

Composite Gospels

From Zacharias' encounter with Gabriel in the temple to John's two disciples who follow Jesus

Summary chronology of Events

Events

1. *Zacharias encounters Gabriel in the temple.*
2. *Gabriel visits Mary*
3. *Mary goes down to visit Elizabeth in the hill country of Judea. She stays about 3 months then returns home.*
4. *Joseph finds out about Mary's pregnancy and also receives a visit from Gabriel in a dream.*

Note: This could be switched with #3, but since Mary left quickly for Judea and was there for 3 months, and it would be several weeks before it could be determined that she was pregnant, it more likely happened in this order.

5. *Elizabeth gives birth to John.*
6. *Mary and Joseph go to Bethlehem to register for the census. A son, Jesus, is born to them. They lay Him in a manger because there is no room in the inn.*
7. *Jesus is circumcised*
8. *The family goes to Jerusalem. Mary completes her days of purification and Jesus, her first-born, is brought to the temple to be dedicated according to the Law of Moses, about 40 days after birth, Lev. 12.1-4 (10 + 30)*

Note: In addition to the reasons given in #9 for this offering to occur before the Magi arrive in Jerusalem, the offering of the turtledoves for Mary's purification in Lk 2:22-24 is the offering of a poor person (Turtledove—Lev. 12:8). But the Magi gave them expensive gifts (including gold), indicating they had not yet received these gifts.

9. *(They return to Bethlehem). Magi visit Jerusalem, then go to Bethlehem to pay tribute to Jesus. They are warned in a dream, and return by another route.*

NOTE: When the Magi arrive at Jerusalem, the child is still at Bethlehem (Matt. 2). The age of the children slaughtered by Herod (2 yrs and under) was based on the period of time from when the wise men saw "His star" until Herod realized he had been tricked (Matt. 2:7, 16). Since it would have taken

considerable time for the Magi to have arrived at Jerusalem from the time they saw the star, it is likely that more than 40 days had elapsed. Besides, if the child had just been born, Herod could be on the alert for any new mother and first-born male child (even if he didn't know for sure that the Messiah would be a first-born) coming from Bethlehem to Jerusalem for the purification and the dedication ceremony.

If one only used Luke's account in determining the order of these events, he might think that they went back to Galilee *immediately* after the purification and dedication ceremonies. Of course Luke is correct in his "chronology" as far as it goes, but look at all the other events that happened in between: Magi visit Jerusalem, then go to Bethlehem to pay tribute to Jesus. They are warned in a dream, and return by another route. Joseph, Mary and Jesus go down into Egypt, then return after the death of Herod and THEN they go to Galilee (Nazareth).

INSIGHT: Much can happen in between one event and another. Do not force a strict chronology on biblical texts and do not assume that nothing happened between one event and another just because it isn't recorded.

10. *Flight to Egypt*
11. *Herod's tirade against the infants.*
12. *The family returns from Egypt and settles in Galilee at Nazareth.*
13. *Jesus and his family visit Jerusalem when He was about 12 (Lk. 241–52).*
14. *John begins his preaching in the wilderness, in the area of the Jordan.*

See notes at end for comments on for points 15–25

15. *"Brood of Vipers"*
16. *Jesus is baptized by John*
17. *Holy Spirit comes on Jesus in form of a dove*
18. *Temptation of Jesus*

Even though the temptation is not part of the texts we've studied so far, it had to be included in our study (as a 3rd-level consideration) because it is an essential part of the chronology. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record that after Jesus was baptized, He went directly into the wilderness to be tempted by the Devil. Mark even says it was *immediately* after His baptism—Mk. 1:12–13. Therefore the events recorded in John 1 very likely occurred *after* His temptation. [See comments at end.]

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19. *John's discussion with the priests and Levites sent by the Pharisees (John 1:19–28)*
 20. *The next day John sees Jesus coming to him: "Behold the Lamb of God..."*
 21. *John explains how he now knows that Jesus is the Son of God.*
 22. *The next day, John sees Jesus walking by: "Behold, the Lamb of God..."*
 23. *Two of John's disciples follow Jesus and "stay with Him" that day.*
 24. *Andrew "recruits" his brother Peter, probably the same day as he and the "other disciple" (probably John) go to be with Jesus.*

The "other disciple" is not named, but he can not be any of those who are named, because there would be no reason for his silence on this. Besides, Andrew finds Peter and brings him to Jesus, and since the "other" disciple was already "staying" with Jesus, he couldn't be Peter; Jesus finds Philip and Philip finds Nathanael. However, this anonymity is consistent with the way John refers to himself throughout his own gospel ("the disciple whom Jesus loved").
 25. *The next day Jesus plans to go to Galilee (John 1:43). That same day, perhaps as He begins leaving the Judean area, He found Philip who then found Nathanael.*
 26. *Jesus and the 5 disciples leave the Judean region and on the third day arrive at Cana at Galilee (John 2:1).*

Comments on events in John 1:19–39

- A. The events of John 1:19–28 took place in Bethany beyond the Jordan (vs. 28). The location of this place is uncertain. Many early Christians supposed it to be on the west side of the Jordan, but most of the evidence points to the east side.
 1. The term "beyond the Jordan" can mean either side of the Jordan. That is, something could be beyond the Jordan to the east, or beyond the Jordan to the west (cf. Josh. 12:1, 7). However, it is usually understood from the perspective of the Jerusalem side, especially during New Testament times, so that *beyond the Jordan* would mean on the east side of the river.
 2. Bethany, the city of Lazarus and his sisters Mary and Martha, is some 20 miles west of the Jordan. But the book of John identifies the place where John was *first baptizing* as being somewhere beyond the Jordan (10:40). We know from Matthew's account that John began his ministry in the Judean region of the Jordan and was baptizing in the Jordan. This is also where Jesus was baptized (Matt. 3:1–6). It is therefore not likely that Bethany near Jerusalem is the "Bethany beyond the Jordan" of John

1:28.

- B. John records the events of 1:19–39 as having occurred on three consecutive days (more than three, if you continue past verse 39):
1. The first day is when John has the discussion with the priests and the Levites. But these are not the same group of people that John scolds in Matt. 3:7ff and Luke 3:7ff as “brood of vipers.” In John’s account, the Pharisees were not there at this time, for they sent the priests and Levites to John instead (1:24). This suggests that the “brood of vipers” incident (during which time Jesus was baptized) happened earlier.
 2. The “next day” (i.e., the 2nd day—vs. 29) after this discussion, John sees Jesus coming to Him. It is not clear how many people John was speaking to at this time, but this is when he explains how that he himself did not know (for certain¹) that Jesus of Nazareth was the “Lamb of God” until he saw the Holy Spirit descending upon and remaining upon Him. That was God’s sign to John that Jesus was indeed the Messiah.
 - a. It is not reasonable to conclude that Jesus was baptized the previous day because to do so, one would have to dismiss the difference in the audiences and must also significantly broaden the meaning of “immediately” in Mark 1:12 to mean that four or more days went by after His baptism, during which Jesus chose five of His disciples before He went “immediately” into the wilderness to be tempted (see comments on #18). Plus, in the following verses, after Jesus gathers 5 disciples he has plans to go to Galilee on the next day (that is, the 4th day, John 1:43).
 - b. It therefore Jesus was *returning* from His temptation and coming to John, possibly to speak to him about His ministry and about choosing His disciples. (Though the reason for His “coming to John” is not given, it would make sense that the first place Jesus would look for His disciples would be from among the one who had first prepared the way for Him.)
 3. “The next day” after this (vs. 35, the 3rd day), John the Baptist saw Jesus walking by while he was standing with two of his disciples. To them, he reiterates his statement of the previous day that Jesus is the Lamb of God. One of these disciples was Andrew (Peter’s brother); the other was (presumably) John who wrote the gospel.

¹ John did know Jesus well enough to know that He did not need to be baptized, and in fact said that He, Jesus, should be baptizing him instead (Matt. 3:13–14).