

Stage III. The Early Judean Ministry

D. Jesus Continues to Make Disciples in Judea

1. Jesus' Four Months of Disciple-making in Judea (#041)

JN 3.22-24 4.1-2

22 After the Passover, Jesus and his disciples went out into the Judean countryside, where he was spending time with them, and continuing to immerse.

23 Now John also was immersing at Aenon near Salim, because there was plenty of water, and people were still coming to him and being immersed. 24 (This was before John was put in prison.)

4.1 Now Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that he was gaining and immersing more disciples than John-- 2 although in fact it was not Jesus who immersed, but his disciples.

NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = ^{MT}, Mark = ^M, Luke = ^L, John = ^J, Acts = ^A. This "superscript ID" is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *the words of Jesus are italicized in red*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

	CONTEXT DIGEST
Location	The Judean countryside, west of the Jordan
Timeline	April to July, 30 AD (Months Three to Six)
Jesus' Life Context	Stage III: The Early Judean Ministry
	D. Jesus Continues to Make Disciples in Judea
Title	I. An Overview of Jesus' Four Months of Disciple-Making in Judea

COMMENT:

These brief verses describe Jesus' ministry in the Judean countryside, on the west side of the Jordan river, from April (after the Passover) through late July or mid-August. Jesus continued to focus on ministry to individuals. He worked in close association and proximity with John the Baptizer during these months, who constantly directed a stream of seekers to Jesus.

We can see the growing influence of Jesus' ministry during this period by the fact that Jesus was ***"gaining and immersing more disciples than John."*** (4.1) The process of multiplication that we noted during the first glorious week of disciple-making was continuing to expand, in spite of the fact that Jesus was ministering in an obscure location. If you imagine constant repetition of the kind of scenes that John described during "the first glorious week," you can get a good feel for what was happening during these four months of ministry.

We should note that John does not mention any miracles during these days. That does not mean that none occurred--but it does suggest that healing ministry was not a major feature of Jesus' work during this time, as it

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was during the Galilean ministry later on. Personal evangelism and discipleship training consumed Jesus' time in the countryside of Judea. We will look now at the way Jesus pursued these two inter-related disciple-making disciplines.

Jesus loved everybody impartially and unconditionally; therefore He sought to witness to each person—individually. He was “*sent from the Father*” as His Witness, so Jesus took His lead position on the “WE” Witness Team seriously indeed. John shows us that Jesus engaged anybody, and everybody He could in personal witnessing. Jesus was approachable by anybody. He received sinners of any kind. If you came to Jesus you knew He would welcome you into His fellowship. So seekers (like Nicodemus) sought him out.

Not only was Jesus zealous in personal evangelism, He was creative. Every witness, to every individual, was different. No canned witnessing outline here. He never whipped out His own version of the “Four Spiritual Laws” and let fly with it. Because every person is a unique individual—His own one-of-a-kind creation—Jesus communicated the gospel to each person in the most appropriate way for them.

This does not mean it is wrong for us to use a consistent gospel summary, or tract when we witness. Witnessing tools, and key Scripture passages are fine. The important thing is that we genuinely relate in love to each individual we witness to, seeking to understand his or her own unique life story, because they are a priceless creation of our Lord. It is about our attitude, not just dispensing information.

Jesus' commitment to personal evangelism meant He sowed a lot of seed. John ends his description of this period of ministry with Jesus saying: “**Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields that are ripe for harvest.**” 4:35B How abundant was this harvest?

John 3:22-4:1 points out that Jesus was converting more people to faith in Himself as Messiah than John the Immerser. This is no small statement. John was a mighty preacher, and throngs of people from all over the Holy Land were coming to hear him daily. Jesus reached more people through His personal evangelism than a powerful preacher converted by speaking to large crowds. That is why John 3:22 says that Jesus “**continued to immerse**” more than John (see 4:1)

So there was a stream of new believers who were receiving immersion as a witness to their new-found faith in Jesus. What did Jesus then do with these new believers? John wrote that Jesus was “**spending time with his disciples.**” Let's dig a bit deeper into what this deceptively simple description actually involves.

Remember that John began his portrayal of Jesus' Early Judean ministry with a day-by-day account of what we have called “the first glorious week.” The very first two disciples to believe in Jesus did so because He promised them: “**come (stay with me), and you will see (who I am).**”

During the roughly 6 hours these two spent with Jesus they came to faith in Him, and then continued to “**abide,**” or “**remain**” with Him. This first example established fellowship with Jesus—spending time with Him—as the basic principle of His discipleship method. John used a tense that described continuous action when he portrayed the four months in Judea: “**Jesus was spending time with them.**” It was an ongoing process; a daily way of life for him, and them.

About a year later, when Jesus selected the Twelve Apostles in Galilee, Mark wrote: “**And He appointed twelve, so that they might continue to be with Him, and that He might send them out to preach.**” 3:14 These Apostles spent a few weeks preaching during the ensuing 18 months; they spent 10 to 15 hours every day in the company of Jesus. Spending time with Jesus was still the most basic principle of relationship of discipleship.

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To top it all off, Jesus ended His ministry in the flesh with anew command for his disciples: **“Abide in me--make your home permanently in my Presence and love.”** Jn 15.1-16 Jesus was commanding the “*spend time with me*” lifestyle as the normal way of life for every future disciple, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

What began in Judea with the first believers is a pictures the essence of a believer’s relationship with Him, forever. In fact, Jesus warned: **“Apart from Me you can nothing.”** JN 15.6 Without consciously making our Home in His Presence through His Spirit by depending ceaselessly upon him, it is impossible to do anything else in our relationship with him.

The ability to “*spend time with Jesus*” was limited by His physical presence in the days of His flesh. But now the barriers of space and time have been smashed by His Spirit’s eternal indwelling with us, so that any believer today can make their home in His constant Presence, in unbroken fellowship. This is what John was pointing to with His cryptic description of the way Jesus made a priority of communing with His disciples during those months in the Judean hill country.

The Christian life is essentially hanging out with Jesus, making our home constantly in His Presence and learning of Him. We do this with the attitude of an obedient slave, and a hungry learner. His Word and Spirit make this possible. Both are equally necessary for abiding in His Presence. It is Jesus’ discipleship plan to make us like Himself by the power of His living, radiant Personality making His mark on us, and therefore changing us over time.

We “abide” in the presence of the greatest personal evangelist that ever lived. To the degree that he transforms us to become like him, we will become lifestyle personal evangelists in his image. We will witness incessantly--not because it is our obligation to do so--but because we cannot stop praising him for the sheer goodness and greatness of everything we have seen and heard in his presence. HE has enrolled each of us as members of HIS Witness Team.

Jesus’ example of personal evangelism, and bringing new believers into his constant presence in the Early Judean Ministry matter. So does his example of immersing new believers. Please access [the pdf notes](#) that describe the way Jesus practiced immersion. It too is an important example to ignore.

APPLICATION:

Some scholars call the "Early Judean Ministry" the "Year of Obscurity." It’s true that we have less gospel content about this period than any other in Jesus' ministry years. "Obscure" is an appropriate term.

At the same time, Jesus laid a solid foundation in Judea for the explosive growth that characterized his ministry in Galilee. Personal evangelism and discipleship training continued to be the solid ground that supported later mass evangelism and extensive healing/exorcism work in Galilee. As a carpenter/stone mason, Jesus was a master builder. He laid the perfect foundation for his work as Messiah during his months in the Judean countryside.

Abiding in Jesus’ intimate presence, and personal evangelism are the common foundation for every believer's ministry today. Nothing has changed. We each have varying spiritual gifts and ministries, but we all share alike in our calling to live in God’s presence, and to witness.

What are your specific plans for these disciplines? What do you need to adjust in order to follow Jesus' example more fully? Who can you discuss this with? When will you begin?