

AN APOLOGY FOR THE LAMB

A brief defence of the one-year ministry of Yeshua

A COMPANION TO

BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD

A Harmony of the Gospels

“To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD.”

LUKE 4:19

BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD

*“Behold the Lamb of God,
who takes away the sin of the world!”*

JOHN 1:29

This booklet accompanies Behold the Lamb of God - A
Harmony of the Gospels, a chronological harmony of
Matthew, Mark, Luke and John following Yeshua through the
Acceptable Year of the LORD.

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WHY AN APOLOGY?

A reasoned defence - and a fuller case

The older meaning of apology is a reasoned defence - an apologia. This booklet does not apologise for the Lamb of God. It asks whether a chronology repeated for generations has been allowed to harden into fact without first being demonstrated from the Gospels.

No Gospel ever states that Yeshua's public ministry lasted three and a half years. The familiar figure is reconstructed. It depends chiefly upon how the Feasts in John are identified and counted and, in a later influential scheme, upon relating that count to the "half-week" of Daniel 9.

Behold the Lamb of God follows another reading: Yeshua's public manifestation unfolds through the Acceptable Year of the LORD, from the revelation of the Lamb to the Passover at which the Lamb is offered.

**THE QUESTION IS NOT WHETHER A TRADITION IS OLD.
THE QUESTION IS WHETHER IT IS WRITTEN.**

The case deserves more than a disputed verse. It involves the wording of John, Irenaeus's Passover count, Clement's chronology, Origen's short ministry, Hort's textual hesitation, the age of the manuscripts we actually possess, the yearling Passover Lamb, and the remarkable journey of the Feasts from Passover to Passover.

Taken separately, each item can be discussed. Taken together, they form a cumulative case that deserves to be seen in full.

WHAT DO THE GOSPELS ACTUALLY SAY?

The familiar figure is an inference, not a verse

Matthew, Mark and Luke name only the final Passover of Yeshua's public ministry. They never give a sequence of annual Passovers from which a three-and-a-half-year ministry can be read. The longer chronology therefore depends overwhelmingly upon how John's Feast notices are handled.

JOHN 2:13 - PASSOVER. A Passover is expressly named near the beginning of John's ministry narrative.

JOHN 5:1 - "A FEAST OF THE JEWS." John does not call it Passover. To make it an annual Passover is an identification supplied by the interpreter.

JOHN 6:4 - "THE PASSOVER." In the familiar text this supplies the additional annual marker that extends the chronology.

JOHN 11:55; 12:1 - PASSOVER. The final Passover is expressly named and leads directly into the Passion.

**NO EVANGELIST EVER WRITES: "YESHUA MINISTERED
FOR THREE AND A HALF YEARS."**

That number appears only after the Feast notices have been identified, counted, and fitted into a chronological scheme. Those steps may be defended - but they are interpretation. The first duty of an apology is therefore simple: separate what John names from what later readers make his Feasts mean.

IRENÆUS: THE DETAIL THAT MATTERS

Read his Passover count exactly as he gives it

Around AD 180 Irenaeus attacks Christians who taught that Yeshua "continued to preach for one year after His Baptism." His chosen answer is to count the Passovers in John. That makes his reckoning unusually important.

His first Passover is John 2. He then identifies the unnamed Feast of John 5 as Passover and expressly treats it as the second Passover visit.

Immediately afterwards he moves into John 6: Yeshua crosses the Sea of Tiberias and feeds the multitude with five loaves. From there Irenaeus moves toward Lazarus, Bethany "six days before Passover," and the final journey to Jerusalem.

Then he gives his total: "these three occasions of the Passover."

**IRENÆUS MAKES JOHN 5 HIS SECOND PASSEVER.
HE DESCRIBES JOHN 6.
HE STILL TOTALS ONLY THREE PASSEVERS.**

This is not incidental silence. Irenaeus is deliberately looking for Passovers in order to defeat the one-year view. Yet the Passover notice familiar to us at John 6:4 contributes nothing to the very calculation in which it would have been decisive.

Source: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* II.22.1, 3-6.

WHAT DOES IRENAEUS'S COUNT SUGGEST?

The simplest historical explanation deserves to be stated

Irenaeus does not merely fail to quote a convenient verse. He creates a Passover out of John 5, where John only says "a Feast," then walks directly into the John 6 feeding narrative, and still finishes with three Passovers.

If the words "the Passover" stood before him at John 6:4 and carried the same chronological force they carry today, they were the obvious words to use. They would have given him exactly the extra annual Passover his argument required.

**THE MOST NATURAL INFERENCE IS THAT JOHN 6:4 DID
NOT FUNCTION IN IRENAEUS'S TEXT AS AN
ADDITIONAL PASSEVER NOTICE.**

That statement is intentionally precise. We do not possess Irenaeus's copy of John, so we cannot put his lost page under glass and prove its exact wording. But historical inference is not the same thing as guesswork. His argument itself is evidence.

At the very least, his testimony establishes that the familiar John 6:4 Passover played no part in one of the earliest surviving Christian attempts to count the Passovers of Yeshua's ministry. That is a serious difficulty for any claim that the longer chronology was simply obvious from John from the beginning.

WHY HORT QUESTIONED "THE PASSEVER"

He followed the patristic evidence, not a modern theory

F. J. A. Hort was one of the architects of the Westcott-Hort Greek New Testament. At John 6:4 he did something striking: although the Greek manuscripts known to him supported the familiar wording, he judged the words to pascha - "the Passover" - "perhaps a primitive interpolation."

Why? Because the earliest Christian evidence did not behave as he expected if an additional Passover stood in John 6. Hort's extended note drew attention to ancient testimony associated with Irenaeus, Origen, Cyril of Alexandria, and the Alogi reported by Epiphanius. The chronology preserved in these witnesses created a textual problem which manuscript counting alone did not explain.

**HORT'S QUESTION WAS NOT: "DO LATE MANUSCRIPTS OMIT
THE WORDS?"**

**IT WAS: "WHAT EARLY TEXT BEST EXPLAINS THE EARLY
CHRISTIAN EVIDENCE?"**

That distinction matters. Hort was prepared to consider the possibility of a primitive alteration - something earlier than the surviving manuscript evidence available to him - because the patristic record pointed behind the copies that had survived.

He also recognised the chronological consequence. Without "the Passover" at John 6:4, the notices in John can be arranged between the Passover of John 2 and the final Passover of John 11-12 within a single annual cycle.

Source: Westcott & Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek*, Appendix, Notes on Select Readings, John 6:4, pp. 77-81.

THE MANUSCRIPTS WE DO NOT HAVE

The Fathers were reading copies which have not survived

No autograph of John survives. More importantly for this question, we do not possess the copies of John read by Irenaeus, Clement or Origen. Their books disappeared; their arguments remain.

P52, the famous Rylands fragment, preserves only a few lines of John 18. The Manchester catalogue notes that its first editor dated it to AD 100-150, while more recent research points nearer AD 200. It tells us nothing about John 6.

P66 is the first substantial surviving witness to this part of John. It is commonly dated to the late second or early third century. It contains the familiar John 6:4 wording - but its date cannot be securely placed before Irenaeus's c. AD 180 Passover argument.

P75 is third century. The great substantially complete Gospel codices, Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, are fourth century.

**IRENAEUS IS NOT "LATE EVIDENCE" STANDING AGAINST A
STACK OF EARLIER COMPLETE BIBLES.
THOSE EARLIER COMPLETE BIBLES DO NOT EXIST.**

A later copy can faithfully preserve an early reading. Equally, a reading once present in another branch of transmission can disappear. This is precisely why textual critics use patristic quotations and arguments alongside manuscripts.

Manuscript dating: CSNTM; P52 description and dating discussion: John Rylands Research Institute and Library.

JOHN 6:4 AND THE LATER MANUSCRIPT TRADITION

Omissions, asterisks and an obelus

The strongest evidence for questioning "the Passover" is early patristic evidence, not late Greek minuscules. Even so, the later manuscript tradition contains more signs of disturbance at John 6:4 than a casual reader would ever know.

Witness	Reported feature
163*, 1634, 2206	Whole verse omitted
156, 178, 187, 748, 2525, 2684	Verse marked with asterisks
472	Scrivener: red obelus in the margin

These witnesses are late, and symbols such as asterisks or an obelus are not self-interpreting; scribal and liturgical marks can serve different purposes. They therefore do not outweigh P66 merely by number.

THE POINT IS MODEST BUT REAL: JOHN 6:4 HAS A HISTORY OF OMISSION AND CRITICAL MARKING. HORT'S UNEASE DID NOT ARISE IN A VACUUM.

One correction is important: older apparatuses mistakenly cited manuscript 472 as omitting the verse. The Münster INTF has confirmed that 472 contains John 6:4. The significant detail is Scrivener's report that it was marked with a red obelus.

Data: Wieland Willker, Textual Commentary on the Greek Gospels, John 6:4; INTF discussion of MS 472.

CLEMENT: BAPTISM, ONE YEAR, PASSION

His chronology is more explicit than a slogan about Isaiah

Clement of Alexandria, writing near the end of the second century, does not merely quote "the Acceptable Year" as a devotional phrase. He places it inside a chronological discussion.

First he cites Luke's dating of John the Baptist in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar. He then refers to Yeshua coming to His Baptism at about thirty years of age.

Then comes the remarkable sentence:

"And that it was necessary for Him to preach only a year, this also is written: 'He has sent Me to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.'"

Immediately within the same chronological discussion Clement records Passion datings placed in the sixteenth year of Tiberius.

**FIFTEENTH YEAR: BAPTISM.
"ONLY A YEAR": PREACHING.
SIXTEENTH YEAR: PASSION DATING.**

That sequence is extremely difficult to square with an intervening John 6 Passover functioning as an additional annual marker. Clement's chronology does not look like a man trying to squeeze three or four Passovers into the ministry. It looks exactly like the chronology he says it is: the Baptism, the Acceptable Year, and the Passion.

We cannot exhibit Clement's lost Gospel manuscript. But we should not weaken what his surviving words plainly tell us about the chronology he was reading and teaching.

Source: Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* I.21.

ORIGEN AND THE EARLY SHORT MINISTRY

A year and some months - not three and a half years

Origen, one of the most learned textual and exegetical scholars of the early Church, also preserves a strikingly short ministry. In *De Principiis* he writes that Yeshua "taught only during a year and some months."

The point of Origen's sentence is the astonishing spread of the Gospel despite the brevity of Yeshua's public teaching. His chronology is therefore not a passing metaphor: the shortness of the ministry is essential to his argument.

ORIGEN: "HE TAUGHT ONLY DURING A YEAR AND SOME MONTHS."

This does not tell us whether Origen's John 6:4 lacked the whole verse, lacked only "the Passover," or was interpreted in some other way. But it does tell us something equally important: an additional intervening Passover was not controlling Origen's chronology.

Set Origen beside Clement and Irenaeus and the early landscape becomes difficult to dismiss. Irenaeus is fighting Christians who preached one year; Clement explicitly says "only a year"; Origen says "a year and some months." Whatever later became standard, a short ministry belongs to the earliest surviving Christian discussion.

The question then becomes sharper: if "the Passover" of John 6:4 was universally fixed and chronologically decisive in their copies, why does their chronological world look like this?

Source: Origen, *De Principiis* IV.1.5 (Greek and Latin recensions preserve the short-ministry statement).

THE LAMB "OF THE FIRST YEAR"

The chronology is also Paschal

Exodus does not simply command Israel to take a lamb. The Passover lamb is described with precision:

*"Your lamb shall be without blemish, a male of the first year." -
Exodus 12:5*

At the beginning of Yeshua's public manifestation, John the Baptist does not merely call Him Teacher, Prophet or King. He cries: "Behold! The Lamb of God." At the end, Paul can say: "Messiah, our Passover, was sacrificed for us."

The Gospel therefore invites us to read the ministry Paschally. The Lamb is revealed; the Lamb is examined; the Lamb fulfils the Father's work; the Lamb goes up to Jerusalem; the Lamb is offered at Passover.

**THE PASSEVER TYPE DOES NOT MERELY SAY "A LAMB."
IT SAYS A LAMB "OF THE FIRST YEAR."**

Typology alone should not manufacture chronology. But when independent chronological evidence already points toward one annual ministry, the detail in Exodus becomes extraordinarily suggestive. The type and the timeline begin to coincide.

And this connection is not a modern invention. An ancient Christian bishop explicitly read the command in precisely this way.

Scripture: Exodus 12:5; John 1:29; 1 Corinthians 5:7.

GAUDENTIUS: THE YEARLING LAMB

Jordan to Passion - one year fulfilled

Gaudentius, bishop of Brescia in the late fourth and early fifth century, preached directly from Exodus 12. He explains the lamb as "perfect," "male," and anniculus - a yearling.

On that final word he becomes explicitly chronological:

"He is a yearling, because after that Baptism which He received for us in Jordan, up to the day of His Passion, the time of one year was fulfilled."

Gaudentius then adds that the things written in the Gospels are what Yeshua taught or did "in that year", while reminding his hearers that the Evangelists did not record everything He did.

**THE YEARLING LAMB.
THE BAPTISM IN JORDAN.
ONE YEAR TO THE PASSION.**

This is remarkable because it joins the very elements that otherwise might be dismissed as unrelated: the age of the Passover Lamb, the Baptism, the public ministry, and the Passion. Gaudentius sees one Paschal pattern running through them all.

He cannot tell us what John's autograph contained. But he proves beyond question that the "first-year Lamb" interpretation has ancient Christian pedigree - and that an early Christian expositor could look at the Gospel ministry itself as one fulfilled year.

Source: Gaudentius of Brescia, Sermon/Tractate III on Exodus (PL 20, 865).

JOHN'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE FEASTS I

Passover to the appointed seasons

The one-year reading is not merely subtraction. Remove the extra annual Passover and John reveals an elegant progression through Israel's calendar.

JOHN	SEASON / FEAST	SIGNIFICANCE
2:13	PASSOVER	Temple; the ministry opens in Jerusalem
4:35	HARVEST LANGUAGE	Fields, sowing and reaping frame the mission
5:1	"A FEAST"	Unnamed by John - not called Passover

John 5 is the pivotal notice. The Evangelist could have written "Passover" - as he does elsewhere - but he does not. Some ancient interpreters identified this Feast with Pentecost/Shavuot rather than Passover, a placement that fits naturally between Passover and the autumn Feasts.

Whatever precise identification is chosen, the important point is textual: John himself leaves it unnamed. The chronology should not silently promote it into an annual Passover and then call the result "what John says."

**PASSOVER -> HARVEST -> AN UNNAMED FEAST.
THE STORY IS ALREADY MOVING THROUGH ISRAEL'S
APPOINTED SEASONS.**

The first half of the journey therefore carries the reader from the spring Passover into the world of sowing, reaping and Feast observance - exactly the world in which Yeshua's signs and teaching repeatedly take their meaning.

JOHN'S JOURNEY THROUGH THE FEASTS II

Tabernacles, Dedication, Passover

From the middle of the Gospel onward the Feast sequence becomes explicit and beautifully ordered.

JOHN	FEAST	SEASON
7:2	TABERNACLES	Autumn - Tishrei
10:22	DEDICATION	Winter - Kislev
11:55; 12:1	PASSOVER	Spring - Nisan

This sequence requires no hidden years. From the Passover near the beginning of the ministry, John can carry the reader through the intervening Feasts, into Tabernacles, then winter Dedication, and finally to the Passover of the Passion.

**PASSOVER -> FEAST / HARVEST -> TABERNACLES ->
DEDICATION -> PASSOVER**

That is the journey which first made the one-year harmony so compelling: not a ministry made smaller, but a ministry given shape. The Feasts are not chronological obstacles to be multiplied; they become the appointed stations through which the Lamb moves toward His hour.

Hort himself recognised the consequence of questioning "the Passover" at John 6:4: John's time notices could then be arranged within the year between the Passover of John 2 and the final Passover of John 11-12.

THE ACCEPTABLE YEAR OF THE LORD

The chronology and the proclamation meet

At Nazareth Yeshua opened Isaiah and announced the character of His mission: good news to the poor, healing, liberty, restoration - "to proclaim the Acceptable Year of the LORD." Then He said, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."

The phrase is rich with Jubilee and prophetic meaning. It need not be reduced to a stopwatch. But theology and chronology are not enemies. Clement explicitly heard chronological force in the words, and Gaudentius linked the year itself to the Lamb's Baptism and Passion.

Read as an annual harmony, the Gospel story acquires a remarkable unity: the Lamb is manifested at Jordan; the Acceptable Year is proclaimed; the signs and teachings unfold through Israel's agricultural and appointed seasons; the winter Feast of Dedication passes; and the Lamb turns toward Jerusalem for Passover.

**THE ACCEPTABLE YEAR IS NOT AN ARGUMENT ADDED
TO THE GOSPELS.
IT IS THE PROGRAMMATIC TEXT YESHUA HIMSELF
ANNOUNCES.**

This is why the one-year chronology is more than a technical dispute about John 6:4. It allows the reader to see a coherent theological architecture: the Year, the Feasts and the Lamb belong to one story.

The question is therefore positive as well as critical: which chronology best allows the words, seasons and types of Scripture to stand together without forcing an unnamed Feast into Passover?

Scripture: Isaiah 61:1-2; Luke 4:18-21.

EUSEBIUS AND THE HALF-WEEK

Where the explicit three-and-a-half-year formula appears

The modern reader often hears "three and a half years" as though the number were printed in a Gospel verse. It is not. By the early fourth century, however, Eusebius of Caesarea states the interpretive mechanism explicitly.

In *Demonstratio Evangelica* VIII he describes the period of Yeshua's teaching and miracles as "three-and-a-half years, which is half a week." He links the duration directly to Daniel 9 and then calls upon John's Feast notices to confirm the calculation.

**THE THREE-AND-A-HALF-YEAR FIGURE IS SUPPLIED BY
THE "HALF-WEEK";
JOHN IS THEN READ THROUGH THAT FRAMEWORK.**

This does not mean that Eusebius invented every longer chronology. It means that here, at last, the familiar formula stands before us in unmistakable form: three and a half years = half of Daniel's prophetic week.

That is exactly why the earlier evidence matters. Irenaeus's Passover count does not use John 6:4. Clement and Origen preserve a short ministry. Hort later questions "the Passover" on patristic grounds. The explicit Danielic formula appears after those witnesses, not before them.

The issue is therefore not whether Daniel 9 is inspired. It is whether Daniel's half-week was intended to supply the length of Yeshua's public ministry. The Gospels themselves never say so.

Source: Eusebius of Caesarea, *Demonstratio Evangelica* VIII.

THE CASE, SET SIDE BY SIDE

A challenge to test - not merely to inherit

THE GOSPELS: no Evangelist states a three-and-a-half-year ministry. John 5 says "a Feast," not Passover.

IRENÆUS: while refuting a one-year ministry, makes John 5 his second Passover, describes John 6, and still totals only three Passovers.

CLEMENT: places the Baptism in Tiberius's fifteenth year, says Yeshua had to preach "only a year," and records Passion datings in the sixteenth.

ORIGEN: says Yeshua taught "only during a year and some months."

HORT: after considering early patristic evidence, judged "the Passover" in John 6:4 "perhaps a primitive interpolation."

THE MANUSCRIPTS: no autograph survives; P66 is late-second/early-third century, P75 third century, and the great near-complete Gospel codices fourth century. The copies read by the second-century Fathers are lost.

THE PASSOVER TYPE: the Lamb is "of the first year"; Gaudentius explicitly connects that yearling Lamb with one year from Jordan to Passion.

JOHN'S FEASTS: without an extra Passover at John 6:4, they form a coherent journey from Passover through the appointed seasons to Tabernacles, Dedication and the final Passover.

**THE CASE IS CUMULATIVE.
READ THE TEXT. FOLLOW THE FEASTS. HEAR THE EARLY
WITNESSES.
AND BEHOLD THE LAMB.**

SELECTED SOURCES

Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* II.22; Clement, *Stromata* I.21; Origen, *De Principiis* IV.1.5; Gaudentius, *Tractate III on Exodus*; Eusebius, *Demonstratio Evangelica* VIII.

Westcott & Hort, *New Testament in the Original Greek*, Appendix, John 6:4, pp. 77-81; Willker, *Textual Commentary*, John 6:4; INTF GA 472; CSNTM P66/P75; John Rylands P52.

An Apology for the Three-and-a-Half-Year-Old Sheep

A little light relief - and one final serious question

The preceding pages have made the serious case. They have asked what the Gospels actually say, heard the early witnesses, considered the Lamb "of the first year," and followed the explicit three-and-a-half-year formula to Eusebius. Before we close, fairness requires that the traditional sheep be allowed an apology of his own. What follows is deliberately light-hearted and does not reopen every argument. It asks only two stubborn questions: where is the explicit biblical statement of a three-and-a-half-year ministry, and where is the explicit Christian witness to that claim before Eusebius? The humour is a tonic; the challenge at the end is sincere. If the verse or witness exists, bring it. If we have missed the evidence, we will gladly correct the record.

And so, after an Apology for the Lamb...

THE DEFENCE MAY CALL ITS SHEEP.

The parody begins on the following page. The final challenge is entirely sincere.

AN APOLOGY FOR THE THREE-AND-A-HALF- YEAR-OLD SHEEP

A Defence of the Surprisingly Mature Paschal Lamb

*"Age is merely
a number."*

— ANCIENT
SHEPHERD'S PROVERB

*"Who are we to
judge a sheep
by appearances?"*

— IRENAEUS
(PROBABLY)

*"With sufficient
ingenuity, almost
anything can be
made to fit
Daniel 9."*

— MODERN
INTERPRETER

*"He remained
theologically
one year old."*

— ANONYMOUS
COMMENTATOR



WARNING — THIS BOOKLET MAY SERIOUSLY DEFEND YOUR TRADITION!

EXTREMELY UNOFFICIAL EDITION

THE BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

We shall let you know if we find any.



There is no explicit biblical statement that the public ministry of Jesus lasted three and a half years, which is unfortunate for a chapter entitled The Biblical Evidence. Matthew does not say it, Mark does not say it, Luke does not say it, John does not say it, Jesus does not say it, and none of the apostles later remembers to mention it. We shall keep looking and will notify the reader immediately if such a verse turns up. For the moment the Biblical Evidence Department has no actual statement of three and a half years to report.

There is, however, interpretation of Scripture, and here Daniel 9 comes to our aid. Daniel contains a prophetic week; half of seven is three and a half; and at last our number has appeared. Eusebius will later identify that half-week with the ministry of Jesus, so we present Daniel 9 as our first - and at present only - biblical passage capable of supplying the required figure. Daniel himself never actually says, “Jesus will minister for three and a half years,” but it would be unreasonable to expect everything to be written down.

There is one administrative difficulty. Scripture knows perfectly well how to describe three and a half years - “time, times and half a time”, forty-two months, 1,260 days - but never uses any of those wonderfully precise expressions for the ministry of Jesus. Worse still, many commentators have already allocated Daniel’s half-week to the Antichrist and the end-time crisis. This seems rather greedy. We need it for Jesus. For now we have written “MINISTRY?” beside Daniel 9 in pencil and moved on.

EXTREMELY UNOFFICIAL EDITION

SUPPLEMENTARY EVIDENCE

FURTHER EXPLICIT BIBLICAL EVIDENCE FOR THE THREE-AND-A- HALF-YEAR MINISTRY



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Editors' note: This space is reserved for the verse. We asked artificial intelligence to search Scripture, searchable libraries, digitised Fathers, ancient fragments, modern scholarship and the darker corners of the internet. It returned Daniel 9, Eusebius and a great many people confidently quoting one another. We asked again. It returned Eusebius. The page remains available.

CHAPTER TWO

THE EARLY WITNESSES

If you know any, please let us know.



If Scripture will not state our chronology, surely the earliest Christians will. We therefore searched the first three centuries for a writer who plainly says that Jesus ministered for three and a half years. Not “more than a year”, not “about three years”, not a chronology from which somebody today might construct three and a half, but the actual familiar claim. We do not have one. If you do, please send the exact words and the exact source. We have left room.

Eventually matters improve. Eusebius, writing roughly three hundred years after Jesus, says that His teaching and miracles lasted “three-and-a-half years, which is half a week.” Three hundred years may sound slightly late when searching for an early witness, but it was still a very long time ago, and Eusebius was no lightweight: Bishop of Caesarea, prominent in Constantine’s imperial world, and commissioned by the emperor to arrange fifty copies of the Scriptures. So Eusebius carries considerable weight; in our present case, all of it actually.

The only awkward question is where Eusebius gets the figure. He takes us straight back to Daniel 9. Thus our biblical evidence is the interpretation of Daniel made explicit by Eusebius, while our first explicit historical witness is Eusebius making that interpretation. Admirably economical. We have now searched for the earlier witness to whom he might have appealed. If he is out there, he is keeping remarkably quiet.

EARLIER WITNESSES EXPLICITLY TEACHING THE FAMILIAR THREE- AND-A-HALF-YEAR MINISTRY



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Editors' note: Artificial intelligence has now been instructed, with machine-like patience and access to more searchable material than any exhausted editor could read in several lifetimes, to locate one explicit pre-Eusebian Christian witness who says that Jesus ministered for three and a half years. It keeps finding everything except the sentence we asked for. Then it finds Eusebius. We have told it to keep searching. It has found Eusebius again.

CHAPTER THREE

TRADITIONS OF MEN

At last - the evidence we can produce in abundance.



At last! Having searched Scripture for an explicit statement and the first three centuries for somebody willing to say exactly what we need, we arrive at evidence in magnificent abundance: Tradition. Not a verse, not an apostolic recollection, not an early witness to the actual three-and-a-half-year claim, but well over fifteen centuries of repetition. Surely that must count for something, mustn't it? It has to. It really, really has to, because otherwise Daniel and Eusebius are left holding the entire sheep between them.

Tradition improves wonderfully with age. An interpretation begins, "I think this passage means..." Another writer repeats it, a commentator cites him, a chronology enters a study Bible, and eventually a preacher announces, "As we all know, Jesus ministered for three and a half years." Nobody remembers learning it because everybody remembers knowing it. At that point an interpretation has achieved the highest promotion available to human tradition: it has become something that "the Bible says", although the Bible remains strangely modest about claiming authorship.

If an awkward reader asks for the verse, we may point to Daniel, then Eusebius, and finally to fifteen centuries of people who were evidently satisfied with Daniel and Eusebius. A large pile of books can look remarkably like a foundation if nobody inspects the bottom. Tradition itself is not the problem; trouble begins when it borrows Scripture's name badge. Surely our fathers could not have inherited an error? Jeremiah says, "Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity..." (Jeremiah 16:19), but in another context, so there is no need for negativity now. Tradition is no longer merely a leg to stand on; it is the only leg touching the floor. Fortunately our sheep has four.

CONCLUSION

IN A NUTSHELL



In a nutshell, Scripture never states that Jesus ministered for three and a half years. Daniel 9 can be interpreted to supply the number, although Daniel never calls the half-week the length of His ministry and a great many interpreters have already assigned the period elsewhere. We searched the earlier Christian witnesses for the explicit familiar claim and came back empty-handed. Then Eusebius arrives in the fourth century and, at last, says it - by means of Daniel.

But we inherited Tradition from our fathers, and our fathers are infallible, aren't they? They must be, or we might have to distinguish Scripture from what later generations confidently said about Scripture. We therefore rest upon Tradition, our great cornerstone and immovable foundation; or, to borrow a more suitable biblical image, the sand upon which we stand.

BEHOLD THE THREE-AND-A-HALF-YEAR-OLD SHEEP

No verse. No early witness. Fifteen centuries of confidence.

A SERIOUS AND OPEN CHALLENGE

RESCUE THE TRADITION



The joke ends here, but the challenge is exact and sincere. If there is an explicit biblical statement that the public ministry of Jesus lasted three and a half years, bring it. If there is a Christian witness before Eusebius who explicitly teaches that familiar three-and-a-half-year ministry, bring the words, the source and the date. If Daniel 9 itself establishes that duration rather than being interpreted that way, show the case from the text.

This is not a request for evidence of a ministry longer than one year, for a chronology someone can reconstruct today, or for another chain of later commentaries repeating the traditional figure. The blank page asks one narrow question: where is the explicit three-and-a-half-year witness before Eusebius? If we have missed him, correct us. We would rather amend the booklet than preserve a joke by ignoring evidence. A true tradition has nothing to fear from being tested.

So the invitation is made in love: bring the witness, bring the text, and rescue the tradition if it can be rescued. If the evidence warrants it, this booklet will be amended publicly and gladly. “Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.” - 1 Thessalonians 5:21. Until then, the blank page stays blank.

FINAL EDITOR'S NOTE

We should perhaps end with an apology. We are genuinely sorry that this defence of the three-and-a-half-year tradition has proved so disappointingly light in weight. Some readers may be left wondering how tradition has managed to triumph over truth. Nevertheless, we shall not give up. The Editors will continue searching diligently for more tradition - sorry, truth - and should an explicit biblical statement or a pre-Eusebian witness finally come to light, we promise to get back to you as soon as we can. Until then, we can only apologise for the inconvenience and thank you for your patience.

Only now do we reveal the culprits: YOVEL PUBLICATIONS.

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Contending for the faith once delivered to the saints - Jude 3

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**WARNING: THIS BOOKLET MAY SERIOUSLY
CHALLENGE YOUR TRADITION.**

HOW LONG WAS YESHUA'S MINISTRY?

For generations, Christians have been taught that Yeshua ministered for three and a half years. But no Gospel ever says so.

The familiar chronology depends heavily upon reading the unnamed **Feast of John 5** as Passover and upon the words "**the Passover**" at John 6:4.

Yet **Irenaeus**, while deliberately counting Passovers to oppose the one-year ministry, makes John 5 his second Passover, passes into John 6, and still counts only three. **Clement** speaks of Messiah preaching "only a year"; **Origen**, of "a year and some months." Later, **Hort** himself judged "the Passover" at John 6:4 "**perhaps a primitive interpolation.**"

HAVE WE INHERITED A GOSPEL CHRONOLOGY - OR A TRADITION?

*An Apology for the Lamb invites you to return to the text, follow the Feasts, hear the early witnesses, and look again at the **Acceptable Year of the LORD.***

AND BEHOLD THE LAMB OF GOD!



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