

THE CHRONOLOGY OF THE LIFE OF CHRIST

- I. Introduction.
 - A. This study is designed to date the major events in the life of Christ, which include:
 - 1. The date of His birth.
 - 2. The beginning of His public ministry, and duration of it.
 - 3. The day and date of His death and resurrection.
 - 4. The date for His ascension.
 - B. It is not designed to provide the detailed chronology of all the events that occurred during His life on earth.
 - C. The bulk of this study will focus on the date of the birth of Christ and, more importantly, dating that event accurately.
 - D. Once that date is established, the dates for the public ministry of Christ, which culminated in His death and resurrection, are more readily ascertained.
 - E. Much of the information concerning the dating of the birth of Christ is drawn from the work "The Birth of Christ Recalculated" by Ernest Martin.

- II. Events surrounding the birth of Jesus Christ.
 - A. The date of Christ's birth has been commonly accepted to have fallen anywhere from 4-7 B.C.
 - B. However, new evidence in the fields of history, archaeology, and astronomy will allow the diligent student to pinpoint the date much more accurately to a date in 3 B.C.
 - C. This new information concurs with the chronological statements of the early Church fathers that Christ was born between 3-2 BC. Since they lived in closer proximity to that time in history, their records should be given extra consideration.
 - D. Luke's gospel is an invaluable aid in any study of this time in history.
 - 1. Luke was a physician and an historian whose chronological statements are made deliberately and with utmost exactitude.
 - 2. They have never been effectively challenged in terms of accuracy.
 - a. Luke wrote during the first century when any information he recorded could be quickly and easily checked for accuracy.
 - b. His writings should be given extra weight, since he wrote to a Roman official, Theophilus, a man of political rank within the empire; one would naturally expect this official to be versed in current political and historical matters. Lk. 1:1-4; Acts 1:1
 - c. Luke wrote during a time when Christian teaching was being greatly challenged; therefore, any fraud would be quickly exposed.
 - d. Relevant to this is the fact that two of the most ardent opponents of Christianity, Celsus, and Porphyry, impugned the general doctrines of the faith but never questioned or denounced Luke's historical reliability.
 - 3. While all this does not prove Luke's reliability, it seems sufficient to show that he should be taken seriously; in fact, he should be taken as seriously as any other who lived at that time in Roman history.

- E. Luke states that Christ was **about thirty years of age** when He began his public ministry. Lk. 3:23
1. We know that John began his ministry in the fifteenth year of Tiberius' reign. Aug 28-29 A.D. Lk. 3:1
 2. If a date as early as 4-5 BC, as has been commonly accepted, was the date of Christ's birth, this would make Jesus about 33 years old.
 3. One should recognize that when Luke used approximate times or numbers, he always intended the range involved to be a small one.
 - a. Mary stayed with Elizabeth about three months (Lk. 1:56); one can hardly imagine that Luke meant one or five months.
 - b. During the denials of Peter Luke states that about an hour had passed (Lk. 22:59); again, this can hardly mean just a few minutes or more than two or three hours.
 - c. Luke 9:28 indicates that between the time Jesus made the statement in verse 27 and the timing of the transfiguration was about eight days.
 - d. Comparison with the synoptic parallels indicates that a figure of seven days actually separated the two events. Matt. 17:1; Mk. 9:2
 - e. When dealing with the timing of events during the crucifixion, Luke states that darkness fell over the land from about the sixth hour (12 PM) and lasted until the ninth hour (3 PM). Lk. 23:44
 - f. Can one believe that Luke actually meant this began in the fourth hour, or lasted until the eleventh hour?
 4. The early Christian scholars certainly believed that Luke was using very close approximations.
 5. Irenaeus (115-202 A.D.), during the 2nd century A.D., stated that Christ had just turned 30 and Epiphanius (315-403 A.D.) said He was precisely 29 years and 10 months old when he began His ministry.
 6. A date of 3 B.C. for Jesus' birth would make Him about 31 years old when He began His public ministry.
- F. The major obstacle against this date is the long-accepted date of 4 B.C. for the death of Herod the Great; this is based on the fact that Herod clearly died after the birth of Jesus Christ. Matt. 2:13-19
1. The Jewish historian Flavius Josephus mentions a lunar eclipse that took place just before the death of Herod, and just before a Passover.
 2. There were precisely four observable lunar eclipses, which occurred over Palestine between 7-1 B.C.
 - a. Mar. 23, 5 BC--total eclipse
 - b. Sept. 15, 5 BC--total eclipse
 - c. Mar. 13, 4 BC--partial eclipse
 - d. Jan. 10, 1 BC.--total eclipse
 3. Most historians have identified the March 13, 4 B.C. eclipse as the one associated with Herod's death for two reasons:
 - a. Josephus said Herod reigned 37 years from the time he was proclaimed king by the Romans in 40 B.C, and 34 years from his capture of Jerusalem; however, this places his death in 3-2 B.C.
 - b. Coins minted by Herod's successors in 4 B.C. would suggest that their reign began in that year.

4. Reasons why these "obvious" facts may be in error:
 - a. The writings of Josephus have known chronological and historical errors and, at times, Josephus even contradicts himself.
 - b. Therefore, when one is evaluating historical information, he should be careful about giving equal weight to all testimony.
 - c. Reasons have been advanced that suggest that Jerusalem was actually captured in the latter part of 36 B.C.; this would place Herod's death in 1 B.C.-1 AD.
 - d. Coins that show Herod's successors reigning in 4 B.C. can be explained by the practice of awarding extra years of reign for achieving certain political objectives, a practice that is well attested.
 - e. However, another explanation is more historically factual, which involves understanding some of the history of Israel through the intertestamental period.
 - 1.) The Hasmoneans, descendants of Hasmon, the great-great-grandfather of Mattathias, led a dynasty that ruled in Israel until about 36 B.C.
 - 2.) They were recognized as legitimate leaders and priests, who consistently attempted to gain their full independence from foreign overlords.
 - 3.) However, they were generally unsuccessful, and their failures resulted in a loss of strength on their part, and the further strengthening of the vassal kings who ruled the country.
 - 4.) When Herod the Great ascended to power, he recognized that the Hasmoneans would always be a threat to him, and he resolved to end that danger through marriage.
 - 5.) Herod was an Edomite, who regularly resorted to political intrigue and had actually executed some Jews without the official consent of the Sanhedrin, bringing on himself the jealousy and wrath of the Jewish rulers.
 - 6.) He was not a popular man and decided to repair his image by marrying Mariamme, a daughter of two Hasmoneans, in order to legitimize his position before the Jews, who were generally supporters of the Hasmonean family.
 - 7.) By Mariamme, Herod had two sons, Aristobulus and Alexander, who were viewed as the legitimate heirs to his throne.
 - 8.) He had another son, Antipater, who was his eldest son by his first wife.
 - 9.) Herod's mother and sister hated Mariamme, and accused her of adultery, a charge which eventually resulted in Herod's order to have Mariamme executed.
 - 10.) After this, Antipater repeatedly flattered Herod and slandered the two sons of Mariamme so successfully over a period of years that they were eventually executed by Herod, leaving Antipater as the supposed heir.
 - 11.) Herod had three other sons, Philip, Archaelus and Herod Antipas, who eventually received the right to rule just before Herod's death.
 - 12.) Having discovered the treachery, along with a supposed murder plot that had been engineered by Antipater, Herod, who was already partially insane from grief, remorse, jealousy, fear and some wasting diseases, had Antipater executed just prior to his own death.
 - 13.) None of the three successors had any royal blood and the only reason that they were given the right to rule was the decree of Herod and Augustus Caesar.
 - 14.) The Jews would have looked on these men with disfavor and viewed them as usurpers and pretenders to the Hasmonean right to rule in Israel.

- 15.) Although Herod and Augustus had accepted these foreign commoners, they had no biblical, traditional, or dynastic right to rule over the Jews; they certainly recognized this difficulty themselves.
 - 16.) One method they employed to resolve this problem, and give themselves some credibility in the eyes of the people, was to antedate their reigns back to the time when the two legitimate Hasmonean heirs were killed in 4 BC.
 - 17.) That these men would have wanted to legitimize themselves is obvious; their need to do so is confirmed by subsequent history, which reveals that after the death of these three, no one except Hasmoneans were allowed by the Romans to rule in Judea.
 - 18.) This certainly offers an explanation as to how Herod could have died after the eclipse in 1 B.C. and coins which showed his sons ruling in Judea could be dated to 4 B.C.
5. The total eclipse of Jan. 10, 1 B.C. is the one that best fits with all the available evidence.
 - a. Herod died 18 days later on Jan. 28, 1 B.C.
 - b. All the events that are recorded would have taken about three months to accomplish, leading up to the Jewish Passover.
 1. The primary event would have been the burial of Herod, for which he had already made provision.
 2. He decreed that his burial be at Herodion (some 23 miles from Jericho), and that the funeral would be the most glorious ever given to any king; the funeral of Augustus, which occurred during the same period of history had taken 24 days.
 3. The time between the eclipse of 4 B.C. on March 13, and the Passover on April 11, is a period of only 29 days.
 4. Allowing time for funeral arrangements, gathering of effects, the preparation of the body, the funeral procession (which itself may have taken 25 days, and possibly longer if they stopped on each Sabbath), final burial, and the seven days of uncleanness, does not leave sufficient time between the eclipse of March 13, the death of Herod 18 days later, and the Passover that fell on April 11. 4 B.C.
- G. The census or registration of Luke 2:1ff, which was mandated by Caesar Augustus during the time when Quirinius (Cyrenius) was the governor of Syria.
1. This was one of two registrations during the time when Cyrenius was governor, the second being mentioned in Acts 5:37, which occurred in 6 A.D.
 2. Cyrenius was not an ordinary governor, but a Roman procurator who had his authority given to him directly from Augustus. In essence, he was a man Friday for Augustus and not the actual governor of the province.
 3. The resident governor at the time was Sentius Saturninus.
 4. The following governed Syria from 7 B.C. to 1 A.D:
 - a. Titius, prior to 7 B.C.
 - b. Publius Varus 7-4 B.C.
 - c. Gaius Saturninus 4-2 B.C.
 - d. Publius Varus (2nd term), 2 B.C.-1 A.D.
 5. Tertullian, a lawyer and Christian apologist, who lived late in the 2nd century, stated that there was a census taken under Saturninus between 3-2 BC.

6. The year 2 B.C. was one of the most important in the career of Augustus, since he had turned 60 years old and it was the 25th year of a reign that had begun in 27 B.C.; further, Rome was celebrating the 750th year of its founding.
 7. Feb. 5, 2 B.C. the Roman senate awarded him the highest of honors, bestowing upon him the title of Pater Patriae (Father of the country).
 8. There was no year like it in Rome for celebrations, and they occurred throughout the Empire.
 9. Augustus, who had been informed of the coming honor beforehand, issued an edict calling for the fresh registration of all who lived within the borders of the Roman Empire.
 10. Josephus mentions an oath of allegiance that was demanded by Augustus; he places this edict about a year to a year and one-half prior to Herod's death.
 11. Various scholars have suggested that this oath of allegiance and the census of Luke are one in the same.
 12. An inscription with such an oath of obedience has been found in Paphlagonia; it was taken by the citizens and Roman businessmen, and clearly dated to 3 B.C.
 13. It is reasonable to conclude that such a registration would have taken considerable time to complete; therefore, it is very likely that the edict was issued as much as a year prior to the festivities, since this would allow for complete enrollment in plenty of time for the celebration in Feb. 2 B.C.
 14. The common misconception is that this registration was for the purpose of taxation.
 - a. While Herod was alive, the Jews did not pay taxes to Rome; rather, they were paid directly to Herod.
 - b. When Herod became king, the tribute to Rome ceased and he collected all the taxes.
 - c. This continued until 6-7 A.D., when direct taxation was again imposed on Judea.
 15. Therefore, in 3 B.C. Quirinius was a special governor during the actual governorship of Saturninus, he was merely present to conduct the special census ordered by Augustus.
 16. This brought Joseph and Mary from Nazareth to their native city of Bethlehem.
 - a. Mary would not normally have had to go with Joseph; however, since both were of royal heritage they had to appear and swear allegiance.
 - b. Luke states that the reason that Joseph and Mary both went to Bethlehem was due to the fact that they were both members of David's royal line. Lk. 2:4
- H. Unusual astronomical activity occurred in the years 3-2 BC.
1. Most early Church historians, who lived from the 2nd century onward, place the birth of Christ after the eclipse of 4 B.C.
 - a. Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Orosius, and Cassiodorus Senator placed His birth in the year we now recognize as 3 B.C.
 - b. Tertullian, Hippolytus, Origen, Eusebius, John Chrysostom, Jerome and others indicate that the nativity occurred in 2 B.C.
 - c. Dionysius Exiguus says that Christ was born in 1 B.C.; this is the man who established the calendar for the Common Era that the majority of the world accepts. He dated from Anno Domini, the year of the Lord as reckoned from the birth of Christ, which he placed on Dec. 25, 1 B.C.

2. Beginning August, 3 B.C. and ending December, 2 B.C. a number of astronomical phenomena occurred, which would have been spectacular to those observing it.
 - a. On Aug. 1, 3 B.C. the planet Jupiter became visible above the eastern horizon as a morning star; 12 days later Jupiter would have been in close conjunction with Venus (already a morning star for 6 months), being separated by only .08 degrees.
 - b. On Sept. 1, 3 B.C., Venus left its previous conjunction with Jupiter, and came into conjunction with Mercury. (.35 degrees apart)
 - c. After the Sept. 1 meeting with Mercury, Venus eventually emerged as an evening star. It moved higher in the sky and again came into conjunction with Jupiter on June 17, 2 B.C. (.04 degrees apart).
 - d. This was a most uncommon occurrence; the light from each planet made it look as if there was one giant star.
 - e. This conjunction occurred at the exact time of the full moon, which already illuminated the eastern sky, while the light from Jupiter/Venus illuminated the western sky.
 - f. Roger Sinnott, writing in the journal *Sky and Telescope*, Dec. 1968, referred to this conjunction as *"a double star which gave the appearance of fusing into a gigantic, single star, which only the sharpest of eyes would have been able to split. The twinkling caused by the unsteady horizon atmosphere would have made this a single star for almost all those viewing it. It would have been a rare and awe-inspiring event when the two brightest planets in the heavens merged together, and at a time when Venus was approaching her greatest brilliance."*
 - g. This was only half the picture, since Jupiter was showing some displays of its own; 33 days after the Venus conjunction (Aug. 12, 3 B.C.), Jupiter came into close proximity to Reglus (the principal star of the constellation Leo) on Sept. 14, 3 B.C.
 - h. After that Jupiter continued through the heavens, and on Dec.1, 2 B.C. the planet stopped its motion and began its annual retrogression. In doing so, it headed once again toward the star Reglus, and was reunited with it on Feb.17, 2 B.C.
 - i. There was a third conjunction between Jupiter and Reglus on May 8, 2 B.C.; three conjunctions between the king star and the king planet in one year are not common.
 - j. Following these conjunctions, Jupiter moved to reunite with Venus in the rare conjunction of June 17, 2 B.C.
 - k. There was a further conjunction between Mars (war) and Jupiter (king), Aug. 27, 2 B.C., which was also not an ordinary occurrence.
 - l. Venus (the morning star) converged with Mercury (the messenger), Jupiter (the king planet), and Mars (war) in an exceptional massing of the planets.
 - m. The year 3-2 B.C. was an extraordinary one for astronomical activity; there were none like it for many years on either side.
 - n. These signs in the heavens are one of the stated purposes for which God created the moon, stars, and planets. Gen. 1:14
- I. The visit of the Magi and the star they followed.
 1. Who were the Magi?
 - a. They were originally one of the six tribes of the Medes, they formed a priestly caste similar to the Levites according to Herodotus and Pliny.
 - b. Their early history indicates that their occupation was to provide the kings of the Medes and Persians with divine information about daily affairs.

- c. Their role in interpreting Divine matters is mentioned in the Bible; Daniel actually was elevated to the status of chief of the magicians, conjurers, Chaldeans and diviners. Dan. 5:11
 - d. Daniel's influence in the court of the Medes would explain why they were aware of, and looking for, astronomical phenomena associated prophecies that indicated a Jewish king would be born at this time. Dan. 9:25
 - e. These men were not merely charlatans or sorcerers, who preyed upon people, since Herod would have hardly treated them with any respect. Matt. 2:1ff
 - f. They came from the court of Parthian kings bearing expensive gifts for the newborn king.
 - 1.) It was customary for subject nations to bring gifts to their superiors; therefore this act signified something more than just another royal birth.
 - 2.) Their presence in Jerusalem, seeking this new king, became a source of great concern for Herod and all Jerusalem. Matt. 2:3
 - 3.) Their gifts were exactly the gifts that had been foretold in the prophetic word. Isa. 60:6
 - g. The Magi were well acquainted with the national aspirations of the Jews, and were generally admired by the Jews since they were not simply pagan idolaters, but had contact with the prophet Daniel
 - h. The Magi were not the only ones aware of the prophecies related to the coming King.
 - i. The Romans were also aware that the rulership of the world would be given to someone from Judea.
 - 1.) "The Jews had a firm belief in that the writings of the ancients taught that this would come to pass at that very time." Tacitus, *History*
 - 2.) Even Nero was advised by court astrologers to move his seat of power to Jerusalem because that city was destined to become the capital of the world. Seutonius *Nero*
 - j. The primary reason given by these men as to why they had come to Judea was "his star"; as pointed out above, the astronomical events of 3-2 B.C. certainly caught their attention.
2. The events surrounding the visit of the Magi.
- a. The Magi arrived in Jerusalem some time after Christ had been born. Matt. 2:2 cf. 2:16
 - b. Jesus had been circumcised on the eighth day (Lk. 2:21), and presented in the Temple some 40 days after His birth. Lk. 2:22-24
 - c. His parents then returned to Nazareth in Galilee where they had been living. Lk. 2:39
 - d. They were either visiting Bethlehem or had relocated to that city when the Magi arrived at the house where they were staying. Matt. 2:11
 - e. They presented their gifts and returned home via a different route, based on the divine warning. Matt. 2:12
 - f. Joseph received an angelic warning to flee to Egypt, and left Bethlehem late in Dec. 2 B.C. when Jesus was almost 16 months old. Note that the Greek term βρέφος (brephos—fetus, newborn, baby) is not used, but the term παιδίον (paidion—a young child) is now applied to Jesus. Lk. 2:12 cf. Matt. 2:11

3. The actual star of Bethlehem.
 - a. Various suggestions have been advanced in an attempt to identify the star that prompted the visit from the Magi.
 - 1.) A comet, which is usually identified as a bad omen, but which does not stand still.
 - 2.) A nova.
 - 3.) A miracle star.
 - 4.) An angel.
 - b. Matthew states that the Magi saw His star rising in the east, indicating that it was a morning star.
 - c. On the morning of Aug. 12, 3 B.C. (about an hour and twenty minutes before sunrise) Jupiter arose in conjunction with Venus.
 - d. How would these astronomers/astrologers have viewed such an event?
 - 1.) Jupiter was the king planet, was known as the father of the gods.
 - 2.) Jupiter was often associated with the birth of kings, and that is how it became known as the king planet.
 - 3.) To the Chaldeans, Venus was Ishtar, the goddess of fertility.
 - 4.) The conjunction of these two planets would suggest that a king was about to be born.
 - 5.) Further, the three conjunctions of Jupiter with Reglus (the king star) would have been viewed as quite significant.
 - e. All this occurred in the constellation of Leo.
 - 1.) The association of Leo with the tribe of Judah has been well attested, since Leo is Judah's natal sign; additionally, there are some allusions to this in the Bible. Gen. 49:9; Rev. 5:5
 - 2.) All the primary planets except Saturn were massing in Leo, while the Sun was moving into Virgo (the virgin).
 - f. The stellar body that played the pivotal role during that time was Jupiter.
 - 1.) Jupiter, the king planet, was involved in 6 key conjunctions, beginning on Aug. 12, 3 BC and continuing until Aug. 2 BC.
 - 2.) Jupiter was moving west at that time and someone from the east following it would likewise be moving westward. Matt. 2:9
 - 3.) The Bible states that the star that was leading them came to a definite halt in the heavens. Matt. 2:9
 - 4.) This reality has caused many to suggest that the account in Matthew is either fictitious or simply a miraculous occurrence.
 - 5.) However, astronomers are fully aware that Jupiter does become stationary at times between its progression and its retrogression.
 - 6.) Amazingly, on Dec. 25, 2 B.C., Jupiter came to a fixed position in the middle of the constellation Virgo.
 - 7.) The Bible says that the Magi saw the star stop while they were in Jerusalem. Matt. 2:9
 - 8.) During the predawn hours on Dec. 25, Jupiter would have been directly over Bethlehem at an elevation of 68 degrees above the southern horizon!!

- III. The day and date of Christ's birth.
- A. Christ was obviously not born on Dec. 25 when the Magi visited; He would have been born sometime prior to that.
1. When the Magi arrived, the family was in a house, not in a stable. Matt. 2:11; Lk. 2:7
 2. By the time the Magi arrive, Jesus is being called a παιδίον (paidion--child) and not βρέφος (brephos—infant, newborn). Matt. 2:11; Lk. 2:12
 3. After the Magi departed, Herod slaughtered all the male children in and around Bethlehem, who were under the age of 2 years. Matt. 2:16
 4. This was to account for the fact that the star might signify either His birth or His conception.
 5. All this points to the fact that Jesus was about 15 months old at the time of the Magi's visit.
- B. Chronological information relative to John the Baptist is also helpful in fixing an approximate date.
1. John was six months older than Jesus. Lk. 1:24,26,36
 2. We know that John began his ministry in the 15th year of Tiberius Caesar, which extended from Aug. 28 A.D. to Aug. 29 AD.
 3. We know that John was conceived during the time when his father was performing his appointed priestly service in the Temple. Lk. 1:8
 - a. Zacharias was of the course of Abijah, the eighth of the twenty-four courses established by David. Lk. 1:5
 - b. His course served twice yearly, once in the late spring and once in the late fall.
 - c. The springtime period ran from May 19-26 on the year in question, and Elizabeth conceived some time after that. Lk. 1:23-24
 - d. Since the gestation period is about 280 days, this would place the birth of John in the spring of 3 BC.
 - e. There are compelling reasons to indicate that the conception did not occur during the fall service; however that information can be found in "The Birth of Christ Recalculated" Ernest Martin.
 - f. Therefore, one should look for the birth of Jesus to occur sometime during the fall of 3 B.C.
- C. The day of Christ's birth.
1. The key to this day and date is symbolically revealed in Rev. 12:1-5. **And a great sign** (astrological sign) **appeared in heaven** (the second heaven, space) **a woman** (the only constellation in which the two luminaries, the Sun and the Moon, travel is Virgo, the Virgin) **clothed with the Sun** (the only time that year that the Sun, known as the Supreme Father, would appear to clothe the woman i.e. to be over the body would be between Aug. 27 and Sept. 15) **and the Moon under her feet** (signifying that the Moon was positioned beneath her) **an on her head a crown of twelve stars** (symbolic for the twelve tribes of Israel, but actually there are twelve visible stars which surround Virgo's head).
 2. In the year 3 B.C., the Sun entered the head of the woman on or around Aug. 13, and exited her feet around Oct. 2.
 3. John said the Sun clothed the woman, placing it somewhere in the middle of her body, which occurs only about 20 days each year; in 3 B.C., those dates were Aug. 27-Sept.15.

4. The Moon was under the woman's feet, which occurred on only one day that year during the period while the Sun was clothing the woman.
5. These two events came to pass precisely, but only for less than 2 hours in Palestine on Sept. 11, 3 B.C. from about 6:15 PM till 7:45 PM.
6. The day before, Sept. 10, the Moon was located around the mid-calf region of the woman, and the day after, Sept. 12, the moon was at least 25 diameters out from under the feet of the woman.
7. The new moon, the first day when a sliver of the moon becomes visible, begins the Jewish month, and that year the month was Tishri, the Jewish New Year, the Feast of Trumpets. Lev. 23:23-25
8. It is intriguing to note that Jesus' birth appears to have occurred in the evening; this is based on Luke's account of the announcement to the shepherds. Lk. 2:7-20
9. It must not have been too late in the evening since these men did not appear to be concerned about going to visit a new-born; this is hardly something one would do after midnight

D. Conclusion.

1. The evidence is compelling for placing the birth of John the Baptist in the spring of 3 B.C.
2. This places the birth of Jesus some six months later, sometime in the fall.
3. The sign of Revelation 12:1ff indicates that the time of birth was to be correlated with the heavenly sign.
4. All the evidence points to a birth in the evening of Sept. 11, 3 BC.

IV. The commencement of His public ministry.

- A. As with every aspect of the life of Christ there are varying opinions as to when Jesus began His public ministry.
- B. Luke states that the public ministry of John the Baptist began during the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius. Lk. 3:1-3
- C. Based on Roman records from the first century, Tiberius' first year began on August 19, 14 A.D.; this places his fifteenth year in August 29 A.D.
- D. Thomas Lewin, in his book "Key to the Chronology of the New Testament", states that the beginning of the reign of Tiberius was as well-known a date in the time of Luke as the reign of Queen Victoria is in our own day, and that no single case has been produced in which the years of Tiberius were reckoned in any other way."
 1. Other historians who concur include: Tacitus, Pliny the Elder, Philo and Josephus.
 2. Further, Luke is addressing his work to Theophilus, a Roman official, and would refer to dates in a manner with which Theophilus was familiar.
- E. John the Baptist began his ministry in the spring or summer of 29 A.D., at which time Jesus was **about thirty years old**. Lk. 3:23
- F. In fact, Jesus would have just turned 30 in September of the previous year.
- G. It is accurate, and a generally accepted fact, to say that Jesus' public ministry began some six months after John began his public ministry.
 1. John was actually six months older than Jesus. Lk. 1:36
 2. Some time (months?) must be allowed before Jesus comes to John based on what Luke records. Lk. 3:3-21

3. John began his public ministry during the spring of 29 A.D., and the spring and summer would have been the time of year most conducive to outside baptisms.
 4. Therefore, Jesus was baptized by John sometime in the fall of 29 A.D.; He then began His public ministry immediately.
- H. The first visit of Jesus to Jerusalem for the Passover, following his baptism, provides a chronological note as to when His ministry began.
1. The first Passover is recorded in John 2:13-25.
 2. There, the Jews state that the temple had been built for forty-six years. Jn. 2:20
 3. There had been an ongoing building program by Herod the Great, which involved the outer portions of the Temple precincts; however, the inner Temple had been completed previously.
 4. Josephus states that this first part of Herod's building program was completed in one year and six months.
 5. Since the reconstruction began in 19-20 BC, the sanctuary was completed in 17-18 B.C.
 6. Forty-six years from that date places us in 29-30 A.D., and since Passover was in the spring we arrive at date of 30 A.D.
- I. Christ's baptism, which signified the beginning of His public ministry, occurred in the late summer or early autumn of 29 A.D., when He would have been 30 years old or just barely 31.

V. The duration of Jesus' public ministry.

- A. Extreme views of the length of Christ's public ministry range from as little as 3-4 months, to as much as 10-20 years.
- B. In order to accommodate a ministry of a few months duration, one must compress the gospel accounts unmercifully.
- C. On the other hand, men such as Irenaeus, in an attempt to refute the view of a one-year ministry, go to an opposite extreme; this is largely based on a comment found in the Gospel of John. Jn. 8:57.
- D. The current views which we will evaluate, include a one, two, three or four year ministry.
- E. The one year ministry view is largely based on Luke 4:19, which is a quote of Isa. 61:2.
 1. Simply put, this passage is based on the literal interpretation of the word year.
 2. The terms year and day in that passage should be understood in a figurative sense, and are not used to indicate the actual duration of an event.
 3. The gospel of John makes a shambles of this theory since there are three distinct Passovers mentioned. Jn. 2:13, 6:4, 11:55
 4. Proponents of this view include: Valentinus, a Gnostic commentator, Clement, Origen, and some modern, German higher critics.
- F. The two-year theory relies on the fact that John mentions only three Passovers.
 1. In order to accommodate this view, the information of John 5 and John 6 must be transposed.
 2. However, there is no textual evidence to suggest any order other than the traditional one.
 3. Hence, Christ's ministry must have exceeded two years in length.
 4. Proponents of this view include: Appolinaris, a bishop in Laodicea c. 350 A.D., Epiphanius, Sutcliffe, Bruce and other German interpreters.

- G. The four-year view has some items which commend it, but also raises some questions that have not been answered satisfactorily.
1. This view assumes that John 1 occurs during the season of the Passover; however, this assumption is made without any textual or historical evidence for it.
 2. Therefore, one has to squeeze an entire year between John 1:51 and 2:13, but lacking any compelling textual reason to do so.
 - a. In fact, the geographic notations indicate that Jesus was beyond the Jordan (Jn. 1:28-29) and three days later went to Galilee. Jn. 1:43
 - b. The next recorded fact is that Jesus went to Cana of Galilee for the wedding, which likely explains why he went to Galilee in the first place. Jn. 2:1
 - c. The next note places Jesus in Capernaum, which is still in Galilee, for **a few days**. Jn. 2:12
 - d. As the map below shows, Cana and Capernaum are about 4 hours apart by foot.



3. The second major problem with this view involves the insertion of another unmentioned Passover between John 10 and John 11.
 - a. This argument is again based on silence, but is suggested by the fact that there is a known Passover, which is not mentioned between John 2:13 and 6:4.
 - b. As we will demonstrate, there is textual proof that there did exist an unmentioned Passover between John 2:13 and 6:4; however, there is no such proof for such an insertion between chapters 10 and 11.
 4. Major proponents are Cheney and Stauffer.
- H. The three and one-half year view has the most to commend it, and is the correct one.
- I. This view rests on the assumption that John is the gospel that provides the chronological framework into which we must fit the events of Christ's public ministry.
1. This view requires no transposition of John 5 and John 6.
 2. However, it does provide for the addition of a Passover that is not recorded by John.
 - a. John 4:35 contains a chronological note that suggests that the harvest was approximately 4 months away.
 - b. Since the harvest occurred in April or May, this places us in January or February of 31 AD.
 - c. The next Passover is recorded in John 6:4, but is this the Passover of 31 AD??
 - d. John 5:1 contains a vague reference to a feast that Jesus attended in Jerusalem; however, it does not tell us which feast is in view.
 - e. The three pilgrim feasts, which all Jewish males were required to attend were the Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles.
 - f. This feast cannot be Passover since John **always** names that feast explicitly in his gospel. Jn. 2:13, 6:4, 12:1
 - g. That leaves Pentecost, which occurs exactly fifty days after Passover; it also indicates that a Passover had occurred.
 - h. The other feast was Tabernacles, which occurs in the fall and again, a Passover must have come and gone.
 3. Proponents of this view include: Melito of Sardis c. 190 A.D., Eusebius, Ogg, Robertson, Hendriksen and Guthrie.
 4. This view allows the necessary time for all the events of the gospel accounts, and does no injustice to the chronology of John.
- J. Therefore, the conclusion is that Jesus' public ministry was three and one-half years in duration, beginning in Aug/Sept 29 A.D. and concluding on Passover, April 33 A.D.

VI. The date of the crucifixion.

- A. Before one can actually settle on a year, it is necessary to discuss the day of the week on which Christ died.
- B. There are three major views on which day of the week Jesus died: Wednesday, Thursday and Friday.
- C. Those who hold to Wednesday as the day of crucifixion believe that Jesus died around sunset and rose exactly 72 hours later.
 1. Scroggie is the most well known exponent of this view.
 2. His support is based on the literal interpretation of Matt. 12:40.

3. Proponents of this view suggest that although it is recognized that Jews considered any part of a day as an entire day, when nights are mentioned this ceases to be the case.
 4. Therefore, they conclude that one must view this as three literal days and nights of 24 hours each.
 5. Those holding to this view state that too many events occurred between Christ's death at 3 PM and His burial at 6 PM. (Scroggie lists 20 such events)
 6. This view argues that from typology that Christ must have been selected as the Passover lamb on Nisan 10, when the literal lamb was selected.
- D. Difficulties with the Wednesday view:
1. It is largely based on one passage, which may not be strictly literal. Matt. 12:40
 2. It ignores the well-known fact that Jews counted any part of a day as a day.
 3. While it is true that many events occurred between Christ's death and burial, some things may have been done before His death, and some may have involved more than one person.
- E. The Thursday view:
1. This view is also largely based on Matt. 12:40 and allows 3 days and nights.
 2. Based on typology, the triumphal entry occurred on Nisan 10, (Sunday) and the Passover lamb was to be slain on Nisan 14. Ex. 12:3,6
 3. Some suggest that support is found in Matt. 28:1, indicating that two Sabbaths are in view, the regular weekly Sabbath and the Passover Sabbath.
 4. Proponents cite Jn. 19:31 to suggest that the following day was the Passover Sabbath.
- F. Difficulties with the Thursday view:
1. Again, any part of a day is reckoned by the Jews as being an entire day.
 2. Typology is not violated if Christ entered Jerusalem on Monday, and was crucified on Friday.
 3. The term Sabbath is frequently used (one-third of all New Testament usages) in the plural when only one day is in view.
 4. The argument of Jn. 19:31 is that the weekly Sabbath was not a normal one, but a high Sabbath, indicating that the Passover Sabbath fell on the regular weekly Sabbath.
- G. The Friday view:
1. When one carefully reads the gospels, they clearly leave the impression that Jesus' body was laid in the tomb on the day before the Sabbath. Matt. 27:62, 28:1; Mk.15:42; Lk. 23:54; Jn.19:31
 2. The women went home and rested, according to the command respecting the Sabbath. Lk. 23:56
 3. They returned early on the first day of the week (Sunday), and went to the tomb, which was empty. Matt. 28:1; Mk.16:1; Lk. 24:1; Jn. 20:1
 4. The same day He rose from the grave, Jesus walked and talked with some disciples on the Emmaus road, where they told Him that **it is the third day since these things happened.** Lk. 24:13-21
 5. This has been the common consensus of the Church fathers, and is the view generally accepted by orthodox theologians today.

H. Difficulties with this view:

1. The passage recorded in Matthew, which some insist must be a period of no less than 72 hours.
2. This difficulty is addressed by Harold Hoehner in his work, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*. *"The most frequent reference to Jesus' resurrection is that it occurred on the third day (not the fourth) (Matt. 16:21, 17:23, 20:19, 27:64; Lk. 9:22, 18:33, 24:7,21,46; Acts 10:40; ICor. 15:4). In John 2:19-22 Jesus spoke of His resurrection, He stated that He would be raised up in three days, not on the fourth day. There are 4 passages that speak of Jesus' resurrection as occurring "after three days", (Matt. 27:63; Mk. 8:31, 9:31, 10:34) but this is obviously dealing with the same period as on "the third day"*
3. This must be true, based on the following 2 reasons:
 - a. The three Markan passages are paralleled by one or two of the other synoptic gospels, and, in each case, the other passage does not use the phrase **after three days**, but **on the third day**. Mk. 8:31=Matt. 16:21/Lk. 9:22; Mk.9:31=Matt. 17:23; Mk. 10:34=Matt. 20:19/Lk. 18:33. Thus, the two phrases both mean a period extending to the third day.
 - b. In Matt. 27:63-64 the Pharisees, when appearing before Pilate state that Jesus had predicted that "after three days I will rise again"; then, the Pharisees asked Pilate if they could have a guard detail to secure the grave until the third day.
 - c. Therefore, the phrase **after three days** must have been equivalent to **the third day**; otherwise, they would have asked for a guard until the fourth day.
4. Hoehner goes on to add that, *"having looked at the New Testament evidence, one must ask whether or not this was standard Jewish thinking. There are several Old Testament passages which show that a part of a day is equivalent to the whole day. Gen. 42:17; IKings 20:29; IIChron. 10:5; Esther 4:16 cf.5:1. Rabbinic literature also agrees with this concept, Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah c. 100 A.D., stated "a day and night are an onah (a portion of time) and the portion of an onah is as the whole of it" In conclusion, when one carefully examines all the evidence, it seems that a part of a day/night is counted as a whole day/night."*
- I. The year of Jesus crucifixion should be readily determined if the dates for His birth and the beginning of His public ministry are accurate.
- J. There is astronomical evidence that the only possible years in which Nisan 14-15 fell on a Friday were 27,30,33 and 36 A.D.
 1. 27 A.D. must be eliminated if one takes Lk 3:1-2 seriously.
 2. 36 A.D. must likewise be omitted based on that same passage, since there is no evidence that Jesus' ministry lasted some 6-7 years.
 3. The 30 A.D. date allows only one year for Christ's ministry, if one takes Luke 3:1-2 as being accurate.
 4. Biblically, chronologically, and astronomically, 33 A.D. is left as the only acceptable date; further, it is the date that fits perfectly with the three and one-half year ministry as outlined by John.
- K. Therefore, Jesus was crucified on Friday, Nisan 14-15, 33 AD; April 3, 33 AD on our calendar.

- VII. The resurrection to Pentecost.
- A. Having established that Jesus was crucified on Friday, all the gospel accounts place the resurrection early on the first day of the week, Sunday, Nisan 16-17, April 5, 33 A.D.
 - B. Jesus appeared several times that day to several individuals and groups of individuals.
 - 1. To Mary Magdalene. Jn. 20:14
 - 2. To other women returning from the tomb. Matt. 28:9-10
 - 3. To Peter later on Sunday. Lk. 24:34; ICor. 15:5
 - 4. To the disciples on the Emmaus road. Lk. 24:13-33
 - 5. To the disciples, minus Thomas, on Sunday evening. Lk. 24:36-43; Jn. 20:19-24
 - C. Jesus continues to appear more sporadically over a period of forty days, culminating with the Ascension.
 - 1. To the disciples, who were with Thomas, a week later. Jn. 20:26-29
 - 2. To the seven disciples at the Sea of Galilee. Jn. 21:1-23
 - 3. To a group of over 500 believers in Galilee. ICor. 15:6
 - 4. To James. ICor. 15:7
 - 5. To the eleven in Galilee. Matt. 28:16-20
 - 6. To the eleven at the ascension in Jerusalem. Acts 1:3-12
 - D. The ascension occurs 10 days prior to Pentecost, and fell on Thursday, May 14, 33 A.D.
 - E. Pentecost, which occurs 50 days following the Passover, inaugurated the change of the base of operations for the Holy Spirit and fell on Sunday, May 24, 33 AD.
 - F. Jesus Christ now sits at the right hand of His Father, awaiting the command to deliver His bride via the rapture. Lk. 22:69; Acts 2:33; Rom. 8:34; Eph. 1:20; Col. 3:1; Heb. 1:3