

Dating the Birth of Jesus Christ

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1. We start with Herod's Life, Matthew 2:1, Important dates, primary source-Josephus
 - a. 47 BC, appointed Governor of Galilee
 - b. 40 BC, appointed King of the Jews by the Roman Senate
 - c. 37 BC, captured Jerusalem, then became sole ruler of Jerusalem
 - d. 4 BC, his death
 - e. The reign of Herod's 3 sons all began in 4 BC
2. Quirinius' first term as Governor, according to archaeological evidence, 10 BC to 7 BC, as Governor or Imperial Commissioner, Luke 2:2
3. Murder of the children under 2 years of age ordered by Herod (from Jerusalem), since Herod died in Jericho, this order following the visit of the magi could well have been made in 5 BC, but limits this to between 7 BC and 4 BC
4. Jesus was "about thirty", which could be between 30-32 years old at the start of His ministry, at age 30 one is qualified for priesthood and would be at the age to be recognized as a rabbi, Luke 3:23
5. Luke 3:1, John the Baptist baptizes Jesus in the 15th year of Tiberius, which could have probably been 26 AD, since Tiberius became co-regent in 11 AD
6. In the first Passover of Jesus' public ministry, it is mentioned that the temple began to be built 46 years prior. That work began in 19 BC, in the 18th year after Herod came to the throne in Jerusalem, including the year zero takes us to 25-27 AD depending on how the time is reckoned, John 2:20
7. A reasonable timeline would be Jesus born in 5 BC, baptized in 26 AD, died on the 4th Passover of His public ministry, in 30 AD
8. Working it backwards, Galatians 2:1, Paul's 2nd visit to Jerusalem "after fourteen years", Galatians 1:18, "after three years", if the 2nd visit to Jerusalem is the same as Acts 15 that was in 50-51 AD, putting the conversion of Paul at 33-34 AD, but according to Galatians 1:13 Paul spent considerable time as an unbeliever persecuting Christians so one still has to work the date back, more likely the second visit to Jerusalem was that of Acts 11:29-30, which took place between 45-48 AD, and brings the date back further, either method points us to a crucifixion year around 30 AD, and not as late as 33 AD, as some claim

The following summation excerpted from-

https://theos-sphragis.info/herods_regnal_years.html

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The Reign of Herod the Great: 47 B.C. to his death in 4 B.C.

An accurate determination of the reign of Herod the Great reconciles the biblical nativity and crucifixion accounts with the Jewish historian Josephus' reports and the intermingled history of Jesus Christ with Caesars Augustus and Tiberius, various Roman Governors, Procurators and Prefects, and various Jewish High Priests.

The date of Herod's death is related to New Testament accounts of the birth of Jesus and the early sequence of Roman governors over Israel. Luke records the birth of Christ when Caesar Augustus decreed a census, the first census while Quirinius was "*hegemoneúo* of Syria" (Luke 2:1-3). The nativity accounts (Matthew 2; Luke 1-2) relate that a miraculous "Star of Bethlehem" lead the Magi first to Herod in Jerusalem and then to the infant Jesus (in either Bethlehem or Nazareth). Following the birth of Jesus, Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt to escape Herod's massacre of the infants and returned after Herod's death. Caesar Augustus made Herod's sons Archelaus an ethnarch and Antipas and Philip tetrarchs over Israelite territories following Herod's death (*Ant.* 17.11.4). Ten years later Archelaus was banished and Rome instituted the offices of Procurator and Prefect over Israel (one of whom was Pontius Pilate), and Quirinius, then Roman governor of Syria, liquidated Archelaus' property (*Ant.* 17.13.2; 18.1.1-2; *Wars* 2.7.3; *Dio Rome* 55.24.9, 55.27.6).

Prior to Herod's death, Josephus reports that a lunar eclipse occurred the night before a Jewish fast (*Ant.* 17.6.4), and a couple weeks before the following Passover Herod the Great killed his son Antipater and then died of a long-festering illness. Josephus double-dates Herod's reign as "34 years since killing Antigonus and 37 years since being made king by the Romans" (*Ant.* 17.8.1; *Wars* 1.33.8). Josephus also synchronizes Herod's reign with Pompey's capture of Jerusalem in 63 B.C. and Augustus' victory at Actium on 31 B.C. Sep 2.

Two phenomena are central to the debate about the year Herod the Great died:

1. when and what was the Star of Bethlehem which lead the Magi to inquire of Herod;

Many researchers and scholars have sought to find a natural phenomenon that coincides with the Star of Bethlehem, and they have suggested astronomical

phenomena observed in comets, conjunctions, supernovae, as well as bright stars. At present it would seem that all such *natural* phenomena have occurred in years other than 5 B.C., and thus all the effort has focused on other years to reconcile Josephus' reports of events in the life of Herod the Great with dates of these suggested astronomical phenomena. Presently, all such efforts to reconcile Herod's death and Christ's birth with some natural stellar phenomena have failed in some aspect; largely because of incorrect dates for the birth and crucifixion of Jesus and an a priori dismissal of the Star of Bethlehem as a miracle (for which there won't be any astronomical evidence). That does not mean the Bible is wrong about the Star of Bethlehem, rather it simply reaffirms the Star of Bethlehem as miraculous.

2. which lunar eclipse did Josephus report had preceded Herod's death.

Efforts to conclusively identify which lunar eclipse had preceded Herod's death (sometimes termed "Herod's Eclipse") have often lacked a correct interpretation of Josephus' grammar about that night, correct dates of Jewish fasts, and a correct chronology of Herod's life. A correct chronology of Herod's life further depends on correctly *reckoning* the regnal dates and years as reported by Josephus. As Josephus' historical sources were Roman, Greek, and Jewish, several reckoning systems are possible and seemingly intermingled. While Josephus is often faulted for ambiguity (if not outright error) in his histories, in retrospect it would seem they are largely self-consistent and correct when properly reckoned.

This analysis largely resolves the second phenomenon, that a [Herodian Chronology reckoned by the Julian calendar](#) best reconciles that Herod's eclipse was definitely in 5 B.C. and most likely that of [March 23](#) (rather than that of [September 15](#)), and Herod died just before the following Passover in 4 B.C., and those are the events to which Josephus alluded when he reported the events leading up to Herod's death.

The following sections and linked supplemental chronologies demonstrate that:

- Josephus' sources most likely used Hebrew *anno mundi Nisan* reckoning up to 40 B.C. and subsequent to establishment of the Julian calendar in 45 B.C. they transitioned to *Julian* non-accession inclusive reckoning by 37 B.C.;
- Josephus double-dated Herod's death from two different events: Herod's appointment by Rome as King and also Herod's capture of Jerusalem;
- "Herod's eclipse" (mentioned by Josephus in *Antiquities* 17.6.4) was likely that of 5 B.C. March 23, preceding the Jewish Ta'anit Bechorim (Fast of the Firstborn) on Nisan 14;
- Nisan 14 fell on 5 B.C. March 24 if the start of the Jewish month was determined by visual sighting of the new moon;
- Herod the Great died a couple weeks before the next Passover in March of 4 B.C.

[Herodian chronologies synchronized by various reckoning systems](#)

Four entire chronologies of the Herod's are developed in yearly and monthly detail, using non-accession reckoning by Nisan and Tishri calendars and by the Julian calendar with variations for each total lunar eclipse of 5 B.C.

[Comparing Josephus' reports to Julian, Nisan and Tishri non-accession reckoning](#)

For each of the three reckoning systems, specifically dated events reported by Josephus are compared to determine which reckoning has the fewest self-inconsistencies and discrepancies with historically dated events.

[Herod's appointment as king by Rome in 40 B.C. and capture of Jerusalem from Antigonus in 37 B.C.](#)

Herod's death is double-dated from these two events, and they in turn are synchronized to Pompey's capture of Jerusalem in 63 B.C., Antiochus IV defeat by the Maccabees in 164 B.C., and Titus' destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D.

[Synchronisms fix Herod's death to 4 B.C.](#)

The fixed, synchronized interrelationships between many key historically dated events is demonstrated, which precludes adjusting the date of any one event without simultaneously invalidating all other dated events. Josephus' reports of events in the Herodian dynasty are a self-consistent, cohesive collection and discrete events cannot be re-dated separately, nor can Josephus' entire account be re-dated en mass as it is synchronized to several independently dated events.

[Josephus on Herod's Eclipse](#)

Having determined that Herod died in 4 B.C., the eclipse preceding his death must have occurred in 5 B.C. and the events mentioned in the context of that eclipse (a Jewish fast and burning the rebels alive) provide a context against which Josephus' phrasing and grammar of *Antiquities* 17.6.4 can be analyzed and understood. Five interpretations are possible based on how Josephus phrased the account, but only two are plausible chronologically and only one is strictly grammatical. Josephus relates that on the night before a Jewish fast, High Priest Matthias recused himself from officiating that fast and that same night there was an eclipse of the moon. Ambiguity enters when Josephus also relates how that High Priest was deposed by Herod who also had others burned alive as punishment for rebellion, and because Josephus' writing style is occasionally terse and disjoint, and lacking a reliable chronological context, misinterpretation is understandable.

[Jewish Fasts proximate to Herod's Eclipse](#)

Of the three possible total lunar eclipses, Jewish fasts are known only for the eclipses of 5 B.C. because the eclipse of 1 B.C. occurs in January and there are no Jewish fasts in evidence for that time of year.

The entire chronology of Herod's life from his being appointed governor of Galilee in 47 B.C. to his death in 4 B.C. followed by the reigns of his sons, and Roman consulships, and the birth and crucifixion of Jesus Christ, all reconcile consistently and accurately with straight forward interpretation of historical texts and coins.