



The Birth of Yeshua

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For more detailed information see my commentary on
Luke 1 & 2; 3:23 and Matthew 1 & 2:

<http://www.blainerobison.com/bible2/bible2.htm>



Outline

- The Dating Puzzle
- Year of Birth
- Season of Birth
- Suggested Nativity Timeline



The Dating Puzzle



The Challenge of Dating

- **Traditional Belief**
 - Yeshua was born 25 December 5 B.C. Was he?
- **Primary Sources for Dating the Nativity**
 - Scripture
 - Extra-biblical Jewish literature
 - Roman historical literature
 - Literature of church fathers (2nd to 4th cent. A.D.)
- **Facts**
 - No Bible verse directly states Yeshua's birthday.
 - No Bible verse directs commemoration of His birth.
 - Narrative events are subject to interpretation.
- **Goal**
 - To deduce a probable date based on the preponderance of evidence.



Pieces of the Dating Puzzle

- **Astronomical** (http://www.tccsa.tc/articles/star_dates.html)
 - Planetary conjunctions, 7 – 1 B.C.
 - Star observed by the Magi, Matt 2:2, 9.
 - Sun and moon in Virgo, Rev 12:1-5.
 - Lunar eclipse in connection with Herod's death, (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVII, 6:4).
- **Political**
 - Reign of Herod the Great, Luke 1:5.
 - Reign of Caesar Augustus, Luke 2:1.
 - Reign of Quirinius in Syria, Luke 2:2.
 - Death of Herod the Great, Matt 2:19.
 - Reign of Archelaus, Matt 2:22.
 - Reign of Caesar Tiberius, Luke 3:1.
 - Procuratorship of Pontius Pilate, Luke 3:1.



Pieces of the Dating Puzzle

- **Religious**

- Duty of Zechariah the priest, Luke 1:5.
- Purification ritual for Miriam, Luke 2:20.
- High Priest in office, Matt 2:4; Luke 3:2.
- Date for building the Temple, John 2:20.

- **Chronology**

- Generations from the exile to Yeshua, Matt 1:17.
- Timing of the Roman census, Luke 2:1-2.
- Timing of Miriam's visit to Elizabeth, Luke 1:36.
- Season for shepherds to stay in the field, Luke 2:8.
- Age of Yeshua at visit of the Magi, Matt 2:11.
- Age of children slaughtered by Herod, Matt 2:16.
- Age of Yeshua at beginning of ministry, Luke 3:23.



Nativity Chronology

Below are the events of the nativity of Yeshua the Messiah described in Matthew and Luke in their chronological order. No dates are considered as yet.

- Prelude

- Genealogy of the Messiah (Matt 1:1-17).

- Birth Narratives

- Angelic announcement to Zechariah in Jerusalem (Luke 1:5-20).
- Angelic announcement to Miriam in Nazareth; Elizabeth six months pregnant (Luke 1:26-38).
- Miriam's visit to Elizabeth in Hebron (Luke 1:39-55).
- After three months Miriam returns to Nazareth and found to be pregnant (Luke 1:56; Matt 1:18).



Nativity Chronology

- Birth Narratives (cont.)
 - Birth of Yochanan (John) the Immerser, six months before Yeshua (Luke 1:57-63).
 - Angelic announcement to Joseph and his obedience (Matt 1:19-25).
 - Prophetic message of Zechariah (Luke 1:64-79)
 - Joseph & Miriam travel to Bethlehem, birth of Yeshua (Luke 2:1-21).
 - Purification offering of Miriam and Messianic prophecies (Luke 2:22-38).
 - Return of Yeshua's family to Nazareth (Luke 2:39).



Nativity Chronology

- Post-birth Narratives

- Travel of Yeshua's family to Bethlehem.
- Visit and adoration of the Magi (Matt 2:1-12).
- Flight of Yeshua's family to and sojourn in Egypt (Matt 2:13-15).
- Massacre of children in Bethlehem (Matt 2:16-18).
- Death of Herod the Great (Matt 2:19).
- Return of Yeshua's family to Nazareth (Matt 2:19-23).



Key Factors to Dating

- **Conventional Wisdom**
 - Suggested dates range from 8-4 B.C.
 - Christian scholars generally, 5 B.C.
- **Regarding the Year of Birth**
 - The census, Luke 2:1.
 - The reign of Caesar Augustus, Luke 2:1.
 - The death of Herod the Great, Matt 2:19.
- **Regarding the Season of Birth**
 - The Priestly Course of Abijah (Heb. *Aviyah*), Luke 1:5.
 - The Festival Calendar
 - The Shepherds in the Field, Luke 2:8.
 - The Sun and Moon in Virgo, Rev. 12:1.
 - The Bethlehem Star, Matt 2:9.



Year of Birth



Prophecy – Daniel 9:24-26

- **Decrees**

- **First:** by Cyrus in 536 B.C. permitting Jews to return to their Land and to build a temple (Ezra 1:1-4).
- **Second:** by Darius in 519 B.C. for temple building (Ezra 6:1-5, 8-12); building completed in 516 B.C.
- **Third:** by Artaxerxes in 458 B.C. for temple work (Ezra 7:11-26).
- **Fourth:** by Artaxerxes in 445 B.C. to amend “third” decree to allow rebuilding the city.

- **Years to Messiah (69 “sevens”)**

- 69 periods of seven years each from city’s rebuilding to Messiah’s coming & being cut off.
- Which decree date to calculate from?
- Only the fourth decree (445 B.C.) seems relevant.
- How should the years be calculated? Lunar or solar?



Date of Messiah & Prophecy

- Assumptions

- Crucifixion: Scholars say either A.D. 30 or 33.
- Destruction of Temple in A.D. 70.
- Glory of God left the Temple forty years prior to its destruction (TB *Yoma* 39b).
- A.D. 30 most likely for crucifixion. (cf. Mark 15:38)

- Calculation

- Total time to account for = 69 “sevens.”
- $360 \text{ lunar days} \times 69 \div 365 \text{ solar days} = 68 \times 7 = 476$ prophetic years.
- Death in A.D. 33 would imply birth in 1 B.C.
- Death in A.D. 30 would imply birth in 3 B.C.
- A.D. 33 minus 476 years = 443 B.C.
- A.D. 30 minus 476 years = 446 B.C. (near 4th decree)



Generations – Matthew 1:17

- **Measurements**
 - From Abraham to David = fourteen generations.
 - From David to the Babylonian exile = fourteen generations.
 - From the Babylonian exile [start or end?] until the Messiah are fourteen generations.
- **Length of a Generation**
 - Changes with each generation.
 - Computed as years from children to grandchildren.
 - Captives taken to Babylon: 606 B.C., 597 B.C., 586 B.C.
 - Cyrus released Jews to return in 536 B.C.
 - This dating factor is too uncertain for calculation.



The Census, Luke 2:1-5

- **Ordered by Caesar Augustus.**
 - Instigator of significant census activity.
 - Augustus revived the office of censor, that had been inactive for forty-one years prior to his accession.
- **Worldwide census, a first, Luke 2:1.**
 - 2 B.C. was the 25th anniversary of the reign of Augustus and the 750th anniversary of Rome's founding.
 - The Roman Senate wanted to give Augustus the title, *Pater Patraie*, "Father of his Country."
 - Augustus refused unless the people agreed, so this called for a census and a pledge of allegiance from those enrolled.



The Census, Luke 2:1-5

- The pledge was especially required from anyone in a royal line in any province who might try to claim the crown at some time.
- This included the line of David in Judea, to which both Joseph and Miriam belonged.
- The decree for the registration and pledge was issued in early August of 3 B.C. and had been completed by the end of the year.
 - On February 5, 2 B.C., Augustus became *Pater Patraie*.
 - Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, Book II, §58.
- In Judea the census was supervised by Quirinius, military legate and administrator of Syria.
- The registration of Augustus was acted on in Judea in the autumn of 3 B.C. Yeshua was probably born about that time.



Reign of Caesar Augustus

- Key Dates for Caesar Augustus
 - Born 63 B.C.
 - Assumed inheritance of Julius Caesar & command of Caesar's army in 44 B.C.
 - Granted consular powers by the Senate in 43 B.C.
 - Ruled alone from 31 B.C. (Battle of Actium).
 - Died August, A.D. 14.
- Yeshua born in the 41st year of Augustus' reign:
 - Irenaeus (A.D. 120-202), *Against Heresies*, III, 21:3
 - Tertullian (A.D. 145-220), *An Answer to the Jews*, VIII
 - Tertullian addendum: birth 15 years before the death of Augustus.
 - Origen (A.D. 185-253), *Homilies, Fragment 82*.
 - Calculated from the consular appointment, 43 B.C.



Reign of Caesar Augustus

- Yeshua born in the 42nd year of Augustus' reign:
 - Eusebius (A.D. 263-339), *Church History* I, 5:2
 - Epiphanius (A.D. 315-403), *Panarion* 51.22.3
 - Calculated from 44 B.C.
- Yeshua born in the 28th year of Augustus' reign
 - Clement of Alexandria (c. A.D. 150-215), (*Stromata* 1:21).
 - Calculated from 31 B.C. (Battle of Actium).
- Thus, Yeshua's birth took place in 3/2 B.C.



Death of Herod

- **Key Dates**

- Appointed king by the Romans in 184th Olympiad, or 40 B.C. (Josephus, *Ant. XVII*, 8:1).
- The general assumption is he reigned 37–4 B.C., putting Yeshua's birth in 6/5 B.C.
- Herod died after a lunar eclipse and before the following Passover (Josephus, *Ant. XVII*, 6:4).
- When Herod died he had reigned 37 years (*Ant. XVII*, 8:1), which questions the 4 B.C. date.

- **Consideration**

- Regnal years did not include the accession year.
- A new regnal year for non-Israelite kings began in Tishri (Sept-Oct), (TB *Rosh Hashanah* 3a).
- Thus, Herod began his regnal years in Tishri 39 B.C.; 37 regnal years would come to Tishri 2 B.C.



Death of Herod

- **Disease**
 - Suffered from a cancer-like affliction called Fournier's gangrene.
- **Events between eclipse & Pesach**
 - Executed two priests, on the day before the eclipse.
 - Herod treated his illness in various ways.
 - Called for imprisonment of Jewish elders.
 - Made his own funeral arrangements.
 - Executed his son Antipater.
 - Directed kingdom to be divided between his 3 sons.
 - Sent gifts to Caesar.
 - Attempted suicide but a cousin prevented it.
 - Five days later Herod died; – 7 days of mourning.
 - Archelaus engages in many admin. activities.
 - Brief sedition arises; then *Pesach*.



Lunar Eclipses – NASA (Israel Time)

- 5 B.C.
 - 23 Mar, 20:16, Total, *Pesach* 23 Mar, same day
 - 15 Sep, 22:05, Total, too late for *Pesach*
- 4 B.C., 13 Mar, 02:45, Partial
 - *Pesach* 12 Apr (30 days)
- 2 B.C., 20 Jan, 13:40, Partial
 - *Pesach* 20 March (60 days)
- 1 B.C., 10 Jan, 01:04, Total
 - *Pesach* 8 Apr (90 days)
- 1 B.C., 29 Dec, 16:34, Partial
 - *Pesach* 29 Mar 1 A.D.



Death of Herod

- Only 3 lunar eclipses near Herod's death.
 - Partial eclipse 13 March 4 B.C. *Pesach* on 12 April.
 - Total eclipse 10 January 1 B.C.
 - Total eclipse 29 December 1 B.C.
- Consideration.
 - Josephus lists too many events from the eclipse to *Pesach* for the 4 B.C. date.
 - The 2 B.C. eclipse does not allow time for Gospel narrative and dating of the church fathers.
 - A total eclipse would more likely be taken note of, so the best date for Herod's death is 1 B.C.
 - Early Christian historians placed Yeshua's birth after 4 B.C. eclipse and before 10 Jan 1 B.C. eclipse. This may eliminate the 29 December eclipse in 1 B.C.



Season of Birth



The Course of Aviyah

- **Background**

- Zechariah assigned to Abijah division, Luke 1:5.
- The priests were organized into 24 divisions; Abijah was eighth in order. (See 1Chron 24:7–18)
- There were at least 20,000 priests (Josephus, *Against Apion*, 2:8) .
- Twelve divisions were stationed in Jericho, and the rest throughout the Land of Israel (TB *Taanith* 27a).

- **Duty**

- Each division served in the temple for one week, twice a year, as well as at the three major pilgrim festivals (Deut 16:16).
- During the time between festivals divisions not on duty could be called in to help the weekly course who was (TB *Sukkah* 5:7).



The Course of Aviyah

- **Starting Point**
 - *Taanith 29a*: On 9 Av in A.D. 70, the Jehoiarib (Heb. *Yehoyariv*) division (the first) was on duty.
- **Calculation Assumptions**
 - Did the priestly divisions perform their duty in unbroken and continuous succession?
 - Did the schedule for the priestly divisions start over with the beginning of the sacred year? (cf. Ex 12:2)
 - There is no firm evidence of the method used for determining the division schedule.
 - Typical scholarly determination of Zechariah's duty begins with an assumption of the year of the nativity and then calculates the divisions from A.D. 70 to that time.



The Course of Aviyah

- **Complication of Backward Charting**
 - In A.D. 70 the Zealots had assumed control of the city and restructured the priestly management.
 - The mention of the Jehoiarib division does not imply a normal schedule. The situation was not normal.
 - Years on the Jewish calendar can have six different lengths to reconcile the lunar and solar year.
 - The multiple times priests served each year makes pinpointing a specific season problematic.
- **Nativity**
 - In reality, the schedule of the priestly divisions is not useful in dating the nativity.
 - Zechariah received his angelic announcement 15 months before Yeshua was born, since Yochanan was 6 months older than Yeshua (Luke 1:36, 42).



Festival Calendar

- John 1:14
 - “And the Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us. We looked upon his glory, the glory of the one and only from the Father, full of grace and truth” (TLV)
 - May imply the birth occurred at the time of *Sukkot*, Feast of Tabernacles (Tishri-Sept.).
- However, consider John 1:9, 11
 - “The true light, coming into the world, gives light to every man. ... He came to His own, but His own did not receive Him.” (TLV)
 - May imply conception during *Hanukkah* or birth during *Hanukkah*, the Festival of Lights (Kislev-Dec.)
- These statements do not date the nativity.



Shepherds in the Field

- **Scripture – Luke 2:8**
 - “Now there were shepherds in the same region, living out in the fields and guarding their flock at night.” (TLV)
- **Shepherd facts**
 - Shepherds were watching their flocks by night - only when lambs are being born in the spring or autumn.
 - The flocks would not be in the fields in the spring because they would trample the new crops.
 - Flocks were only allowed in the fields in the autumn to graze the stubble and for the fall lambing season.
 - The season favors September for the birth.



Sign in the Heavens

- **Background**
 - The twelve constellations were created for the benefit of Zion (TB *Berachot* 32b).
 - On the Hebrew calendar the constellations coincide with the religious seasons, beginning with Passover occurring in Aries (Josephus, *Ant.* III, 10:5).
- **Chief Planets & Constellations – Symbolic Meaning**
 - Jupiter = Planet of kings, righteousness, the Messiah
 - Venus = The Mother Planet
 - Saturn = Planet Protector of the Jews
 - Mars = Planet of War, Aggression, Danger
 - Mercury = Planet of Speed, Messenger, Deception
 - Regulus = Star of Kingship, Chief Star of Leo
 - Leo = Constellation of Kings and Judah
 - Virgo = The Virgin; also symbol of marriage



Sign in the Stars

- **Scripture: Revelation 12:1-2**
 - “A great sign was seen in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of twelve stars. She was with child. She cried out, laboring and in pain, giving birth.” (NASB)
- **Interpretation**
 - Birth took place when sun and moon were in the Virgo Constellation.
 - Virgo is associated with the September Equinox.
 - This occurs at the time of the September New Moon, or shortly thereafter.



Coming of the Magi

- **Background (Heb. *chartummim*)**
 - Wise and learned men (Cicero).
 - House of Persian parliament; king makers (Strabo).
 - Teachers of divine virtues (Philo).
 - These Magi likely Jewish. (came to “worship”)
 - They had Daniel’s prophecy of the Messiah.
- **Meanwhile in Bethlehem**
 - Yeshua was a child (Grk. *paidon*, Matt 2:8, 11), not a baby (Grk. *brephos*, Luke 2:12, 16)
 - Yeshua’s family was in a house, Matt 2:11.
 - Yeshua was likely 1–2 years old, Matt 2:16.
 - Visit of the holy family in Bethlehem likely occurred in September – December, for *Sukkot* or *Hanukkah*.
 - Joseph had intended to live in Bethlehem, Matt 2:21-22.



Coming of the Magi

- **Narrative**

- The Magi saw a “star” rising where they lived, perhaps Babylon or Persia.
- They saw the star and left home; they did not follow the star to Israel. (Matt 2:2)
- Matthew records the direction from which they traveled as “east.” They likely traveled across Arabia to avoid the Roman army.
- Six weeks later they arrived in Judea and went to see King Herod.
- They asked the location of the King of the Jews – what chutzpah! “We saw His star in the morning light;” “We want to worship Him!”
- The Magi learned Yeshua’s birthplace and left, but then observed the star to reappear and precede them, coming to rest over the house. (Matt 2:9)



Star of Bethlehem

- **Many different suggestions have been made.**
 - A comet or meteor, but no comets in 3/2 B.C.
 - A supernova, but none in vicinity of 3/2 B.C.
 - Sh'kinah glory of God, due to action in verse 9, but “star” does not translate Sh’kinah in the Tanakh.
 - A conjunction of planets. Most popular solution.
 - God insured the Magi found the right house.
- **Remarkable Events (2 B.C.)**
 - 27 August: a conjunction of planets In Virgo: Jupiter (the King Planet), Mars (Danger), Saturn (Protection), and Venus (the Mother).
 - 25 December: conjunction above Bethlehem of Jupiter, Venus, the King star Regulus (the star of the Jewish Messiah) in Leo (the constellation of Judah), while the sun was then located in Virgo (the Virgin).



Suggested Nativity Timeline



4 B.C.

- June: Angelic announcement to Zechariah in Jerusalem (Luke 1:5-20).
- November/December: Angelic announcement to Miriam in Nazareth (Luke 1:26-38).
- December: Miriam's visit to Elizabeth in Hebron (Luke 1:39-55).
- December 14-21: Celebration of Hanukkah.



3 B.C.

- **March: Miriam returns to Nazareth (Luke 1:56).**
- **March: Birth of Yochanan (Luke 1:57-63).**
- **April: Miriam found to be pregnant (Matt 1:18).**
- **April-May: Angelic announcement to Joseph and his obedience (Matt 1:19-25).**
- **August: Travel from Nazareth to Bethlehem (Luke 2:4-5).**
- **September: Birth of Yeshua in Bethlehem (Luke 2:6-21)**
- **October: Purification offering of Miriam (Luke 2:22-24); Messianic prophecies (Luke 2:25-38); and return to Nazareth (Luke 2:39).**



2 B.C.

- **Late Fall: Return of Yeshua's family to Bethlehem with the intention of settling there.**
- **December 22-29: Celebration of Hanukkah.**
- **December: The visit and adoration of the Magi (Matt 2:1-12).**
- **December: Flight of Yeshua's family to and sojourn in Egypt (Matt 2:13-15).**



1 B.C.

- **January: Massacre of the children in Bethlehem (Matt 2:16-18).**
- **January 10: Total eclipse of the moon.**
- **January 28-29: Death of Herod the Great (Matt 2:19).**
- **March: Return of Yeshua's family to Nazareth (Matt 2:19-23).**



Conclusion

“But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, having been born of woman, having been born under Torah, that he might redeem those under Torah, that we might receive adoption as sons.” (Gal 4:4-5 *BR*)