

The Stages of Jesus' Ministry

Did you know that there are a total of 90 chapters in the Gospel records and in Acts 1 about Jesus Christ's appearance and ministry in the world? Author and scholar Carl W. Wilson has calculated that the first 5 chapters of a biblical harmony have to do with Christ's coming into the world, His incarnation. The last 33 chapters focus on Jesus' death and resurrection (these chapters make up more than a third of the record). Between the first 5 and the final 33 are 52 chapters which describe how Jesus trained the disciples to minister in His name. Wilson concludes that "through the teaching of Jesus, the apostles experienced a way of ministry that made the church unstoppable. A leader may profess that Jesus is the head of his ministry, but when he strays from the principles of Jesus' ministry, he's really just taking over himself. Jesus' methodology keeps everyone aware that He, and He alone, is the head of the church." In this session, Advanced Track leaders will be challenged to master the various stages of Jesus' ministry and to discern analogous practices for fruitful contemporary discipleship. **Participants are encouraged to bring their favorite Harmony of the Gospels to this Forum session.** Suggestions: A Harmony of the Gospels by A.T. Robertson; Unique Harmony of the Gospels: A Revelation of the Development of Jesus' Life and Ministry by Carl Wilson; or, Synopsis of the Four Gospels by Kurt Aland.

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I. Introduction

A. Why study the various stages of Jesus' public ministry?

B. The duration of Christ's ministry

1. One-year theory
2. Two-year theory
3. Three-year theory
4. Four-year theory
5. "The three year ministry of Jesus from the first Passover to the passion Passover is the most viable option. Of course, since Jesus' baptism and public ministry preceded the first Passover, the total length of His ministry would be about three and a half years" (Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, p. 60).

C. Discerning analogous practices for fruitful contemporary discipleship

II. The Most Popular Stage-Related Model

- A. Jesus did it (ministry) alone.
- B. Jesus did it and they (Apostles) watched.
- C. They (Apostles) did it and He (Jesus) watched.
- D. They (Apostles) did it alone.

III. Going Deeper: Irving Jensen's and Loraine Boettner's Stage-Related Model

- A. Broad overview of Jesus' public ministry
 - 1. Year of Obscurity
 - 2. Year of Popularity
 - 3. Year of Opposition
- B. Geographic overview of Jesus' public ministry
 - 1. Opening Events
 - 2. Early Judean ministry
 - 3. Early Galilean ministry
 - 4. Middle Galilean ministry
 - 5. Later Galilean ministry
 - 6. Later Judean ministry
 - 7. Perea ministry
 - 8. Passion week in Jerusalem
 - 9. Resurrection & ascension

IV. Simon Greenleaf's Synopsis of the Gospels

- A. Announcement and introduction of our Lord's public ministry (about 1 year)
- B. Our Lord's first Passover, and the subsequent transactions until the second (1 year)
- C. Our Lord's second Passover, and the subsequent transactions until the third (1 year)
- D. From our Lord's third Passover until His final departure from Galilee at the Festival of Tabernacles (6 months)
- E. The Festival of Tabernacles, and the subsequent transactions until our Lord's arrival at Bethany, six days before the fourth Passover (6 months less one week)
- F. Our Lord's public entry into Jerusalem, and the subsequent transactions before the fourth Passover (5 days)
- G. The fourth Passover; our Lord's passion; and the accompanying events until the end of the Jewish Sabbath (2 days)
- H. The Lord's resurrection, His subsequent appearances, and His ascension (40 days)

V. Carl W. Wilson's Stage-Related Model

- A. Preparation ministry
- B. Gathering ministry (invitation to associate)
- C. Outreach ministry (invitation to fish for men)
- D. Organization (appointment of 12)
- E. Testing (bread from heaven crisis)
- F. Teamwork (appointment of 70)
- G. Exportation (cross, resurrection, Pentecost)

VI. Robert E. Coleman's Stage-Related Model

- A. Selection
- B. Association
- C. Consecration
- D. Impartation
- E. Demonstration
- F. Delegation
- G. Supervision
- H. Reproduction

VII. Kurt Aland's *Synopsis of the Four Gospels*

- A. Preparation
- B. The beginning of Jesus' public ministry
- C. Jesus' ministry in Galilee
- D. The Sermon on the Mount
- E. The Sermon on the Plain
- F. Jesus ministry in Galilee continued
- G. The way to the cross
- H. Last journey to Jerusalem
- I. Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem
- J. The ministry in Judea
- K. The final ministry in Jerusalem
- L. The eschatological discourse
- M. Conclusion of the account of the time before the Passion
- N. The Passion narrative
- O. The Farewell Discourses
- P. The arrest, crucifixion, and burial
- Q. The resurrection
- R. Epilogue: the endings of the Gospels

VIII. A.T. Robertson's Chief Divisions of the Harmony

- A. The beginning of the Baptist's ministry
- B. The beginning of Christ's public ministry

- C. The great Galilean ministry
- D. The special training of the Twelve in districts around Galilee
- E. The later Judean ministry
- F. The later Perea ministry
- G. The last public ministry in Jerusalem
- H. In the shadow with Jesus
- I. The arrest, trial, crucifixion, and burial of Jesus
- J. The resurrection, appearances, and ascension of Christ

IX. Imitating Jesus Christ in Disciple Building

- A. **Commitment:** being a life-long student of the life of Christ
- B. **Perspective:** seeing the broad overview of Jesus' public ministry
- C. **Details:** noting the specific events that occur within each period of Jesus' ministry
- D. **Patterns:** how Jesus trained the Twelve over 3½ years
- E. **Principles:** fundamental truths that govern contemporary discipleship practices
- F. **Review:** revising our discipleship principles and practices in the light of Scripture

Suggested Readings:

Kurt Aland, ed., *Synopsis of the Four Gospels* (Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Church of Christ in the United States of America, 1946).

Lorraine Boettner, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1976).

Robert E. Coleman, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1963).

Simon Greenleaf, *The Testimony of the Evangelists: Examined by the Rules of Evidence Administered in Courts of Justice* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1874).

Irving L. Jensen, *Life of Christ: A Self-Study Guide* (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1969).

A.T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels for Students of the Life of Christ* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1922).

Carl W. Wilson, *With Christ in the School of Disciple Building* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: NavPress, 2009).