

5. Coincidences around the Last Passover

5.1 The Entry into Jerusalem ****

Matthew 21:1-9, Mark 11:1-10 and Luke 19:29-40 contain accounts of the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem five days before the Passover. This is also referred to in less detail in John 12:14-19.

One detail appears in Matthew 21:8 and to a lesser extent in Mark 11:8:-

And a great crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. (Matthew 21:8)

And many spread their cloaks on the road, and others spread leafy branches that they had cut from the fields. (Mark 11:8)

It is the fact that a large number of people was present to see Jesus enter Jerusalem that is of interest. The Greek here is: πλειστος ὄχλος “A multitudinous crowd”, although some modern translations seem to prefer the rather less accurate “many within the crowd”. The point, however, is that a large number of people was present to watch Jesus enter Jerusalem. This detail is incidental to the story but forms the basis of the coincidence.

This detail is picked up by Matthew, who was there, and to a lesser extent by Mark, who lived in Jerusalem but may not have been present. Luke, who was not there, was much more vague about those who watched Jesus enter Jerusalem.

John (who was also present) also mentions the large crowd:-

The next day the large crowd that had come to the feast heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem. (John 12:12)

This Gospel is as emphatic as Matthew that the crowd was a large one. It also explains why so many people were gathered to see Jesus enter Jerusalem:-

17 The crowd that had been with him when he called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead continued to bear witness.

18 The reason why the crowd went to meet him was that they heard he had done this sign. (John 12:17,18)

A vast number of people came to witness the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem because they knew about the raising of Lazarus and wished to see someone who was able to raise the dead.

This is a twofold coincidence. First, the number of people in the crowd forced itself into the memory of the two definite eyewitnesses, and Mark who was in the city and would have heard of the event also included it. Luke, who did not arrive in Jerusalem until about 30 years afterwards, knew the topography of the area very well, but did not understand the size of the crowd. The reason given in John explains why so many people were present.

Comment: This coincidence involves a minor detail in Matthew concerning Jesus' entry into Jerusalem which is explained by John's account. It thus qualifies as an undesigned coincidence. The coincidence, however, assumes that the raising of Lazarus happened. It therefore attests to a miracle, the raising of someone from the dead after four days. This coincidence can be rated “Strong”.

Source: JCT

5.2 Days to the Passover ****

The arrival of Jesus at Bethany at the start of the last week before the crucifixion is described in John 12:1. Jesus arrives and is given supper (Greek δείπνον [*deipnon*] - the evening meal - John 12:2), which shows that this is the end of the day. John 12:1 tells us that this was six days before the Passover.

Jesus entered Jerusalem the next day, the incident when he rode a donkey and was greeted by crowds with palm branches. This event is described in John 12:12ff; it is also described in Mark 11:1ff. This begins with the disciples in Bethany being sent to Bethphage for a donkey; Jesus enters Jerusalem, goes into the Temple and returns to Bethany in the evening (Mark 11:11). This is five days before the Passover.

The next day is four days before the Passover. Jesus again enters Jerusalem (Mark 11:12-14), and on this occasion he curses the fruitless fig-tree. He cleanses the Temple and in v19 he leaves the city, presumably to return to Bethany.

The following day, three days before the Passover, is described in Mark 11:20 to Mark 13. On the way into Jerusalem the disciples follow the same route and notice the now-withered fig tree (Mark 11:20). There follows a lengthy discussion in the Temple, which ends when Jesus and the disciples leave in Mark 13:1 and go onto the Mount of Olives (which is where Bethany was).

The next day is described in Mark 14:1 as being “Two days before the Passover”. This exactly matches the chronology worked out above, beginning with John 12:1.

Comment: This coincidence is about the match of the two chronologies. The two accounts are clearly independent; a considerable amount of digging has to be done before the chronology of Mark is worked out. In spite of this the timing matches exactly. This is clearly a strong coincidence.

Source: Blunt p 294

5.3 Jesus and Bethany ****

The account of the week before the crucifixion includes several references to Bethany. Some of these references are direct and others are indirect. These passages indicate that Jesus when Jesus went to Jerusalem he tended to stay in Bethany at night.

- John 11 contains the account of the raising of Lazarus. This is at the start of the week. The event establishes a connection between Jesus and the family of Mary, Martha and Lazarus at Bethany.
- Mark 11:11 - “And when he had looked around at everything, as it was already late, he went out to Bethany with the twelve.” This suggests that Jesus had made arrangements to stay in Bethany.
- Mark 11:19 - “And when evening came they went out of the city.” This verse confirms that Jesus did not spend the nights inside Jerusalem. He left the city in the evening to spend the night. As he had friends in Bethany, only a short distance from Jerusalem and had spent the previous night there it is likely that he continued to do so.

- Luke 21:37 - “And every day he was teaching in the temple, but at night he went out and lodged on the mount called Olivet.” This verse confirms that Jesus did not sleep in the city at night, but that he left in the evening to return in the morning. Bethany, of course, is on the Mount of Olives (See Luke 24:50 and Acts 1:10-12 which refer to the same event) and not very far from Jerusalem.
- Luke 22:39 - “And he came out and went, as was his custom, to the Mount of Olives, and the disciples followed him.” This is a reference to the Garden of Gethsemane, also on the Mount of Olives. On this occasion Jesus was arrested before he could return to Bethany, but on other occasions he would continue. It is highly unlikely that Jesus and the disciples would sleep in the open when they had a household of friends nearby.

This picture would be a minor undesigned coincidences on its own. The fact that Jesus and the disciples spent every night in Bethany is deduced from the text; it is not an explicit fact. However, there is more.

In Luke 10:38,39 we read that Jesus taught in the house of Martha and Mary.

38 Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house.

39 And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet and listened to his teaching.
(Luke 10:38,39)

These verses identify the house as belonging to Martha and Mary, but don’t name Bethany. This is one of the visits to Jerusalem that one can infer from Luke’s account but which doesn’t appear explicitly in Luke’s Gospel.

This shows that Jesus already had a connection with the household at Bethany before the last week. This connection surfaces in John 11.

1 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.

3 So the sisters sent to him, saying, “Lord, he whom you love is ill.”

(John 11:1,3)

Mary and Martha are able to send a message to Jesus to say that Lazarus is ill. This would mean that they would have had to know Jesus and to know where he was, which is evidence of a connection between Jesus and the family in Bethany.

The other reference is an oblique one in John 8 -

but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. (John 8:1)

This is the occasion where Jesus has an altercation with the Jewish authorities. At the end of their discussion of what to do about Jesus the authorities go to their homes in Jerusalem while Jesus goes off to the Mount of Olives. The next morning he returns to Jerusalem and teaches in the Temple, during which there is the episode of the woman taken in adultery (John 8:2-11). The suggestion is that Jesus’ habit of sleeping in the house at Bethany was already established by this time.

This section (John 7:55 - 8:11) is omitted from some early manuscripts, but the fact that it is involved in an undesigned coincidence suggests that it was part of the original text.

Comment: The part of the coincidence in the last week would merit the grade “Significant” or “Strong” on its own. It depends on various details such as the fact that Bethany is on the Mount of Olives and is not written consistently in any single Gospel.

When one adds to this the further pictures of prior knowledge of Jesus on the part of Martha and Mary (John 11:3) which appear only in John and the first arrival of Jesus at this household (Luke 10:38ff) which appears only in Luke the coincidence is strengthened and should definitely be awarded the grade “Strong”.

The connection with the controversial passage in John 8 is useful because it helps to establish the bona-fides of this passage.

Source: JCT

5.4 John in Jerusalem ****

The Gospel of John gives several indications that John the disciple (and writer of the Gospel) was a frequent visitor to Jerusalem and had some small regular lodging there. There are four elements to this evidence:-

- 1 John is the only evangelist to record regular visits of Jesus to Jerusalem in any detail before the final Passover. This indicates that John knew Jerusalem and was a witness to events in Jerusalem.
- 2 John 18:15 records that John was known to the high priest, and implies that he was well known in the High Priest’s household.
- 3 In John 19:26,27 Jesus commends his mother, Mary, to the care of John. John is able to look after her and we read that he took her to his house “from that hour” (v27). This implies that John had a lodging to which she could be taken, and that this was not far from the site of the Crucifixion.
- 4 After the disciples Peter and John had been to the tomb of Jesus and found it empty they returned to different homes. It seems that Peter was staying in the house of the last supper; John must have had a different house. Presumably he was staying there to look after Mary.

The existence of a house belonging to (or leased by) John in Jerusalem is also implied by Acts 1:13,14. Here we find that the disciples stayed in the upper room, but that the family of Jesus stayed elsewhere. This means that there was another lodging place. However, it must have been small or it would have been possible to hold the last supper there. It is difficult to account for a second small dwelling in Jerusalem associated with the disciples before Pentecost unless it was already owned by one of the disciples.

Comment: There is never any explicit mention of John's Jerusalem home in any of the Gospels. Its existence is hinted at several times and is virtually certain, but one has to work to find details. This is therefore a well hidden coincidence. It also fits several details together very well. It can be rated "Strong"

Source: JCT

5.5 The Servant of the High Priest ***

John the disciple was apparently a frequent visitor to Jerusalem, and was known in the High Priest's household. This is stated explicitly in John's Gospel, where John is described as "another disciple":

Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the court of the high priest, (John 18:15)

Not only was John well enough known by the High Priest's household to be admitted at a time of considerable crisis, but he was able to arrange for a complete stranger (Simon Peter) to be admitted as well (v16). This means that there must have been considerable familiarity between John and the High Priest's servants.

All four Gospels record that as Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane one of the disciples sprang forward and swung a sword, managing to sever the ear of one of the High Priest's servants. Matthew, Mark and Luke do not identify the servant, but John's Gospel does:-

Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) (John 18:10)

compare:

And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. (Luke 22:50 - see also Matthew 26:51 and Mark 14:47)

It is noticeable that it is the disciple who was familiar with the High Priest's household who recognised the servant and recorded his name. The other disciples did not know the servant and did not distinguish him from others present at the time.

Jesus was then taken to the House of the High Priest, where he was followed by John and Peter. In the house of the High Priest Peter was recognised by at least two of the servants present. One of these occasions is described by John as follows:-

One of the servants of the high priest, a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off, asked, "Did I not see you in the garden with him?" (John 18:26)

Again, it is only John's Gospel in which the servant is identified. Not only this, but John knows that this servant is a relative of the servant whose ear was cut off and healed. Accurate knowledge of the High Priest's household comes only from the one disciple who had access to that household.

Comment: This is another significant coincidence. It contains a strong connection between John's Gospel and John the Apostle, and it looks very carefully at significant details. There are two reasons that it is not classified as Strong. The first of these is that the synoptic Gospels don't mention the name of Peter either, although it is quite clear that they knew his name. The second is that to really appreciate the coincidence it is necessary to spend time showing that the other disciple is, in fact, John; this would require a document of considerable length and is outside the scope of this study.

Source: Blunt p301

5.6 Peter and the High Priest's Maid ****

In Matthew 26:71 Peter, having spent some time in the courtyard of the High Priest's house during the examination of Jesus is accused of being a follower of Jesus by a maid.

And when he went out to the entrance (Greek πυλών - pylon = gateway), another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth."
(Matthew 26:71)

This maid is in the gate of the High Priest's house. As Peter has been some time in the courtyard and has not been recognised so far, this leaves one to wonder why he should be recognised by a maid. The conditions would be fairly turbulent as there were additional crowds present and attention was being distracted by the examination of Jesus which was going on at the time.

The explanation comes in John 18:16 where Peter is introduced to a maid at the gate by John.

but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in. (John 18:16)

The fact that Peter was introduced to the maid by John would draw her attention to Peter and might also indicate that Peter was a Galilean. If the maid knew John well it might even arouse suspicion that Peter was a disciple of Jesus like his friend. The maid at the door may have been the doorkeeper herself, or the doorkeeper might have spoken to another maid about Peter, but either way the doorkeeper could not leave the gate and so the event would have had to have taken place near the gateway.

Comment: This is a significant coincidence if one simply considers that the maid recognised Peter because she had been introduced to him by John. When one adds to this the fact that the exchange took place at or near the gateway to the house the rating of the coincidence becomes "Strong".

Source: Blunt p277

5.7 Doorkeeping Maids ***

The account of the arrest of Jesus in John's Gospel includes a minor detail which matches a similar, but completely independent detail in Acts. This is the detail that the doorkeeper at the High Priest's house was a woman (John 18:16,17). This is a little unexpected. In ancient times there was very little by way of a police force and one would expect a male doorkeeper. A similar circumstance appears in Acts 12:13. Here the gate of the house of the mother of John Mark is kept by a woman (a maidservant by the name of Rhoda).

It seems that in Jerusalem it was customary for the gates of houses to be kept by women servants.

Comment: This is clearly an independent insignificant detail. The account of John's Gospel is independent of Acts, and the detail of the sex of the doorkeeper is hardly important. However, it is not known how widespread the custom of using a maid to keep the door was in the Ancient world, and it is possible that the detail of a female doorkeeper would have been so ubiquitous that one would assume a maid after the event. The coincidence is therefore rated as "Significant".

Source: JCT

5.8 Peter's Accusers ****

Jesus was arrested in the small hours of the morning in Gethsemane and taken to the house of the high priest for examination. Most of the disciples fled, but Peter and John found their way to the house of the high priest and were admitted to the courtyard. Here Peter was three times accused of being a follower of Jesus; after each accusation he denied Jesus and said that he did not know him. Two of these occasions form an undesigned coincidence.

Matthew tells us that Peter was first seen by a maid in the courtyard:-

Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." (Matthew 26:69)

The detail of this is expanded in the Gospel of Luke:-

55 And when they had kindled a fire in the middle of the courtyard and sat down together, Peter sat down among them.

56 Then a servant girl, seeing him as he sat in the light and looking closely at him, said, "This man also was with him." (Luke 22:55,56)

This tells us that at this time Peter was in the light of the fire which was lit in the courtyard. Peter had grown cold and moved nearer to the fire to warm himself, and at this point he was illuminated by the firelight, seen by the maid and recognised.

Having denied Jesus, Peter moves away from the fire so as to be less conspicuous and goes into the gateway. Here, however, he is recognised by a second maid. The fact of Peter's moving into the gateway is mentioned by Matthew but not Luke.

71 And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." (Matthew 26:71)

The presence of a maid in the gateway is described in the Gospel of John (John 18:15,16), where it is pointed out that Peter had already been introduced to a maid by John as they entered the courtyard. John, however, records the first accusation later on in v25, where it is placed with the third accusation.

Mark 14:66-72 records the full sequence, but doesn't indicate Peter's move back to the fire. Thus Mark records nearly all the events which surround the coincidence but not quite enough to provide all the detail. The coincidence cannot simply be explained by the theory of Markan priority (the idea that Mark's Gospel was written first and that the other Gospels used it as their primary source). The fact that Mark contains the account in almost complete detail supports the idea that Mark's Gospel is associated with the Apostle Peter.

Comment: This is a detailed coincidence which covers a number of different points. The action is covered in all four Gospels, but none of them contains the whole story and some contain only hints of the main points of the narrative. The detail is genuinely insignificant and the accounts are independent. This is a strong coincidence.

Source: JCT

5.9 Upper Rooms ***

The account of the Last Supper is quite clear that the meal took place in an upstairs room. Both Mark 14:15 and Luke 22:12 are clear on this point. For example:-

14 and wherever he enters, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?'
15 And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us."
(Mark 14:14,15)

The word "Upper Room" is the Greek *ἀνάγαιον* (*anagaion*). It refers to the upper stories of a house or to an upstairs room; in this case it is a single upstairs room, which is described as "large".

After his arrest, Jesus was taken to the house of the High Priest where he was examined by the priests in a room which contained a considerable number of people.

55 Now the chief priests and the whole Council were seeking testimony against Jesus to put him to death, but they found none.
56 For many bore false witness against him, but their testimony did not agree.
(Mark 14:55,56)

To contain this number of people, as well as Jesus and his guards, the room would have had to have been large. We also read where Peter was:-

66 And as Peter was below in the courtyard,
(Mark 14:66)

For Peter to have been below, the room must have been an upstairs room.

These two passages, taken together, imply that well-to-do houses in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus had large upstairs rooms. These were not used by the inhabitants of the house as a matter of course and could thus be used as guest-rooms or for public business. This fact is confirmed by archaeology, but would have been unknown to people in the generation following the fall and consequent destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD.

Comment: This is an insignificant detail which is well hidden in the accounts. The fact of the room of the last supper depends on a single Greek word, which is often translated as being simply “a room”, as in the French Darby Bible or the Albanian New Testament. The correspondence is also backed up by archaeology, which is guaranteed to be independent of any Gospel writers.

However, it is not clear how widespread was the custom of having a large upper guestroom. In Acts 20:9 Eutychus falls from the floor of an upstairs room where the congregation at Troas had been meeting; this implies that the custom of having a large upper room was more widespread than one might otherwise expect.

The coincidence is therefore graded as “Significant”

Source: JCT

5.10 Destroying the Temple ****

In the Gospel of Matthew account of the pre-trial hearing of Jesus, witnesses were brought before the priests in an attempt to find a charge on which to convict him. One collection of witnesses brought the accusation that Jesus had said: “This man said, ‘I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it in three days.’” (Matthew 26:61). The account in Mark has something similar:-

- 57 And some stood up and bore false witness against him, saying,
 58 “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.’”
 59 Yet even about this their testimony did not agree. (Mark 14:57-59)

The details in the two Gospels are slightly different from one another. This is only to be expected as the witnesses did not agree among themselves exactly what Jesus had said. The discrepancies show that the accounts of Matthew and Mark are here independent of one another.

The accounts of neither Gospel give any indication of the incident to which the false witnesses refer. The charge appears abruptly in the narrative without any explanation. If John’s Gospel did not exist then we would be completely ignorant of it.

The background to the accusation is provided in the Gospel of John:-

- 18 So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?”
 19 Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.”
 20 The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?”
 21 But he was speaking about the temple of his body. (John 2:18-21)

There is no point of contact at all between the synoptic accounts of the trials of Jesus and the account of the cleansing of the Temple in John’s Gospel (which is where the John passage is found). They are clearly completely independent accounts. However, John’s Gospel fills in the background which is missing in Matthew and Mark. What is present is evidence that both the accounts of the trials and the account of the cleansing of the Temple in John 2 are accurate.

The same charge also appears in Acts, this time applied to Stephen, who was being persecuted because he was seen as a disciple of Jesus. Stephen was accused of saying that “this Nazarene, Jesus, will destroy this place and alter the customs which Moses handed down to us.” (Acts 6:14) This is an independent record which indicates that the same story was still being used by the Jerusalem religious establishment.

Comment: This is a strong example of an undesigned coincidence in that the accounts are clearly independent of one another and the details are entirely incidental. John fills a gap in the Synoptic accounts, but in neither account is there any direct reference to the other. This is therefore a strong coincidence.

Source: Blunt p269 extended

5.11 Prophecy: Who struck you? ****

The Gospels all record some of the abuse that Jesus suffered the night before his crucifixion. Included in these is one particular incident where the guards in the house of Caiaphas hit Jesus and then challenge him to identify which of them it was that struck him. The accounts are as follows:-

67 Then they spit in his face and struck him. And some slapped him,
68 saying, “Prophecy to us, you Christ! Who is it that struck you?” (Matthew 26:67,68)

65 And some began to spit on him and to cover his face and to strike him, saying to him,
“Prophecy!” And the guards received him with blows. (Mark 14:65)

63 Now the men who were holding Jesus in custody were mocking him as they beat him.
64 They also blindfolded him and kept asking him, “Prophecy! Who is it that struck you?”
(Luke 22:63,64)

The wording of the accounts differs significantly between the different Gospels, but it is perfectly clear that the same incident is intended.

Mark, for example, records that the guards struck Jesus and called on him to prophesy, but doesn't include the point that the guards were asking him to identify which of them it was that struck him. Matthew's Gospel account doesn't include the fact that Jesus was blindfolded. Luke's account is the most complete, but even here the striking of Jesus by the guards is mentioned only indirectly.

The full picture is easily seen from all the accounts put together, but is only seen in part from the other accounts. The detail of the blindfolding is missing from Matthew, but is clearly consistent with the account of what happened.

Comment: The differences between the three Gospel accounts is sufficient to show independence. The fact that Matthew omits the blindfolding of Jesus is particularly interesting. It suggests that Matthew had a vivid picture in his mind's eye which was so strong that he did not feel a need to explain minor details. The details are insignificant, and all three Gospels are needed for the full set. The fact that they fit together shows that they refer to the same incident. This coincidence can be graded “Strong”

Source: Blunt p271

5.12 The Charges against Jesus ****

Jesus was accused of different crimes in different courts. Before the Jews he was accused of blasphemy:-

Then the high priest tore his robes and said, "He has uttered blasphemy. What further witnesses do we need? You have now heard his blasphemy. (Matthew 26:65)

This was calculated to destroy the sympathy that the Jewish crowds of Jerusalem had for Jesus, but would carry no weight with the Gentile governor of Judea who would be needed to confirm the sentence of death. The attitude of the Roman upper class to matters of religion is shown by the actions of Gallio (Acts 18:12-17), Claudius Lysias (Acts 23:29) and Festus and Agrippa (Acts 26:31,32).

Lysias wrote:-

I found that he was being accused about questions of their law, but charged with nothing deserving death or imprisonment. (Acts 23:29)

and the judgement of Festus and Agrippa was:-

- 31 And when they had withdrawn, they said to one another, "This man is doing nothing to deserve death or imprisonment."
 32 And Agrippa said to Festus, "This man could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar." (Acts 26:31,32)

Before Pilate the charge is one of sedition:-

- 1 Then the whole company of them arose and brought him before Pilate.
 2 And they began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king." (Luke 23:1,2)

So far this is a clear coincidence which fits the known facts about Jewish and Gentile opposition to Jesus. However, this is rather too obvious to form a proper undesigned coincidence and the coincidence would be graded as "Weak". What it does do, however, is to confirm an early date for the Gospels. After 64AD Christianity was a "*Religio Illicita*" within the Roman empire and would be persecuted by the authorities rather than ignored.

Blunt takes the coincidence only this far. However, it can be taken further and then becomes much stronger.

In the Luke account, Jesus is accused of sedition before Pilate and in Luke 23:3 he admits to claiming the kingship of the Jews:-

And Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" And he answered him, "You have said so." (Luke 23:3)

This is an admission from Jesus; the phrase "You have said so" would, at the time, have been used as a reluctant assent. In spite of this fact, Pilate nevertheless acquits Jesus:-

Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no guilt in this man." (Luke 23:4)

This is the next verse. No evidence is produced in Luke, and the acquittal in the face of this lack of evidence is slightly perplexing. It is only when one comes to John's Gospel that the reason for Jesus' acquittal at this point becomes clear.

The exchange between Pilate and Jesus appears in John 18:33-38; the most significant core is in verses 36 and 37:-

- 36 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting, that I might not be delivered over to the Jews. But my kingdom is not from the world."
 37 Then Pilate said to him, "So you are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world—to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice." (John 18:36,37)

Pilate (who by this stage of his career had been much bludgeoned by the Jewish authorities) was convinced that Jesus was innocent and was prepared to say so. However, he was not so concerned about the person of a Galilean Jew to stand up for Jesus against a threat to his career.

Interestingly the exchange begins with Pilate's question "Are you the King of the Jews?" (John 18:33). John gives no reason for this. No charge against Jesus is recorded in John's Gospel at all, but Pilate begins his question with the question of whether Jesus is a king. There is no explanation either in Matthew or in Mark. The account in Luke is needed to give a thorough picture of what went on, and only this Gospel considers it worthwhile to provide a full picture of the charge.

Comment: This is a significant coincidence. The version in Blunt is weak, but it is considerably strengthened by the additional comparison between John and Luke. The detail is important, but it is omitted from John's Gospel; the two accounts are clearly independent but are both necessary to understand the situation fully. The charge before Pilate is not considered significant enough to be given in full in any other Gospel than Luke. This has become a strong coincidence.

Source: Blunt pp273,304 enhanced by JCT + comments from WWW.

5.13 Paying Taxes to Caesar ***

The precise charges laid against Jesus are recorded in Luke 23 as follows:-

And they began to accuse him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ, a king."
 (Luke 23:2)

These include the charge that Jesus claims to be a king, hence challenging the rule of Rome and potentially fomenting insurrection. Given that there had recently been an insurrection (Lk 23:25) this became the major charge. However, there was also another charge, rather less important. This was the charge that Jesus forbade the paying of taxes to Caesar. The charge is made, but does not appear again. It is far less important than the charge that Jesus claimed kingship. It is not sufficiently important to appear in any Gospel other than Luke.

The charge appears earlier in the accounts when the Scribes and Pharisees ask Jesus whether it is lawful to pay taxes to Caesar:-

21 So they asked him, “Teacher, we know that you speak and teach rightly, and show no partiality, but truly teach the way of God.

22 Is it lawful for us to give tribute to Caesar, or not?”

(Luke 20:21-22 See also Matthew 22:15ff, Mark 12:13ff)

This was clearly a trap; if Jesus said that they should pay taxes to Caesar he risked unpopularity while if he said that they should not he was likely to be in trouble with the Romans.

While any witnesses to the event would tend to be unreliable and might show the political nature of the charges, this was possibly worth an attempt. The picture is therefore given of a minor charge which is based on a separate incident.

Comment: The detail of the charge of forbidding the giving of taxes is clearly minor; it is only recorded in one Gospel and it is dropped early on in the trial process. However, the fact that it harmonises with the account of Jesus discourse with the religious authorities slightly earlier makes it an undesigned coincidence. The criteria for a significant coincidence are met, but the coincidence is not as strong as the accusation of threatening to destroy the temple. It is therefore graded as “Significant”.

Source: JCT

5.14 Herod and Pilate ***

In Luke 23:12 we read that Pilate’s action in sending Jesus to Herod brought about a reconciliation between Herod and Pilate. There is also a side comment that before this they had been at enmity with one another.

One occasion that might have caused this enmity is recorded in Luke 13:1. This refers to an incident in which some Galileans had their “blood mingled with their sacrifices”; presumably this means that they were killed while preparing sacrifices or while actually sacrificing. As Herod was the ruler of Galilee, this would have been an interference with his subjects and might create a diplomatic incident. Pilate had, on this occasion, killed Herod’s subjects in haste, without consulting Herod first.

In the trial of Jesus Pilate shows an apparent concern for Herod’s sovereignty over Galilee. It was part of the Roman legal process to allow defendants to be tried in the province of their origin; a similar concern was shown for Paul’s trial in Acts 23:34). By sending Jesus to Herod Pilate was acknowledging that Galilee was a separate province from Judea and apparently repenting of his earlier conduct in ignoring Herod’s jurisdiction. In reality he was attempting to pass the buck on Jesus’ trial, but Herod would not perceive it in this way.

Thus the relationship between Herod and Pilate is in evidence in Luke 13 and the reason for the change is in Luke 23.

Comment: This is another minor incident, but one which shows a consistency in the behaviour of Pilate and Herod. The incident with the sacrifices would be typical of a behaviour which would cause a breach of relations with Herod, and the incident in the trial of Jesus would be likely to heal such a breach. However, other, undescribed incidents would also contribute to the situation and this detracts slightly from the coincidence. It is graded as “Significant”

Source: JCT

5.15 Pilate and the Crowd ****

The trial of Jesus before Pontius Pilate was greatly influenced by the presence of a hostile crowd before Pilate’s judgement (Matthew 27:22; Mark 15:15).

Pilate seems to have had a mild desire to release Jesus. He seems to have taken a line typical of other Roman governors such as Gallio in Corinth (Acts 18:14,15) who were determined not to involve themselves in the religious disputes of Jews (as they saw matters). One of the stratagems to which he resorts to arrange the release of Jesus without causing a diplomatic incident involving the Jerusalem religious elite was to appeal to the crowd. At one point he invites them to call for the release of Jesus; he fails as the crowd demands the release of Barabbas instead. (Matthew 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-17; Luke 23:13-21; John 18:39,40)

Pilate might reasonably have expected the crowd to have contained a preponderance of supporters of Jesus. There are two obvious reasons for this:-

- The crowds had welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem with great enthusiasm only a week earlier, waving palm branches and making a roadway for him with their coats (John 12:12-19; see also Matthew 21:1-10; Mark 11:1-11; Luke 19:28-40).
- Jesus had taught openly in the temple among the people who had supported his teaching. John’s Gospel describes this as follows:-

Jesus answered him [the High Priest], “I have spoken openly to the world. I have always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where all Jews come together. I have said nothing in secret. Why do you ask me? Ask those who have heard me what I said to them; they know what I said.” (John 18:20,21)

In spite of this the crowd had turned against Jesus and demanded his crucifixion. This was because it was stacked with the servants of the Religious authorities and members of the Sanhedrin and its administrators. Luke 23:1 tells us that the whole court came as a deputation to Pilate and John 18:38 shows a stratagem by which the priests ensured that Pilate had to come out continually to face the crowd.

Comment: The belief of Pilate that the majority of the crowd would support Jesus is based on two events of the recent past recorded as detail in the Gospels. This is an independent sub-plot, although the detail of the crowds at Jesus’ entry to Jerusalem is not minor. This would warrant the grade “Significant”. However, the additional details of how the crowd was stacked with the Priests’ supporters and how the priests exploited this are much more obscure and raise the status of the coincidence to “Strong”

Source: JCT

5.16 The Veil of the Temple **

At the end of the crucifixion of Jesus the veil of the temple was torn in two from the top to the bottom. This was a curtain which divided between the holy of holies in the Temple of God in Jerusalem where the Glory of God was believed to dwell, and the rest of the Temple. This event is recorded in the synoptic Gospels (Matthew 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45).

There is no description of this event in any document outside the Bible. This is understandable. The event must have been a considerable embarrassment to the Jerusalem religious establishment which would do its best to suppress the story.

However, there is a passing reference to the tearing of the veil in Ephesians:-

For he is our peace, who made both one, and brake down the middle wall of partition, (Ephesians 2:14).

Comment: The two accounts are clearly independent of one another. There are no points where similar wording appears between the Gospel accounts and Paul's letter. The account in Paul cannot depend on the text of the Gospels as the letter was written considerably earlier than the Gospels. The text in Paul is also insignificant; some translations obscure it completely. However, the coincidence depends on an identity between the "middle wall of partition" and the veil of the Temple. This is a likely identity, but it is not certain. The coincidence can thus be graded "Likely".

Source: JCT

5.17 Go out into all the World ****

In 1 Corinthians there is a list of people who were witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus. This included a large group of over 500 people. Here is the account:-

Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. (1 Corinthians 15:6)

The detail that most of the 500 witnesses were still alive only makes any real sense if it is implying that these were available to be questioned on the matter. As the point appears in a letter written by Paul from Ephesus to Corinth, this in turn implies that there was a group of people (evangelists?) who were in the process of travelling around the Christian community giving witness to what they had seen, and in particular to the resurrection of Jesus. Some of these must have gone a considerable distance if Paul had news of them in Ephesus and could write about them to Corinth in terms which suggested that the members of the congregation in Corinth would encounter them.

When one looks at the accounts of the resurrection appearances in the Gospels for one where over five hundred people saw the risen Jesus at one time, the obvious incident is at the end of Matthew:-

- 16 Now the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain to which Jesus had directed them.
- 17 And when they saw him they worshipped him, but some doubted.
- 18 And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.
- 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit... (Matthew 28:16-19)

This includes a commandment to go to all nations. Mark's Gospel has "go into all the world" (Mark 16:15). It seems that some, at least, of the people who heard the commandment of Jesus did in fact go out into all the world - as far as Corinth at any rate.

This confirms that the command was given, and the existence of a group of people who went out as a witness to the resurrection. This is quite an important point in terms of the understanding of the Gospel. The existence of such a group of witnesses to the resurrection in 55AD (when 1 Corinthians was written) is significant and the passage in 1 Corinthians implies that these are a well-established group carrying out a well-established activity. The coincidence is a strong confirmation of the existence of such a group and hence of the resurrection of Jesus itself.

Comment: This is a slightly odd coincidence as it confirms the existence of a group of people who have few mentions in the New Testament or in church histories rather than a detail of the text. This group of people is, however, important as they are eyewitnesses to the resurrection.

Source: JET