

Problems in the Gospels.

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III.

Where was Jesus during the absence of the Twelve?

THIS question pressed itself upon me with great power during the past winter while lecturing upon the life of Jesus, until at last the solution came which I shall give in this article.

I have asked several eminent New Testament scholars, but not one of them had thought of it before, or could give me an answer. So far as I am aware, the harmonists and authors of Lives of Jesus have not considered it.

The sending forth of the Twelve was for a mission in Galilee (Mk 6⁷⁻¹³, Mt 9^{36-11¹}, Lk 9¹⁻⁶). They went in pairs, therefore in six different circuits. This mission must have taken some considerable time; for it contemplates the going from one city to another and from house to house, and the sojourning for a time in houses and cities, because directions are given respecting just these things. All this could not have been accomplished in a few days. A comprehensive mission seems to have been contemplated so as to reach entire Galilee.

The return is given in close connexion with the sending in Mk 6³⁰, Lk 9¹⁰. These Evangelists insert accounts of the death of John the Baptist (Mk 6¹⁴⁻²⁹ = Lk 9⁷⁻⁹), motivated by the fact that Herod heard of the great work of Jesus, and was so disturbed by it that he supposed that John the Baptist had risen from the dead in Jesus. This is given by Matthew (14¹⁻¹²) immediately before the feeding of the multitude, without any mention of the return of the Twelve. That Gospel inserts a considerable amount of material here.

(1) An account of the message of the Baptist to Jesus (11²⁻¹⁹), which is given by Luke at an earlier and more probable date (7¹⁸⁻³⁵), and then (2) a number of logia (11²⁰⁻³⁰), the most of which are given by Luke more appropriately in connexion with the return of the Seventy (10¹³⁻²⁴). Matthew also gives, before the feeding of the multitudes, various incidents reported by Mark and Luke at other dates as follows:—(3) Mt 12¹⁻²¹ = Mk 2^{23-3¹²} =

Lk 6¹⁻¹¹; (4) Mt 12²²⁻⁵⁰ = Mk 3^{19b-35}—incidents given by Luke at two different times, the former (11¹⁴⁻³⁶) at a later date, the latter (8¹⁹⁻²¹) at an earlier date; (5) Mt 13¹⁻⁵³, the parables by the sea = Mk 4¹⁻³⁴ = Lk 8⁴⁻¹⁸; and (6) Mt 13⁵⁴⁻⁵⁸, the rejection at Nazareth = Mk 6¹⁻⁶ = Lk 4¹⁶⁻³⁰.

Mark and Luke make no statement whatever as to what Jesus did in the absence of the Twelve. But Matthew tells us (11¹): '*And it came to pass, when Jesus had made an end of commanding His twelve disciples, He departed thence to teach and preach in their cities.*' This is a general statement, which this Gospel adds to the Markan source, and is indeed most probable in itself. But it does not tell us where Jesus carried on His ministry. It is not probable that He reserved a seventh circuit in Galilee to Himself, or that He went with one pair on one of these circuits. It is much more probable that having divided up Galilee among the Twelve, He Himself, either alone or, more likely, with one of these pairs, went elsewhere to carry on His ministry. The insertion of so many incidents by Matthew prior to the feeding of the multitudes, in connexion with which Mark, followed by Luke, gives the return of the Twelve, although Matthew does not mention the return at all, yet implies that the author of this Gospel supposed there was a considerable ministry of Jesus during that interval. Some of these incidents given by Matthew in this interval really belong there. But Mark's order in most cases is to be preferred; in others, that of Luke. We must recognize the effort of the author of Matthew to fill up this gap.

If it is reasonable to suppose that Jesus, during the absence of the Twelve, would carry on His ministry elsewhere than in Galilee, then we have a gap of time in which we may place the Jerusalem ministry of the Gospel of John and the Peræan ministry of the Gospel of Luke, both absent from the Gospel of Mark because Peter was on a mission in Galilee all this time. And, indeed, this ministry in Jerusalem and Peræa fits into this space with the utmost exactness and nicety. It is evident from Mark and Luke that the anxiety of Herod was a real peril for the continuance of Jesus' work, and was a sufficient motive for giving over His

Galilean ministry to the Twelve, while He Himself retired elsewhere.

Luke (9⁵¹⁻⁵⁶), at the beginning of the material derived by this Evangelist from another source than Mark, tells us that Jesus set His face to go to Jerusalem, and that He went by way of Samaria. This unusual route to Jerusalem instead of the usual route by the valley of the Jordan was doubtless because of the peril from Herod and the need of a secret journey. The brother pair, James and John, accompanied Him on this journey to Jerusalem, as is evident from the first incident in Samaria, where their names are mentioned and no others. There is no evidence of the presence of any others of the Twelve.

This journey may be put in parallelism with the journey described in Jn 7²⁻¹⁴. Jesus does not go up to the Feast of Tabernacles with His brethren in a public way, but in secret; and He does not appear in public until the midst of the feast (7¹⁰⁻¹⁴). During this feast the visit to Martha and Mary in Bethany (Lk 10³⁸⁻⁴²) doubtless occurred. It is probable that the Seventy were sent forth from Jerusalem on their mission to Peræa and Judæa. From Jerusalem Jesus follows in the footsteps of the Seventy in a ministry in Peræa (Lk 10²⁵⁻³⁷, 11-13²¹), which concludes with a journey to Jerusalem (Lk 13²²). This journey seems to correspond with that reported in Jn 10²²⁻³⁹ at the Feast of Dedication, from which He returns to Peræa (Jn 10⁴⁰).

The ministry in Peræa included the incidents and teaching mentioned in Lk 14-17¹⁰, for the most part at least, although the exact connexion of the logia is by no means certain. From this ministry Jesus is suddenly recalled to Jerusalem by the death of Lazarus (Jn 11). The raising of Lazarus from the dead excited so great attention that Jesus was in great danger from the authorities, and He retires to Ephraim on the borders of Samaria (Jn 11⁵⁴).

It is probable that the journey northward to Galilee through Samaria (Jn 4⁸⁻⁴³) occurred at this time. He was in peril, both from the authorities of Jerusalem and also from Herod, and the safest journey was just this one. He was on the borders of Samaria at Ephraim, and the journey through Samaria was the easiest from this place. The statement 'Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh the harvest?' (Jn 4³⁵) exactly suits this time. Moreover, the explicit statement

of His Messiahship suits this period of His ministry, and could hardly have come much earlier.

The order of the material of John is certainly not chronological but topical, as Tatian recognized. He puts the journey through Samaria after Mk 7²⁴⁻³⁷. At this time John and James alone of the Twelve were with Jesus, and therefore John's Gospel tells us of these things and Peter's Gospel does not mention them. Indeed, these brothers would be especially valuable to Jesus in Jerusalem because of their important acquaintanceship there (Jn 18¹⁵⁻¹⁶).

Arriving in Galilee, Jesus comes at once into peril from Herod, and therefore He avoids renewing His ministry in Galilee and hurries northward to Tyre and Sidon (Mk 7²⁴⁻³⁰). It is probable that the preaching in Nazareth and His rejection there occurred on His way. The Synoptists are in disagreement as to the time (Mk 6¹⁻⁶, Mt 13⁵⁴⁻⁵⁸, Lk 4¹⁶⁻³⁰). It is more appropriate here because of the explicit statement of Jesus' Messiahship with the implication of His impending sufferings and the hostile temper of the Nazarenes. The logion Jn 4⁴⁴ certainly was uttered at Nazareth, and suggests that the discourse at Nazareth immediately followed the journey through Samaria. As I shall show later, there has been a displacement of the original John in this place.

Here Mark resumes his narrative, and it is probable that Peter and Andrew join Jesus at Nazareth for the journey northward, while John and James depart. From Phœnicia Jesus journeys along the northern borders of Galilee to Northern Decapolis (Mk 7⁸¹), and so to Bethsaida, where He is rejoined by the entire Twelve (Mk 6³⁰ = Lk 9¹⁰). It is significant that the feeding of the four thousand, which is probably only a variant tradition of the feeding of the five thousand, is placed by Mark (8¹⁻⁹) and Matthew (15³²⁻³⁸) after the journey from Sidon by way of Decapolis. The feeding of the five thousand is reported in John (6¹⁻¹⁵). Andrew and Philip, representing two pairs of the Twelve, are mentioned as with Him. It is also stated that 'the passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand' (Jn 6⁴), which exactly suits this time. The harmonists, even Tatian, place this event too early, and therefore find it difficult to explain the discourse of Jesus in Capernaum, which follows just after crossing the sea (Jn 6¹⁶⁻⁶⁶), which offends many of His disciples and brings on the crisis in which the Twelve recognize Him distinctly as

the Messiah. Jn 6¹⁷ states that He crossed to Capernaum; Mk 6⁵³, Mt 14³⁴ to the plain of Gennesaret; Mt 15³⁹ that He crossed to the borders of Magadan; Mk 8¹⁰ to the parts of Dalmanutha. Mk 6⁴⁵ states that their real destination was Bethsaida. Gennesaret is a general term of the plain on the border of which Capernaum was situated. Magadan may be another name for Magdala, which is on the south side of the plain, as Capernaum is on the north. Dalmanutha may be a more precise designation of the place, which has not yet been identified. All these places were within a few miles of each other. The calm after the storm compelled them to seek the nearest land. But that the original plan of going to Bethsaida was carried out is evident from the healing of the blind man there (Mk 8²²⁻²⁶) before the journey north to Cæsarea Philippi.

This is the readjustment of the order of events in the life of Jesus which is required by the answer to the question, *Where was Jesus during the absence*

of the Twelve? It solves a number of the most difficult problems of the New Testament, explains the silence of Mark as to the ministry in Peræa and Judæa, and the full report of John as to the Jerusalem ministry, and his implicit agreement with the full report of Luke as to the Peræan ministry. It also fills the gap in time which the absence of ten of the Twelve requires by a sufficient amount of active ministry of Jesus to satisfy all conditions of the problem. It also explains the movements of Jesus in accordance with the perils of His position, and enables us to see how the crisis is brought on which finally removes every reason for caution, and justifies Him in making a distinct announcement of His Messiahship. Thus He secures His definite acceptance as Messiah by His chief disciples, and is enabled to give them a clear warning of His impending death and resurrection just before He makes His last journey to Jerusalem, to the cross and the crown.

Point and Illustration.

He saw the Heavens opened.—Mr. F. B. Meyer took the Temptation for the subject of his address at the Manchester Mission recently. He spoke of Jesus being driven into the wilderness, and he said: ‘There is a difference between a wilderness and a desert. A desert is an ocean of burning sand, where God bakes the winds and makes possible the trade-winds; but a wilderness is used in the Bible perpetually as rather a lonely spot where no blue smoke climbs from the shepherd’s cot, where no boy is heard whistling or calling to his sheep, where only the cry of the grouse, where only the low growl of the beast of prey as he goes forth at night upon his prowls, only the sounds of nature and the sob of the wind over the grass, only such sounds as these are heard.’

He spoke also of the opening of the heavens that came between the Baptism and the Temptation, and he said: ‘Jesus Christ had stood under the open sky, and, as I read the Gospels, He had only stood there for a minute. The open sky was but for a very brief space. If you ask me what the open sky meant, I reply that, in my judgment, it was the revelation to Jesus Christ of new spiritual

forces that lay within His reach. I will not further dwell on that thought; it is an inviting, a wonderfully inviting subject, but I believe the development of Jesus Christ in knowledge and power had been constantly increasing until He had come to a moment when He not only knew exactly who He was, and whence He came, but whence He was going, that in order to move the world He must lay hold upon those heavenly forces that lie within the reach of every faithful touch. It was just as when Newton discovered the law of gravitation and heaven was opened to him, or Watt discovered the law of steam, and a new driving motor force was revealed to him, and as I the other day for the first time saw ether burning in its blue flame and saw the driving force of the next twenty years. So Jesus Christ had seen the heavens opened. But it was only for a moment, and only John and He saw it. It was but a flash, and then the clouds gathered again, and He was “driven.”’

The Carpenter’s Shop.—How far is it lawful to go in the imagination of scenes which the Gospels do not record? Is it lawful to imagine