

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.

**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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