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James W Barker



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The Narrative Chronology of Tatian's Diatessaron

James W. Barker

Western Kentucky University, Department of Philosophy and Religion, 1906 College Heights Blvd., Bowling Green, KY 42101-1086 USA. Email: james.barker@wku.edu

Abstract: The Synoptics narrate a single Passover during Jesus' ministry, whereas John's Gospel spans three Passovers. The Diatessaron harmonised the Four Gospels, but previous scholarship has misapprehended Tatian's chronology of Jesus' ministry. The Diatessaron included all the Johannine festivals, but Tatian rearranged the order of events. Distinctively resolving a significant disagreement between John and the Synoptics, Tatian innovated a narrative sequence wherein Jesus' temple disruption occurs at the second of three Passovers.

Keywords: Tatian, Diatessaron, chronology, Gospel harmonies, Ephrem

1. Introduction

This article answers a fundamental question regarding the narrative chronology of Tatian's Diatessaron. According to the Synoptic chronology of Jesus' ministry, he made a single trip to Jerusalem, disrupted commerce in the temple and was crucified shortly after Passover. The Gospel of John narrates three Passovers; the first occasioned the temple disruption, and the last coincided with the passion. Extant witnesses to the Diatessaron unanimously split the difference, such that the temple incident occurred one year before the passion. Yet witnesses are divided concerning the duration of Jesus' ministry: the (eastern) Arabic harmony includes three Passovers;¹ the (eastern) commentary on the Diatessaron attributed to Ephrem mentions two Passovers;² and the (western) Codex Fuldensis along with [p. 289] the Stuttgart, Liège and Zurich harmonies reference two Passovers,³ albeit different ones than in Ephrem's commentary.

¹ A.-S. Marmardji, *Diatessaron de Tatien* (Beirut: Imprimerie Catholique Beyrouth, 1935); A. Ciasca, *Tatiani Evangeliorum harmoniae arabice* (Rome: Typographia Polyglotta, 1888); H. W. Hogg, 'The Diatessaron of Tatian', *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. IX (ed. Alan Menzies; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896) 33–138.

² L. Leloir, *Saint Éphrem: commentair de l'Évangile Ccncordant* (Chester Beatty Monographs 8; Dublin: Hodges Figgis & Co., 1963/Leuven: Peeters, 1990); C. McCarthy, *Saint Ephrem's Commentary on Tatian's Diatessaron* (JSS Suppl. 2; Oxford: Oxford University Press/ [p. 289] University of Manchester, 1993); C.

The key to this puzzle is found in fourth-century Syrian censures of Christian participation in Jewish holidays. I discern a redactional *Tendenz*, whereby Ephrem's commentary intentionally suppresses Jewish festivals. It is thus fallacious to argue that Tatian lacked references to certain feasts simply because they go unmentioned in Ephrem's commentary. Once Ephrem's supersessionism is accounted for, Tatian's own redactional tendencies become clearer. I demonstrate that Tatian included all the Jewish festivals from the Gospel of John, but Tatian reworked the Fourth Gospel's chronology, thereby exercising the prerogative of an evangelist in his own right.⁴

This study aligns with a broader trend in Diatessaron research. Scholars have long been preoccupied with the Diatessaron's wording. For example, after healing a man's leprosy, Jesus commands him to go and show himself to the priest. At this point Jesus adds either 'offer the gift which Moses commanded', or 'fulfil the Law'.⁵ Such inquiries remain important, but they often arrive at an impasse, since extant witnesses are divided. Moreover, Ulrich Schmid has argued compellingly that some consistently cited witnesses may be remotely related – or even unrelated – to Tatian.⁶ Accordingly, focus has shifted to narrative sequence.

Lange, *Ephraem der Syrer: Kommentar zum Diatessaron* (2 vols.; Fontes Christiani 54; Turnhout: Brepols, 2008).

³ E. Ranke, *Codex Fuldensis* (Marburg/Leipzig: N. G. Elwert, 1868); D. Plooi, *The Liège Diatessaron* (8 vols.; Amsterdam: Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1929–70); C. C. de Bruin, *Diatessaron Leodiense* (CSSN 1.1; Leiden: Brill, 1970). For the Stuttgart harmony, see J. Bergsma, *De Levens van Jezus in het Middlenederlandsch* (Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1895). For the Zurich harmony, see C. Gerhardt, *Diatessaron Theodiscum* (CSSN 1.4; Leiden: Brill, 1970).

⁴ On reading the Diatessaron as 'a gospel in its own right', see F. Watson, 'Towards a Redaction-Critical Reading of the Diatessaron Gospel', *Early Christianity* 7 (2016) 95–112, at 100.

⁵ W. L. Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron: Its Creation, Dissemination, Significance, and History in Scholarship* (VC Suppl. 25; Leiden: Brill, 1994) 22–4; cf. J. Joosten, 'Tatian's Sources and the Presentation of the Jewish Law in the Diatessaron', *The Gospel of Tatian: Exploring the Nature and Text of the Diatessaron* (ed. M. R. Crawford and N. J. Zola; The Reception of Jesus in the First Three Centuries 3; London: T&T Clark, 2019) 55–66, at 62.

⁶ U. B. Schmid, 'The Diatessaron of Tatian', *The Text of the New Testament in Contemporary Research: Essays on the Status Quaestionis* (ed. B. D. Ehrman and M. W. Holmes; NTTSD 42; Leiden: Brill, 2013) 115–42.

In a recent edited volume exhibiting the *status quaestionis* of Diatessaron studies, Matthew Crawford and Nicholas Zola state, ‘Evidence suggests that the macrolevel sequence of one pericope after another is likely to be more stable than the microlevel sequence of one word after another, since in the transmission of harmonies it takes a minor editorial intervention to rearrange the words within [p. 290] an episode but a major intervention to relocate an entire episode somewhere else in the narrative sequence.’⁷ They add that a better understanding of the Diatessaron’s order would illuminate ‘Tatian’s own editorial techniques and strategies’.⁸ This is a welcome return to the approach of F. C. Burkitt, who nearly a century ago prioritised the reconstruction of Tatian’s narrative sequence before drawing inferences regarding the Diatessaron’s wording.⁹

The Jewish festivals frame the Johannine narrative, so it is crucial to determine the extent to which they were featured in the Diatessaron. I begin by critiquing previous reconstructions by Theodor Zahn and Adolf von Harnack. Thereafter I demonstrate that Ephrem’s commentary suppresses feasts that were indeed present in the Diatessaron. Tatian is shown to have included all the festivals from John’s Gospel, most importantly the three Passovers. I conclude by elucidating Tatian’s redaction of the Jewish feasts, particularly his innovations at Sukkoth and the penultimate Passover.

2. Previous Reconstructions of the Diatessaron’s Chronology

Scholars have rarely attempted to reconstruct Tatian’s narrative chronology, and it has remained a puzzle because Ephrem’s commentary selectively omits temporal markers from the Gospel of John. When Jesus heals the disabled man from John 5 (*Comm. Diat.* 13.1–7), Ephrem fails to mention that Jesus was in Jerusalem for a festival. Ephrem later references a feast (ܦܫܚܐ) in the

[p. 290] ⁷ M. R. Crawford and N. J. Zola, ‘Introduction’, *The Gospel of Tatian: Exploring the Nature and Text of the Diatessaron*, 1–9, at 6. Elsewhere Crawford has profitably elucidated Tatian’s division of Jesus’ one Synoptic sermon at Nazareth into two separate events: ‘Rejection at Nazareth in the *Gospels of Mark, Matthew, Luke – and Tatian*’, *Connecting Gospels: Beyond the Canonical/Non-Canonical Divide* (ed. F. Watson and S. Parkhouse; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018) 97–124.

⁸ Crawford and Zola, ‘Introduction’, 7.

⁹ F. C. Burkitt, ‘Tatian’s Diatessaron and the Dutch Harmonies’, *JTS* 25 (1924) 113–30.

context of John 7 (*Comm. Diat.* 14.28), but he does not specify Sukkoth. Ephrem skips altogether the Hanukkah narrative from John 10.¹⁰ Yet Ephrem does mention two of John's three Passovers, one at the feeding of the five thousand (*Comm. Diat.* 12.6) and the other coinciding with the passion (*Comm. Diat.* 20.3). The presence and absence of Jewish festivals in Ephrem's commentary quintessentially exhibits the methodological uncertainty inherent in Diatessaron research: either Ephrem is following Tatian, who himself excluded Johannine chronological markers, or Ephrem is excluding references that Tatian actually included.

In the late nineteenth century, Zahn and Harnack each attempted to reconstruct the Diatessaron's narrative chronology. Harnack argued that Tatian used [p. 291] all the Johannine stories but rejected the overall Johannine chronology. Harnack strictly interpreted Ephrem's two explicit Passovers such that Jesus' ministry lasted one full calendar year in the Diatessaron.¹¹ Harnack added that the Diatessaron must have lacked the other Johannine chronological markers, because Ephrem would not have omitted them accidentally.¹²

Zahn similarly noted that Tatian's chronology is obscured because Ephrem does not comment on John's geographical and chronological transitions.¹³ Zahn nonetheless filled in the gaps and presumed Tatian to have included all the Jewish festivals, mostly mirroring the Johannine chronology.¹⁴ Zahn supposed that the Diatessaron referenced Passover early on, after the wedding at Cana (John 2.13),¹⁵ and he imaginatively placed the temple disruption at Hanukkah

¹⁰ I.e. *Comm. Diat.* 16.33 ends with a quotation from John 10.8, and Ephrem transitions to Lazarus (John 11.1) in *Comm. Diat.* 17.1, thereby skipping John's Hanukkah scene (10.22–41).

[p. 291] ¹¹ A. von Harnack, 'Tatian's Diatessaron und Marcion's Commentar zum Evangelium bei Ephraem Syrus', *ZKG* 4 (1881) 471–505, at 487; albeit differently from Harnack, S. Hemphill (*The Diatessaron of Tatian* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1888) xxx–xxxii n. 2) also claimed a one-year ministry, and I myself made this mistake in J. W. Barker, 'Ancient Compositional Practices and the Gospels: A Reassessment', *JBL* 135 (2016): 109–21, at 119.

¹² Harnack, 'Tatian's Diatessaron', 487.

¹³ T. Zahn, *Tatians Diatessaron* (Erlangen: Andreas Deichert, 1881) 250; see 249–62 for his reconstruction of Tatian's chronology.

¹⁴ Zahn, *Tatians Diatessaron*, 251.

¹⁵ Zahn, *Tatians Diatessaron*, 250.

rather than Passover.¹⁶ Zahn's Achilles heel is that his overall schema does not correspond to any extant witness to the Diatessaron.¹⁷ The same criticism applies to Harnack's minimalist chronology.

Even though extant witnesses disagree among themselves, the question is which one more likely represents Tatian's schema. And it is essential to recognise that Ephrem's commentary is far from comprehensive.¹⁸ For example, *Comm. Diat.* 5.18–19 transitions from the miraculous catch of fish in Luke 5.1–11 to the paralysed man in Capernaum.¹⁹ This resembles Luke's sequence but skips several pericopes in the Arabic harmony (6.5–7.10). Similarly, Ephrem's omission of the feeding of the four thousand does not mean that the Diatessaron lacked this story,²⁰ which is present in every extant harmony related to Tatian. This qualification equally applies to the Jewish festivals in the Gospel of John. The conflicting Diatessaron witnesses still need to be sorted out, but this process will be facilitated [p. 292] by scrutinising why Ephrem's commentary lacks so many chronological markers in the first place.

3. Ephrem's Suppression of Jewish Festivals

Two elements of Ephrem's commentary forestall reading a one-year, two-Passover ministry into the Diatessaron. One is that Ephrem explicitly references three years of Jesus' ministry (ܫܠܫ ܫܢܝܢ; *Comm. Diat.* 14.27). The other is Ephrem's thoroughgoing anti-Judaism. Just before Sukkoth, Tatian relates Luke's parable of the fig tree, which had not produced fruit in three years; the owner wants it cut down, but his gardener says to wait another year.²¹ Ephrem allegorises the fig tree as the synagogue, which was not uprooted until Jesus spent three years revealing himself to be the Jews'

¹⁶ Zahn, *Tatians Diatessaron*, 256–9.

¹⁷ J. H. Hill, *A Dissertation on the Gospel Commentary of S. Ephraem the Syrian* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1896) 171–7; Petersen (*Tatian's Diatessaron*, 122) curiously claimed that 'many connoisseurs regard (Zahn's) reconstruction as unsurpassed'.

¹⁸ Petersen, *Tatian's Diatessaron*, 135.

¹⁹ Matt 9.1–8 // Mark 2.1–12 // Luke 5.17–26.

²⁰ Contra R. H. Connolly, 'The Diatessaron in the Syriac Acts of John', *JTS* 8 (1907) 571–81, at 574; cf. Hemphill, *Diatessaron of Tatian*, 24.

[p. 292] ²¹ Luke 13.6–9; Arabic harmony 27.36–9; Fuldensis 103; Liège 141; Stuttgart/Zurich 130.

saviour (*Comm. Diat.* 14.26–7). Ephrem also knew the separate Gospels in addition to the Diatessaron,²² but Ephrem's references to Jesus' three-year ministry correspond more closely to the Arabic harmony than to any other extant Gospel or harmony. That is, hardly any events transpire before the first Johannine Passover, whereas nearly half of the gospel material from Jesus' ministry transpires before the first Passover in the Arabic harmony.

Harnack was correct that Ephrem generally omitted the Johannine chronological markers, and Harnack was correct that Ephrem did not omit them accidentally. Yet Harnack failed to imagine that Ephrem intentionally suppressed John's references to Jewish festivals. Christine Shepardson carefully contextualises Ephrem's anti-Judaism in fourth-century Syria.²³ His Paschal hymns are especially important, and the refrain of Hymn 19 goes, 'Praise to the Messiah who with his body abolished (ܐܘܟܠ) the unleavened bread of the [Jewish] people along with the people.'²⁴ The hymn also mentions that Jesus ate the Passover Seder but replaced it with the Eucharist: '(Jesus) himself ate unleavened bread: within the unleavened bread, his very body is for us an unleavened bread of truth. Right there marked the end: the symbol had run its course from the days of Moses until right there. But this evil people, which is pleased by our death, enticingly gives us death in the food' (Ephrem, *Azym.* 19.3–5). [p. 293]

According to Ephrem, if Christians now eat Jewish unleavened bread, it will kill them:

Do not take, my brothers, that unleavened bread from the people whose hands are defiled with the blood. For the blood of the Messiah mixes with, and remains in, the [Jewish] people's unleavened bread and our Eucharist. The one who gets (the blood of the Messiah) in the Eucharist gets a drug of life; the one who eats (the

²² M. R. Crawford, 'The Fourfold Gospel in the Writings of Ephrem the Syrian', *Hugoye* 18 (2015) 9–51.

²³ C. Shepardson, *Anti-Judaism and Christian Orthodoxy: Ephrem's Hymns in Fourth-Century Syria* (North American Patristics Society Patristics Monograph Series 20; Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2008) 62–7.

²⁴ Similarly, 'The Lord ate the Passover with his disciples; in himself, the bread that he broke, he abolished the unleavened bread' (Ephrem, *Azym.* 6.4). My translations of Ephrem's Paschal hymns are based on the Syriac text edited by E. Beck, *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Paschahymnen* (CSCO 248; Leuven: CSCO, 1964).

blood of the Messiah) with the [Jewish] people gets a drug of death. For that blood, which they cried that it be upon them, is itself mixed in their festivals and in their Sabbaths. And whoever joins with their feasts, it comes to him – even to him – the sprinkling of the blood. (Ephrem, *Azym.* 19.16, 23–6)

Thus Christians must ‘detest’ (ܐܘܘܪܐܘܢܐ, *Azym.* 19.11) and ‘flee’ (ܐܘܘܪܐܘܢܐ, *Azym.* 19.12, 28) the Jewish feasts.²⁵

Despite Ephrem’s disdain for Jewish feasts, the commentary does place the feeding of the five thousand near Passover, as in John 6.4. The commentary adds a supersessionist interpretation of the prophet Nahum.²⁶

Indeed for this reason the Lord himself did that miracle of the bread at the time of the feast of unleavened bread. The prophet said, ‘Judah, make your feasts’ (Nah 2.1aβ); indeed our feast came to her. ‘And complete your vows’ (Nah 2.1aβ); that is, the lamb of truth came to her and abolished (ܐܘܘܪܐܘܢܐ) the ancient vow and completed their commemoration. (*Comm. Diat.* 12.6)

Mentioning any Jewish feast is exceptional in Ephrem’s commentary, and it is no accident that this one is highlighted, for it is the only feast in the Gospel of John that Jesus does not attend in Jerusalem. Jesus makes pilgrimage every other time John names a festival, but this time Jesus opts out. Ephrem’s subtext is that Christians should emulate Jesus at Passover – not by eating abolished and deadly unleavened bread, but by desisting from Jewish rituals.

Opposition to Jewish praxis is a redactional *Tendenz* in Ephrem’s writing. Supersessionism explains why he repeatedly suppresses the names of Jewish festivals, which – as elucidated below

[p. 293]²⁵ Christians were participating in Jewish rituals in the late fourth and early fifth centuries (see D. Boyarin, *Border Lines: The Partition of Judaeo-Christianity* (Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religions; Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004) 202–25), and Ephrem’s admonishments resemble ones by John Chrysostom (*Adversus Judaeos*) as well as Jerome and Augustine (Augustine, *Ep.* 40, 75, 82). So even if, as Christian Lange argues (*Kommentar zum Diatessaron*, 1.53–5, 81–106), the Diatessaron commentary comes from a school associated with Ephrem rather than Ephrem himself, the same fourth-century Syrian concerns contextualise the text preserved in Chester Beatty MS 709.

²⁶ My translations of Ephrem’s commentary are based on Leloir’s edition of the Syriac text.

– Tatian undoubtedly included. In the Diatessaron, Jesus' ministry transpired during three calendar years, as [p. 294] Ephrem's commentary attests (14.26–7), and Ephrem's explicit reference to Passover at the feeding of the five thousand strongly corroborates the Arabic harmony's chronology.

Privileging the Arabic harmony in this way requires a methodological proviso regarding the distinction between sequence and wording. Quotations of the Diatessaron in the Syriac version of Ephrem's commentary are as close as we can get to Tatian's wording.²⁷ With respect to wording, the Arabic harmony is more distant, for its *Vorlagen* were conformed to the Peshitta over a long transmission history.²⁸ The western harmonies, even the Vulgatised Codex Fuldensis, thus remain strong witnesses to Tatian's wording. Their weakness pertains to narrative sequence. As Burkitt noted long ago, the western harmonies include the adulteress pericope (John 7.53–8.11), which does not appear in the Arabic harmony or Ephrem's commentary.²⁹ Moreover, the eastern witnesses include an early Lukan anointing,³⁰ along with a passion anointing that harmonises Matthew, Mark and John.³¹ The western harmonies streamline these into one anointing harmonising the Four Gospels just before the passion.³² A full comparison of the narrative chronologies of Diatessaron witnesses lies far beyond the scope of this short study. When it comes to the narrative sequence of Jewish festivals, though, I concur with Burkitt that 'it is the Arabic which is unaltered, and the Western texts that are peculiar'.³³

[p. 294]²⁷ For many of Ephrem's quotations, see L. Leloir, *Le témoignage d'Éphrem sur le Diatessaron* (CSCO 227; Leuven: CSCO, 1962).

²⁸ Nevertheless, as P. Joosse argues ('An Introduction to the Arabic Diatessaron', *OrChr* 83 (1999) 72–129, at 127), even when the Arabic harmony diverges from Ephrem's commentary due to the Peshitta's influence, the Arabic may still attest Tatian's text, so variants must be weighed case by case.

²⁹ Burkitt, 'Tatian's Diatessaron', 115. In all likelihood, the adulteress pericope was nowhere incorporated into the Gospel of John when Tatian composed the Diatessaron.

³⁰ Arabic harmony 14.45–15.11; Ephrem, *Comm. Diat.* 10.8; cf. Luke 7.36–50.

³¹ Arabic harmony 39.1–17; Ephrem, *Comm. Diat.* 17.11–13.

³² Fuldensis 138–9; Liège 186; Stuttgart/Zurich 183; Burkitt, 'Tatian's Diatessaron', 116.

³³ Burkitt, 'Tatian's Diatessaron', 114–15.

4. Tatian's Redaction of Jewish Festival Narratives

As shown in Table 1, the foremost Diatessaron witnesses agree almost entirely on the timing of Jewish festivals. The lone difference is that the eastern witnesses include the Passover reference at the feeding of the five thousand,³⁴ but the western witnesses exclude it.³⁵ Since the Arabic harmony and Ephrem's commentary independently attest John 6.4, there is no reasonable doubt that it [p. 295]

Table 1: Comparative Chronologies of John's Gospel and Diatessaron Witnesses		
<u>Gospel of John</u>	<u>Arabic harmony</u>	<u>Fuldensis, Liège, Stuttgart, Zurich</u>
Passover 1 of 3: Temple Disruption (ch. 2)	Passover 1 of 3: Feeding the 5000 (A18)	Feeding the 5000: Passover goes unmentioned. (F81, L100, S/Z96)
Unnamed Festival (ch. 5)	Unnamed Festival (A22)	Unnamed Festival (F89, L116, S/Z110)
Passover 2 of 3: Feeding the 5000 (ch. 6)	Sukkoth (A28)	Sukkoth (F105, L142, S/Z132)
Sukkoth (ch. 7)	Passover 2 of 3: Temple Disruption (A30)	Passover 1 of 2: Temple Disruption (F118, L153, S/Z150)
Hanukkah (ch. 10)	Hanukkah (A37)	Hanukkah (F135, L182, S/Z178)
Passover 3 of 3: Passion (ch. 12)	Passover 3 of 3: Passion (A39)	Passover 2 of 2: Passion (F136, L/S/Z185)

stood in the Diatessaron. Accordingly, the Diatessaron included all the festivals from the Gospel of John, but Tatian reordered them.

John 6–12 neatly proceeds through a calendar year, with Passover in the Spring (ch. 6), Sukkoth in the Fall (ch. 7), Hanukkah in the Winter (ch. 10) and Passover in the Spring (ch. 12). Tatian disrupted the Johannine sequence. He did not mention Passover after the wedding at Cana.³⁶ Instead, the Diatessaron's first Passover of Jesus's ministry coincided with the feeding of

³⁴ Ephrem, *Comm. Diat.* 12.6; Arabic harmony 18.25.

³⁵ Fuldensis 81; Liège 100; Stuttgart/Zurich 96.

[p. 295] ³⁶ Contra Zahn, *Tatians Diatessaron*, 251–2.

the five thousand, which preceded the unnamed festival in John 5. Additionally, Tatian inserted a Passover between Sukkoth and Hanukkah. In other words, two or three months pass between John 7 and 10, but fourteen or fifteen months pass between Arabic harmony 28 and 37 or Fuldensis 105 and 135.

Whereas all of John 7.2–10.21 transpires at the Feast of Tabernacles in the Fourth Gospel, only the material in John 7.2–31 relates to Sukkoth in the Diatessaron.³⁷ After John 7.31, Tatian gathers disparate Synoptic episodes concerning money. First, a man asks Jesus to tell his brother to divide the inheritance, but Jesus replies with the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12.13–21).³⁸ Second, the rich young ruler asks Jesus how to gain eternal life, and Jesus posits eternal rewards for leaving everything and following him (Matt 19.16–30 // [p. 296] Mark 10.17–31 // Luke 18.18–30).³⁹ Third, Jesus tells the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16.19–31).⁴⁰ Finally, Jesus tells the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matt 20.1–16).⁴¹ None of this Synoptic material was set in Jerusalem, so Tatian freely redacted his sources, and he clearly clustered material thematically.

In the Diatessaron, sometime after Sukkoth Jesus heals ten people with leprosy (Luke 17.11–19) while travelling to Jerusalem for the Feast of Unleavened Bread.⁴² When Jesus arrives, he disrupts the commerce in the temple,⁴³ and soon thereafter he dialogues with the Pharisee Nicodemus (John 3.1–21).⁴⁴ Tatian also narrates several Synoptic controversies during this Passover, a year before the crucifixion. These include the Pharisees' and Herodians' question

³⁷ Arabic harmony 28.1–32; Fuldensis 105; Liège 142–3; Stuttgart/Zurich 132–3.

³⁸ Arabic harmony 28.33–41; Fuldensis 106; Liège 144; Stuttgart/Zurich 134.

[p. 296] ³⁹ Ephrem, *Comm. Diat.* 15.1–11; Arabic harmony 28.42–29.11; Fuldensis 107; Liège 145–6; Stuttgart/Zurich 135–6.

⁴⁰ Ephrem, *Comm. Diat.* 15.12–13; Arabic harmony 29.12–26; Fuldensis 108; Liège 147; Stuttgart/Zurich 137. At this point the western witnesses include Jesus' parable of the shrewd steward (Fuldensis 109; Liège 148–9; Zurich 138–9; cf. Luke 16.1–12), which occurs elsewhere in the Arabic harmony (26.34–45).

⁴¹ Ephrem, *Comm. Diat.* 15.14–17; Arabic harmony 29.27–42; Fuldensis 110; Liège 150; Stuttgart/Zurich 140.

⁴² Arabic harmony 30.31; Fuldensis 112; Liège 153; Stuttgart/Zurich 143.

⁴³ Ephrem, *Comm. Diat.* 15.23; Arabic harmony 32; Fuldensis 118; Liège 159; Stuttgart/Zurich 150; cf. Matt 21.12–13 // Mark 11.15–17 // Luke 19.45–6 // John 2.13–17.

⁴⁴ Ephrem, *Comm. Diat.* 16.11–15; Arabic harmony 32.27–47; Fuldensis 120; Liège 163; Stuttgart/Zurich 154–5.

about paying taxes to Caesar and the Sadducees' question about the resurrection,⁴⁵ as well as the scribe's question about the greatest commandment and the parable of the good Samaritan.⁴⁶

Here Tatian clusters thematically similar statements from Mark 12.34, Luke 19.47–8 and John 7.31–2. After the parable of the good Samaritan, Tatian tacks on Mark's conclusion to the greatest commandment, 'And no one dared to ask him anything' (12.34).⁴⁷ Then Tatian picks up Luke's conclusion to the temple disruption: Jesus taught daily at the temple, and the chief priests, scribes and leaders of the people were trying to destroy him, but the people hung on Jesus' every word (19.47–8).⁴⁸ At this point, the Diatessaron relocates leftover Sukkoth material to Passover, beginning with John 7.31–3, wherein the crowds believe Jesus to be the Messiah and the chief priests and Pharisees unsuccessfully attempt to arrest Jesus.⁴⁹ Although these snippets come from different settings and different [p. 297] Gospels, the three summary statements cohere thematically. In each instance, Jesus outdoes his opponents and frustrates their plots against him.

John 7.31–2 thus fits perfectly at this point of Tatian's narrative. Chronologically, though, it is crucial to recognise that in the Diatessaron the ensuing 'last day of the great festival' from John 7.37 (e.g. Arabic harmony 35.1; Fuldensis 130) refers to Tatian's intercalated Passover, one year before the passion. Although readers of John's Gospel readily associate the phrase with Sukkoth, Tatian's Gospel engenders new meaning by liberally reworking source material.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Ephrem, *Comm. Diat.* 16.21–2; Arabic harmony 34.1–24; Fuldensis 127–8; Liège 171–2; Stuttgart/Zurich 163–4; cf. Matt 22.15–33 // Mark 12.13–27 // Luke 20.20–40.

⁴⁶ Ephrem, *Comm. Diat.* 16.23–4; Arabic harmony 34.25–45; Fuldensis 129; Liège 173; Stuttgart/Zurich 165; cf. Matt 22.34–40 // Mark 12.28–34 // Luke 10.25–37.

⁴⁷ Arabic harmony 34.45; Fuldensis 129; Liège 173; Stuttgart/Zurich 165.

⁴⁸ Arabic harmony 34.46–7; Fuldensis 130; Liège 174; Stuttgart/Zurich 166.

⁴⁹ Arabic harmony 34.49–50; Fuldensis 130; Liège 174; Stuttgart/Zurich 167.

[p. 297] ⁵⁰ N. J. Zola ('Evangelizing Tatian: The *Diatessaron's* Place in the Emergence of the Fourfold Gospel Canon', *PRSt* 43 (2016) 399–414, at 408) mistakenly claims that Tatian placed 'Jesus's clearing of the temple ... not at the Passover but at the Feast of Tabernacles (from John 7), in a sequence that exists in exactly none of the four Gospels'. On the contrary, the upcoming Passover (Arabic harmony 30.31; Fuldensis 112; Liège 153; Stuttgart/Zurich 143) was the antecedent for 'the last day of the great festival' (Arabic harmony 35.1; Fuldensis 130; Liège 173; Stuttgart/Zurich 167; cf. John 7.37). For Tatian's creation of new meanings by juxtaposing material from different sources, see Watson, 'Towards a Redaction-Critical Reading', 111.

Another intention behind Tatian's redaction is to eliminate the gap between Nicodemus' two scenes with speaking parts. As the Diatessaron proceeds with its transposed Sukkoth material, Nicodemus, 'who came to him earlier' (John 7.50), intervenes when Jesus is nearly arrested. In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus' night-time dialogue with Nicodemus predates the Sukkoth intervention by approximately a year and a half. In the Diatessaron, however, Nicodemus advocates for Jesus within days of their initial conversation during Passover.

The most noteworthy aspect of Tatian's chronology is how he mitigates one of the sharpest differences between John and the Synoptics. In the Synoptics, Jesus' disruption of temple commerce precipitates the passion, whereas the Johannine temple incident occurred two years prior. Tatian had multiple choices for harmonising the two events: (a) use only the initial Johannine disruption; (b) use only the ultimate Synoptic incident; (c) use both temple incidents in their respective places. Augustine (*Cons.* 2.129) argued that Jesus disrupted the temple commerce on separate occasions, and this is how Tatian himself resolved the earlier and later anointing stories. For the temple incident, however, Tatian chose (d) none of the above. The Diatessaron narrates one temple disruption neither two years before the passion, nor coinciding with it, but rather one year before the crucifixion. The narrative effect is to prolong the tension between Jesus and his opponents in Jerusalem. Tatian also asserts his authorial prerogative to rework his source material however he sees fit.

In conclusion, minimalist reconstructions of the Diatessaron's narrative chronology are inaccurate, since Ephrem suppressed Johannine references to Jewish feasts. For the sequence of feasts during Jesus' ministry, the Arabic [p. 298] harmony offers the single best witness to the Diatessaron. It included all of John's festivals, but Tatian freely rearranged what happened when and where. Thus scholars should not presume episodes to be misplaced simply because they are relocated in the Diatessaron, for Tatian's sources likewise disagreed among themselves. Reconstructing the Diatessaron's narrative sequence proves to be a promising means of discerning Tatian's redactional tendencies. Thematic grouping clearly emerges as one, since the Diatessaron clusters similar statements and characters. Much work remains to be done to sort out the divergent narrative sequences of harmonies related to the Diatessaron, but solving the fundamental question of the duration of Jesus' ministry establishes a useful starting point.