 till after the death of Herod, and thus to make room for another unknown census taken while Herod was king, is a mere subterfuge. On the other hand, Zahn and Spitta have recently shown⁴ that Josephus rather than Luke may be the author who is here principally in error. Revolts took place in B.C. 4-2 in all parts of Herod's dominions, that in Galilee being led by a certain Judas, whom Schürer declares to be "certainly identical" with the famous leader of the revolt "in the days of the Census." Quirinius is known to have been proconsul of Syria in B.C. 4-2, but *not* at the time alleged by Josephus. In fact, Josephus is particularly ill-informed as to the period of the census. Whether, then, Luke be right or wrong in

² *Ant.* XVII. xlii. 5 and XVIII. i. 1. See, however, the suggestion of Spitta below, as to a possible error of Josephus regarding the date of Quirinius' appointment.

³ *Mk.* 12 14.

⁴ *Cf.* Zahn, "Die Syrische Statthalterschaft u. d. Schätzung d. Quirinius" in *N. Kirchl. Zts.* 1898, and Spitta, "Die chronol. Notizen," etc., in *Zts. f. alt. W.* 1906.

connecting the name of Quirinius with the census, and whether it be allowable or not to think of the census as occurring in B.C. 3-2, the mention of the proconsulship of Quirinius indicates B.C. 3-2 as the date really intended.⁵

If this explanation be found inadmissible, there is no insuperable difficulty in attributing to an author guilty of the glaring anachronisms of Ac. 5 *æ t.* the antedating by some ten years of the census of Quirinius. It certainly did not occur "in the days of Herod the king." The explanatory way in which Lk. 2 2 is interjected suggests that the whole effort to connect the story of the birth in Bethlehem with Quirinius and the famous census is only a somewhat blundering attempt to connect with outside history, similar to that of Ac. 11 28, where the local Palestinian famine of A.D. 46-47 is universalized.

3. *Duration of the Ministry.* The synchronisms of Lk. 3 1, so elaborately constructed, yet followed by no date for the Passion and Resurrection, nor any intimation that more than a year expired before this culmination of the drama of redemption, suggest that Luke in common with practically the entire body of the Christian church down to the time of Eusebius, understood literally the reference to "the acceptable year of the Lord" (Is. 61 2) placed in the mouth of Jesus in his programmatic address (Lk. 4 19). At least there is no indication in the third gospel of departure from the general synoptic type derived from Mark, in which events lead up to the final Passover, as if all fell within the limits of the single ecclesiastical year.

Attempts to determine the duration of the ministry from indirect indications of the evangelists should be distinguished from determinations of their own conception. It is possible and even probable that the evangelists' conceptions had in course of a generation or more become affected by the primitive practice of observing the 14th Nisan as the anniversary

⁵ Since the above was in type an article has appeared in the *Zts. f. ntl. Wiss.* x. 4, 1909, from the pen of Rev. Wm. Weber of Pittsburgh, Pa., supporting the view of Spitta, and offering the conjecture that the name "Sabinus" in *Ant.* xvii. 221 ff. represents a misreading by Josephus of his Aramaic source (Nicholas of Damascus), which had *Quirinius*.

of the Lord's death. This would tend to give to the gospel drama a cyclic character, condensing into the limits of a single ecclesiastical year events which really exceeded them. But the data commonly cited in favor of its longer duration fall far short of their object. They not only fail to remove the discrepancy between synoptic and Johannine tradition (see below, under 8), but even absolutely they do not require much extension of the synoptic single year. The cyclic conception would not be dominant at so early a period if the ministry had really extended over much more than a year, and 18 months are quite sufficient to account for known events. Mk. 2 23 (not in chronological order) and 6 30 may be taken to imply a Passover season spent in Galilee. The fact that Jesus has friends in Peræa and Judæa (Lk. 10 38 Mk. 11 2 14 3 15 43 (?)) has no bearing on the case unless all Jesus' friendships are to be dated after the opening of the ministry. Lk. 13 7 is wholly inapplicable, and equally the quotation Mt. 23 34-39 (*cf.* Lk. 11 49), where the personified "Wisdom of God" complains in a figure derived from Ps. 91 4 that *her* repeated appeals to Jerusalem through "prophets and 'wise men' and scribes" have been in vain. All this, accordingly, does not carry us beyond the fact that Jesus' public ministry extended probably over two Passover seasons. It does not warrant us in assuming that Luke or even Mark so understood.

4. **Patristic Dating.** The Lucan chronology, with which we are now dealing, starts from some point in the fifteenth year of Tiberius (April A.D. 28-Aug. A.D. 29), placing the Nativity 30 years before, and the Passion 12 months after. This chronology became dominant by the middle of the second century, especially among Gnostic exploiters of the symbolism of the numbers 30 and 12.⁶

Even in the particular of the one-year ministry it remained unaltered for a full century after the general acceptance of the fourth gospel with its three Passovers (2 13 *ff.* 6 4 11 55 *ff.*) made modification seemingly unavoidable. Against opponents of the fourth gospel, who pointed to this

⁶ Irenæus, *Her.* II. xxi.

contradiction, Apollinaris of Hierapolis, and perhaps Melito of Sardis, had maintained a two-year ministry. Irenæus (A.D. 186) attempts to harmonize by the assumption of a ministry of 20 years' duration. Later harmonizers perhaps employed thus the traditional 12 years before the Dispersion of the Twelve (below, ii. B, 3). "Tradition" in Eusebius' time had settled down to the explanation, which he himself adopts, that "the three evangelists recorded only the deeds done by the Savior for one year after the imprisonment of John the Baptist, . . . but John in his Gospel records the deeds of Christ which were performed before the Baptist was cast into prison. . . . One who understands this can no longer think that the Gospels are at variance with one another." (*HE*, III. xxiv.) The great Paschal Controversy, whose first outbreak (A.D. 154) coincides with efforts of the learned world to readjust the systems of dating, led to many attempts at absolute chronologies, of which the paschal cycle of Hippolytus at Rome (A.D. 224) was the ultimate outcome. These endeavor to carry back an exact reckoning of all gospel events to the very day and hour of the Nativity. One in particular, traceable to Alexander of Jerusalem (A.D. 218), and claiming to go back to "apostolic documents,"⁷ attempts not merely to fix by consulships the date of the great ecclesiastical anniversaries, but also to harmonize the Lucan chronology with the supposed requirements of John.⁸ Omitting the days of the month the datings are as follows: Nativity, A.D. 9; Baptism, A.D. 46; Crucifixion, A.D. 58 (!); Resurrection, Mar. 25,⁹ A.D. 58.

In all later attempts, and nearly all of the second century,

⁷ An early form of the *Acts of Pilate* is probably meant. The Cappadocians, from among whom Alexander came, kept the (Christian) Passover on the vernal equinox of the Julian calendar (Mar. 25; others Mar. 18, the date of the sun's entrance into Aries). This fixation of the anniversary of the feast of the Redemption on Mar. 25 is the main point of the Alexander fragment. But the Cappadocians adduced as their authority for the practice the *Acts of Pilate*.

⁸ Dobschütz, *T. u. U.* xi. 1, pp. 136 ff.

⁹ On the significance of this date see below, B 2. Mar. 25 fell on Saturday in A.D. 58, a discrepancy in the source.

the fixed point is the so-called "year of the two Gemini" for the year of the Passion. It is from this, reckoned as Tib. xvi, that in Turner's opinion the synchronisms of Lk. 3 1 are calculated. Manifestly the practice of observing the anniversary of Jesus' death and resurrection as a Christian feast of redemption coincidentally with the Jewish Passover, a practice amply attested as in vogue since the times of the apostles, if not alluded to by Paul himself (I Cor. 5 7 15 20), would make the determination of the year from which this so-called "Quartodeciman" practice originated a matter for precise determination at a *very* early period.

5. *Relation to John.* More important support for the Lucan chronology than the adhesion of the second century fathers may be found in Jn. 2 20. In spite of some ancient authorities²⁰ who apply the reference to Solomon's or Zerubabel's temple, it seems more probable that the author has carefully reckoned out the synchronism of 46 years completed since the beginning of Herod's enterprise (B.C. 20-19, Turner), making the ministry begin with the Passover of 26 and end with that of 29. If with Irenæus we take the feast of Jn. 5 1 as a Passover, as well as 6 4, the duration of the ministry will be reckoned at three years and Jesus' age as 49. This author's divergence in other respects from synoptic tradition (below, *D*) cannot therefore affect his clear acceptance of the main factor in the Lucan chronology, the year 29 for the Crucifixion. Whether this acceptance is due to independent tradition, or merely ranks the writer of Jn. 2 20 with later chronographers who depend on Luke, must be decided by our judgment of the value of the date, and of the two systems respectively. It stands, at all events, as a confirmation of 29 as the traditional year of the Crucifixion and corroborates our interpretation of Lk. 3 1.

We must inquire later as to the duration of the ministry, and of Jesus' life, implied in Jn. 2 20, and in the fourth gospel as a whole.

²⁰ *Gosp. of Nicod. and De Mont. Sina et Ston.*

B. CRITICISM OF THE LUCAN CHRONOLOGY

In spite of this array of second century support, very serious reason exists to question the accuracy of the date Tib. xvi (*i.e.* the year of the two Gemini) implied in Lk. 3 1, independent of the evidences of this author's superficiality elsewhere. The mere fact that ancient and modern chronographers have not ventured further from it than to extend the duration of the ministry in the interests of harmony, or to make some other reckoning of the years of Tiberius is not a guarantee; and if the pivotal date of Lk. 3 1 with the connected "year of the two Gemini" be invalidated, the whole chain of derived chronologies falls with it.

1. **The Calendar Argument.** It is a statement of all the Gospels, of practically universal acceptance,¹¹ that the Crucifixion occurred on a Friday. The Gospels differ, however, as to its having occurred before (John) or after (synoptics) the Passover supper, *i.e.* on the 14th or 15th of the lunation Nisan, which was invariably that of the first full moon after vernal equinox. Astronomical calculation can determine within limits of reasonable certainty on what years of Pilate's administration Nisan 14 fell on Thursday, which would make the year possible from the point of view of the synoptic writers; or on Friday, which would agree with John. No year in which Nisan 14 fell *neither* on Thursday or Friday can possibly have been that of the Crucifixion.

Naturally this method of determination by exclusion has been repeatedly applied, but with varying results, not from uncertainty in the astronomical calculations, which determine with exactness the day and hour of what should have been the Passover full moon, but from uncertainty as to the degree of approximation to this date with which the feast was appointed by the Jewish authorities. It admits, however, of positive demonstration¹² that the day of the month was fixed

¹¹ An exception must be made of E. Schwartz ("Osterbetrachtungen," *Z. nt. W.* vii. 1, 1906, pp. 37 ff.), who considers that the observance of "the Lord's day" as the resurrection day and of *Wednesday and Friday as fast days* (Δ .d. viii. 1) arose independently of the events of Passion week.

¹² *Preaching of Peter ap. Clem. Al., Strom.* vi. 5; cf. Bacon, "Incidence of Passover," in *Expositor*, July, 1900.

by actual observation of the moon's *phasis* at the beginning of the lunation. The day preceding that night in which two credible witnesses had seen the slender crescent of the new moon was "sanctified" on the following day (second of the month), according to the requirements of the Talmudic treatise on "The Beginning of the Year," as the first of the month. The new moon of Nisan (first month of the year) was, of course, the most important. Several uncertainties remain, however, to limit our process of exclusion.

a. Whether a given lunation should be regarded as the first of the new year (Nisan) or added (by intercalation) to form the last of the old (Veadar), would admit of doubt only when full moon nearly coincided with spring equinox. Jewish astronomy was not equal to the task of determining the equinox more nearly than within one or two days, and the rules given for choice of the lunation Nisan are therefore quite crude and empirical. In such ambiguous years two possible lunations must be calculated, either of which may have been Nisan.

b. Cloudy weather might delay the "sanctification" of Nisan 1. The delay, however, *could not exceed 24 hours*, because of the rule limiting the months to 30 days.¹⁸ We must therefore include in our calculations both the 14th and 15th Nisan.

c. The Synoptic Gospels represent the Crucifixion as taking place on Nisan 15; John, with greater probability (below, *D*, 2), on Nisan 14. Two days must be admitted as possible in each Nisan on this score. Fortunately, the allowance largely cancels that of *b*; for a delayed Nisan 14 would coincide with Nisan 15.

With these allowances to cover all uncertainties it becomes possible to rule out certain years, in which, on no admissible supposition, either Nisan 14 or 15 could have fallen on a Friday.

¹⁸ Turner, *ibid.* p. 412, declares it as "one of the rules which may well go back to our Lord's time that Adar never consisted of more than 29 days." This would still further reduce the elements of uncertainty our tables are designed to cover, but the authority is not stated.

The subjoined table, taken substantially from Fotheringham (*Journ. of Philol.* 1903, p. 100 ff.), avoids the crudity of those previously constructed on the uniform average allowance of 36 hours between astronomical new moon and phasis.¹⁴ By determining the astronomical conditions of visibility in each lunation in terms of the moon's Mean Anomaly and Latitude of the Ascending Node, it fixes with practical certainty the evening before which the moon was *invisible*. By including the years 26 and 27 and calculating a second date for 26, 29 and 34, in which Nisan 14 would have fallen before Mar. 25, the equinox of the Julian calendar,¹⁵ two further sources of uncertainty are removed.

A.D.	ADAR		(VEADAR) NISAN		
	<i>Astr. New Moon</i>	<i>Phasis</i>	<i>Astr. New Moon</i>	<i>Phasis</i>	<i>Nisan 14</i>
26	6 Feb., 8 A.M.	8 Feb.	{ 7 Mar., 7 P.M. 6 Apr., 5 A.M.	9 Mar. 7 Apr.	Sa. 23 Mar. Su. 20 Apr.
27	25 Feb., 5 A.M.	27 Feb.	26 Mar., 6 P.M.	28 Mar.	Fr. 11 Apr.
28	14 Feb., 9 A.M.	16 Feb.	15 Mar., 2 A.M.	17 Mar.	We. 31 Mar.
29	2 Feb., 8 A.M.	4 Feb.	{ 4 Mar., 3 A.M. 2 Apr., 8 P.M.	6 Mar. 5 Apr.	Su. 20 Mar. Tu. 19 Apr.
30	21 Feb., 5 A.M.	23 Feb.	22 Mar., 8 P.M.	{ 24 Mar. 25 Mar.	Fr. 7 Apr. Sa. 8 Apr.
31	11 Feb., 0 A.M.	12 Feb.	12 Mar., 1 A.M.	14 Mar.	We. 28 Mar.
32	29 Feb., 1 P.M.	2 Mar.	29 Mar., 11 P.M.	31 Mar.	Mo. 14 Apr.
33	18 Feb., 5 A.M.	19 Feb.	19 Mar., 1 P.M.	{ 20 Mar. 21 Mar.	Fr. 3 Apr. Sa. 4 Apr.
34	7 Feb., 8 P.M.	9 Feb.	{ 9 Mar., 6 A.M. 7 Apr., 2 P.M.	10 Mar. 8 Apr.	We. 24 Mar. Th. 22 Apr.
35	26 Feb., 8 P.M.	28 Feb.	28 Mar., 6 A.M.	29 Mar.	Tu. 12 Apr.

The only admissible years among the above, if synoptic tradition be right, are 34, in which, if the later lunation was proclaimed Nisan, the 15th fell normally on Friday; and 28 and 31, if bad weather delayed the phasis. But no amount of delay from this cause would produce any effect at the beginning of Nisan in 28 and 31, because Adar, the preceding month, had its full quota of 30 days. Only on the sup-

¹⁴ So Wurm, Anger, Wieseler, and Achelis.

¹⁵ Wurm's rule (*ap.* Wieseler, tr. Venables, *Syn. of Four Gospels*, p. 406), giving Mar. 23 for the equinox, is too exact. The Sanhedrin may have followed ordinary (Julian) usage.

position of delay *both* at the beginning of Adar and of Nisan do these years become admissible. They are not admissible at all unless synoptic tradition be right as against Johannine.

If Johannine tradition be right, 34 is again the most probable year; for while the conditions of visibility were such as to make Thursday, Apr. 22, A.D. 34, a possible 14 Nisan, thus confirming synoptic story, this is only just possible, and a single day's delay in observation from clouds or otherwise would make it Friday, Apr. 23, confirming the fourth gospel. Two days' delay (in this case quite supposable) would admit the date of the alternative Nisan. For in this year, A.D. 34, Friday, Mar. 26, would then have been Nisan 14, again confirming the fourth gospel.

But besides the year 34 (the most probable by either Johannine or synoptic tradition), the years 33 and 30 are both admissible, though by Johannine tradition only. Fotheringham adopts 33 as the true date, because "the date Saturday, Apr. 4, for Nisan 14 in this year is astronomically only slightly more probable" than Friday, Apr. 3. Of 30 he says: "In the case of 30 the conditions are so pronouncedly in favor of a late phasis that it would be difficult to adopt an earlier date" than Saturday, Apr. 8.¹⁸ This would of course exclude 30 A.D. from consideration. Nevertheless, Friday, Apr. 7, must be admitted to be possible, as cases are known of observation of the new moon under conditions more unfavorable. We therefore include this as a possible date, and 30 as an admissible year under Johannine tradition. Under synoptic it is entirely inadmissible.

As regards 29, the patristic "year of the two Gemini" corresponding to Lk. 3 1, Fotheringham's discussion is exhaustive and his conclusion decisive. "Whatever date therefore be astronomically possible, 29 appears to be impossible." Even Achelis, who reverts to the demonstrably false method of

¹⁸ In the table as given above, the columns giving Mean Anomaly and Longitude of the Ascending Node have been omitted. 200 marks the maximum of unfavorable conditions which become more favorable as the number advances toward 400 or recedes toward 0. At Nisan A.D. 30 they were 164 and 71 respectively.

dating by astronomic new and full moon,¹⁷ makes Nisan 14 in A.D. 29 fall on Sunday, Apr. 17, whether by this method or in calculating by phasis!¹⁸

2. *Source of the Lucan Date.* If then the patristic "year of the two Gemini" be really inadmissible, how account for the origin of the dating? In the view of Turner it does not rest upon Lk. 3 1, but antedates the third gospel itself. At all events, Luke has some source for it, because it cannot be connected with any other datum of his story. Whosoever the responsibility, the explanation of the adoption of this date is not far to seek. It is suggested by the course actually pursued by Hippolytus in dating the Crucifixion on Mar. 25, A.D. 29.

Epiphanius (*Hær.* I. 1, L. 1, 23) tells us of primitive Quartodeciman sects in Cappadocia who, in continuing their observance of Passover as the anniversary of the Crucifixion, had broken away from the Jewish lunar calendar and, instead of observing Nisan 14, observed the solar date, Mar. 25, just as we celebrate the Nativity at winter solstice, Dec. 25, observing the same day of the (solar) month each year. The certainty that the date, Mar. 25, was an arbitrary one is afforded by the practice of some of their number, who observed not Mar. 25, but Mar. 18; for *in both cases* we have simply spring equinox of the Julian Calendar, where Mar. 18 is the date for the entrance of the sun into Aries, Mar. 25 true equinox.¹⁹ Now in A.D. 29, Mar. 18 and Mar. 25 actually fell on Fridays. In all other conceivable years equinox fell on some other day of the week; so that it is quite supposable that A.D. 29 was made the basis of the synchronisms

¹⁷ Turner and Ramsay are certainly wrong in this assumption. Just because the Jews considered accuracy in the determination of their festal calendar vitally important, they clung with fanatical tenacity to their determinations by actual observation long after Gentile astronomy was competent to fix the dates by calculation. See the fragment of *Ker. Petri*, quoted above, note 12.

¹⁸ *Gött. gel. Nachr., phil. hist. Kl.*, 1902, pp. 707 ff. The obsolete method of allowing a uniform delay of 36 hours between astronomic new moon and phasis accounts for the discrepancy with Fotheringham's results.

¹⁹ See above on the fragment from Victorinus discussed by Dobschütz (*T. u. U.* xi. pp. 186 ff.), in which this dating for the Quartodeciman anniversary is attributed to Alexander, the *Cappadocian* bishop of Jerusalem, ca. 210 A.D.

of Lk. 3 1 for this reason, the dating of Jn. 2 21 and of the patristic chronographers simply resting upon the same. For Quartodecimans must very soon have discovered the remarkable coincidence that the Friday of Passover week in "the year of the two Gemini" coincided with the (Julian) vernal equinox, just as Jesus' birth was later understood to coincide with the (Julian) winter solstice. At all events, 29 A.D. as the year of the Crucifixion seems to be the one universal, unanimously attested date of all the earliest sources. Every dating takes its start from this—and yet it is astronomically impossible!

Per contra, since the year 30 is not altogether excluded under Johannine tradition, and second century interpretation of Lk. 3 1 may have been mistaken, the possibility must also be recognized that Lk. 3 1 may be based on independent historical tradition. Jn. 2 21 will then no doubt be adduced as supporting the same. In this case, however, the two passages must be understood as pointing to A.D. 30, and not 29. A decision as between the alternative possibilities must await further evidence.

C. PRE-LUCAN CHRONOLOGY

1. **Traces in Matthew and Luke.** On other points than the universally accepted starting point of 29 A.D. for the Crucifixion there is decided disagreement in the sources. They vary both as to the duration of the ministry and of Jesus' life. We have seen above (A, 2) that Luke's calculations of date do not always agree even with his own material. In particular the Nativity is placed "in the days of Herod the king," by Lk. 1 5, if indeed the original reference of Lk. 2 1 be not to some purely statistical census made under Saturninus in B.C. 9-7. The implications of Mt. 2 16 (note last clause) make 6 B.C. the *lowest* limit, but a date several years earlier may quite as well be implied.²⁰ Thus the 30 years of

²⁰ If the legend of the star Mt. 2 2 be really an outgrowth of the remarkable conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in Pisces in May, October, and December of B.C. 7 in accordance with the statement of R. Abarbanel that the conjunction of these two planets in Pisces is to be a sign of Messiah's coming, we may be still more specific. A date in the neighborhood of B.C. 7 will have been assumed by the tradition.

Lk. 3 23 give in any case a lower estimate of Jesus' age "when he began" than the older tradition implied. We have evidence which is far from deserving the neglect it has received that his age was in reality more nearly 40.

2. **The Elders' Tradition of Jesus' Age.** Irenæus, in his attempts to defend the fourth gospel against the charge of unauthenticity,²¹ refers to an author, now generally acknowledged to be Papias (*ca.* A.D. 145), as reporting from "the Elders who were disciples of the Apostles," that Jesus when he began to teach had reached the age of 40 years, the age which "befits the teacher." We may infer from this latter expression that in its original form the tradition was a vindication of Jesus' right to the title and function of Rabbi under the legal requirement of 40 as the teaching age.²² Irenæus twists this into a defense of his interpretation of Jn. 8 57, as implying that Jesus continued his teaching until nearly the age of 50! Regarding this latter conception (that Jesus attained the age of 50 years) we shall have more to say presently. That of Papias with which we are now dealing (40 years) is not only reasonable in itself, and quite in harmony with Mt. 2 16 Lk. 1 5, but has positive confirmation in Ac. 7 23, where the statement is made that Moses when he visited his brethren in the rôle of peace-maker, "supposing that they would understand how that God by his hand was giving them salvation," had "fully completed his fortieth year."²³ This trait in Stephen's portrait of Moses the great prototype of Christ is introduced *without more than inferential warrant in the Old Testament*, which would hardly be the case if it were not intended to mark a correspondence.

3. **Jewish Polemic.** Conversely, Herford adduces evidence from the Jewish side of this polemic between Church and Synagogue which indicates Jewish interest to prove that Jesus did *not* attain the age of 40. Jesus is referred to (as

²¹ *Her.* II. xxii. 4, 5.

²² *Aboda Zara*, b. Talm. Frankfort ed. f. 19 b. Ad quodnam vero ætatis momentum expectandum est antequam vir doctus alios docere possit? *Resp.* Ad exactos annos quadraginta.

²³ ἐπληροῦτο αὐτῷ τεσσαρακονταετῆς χρόνος.

Herford shows) in Bab. Talm., *Sanh.* 106 *b*, under the mask of "Balaam" (slain for seducing Israel, according to Num. 31 s. 16). A Christian opponent of Rabbi Hanina answers the question "How old was Balaam when he died?" as "83 or 84 years." This is justified thereupon by combination of Ps. 55 23 and Ps. 90 10. Because Jesus was a "bloody and deceitful man" he must have perished before attaining half a man's allotted days (*i.e.* 70 years). The (Palestinian) elders on the one side, rabbis on the other, corroborate the existence of a tradition independent of the Lucan, fixing the age of Jesus not at thirty, but at *forty*.

D. JOHANNINE CHRONOLOGY

We are thus brought again to the question so drastically treated by Irenæus. What is the relation of the Johannine chronological system to the Lucan?

1. **The Johannine Synchronism.** Jn. 2 13-22 transfers the scene of the temple-cleansing from the end of the ministry (Mk. 11 15-18 and parallels), its only possible historical position, to the beginning, thus making it occupy a position corresponding to that of Lk. 4 16 *π.*; where Luke depicts the beginning of the ministry by describing how Jesus proclaimed "the acceptable year of the Lord" in his *παρῶς*. This transfer with the connected indirect synchronism (vv. 20. 21) and the emphasizing in 6 4 of a point only indirectly recognizable in Mk. 6 38, suggests that the fourth evangelist, while accepting the Lucan fixed point of A.D. 29 for the Crucifixion, has a deliberate, if tacit, intention to readjust the prevailing chronology (*a*) in respect to the age of Jesus, (*b*) in respect to the duration of the ministry, (*c*) in respect to the day of the Crucifixion.

a. Early errorists in Rome referred to by Augustine,²⁴ perhaps Caius and the Alogi, insisted on interpreting not only Jn. 8 57, but also 2 20, as implying that Jesus attained an age of nearly 50 years. Irenæus, as we have seen, the most determined opponent of the Alogi, admitted this interpretation of Jn. 8 57, and other Church writers, not long after, admitted it

²⁴ *de Doctr. Chr.* ii. 28.

as regards 2 20.²⁵ We still have, in fact, many traces of harmonistic chronologies of this period which reckon the duration of Jesus' life at 49 years.²⁶ As these interpretations did not disappear until their real irreconcilability with Luke became apparent, so it is probable that but for prepossessions of a similar kind we ourselves would recognize that at least Jn. 8 57 is not written from the standpoint of Lk. 8 23, but more nearly from that of the pre-Lucan chronology of Mt. 2 16, Lk. 1 5 21 (?) Ac. 7 23 and "the Elders" of Papias, if, indeed, John does not go still further in the direction of Irenæus' extravagant claims.

b. We have already recognized the probability that Jn. 2 13-22 is intended to rectify the Lucan thirty-year duration of Jesus' life; we must now recognize the further fact that this writer certainly extends the duration of the ministry, and the probability that he intends it to cover a period of three years, perhaps taking the suggestion from Lk. 13 7.

We may be sure from Jn. 8 57 that he reckoned the duration of Jesus' life as at that time (Tabernacles) approximating 50 years. But did he think of it as attaining just 50 at the ensuing Passover? If he reckoned after the manner of the later Greek chronographers, his starting point for the period of the incarnation would be not the birth of Jesus, but his conception (*σύλληψις*) in the womb of Mary. "Forty-six years" of age, therefore, would mark more nearly 47

²⁵ So among moderns Loisy and Jülicher.

²⁶ A number of medieval chronographers who seem to rest upon the *Defense of the Fourth Gospel and Apocalypse*, by Hippolytus (ca. A.D. 205), calculate by *jubilees* of years, reckoning 120 jubilees (6000 years) as the duration of the world, after which the millennium completes the period of 140 (2×70). Thus a fragment of the *Apocalypse of Thomas* quoted by Frick (*Zts. f. ntl. Wiss.* 1908, 2, p. 172) forecasts "nine jubilees" (= 450 years) from the Ascension to the Second Coming. The Nativity is dated in chronologies of this class in A.M. 5500 (so, e.g., Annianus, ca. 412 A.D.), so that *Apoc. Thom.* probably reckoned one jubilee (50 years) as the period of the Incarnation. Chapman, however, has cogently argued (*Journ. of Theol. Studies*, viii. 1906) for the dependence of this reckoning on Hippolytus, who employed the blundering calculations of Tertullian from the consular lists. Thus the extraordinary dates of Epiphanius and the Alexander fragment giving 12 years as the duration of the ministry and 49 as the duration of Jesus' life would be purely fortuitous in origin!

of the incarnation period. We may also assume that he regarded the unnamed "feast of the Jews" of Jn. 5 1 as a Passover, because such is the general understanding of the fathers.²⁷ If, then, a correspondence is intended between Herod's building and "the temple of his (Jesus') body," the Passover of the utterance will approximate the close of the forty-seventh year of the incarnation, that of 5 1 the forty-eighth, that of 6 4 the forty-ninth, and that of the Passion and Resurrection the fiftieth year.

On the other hand, the internal structure of the fourth gospel convinces us that Turner is right in his declaration that it contemplates originally and fundamentally no other chronology of the ministry than is reasonably and most naturally to be derived from Mark, viz. a period of one year for the Galilean ministry, ending with the Passover of Ch. 6, and a second, also of one year, for the ministry in Peræa and Judæa, ending with the Passover of Ch. 11.²⁸ In this case Jn. 2 13 α . will represent an extension of the original Johannine duration of Jesus' ministry, as well as an attempt at more exact dating of his birth.

c. The placing of the Crucifixion on Nisan 14 (Jn. 13 1. 29 18 28), instead of 15 as the synoptists declare, is an extraordinary instance of the combined boldness in matter with reserve in manner of the corrections of our fourth evangelist. His undeniable disposition to find mystical coincidences (*e.g.* 9 7 11 50) has indeed been regarded as sufficient to account for even such a tour de force as this, inasmuch as Jesus' death, the author's parallel to that of the Passover lamb (1 29. 36), is thus made to fall coincidentally with this sacrifice. But it is to be observed that the real author of this comparison is Paul (1 Cor. 5 7), and that Paul adds to it a further com-

²⁷ In our own judgment a misunderstanding. The dialogue of Jn. 5 is concerned with the authority of Jesus *vs.* the Law of Moses. *Pentecost* was the feast of the giving of the Law. But this only shows that Jn. 2 13 α . is a late addition, which can be made probable independently.

²⁸ Turner, *s.v.* "Chronology of N. T." in Hastings' *BD*, i. p. 409 b). "St. Mark's Gospel was shown (p. 406), if its order of events can be taken as chronological [the fourth evangelist would so take them], to imply, exactly like St. John's, a two-year ministry."

parison of the Resurrection to the waving of the Firstfruits (1 Cor. 15 20), which took place on Nisan 16. This he would scarcely do if the days of Crucifixion and Resurrection had fallen respectively on Nisan 15 and 17. Moreover, there is strong internal evidence of self-contradiction in the story of Mk. 14 ff. and parallels, indicating that the temptation to regard the last supper as the actual Passover with which it so nearly coincided, has availed to alter the original representation. Even now the account is bare of all the distinctive features of the Passover meal. In all probability, then, we must invert the supposed relation. Symbolism is unquestionably an exaggerated factor in John; but it grows out of the historic tradition, and not conversely. And what we thus find to be true respecting the day of the Crucifixion is at least partially true of the duration of the ministry, which, if not exactly two years, was almost certainly more than one; also of Jesus' age, which if not exactly 49, was very probably in the region of 40.

E. HARMONISTIC CHRONOLOGIES

Current harmonistic chronologies based on a 3-4 year ministry date from the period of Eusebius, who adopted 29 (Lk. 3 1) as the date of the Baptist's mission, 30 as that of the Baptism, and 33 for the Crucifixion, finding *four* Passovers in John. The heathen chronographer Phlegon, A.D. 117-138, furnished him with records of an earthquake which had occurred in 32-33 in Bithynia, and an eclipse of the sun (certainly that of Nov. 24, A.D. 29) visible in the same region. Unfortunately there is no good reason to suppose that any but Christian borrowers from Phlegon identified these events with the "eclipse" of Lk. 23 44 and the earthquake of Mt. 27 51. Still it is of interest to note Phlegon's date for the earthquake, if not for both events, in view of the fact that other Christian chronologists before Eusebius may have brought it into relation with gospel story. Phlegon's date was Ol. 202. 4 = A.D. 32-33.

CONCLUSION

The date A.D. 29 for the Passion seems to be older than any of our gospels, and yet on the showing of astronomy both incorrect and factitious. Luke would seem to have employed it for his dating of the beginning of the ministry "in the fifteenth year of Tiberius." The writer of Jn. 2 13 π . would seem also to have calculated from it; but whereas Luke — misled perhaps by the desire to connect the birth in Bethlehem with "the census" — placed the Nativity but 30 years before it, John, more loyal to the older tradition of Jesus' having "attained the age of the teacher," placed the Nativity more than 40, perhaps exactly 49 years before it. Astronomically the most probable dates for the Passion are A.D. 33 or 34. The most probable estimates of the duration of the ministry are those which come nearest the two-year period. The most probable estimates of the duration of Jesus' life are those which exceed rather than fall below the period of 40 years. The Nativity should be dated "in the days of Herod the king," most reasonably in about B.C. 8.