

# Dating Christ's Crucifixion

**Abstract:** This paper reevaluates the possible date for the death of Jesus Christ based on W. Graham Scroggie's postulate for the day of the crucifixion. The analysis shows a remarkable alignment of astronomical data with historical evidence, when assessed with a new understanding of the length of Christ's ministry. It was found that Christ began his ministry in the spring/summer of AD 26 and was crucified on Wed April 28, AD 28 (Julian).

## 1 Historical perspective on the date of the crucifixion

A commonly proposed date for the crucifixion of Christ is Friday April 3, AD-33. This was the conclusion of Fotheringham (1934)<sup>[1, 2]</sup>, Hoehner (1978)<sup>[3]</sup>, Humphreys and Waddington (1985)<sup>[4]</sup>, Schaeffer (1990)<sup>[5]</sup> and others. Newton also considered this date but preferred Friday April 23, AD-34<sup>[6]</sup>. Various other dates have been proffered, among which are proponents of the Wednesday crucifixion on April 25, AD-31<sup>[7]</sup>.

## 2 Difficulties with the Friday crucifixion

The grave problem with a Friday crucifixion is the difficulty in reconciling it with the biblical record. Scroggie (1948)<sup>[8]</sup> postulated a Wednesday evening burial/Saturday evening resurrection that is more plausible, and Banks<sup>[9]</sup> has comprehensively outlined the problems with both the Friday and Thursday crucifixion scenarios. In brief, the discrepancies raised by the Friday evening crucifixion and Sunday morning resurrection are as follows:

- a) Matt 12:40 is emphatic that Christ would lie in the grave for three days and three nights. This is no minor matter to be ignored or trivialized since Christ indicated that it is the only sign of his messiahship (Matt 12:39; Luke 11:29~30). Neither the Friday or Thursday crucifixion days satisfy the three day and three night criteria.
- b) The weight of the evidence is that Christ was not resurrected on Sunday morning. All the gospels agree that when the women came to the tomb early Sunday morning, Christ was not there (Matt 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1; John 20:1). John's account points out that it was still dark when they came to the tomb. This makes the Friday crucifixion date even more untenable since it effectively removes any fraction of the Sunday daylight period from the count. Most translations of Mark 16:9 have interjected the word 'Jesus' into the verse and wrongly give the impression that Jesus rose on the first day of the week. The New International Version, based on the minority texts, even discounts the whole section from Mark 16:9 ~ 20<sup>[10]</sup>.
- c) Considering the events that transpired from Jesus' death at about 3.00pm (Matt 27:45) to the time he was placed in the tomb, it is likely that Jesus was placed in the tomb at dusk (Matt 27:57). This situation will also remove a partial daylight period from the count and further calls into question the Friday crucifixion.
- d) John 19:31 makes it clear that the Sabbath following Christ's crucifixion was a 'high day' or an annual Sabbath which could fall on almost any day of the week (Lev 23:5~7). The weekly Sabbath by comparison begins at twilight on Friday and ends at twilight on Saturday (See section 3.1). The misunderstanding of this

distinction is perhaps the prime reason why so many analyses have gravitated to Friday crucifixion date.

- e) Luke 23:56 tells us that the women prepared spices and then rested on the Sabbath. Since a High Day Sabbath followed the crucifixion, the spices could not be prepared until after the High Day Sabbath had come to an end. Luke 23:56 requires another Sabbath rest day following the High Day Sabbath, which a Friday crucifixion/Sunday resurrection does not allow. This verse also negates a Thursday crucifixion, since the day following the crucifixion was a High Day Sabbath and no work was to be done (Lev 23:7).
- f) Bullinger<sup>[11]</sup> [appendix 148] points out that the Jews required at least three days burial to certify a death. This was one reason that Christ waited four days to resurrect Lazarus (John 11:6, 17). To negate any doubts as to the certainty of his death, Christ would want to satisfy this legal requirement.

The widespread fixation on a Friday crucifixion in the face of such compelling biblical contradiction is puzzling, especially since the historical details of the process of adoption of the Easter tradition following the ‘Quartodeciman controversy’ is well documented<sup>[12]</sup> and clearly shows a movement to disassociate from the Jewish tradition.

### 3 First century Jewish Passover Practice

To decipher the events surrounding Christ’s death and resurrection, they must be examined in the context of Jewish religious practices at the time. The term ‘Jewish’ is taken to be a regional descriptor for the Israelitish inhabitants of the area including the descendents of the tribe of Judah, the priestly tribe of Levi and the tribe of Benjamin (IIChron 11:12 ~ 14; Ezra 1:5; Acts 22:3). Two items in particular that help bring clarity to the Gospel accounts are:

- a) An understanding of how the Jews counted the day.
- b) An understanding of how different sects observed the Jewish Spring Holy Days.

#### 3.1 The Jewish Day

Stroes<sup>[13]</sup> and other researchers<sup>[7]</sup> [chap 5] have pointed out the difficulties in exegesis for words translated ‘day’ in the Bible and also for terms relating to the day, such as ‘morning’, ‘evening’ and ‘between the evenings’. Zeitlin<sup>[14]</sup> has also highlighted possible changes in time reference in the Old Testament.

However, for the period of Christ’s life, there is consensus that the dominant Jewish sects counted the start of the day at twilight, so that a full day consisted of the night period followed by the daylight period<sup>[7]</sup> [pg 52]. Mark 1:21, 32 is a confirmation of this practice, since the people waited until the Sabbath ended at sunset, before bringing their sick to Jesus.

Proponents of the Easter tradition have based their case on the Jewish practice of using the term ‘day’ to apply to all or a fraction of a twenty-four hour period, but this is invalid because the New Testament is written in Greek which holds no such practice. Even if the Jewish custom of designating a partial day as a day is considered, Christ’s use of the term ‘three days and three nights’ is definite enough to demand at least fractions of three days as well as three nights, which the Friday crucifixion and Sunday-morning resurrection does not satisfy.

### 3.1.1 Harmonizing John 19:14

The timeline of the Synoptics is a 9.00 am crucifixion followed by a period of darkness from noon to 3.00 pm, when Christ dies (Mark 15:25, 33; Matt 27:45; Luke 23:44). In John 19:14 however, the term ‘sixth hour’ (KJV) is used and many have assumed that John was referring to the time just before the crucifixion. Some authors have proposed that the ‘sixth hour’ in the Roman system of timekeeping is about 6.00 am, and signified the time that Jesus was brought to Pilate for questioning. Wright<sup>[15]</sup> has highlighted the difficulties in this interpretation since the placement of John 19:14 is after the trials by Pilate and immediately precedes the crucifixion. In examining the other scriptures where John gives the time of day (John 1:39; 4:6, 52), the context is consistent with the Jewish system of timekeeping. In any event, it seems implausible that Pilate’s Judgment hall would be open as early as 6.00 am, since that corresponds to daybreak around the time of the spring equinox at Jerusalem’s latitude.

The difficulty can be resolved if the term ‘sixth hour’ is associated with preparation for the Passover, so that a paraphrase of John 19:14 would read as follows:

‘Now preparations for the Passover (sacrifice) started at noon, so he (Pilate) said to the Jews “Here is your King.”’

The issue was that Pilate was being pressed to make a decision, since the Jews had to start preparations at noon for the sacrifice of Passover lambs. (See section 3.2.2)

## 3.2 Jewish Spring Holy Days

The Jewish Holy Days during spring comprised the following celebrations (Ex 12:6, 42; Ex 13:6 ~ 7; Lev 23:5 ~ 14; Num 28:16 ~ 26; Deut 16:1 ~ 8)<sup>[16]</sup>:

- a) The Passover.
- b) The Days of Unleavened Bread.
- c) A High Day Sabbath on the first day of Unleavened Bread.
- d) A High Day Sabbath on the last day of Unleavened Bread
- e) The Night to be Much Observed.
- f) The Wave Sheaf Offering.

Though different sects recognized these events during the Spring Holy Days, they did not always agree on when and how they were to be kept. There was consensus that the Days of Unleavened Bread was a seven-day period commencing on the fifteenth of the first Jewish month, called Abib or Nissan, with the first day being a High Day Sabbath and the seventh day being a High Day Sabbath.

However, different sects had different views on the other spring Holy Day events. The plurality of practices that existed at the time of Christ is best illustrated by the differences in when the Wave Sheaf Offering was observed.

### 3.2.1 The Wave Sheaf Offering

The Pharisees kept the Wave Sheaf Offering on the day after the High Day Sabbath on the first day of Unleavened Bread, while the Samaritans and Karaites observed it on the day following the weekly Sabbath that falls within the period of the Days of Unleavened Bread. The Boethusians, on the other hand, kept the Wave Sheaf Offering on the day following the weekly Sabbath that came after the Days of Unleavened Bread, while the Falashas observed it on the day following the High Day Sabbath on the last Day of Unleavened

Bread<sup>[17, 18]</sup>. The Qumran sect kept the Wave Sheaf Offering on the day following the Sabbath that falls during the Days of Unleavened Bread, but used a 364 day Solar Calendar that differed from the Lunar Calendar used by most of the other sects<sup>[19]</sup>, so that the Spring Holy Day events fell on specific days of the week.

### 3.2.2 The Passover

In the case of the Passover, the Pharisees, the dominant sect at the time of Christ's crucifixion, killed the Passover in the daylight portion of the fourteenth of Abib and consumed it on the night portion of the fifteenth of Abib, at the same time that the first day of Unleavened bread had begun. Josephus places the slaying of the lambs between 3.00 ~ 5.00pm<sup>[20]</sup> [6.9.3], while other sources suggest that the slaughter began at midday<sup>[21-23]</sup>. Even though the Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread were separate events (Mark 14:1), the Pharisees and other sects also used the terms 'Passover' and 'Days of Unleavened Bread' interchangeably (Luke 22:1)<sup>[24, 25]</sup>. The Passover practices of many of the other sects were lost when they disappeared from history, but we do have existing today, a small community descended from the Samaritans, who observe the Passover on the evening portion of the fourteenth of Abib<sup>[26]</sup>. The Samaritans who derived their religious practices from Israelitish priests (II Kings 17:27 ~ 28), also hold to the pre-deuteronomic rituals of the Passover, where the sacrifice is to be done by the laity and not by the priests at the sanctuary<sup>[27]</sup>. Talmon<sup>[28]</sup> has pointed out that there are historical differences in Holy Day practices between the Jews and the other tribes that constituted Israel. Philo also confirms that the Passover was kept according 'to the order and tradition of each people'<sup>[29]</sup>.

### 3.2.3 The Night to be Much Observed

As for the Night to be Much Observed, the Pharisees have traditionally combined this celebration with the Passover celebration on the evening portion of the fifteenth of Abib. Since the destruction of the Temple, Pharisees have continued with this celebratory meal but have reduced the Passover observance to preparing a token Passover plate containing the roasted shank of a lamb<sup>[30]</sup>. The Karaites as well, have celebrated the Night to be Much Observed on the night of the fifteenth of Abib, but have not celebrated the Passover since the destruction of the Temple in 70AD<sup>[31]</sup>.

### 3.2.4 Inferences on the Last Supper

Much of the confusion on the keeping of the Jewish Spring Holy Days is attributable to the Deuteronomic instructions, which differ in significant ways from the instructions in the other books of the Torah<sup>[32]</sup>. These differences have prompted Coulter<sup>[33]</sup> to make a case for scriptural editing of Deut 16, along the lines of those evidenced by Deut 34. Indeed, it is unlikely that Moses would have instituted such significant changes to the Passover rituals without some explanation on the change from his previous instructions in Ex 12 and 13, Num 28 and Lev 23.

The important observation is that there was no uniform way in which the Spring Holy Days were observed in the time of Christ. The Gospel accounts can therefore be accepted without interpretation, with Christ and his disciples observing the Passover on the evening/night of the fourteenth of Abib, while the Pharisees began preparations for their Passover sacrifice on the afternoon period of the fourteenth of Abib and consumed the Passover sacrifice on the evening/night of the fifteenth of Abib.

## 4 Timeline for the Crucifixion Day

Based on the previous discussions, we can propose the timeline for Christ's last day as shown in Table 1:

**Table 1: Timeline for the Crucifixion Day**

Event	Jewish Time	Roman Time System	Remarks
Christ observes the Passover with his disciples according to the pre-deuteronomic guidelines	Abib 14 - Night	Tuesday – 6.00pm ~ 10.00pm	I Cor 11:23; Mark 14:16 Matt 26:19 Luke 22:13 ~15
Christ is arrested	Abib 14 - Night	Tuesday – midnight	Luke 22:55
Christ tried and convicted by the Jews	Abib 14 - Night	Wednesday – 1.00am ~ 6.00am	John 18:19 ~ 24
Christ brought before Pontius Pilate	Abib 14 - Day	Wednesday – 7.00am	Matt 27: 1 ~ 14 Luke 23: 1 ~ 7 John 18:29 ~ 38
Christ sent to Herod	Abib 14 - Day	Wednesday - 7.30am	Luke 23:8 ~ 10
Christ brought once again before Pontius Pilate	Abib 14 - Day	Wednesday - 8.00am	John 19:8 ~ 16
Christ crucified	Abib 14 - Day	Wednesday - 9.00am	Mark 15:25
Darkness over the land	Abib 14 - Day	Wednesday - 12.00noon ~ 3.00pm	Matt 27:45; Mark 15:33 Luke 23: 44 ~ 45
Christ dies	Abib 14 - Day	Wednesday - 3.00pm	Matt 27:50; Mark 15: 37 Luke 23:46; John 19:30
Christ placed in tomb	Abib 14 - dusk	Wednesday - 6.00pm	Matt 27:59 ~ 60 Mark 15:46; Luke 23:53 John 19: 41 ` 42
High Day Sabbath 1 <sup>st</sup> Day of Unleavened Bread (Pharisaic Passover at Wednesday Evening)	Abib 15 – Night and Day	Wednesday - 6.00pm ~ Thursday 6.00pm	
Women buy and prepare spices. (Wave Sheaf Offering according to Pharisee tradition in morning)	Abib 16 – Day	Friday – between 6.00am and 6.00pm	Luke 23:56
Weekly Sabbath Women rest	Abib 17 – Night and Day	Friday - 6.00pm ~ Saturday 6.00pm	Luke 23:56
Christ resurrected	Abib 17 - dusk	Saturday - 6.00pm	Matt 12: 40
Women visit the empty tomb	Abib 18 - dawn	Sunday - 6.00am	Matt 28:1 Mark 16:1 ~ 4 Luke 24:1 ~ 3; John 20:1
Christ - the Wave Sheaf according to Sadducee tradition.	Abib 18 - day	Sunday – between 7.00am and 6.00pm	John 20:17

## 5 Identifying the date of the crucifixion

### 5.1 Astronomical possibilities for the day of the crucifixion

Jesus was crucified during the procurator-ship of Pontius Pilate, which was during AD 26 to AD 36<sup>[34]</sup>, so this limits the period to be investigated.

If the fourteenth of Abib was from Tuesday 6.00pm to Wednesday 6.00pm, then the first of Abib would fall from Wednesday 6.00pm to Thursday 6.00pm.

At the time of Christ, the first day of the month was determined by observation of the first appearance of the New Moon<sup>[35, 36]</sup>. Additionally, the proclaiming of the first month of the year was determined by the New Moon that permitted the barley harvest to be full enough to perform the Wave Sheaf Offering.

The fixed Jewish Calendar in use today, as well as contemporary observations of the barley harvest by the Karaites, place the start of Abib, both prior to and following the spring equinox on March 21<sup>st</sup>, once the Passover itself falls after the spring equinox<sup>[37]</sup>. We will consider both pre and post equinox months for thoroughness.

Schaefer's<sup>[5]</sup> analysis for the likely Julian dates of the observable New Moon at Jerusalem provides the Calendar data for the period AD 26 ~ AD 36<sup>[38]</sup> shown in Table 2:

**Table 2: Possible Crucifixion Days AD 26 ~ AD 36**

<b>YEAR</b>	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Abib pre/post Equinox (starting at 6 pm on)</b>	<b>14<sup>th</sup> Abib - Julian (ending at 6pm on)</b>	<b>14<sup>th</sup> Abib - Gregorian (ending at 6pm on)</b>
AD 26	Fri Mar 8 Sun April 7	Fri Mar 22 Sun April 21	Fri Mar 20 Sun April 19
AD 27	Wed Feb 26 Thu March 27	Wed Mar 12 Thu April 10	Wed Mar 10 Thu April 8
AD 28	Tue Mar 16 Wed April 14	Tue Mar 30 Wed April 28	Tue Mar 28 Wed April 26
AD 29	Sat Mar 5 Mon April 4	Sat Mar 19 Mon April 18	Sat Mar 17 Mon April 16
AD 30	Fri Mar 24 Sat April 22	Fri April 7 Sat May 6	Fri April 5 Sat May 4
AD 31	Tue Mar 13 Wed April 11	Tue Mar 27 Wed April 25	Tue Mar 25 Wed April 23
AD 32	Sat Mar 1 Mon March 31	Sat Mar 15 Mon April 14	Sat Mar 13 Mon April 12
AD 33	Fri Mar 20 Sat April 18	Fri April 3 Sat May 2	Fri April 1 Sat April 30
AD 34	Wed Mar 10 Thu April 8	Wed Mar 24 Thu April 22	Wed Mar 22 Thu April 20
AD 35	Sun Feb 27 Tue March 29	Sun Mar 13 Tue April 12	Sun Mar 11 Tue April 10
AD 36	Sat Mar 17 Mon April 16	Sat Mar 31 Mon April 30	Sat Mar 29 Mon April 28

Thus the astronomically possible Julian dates for a Wednesday crucifixion are:

- Wed March 12, AD 27
- Wed April 28, AD 28
- Wed April 25, AD 31
- Wed March 24, AD 34

## **5.2 Evidence of the Fig Leaves**

In Mark 11:13 and Matt 21:19, Jesus sees a fig tree with leaves on the eve of his crucifixion. Since figs are among the late-bearing fruits in Jerusalem, this evidence points to a crucifixion late in the year, and thus a post-equinox start of the year<sup>[39]</sup>. This limits the possible dates of the crucifixion to the following:

- Wed April 28, AD 28
- Wed April 25, AD 31

## **5.3 Other Determinants in the Chronology of Christ**

To determine on which of the above days Christ was crucified, it is necessary to examine the following additional items:

- a) The commencement of Christ's Ministry
- b) The duration of Christ's ministry

### **5.3.1 The commencement of Christ's Ministry**

The commencement of Christ's ministry can be reckoned from his baptism. Luke 3:1 tells us that John the Baptist began his ministry in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius. Christ was baptized soon afterwards and as he was approaching his thirtieth birthday (Luke 3:21 ~23). Tiberius was appointed co-regent with Augustus Caesar in late AD11<sup>[40]</sup> [(pg 64)<sup>[3]</sup> [Chap II]]. Thus the fifteenth year of Tiberius would late AD 25 to late AD 26.

Since Christ's ministry began with baptism (Matt 3:6; Mark 1:9), it is unlikely to occur during winter, which restricts it to the spring/summer period (John 3:23). This places Jesus' baptism to the spring/summer of AD 26.

In John 2:20, the temple was dated as forty six years from the start of construction. Since the temple was started in 20 BC<sup>[3]</sup> [pg 40], the incident of John 2:20 occurred in AD 27. The start of Christ's ministry preceded that date thus supporting the baptism date of spring/summer of AD 26.

Also supporting the AD 26 start date of Jesus' ministry is the Dan 9:25 prophecy that the Messiah would appear sixty-nine weeks from the decree to restore Jerusalem. This is equivalent to four hundred and eighty-three years ( $69 \times 7 = 483$ ) (Gen 29:20, 27; Num 14:34; Ezek 4:6). Of the decrees of Cyrus in 537 BC (Ezra 1:2 ~ 4; 6:3 ~ 5), Artaxerxes in 458/457 BC (Ezra 7:12 ~ 26) and Artaxerxes in 444 BC (Neh 2:5 ~ 8; 17, 18), the only one that corresponds to the unveiling of Christ is Artaxerxes' decree of 458/457 BC<sup>[56]</sup>. Four hundred and eighty-three years from 458/457 BC takes us to AD 26, using the Jewish method of inclusive counting.

### **5.3.2 The duration of Christ's Ministry**

The Synoptics all primarily focus on the portion of Christ's ministry that occurred after John was put in prison and with the calling of Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John. (Matt 4:12~22; Mark 1:14~20; Luke 3:20, 5:3~11) This portion of Christ's ministry covers an arc of events beginning in the region of Galilee and culminating in Christ's crucifixion at Jerusalem, within a time frame of the five to six months between the Feast of Tabernacles and the crucifixion Passover. We can conclude this since there were no intermediate visits

to Jerusalem during this period, as would be necessary to observe the Holy Days. (Deut 16:16; Luke 2:42; John 7:10)

The Gospel of John on the other hand, adds some details of Christ's ministry prior to the period covered in the Synoptics. Some have taken the three Passovers mentioned in John (John 2:13; 6:4; 11:55) as evidence of a ministry lasting more than three years, but this would be incorrect since the Gospel of John is not strictly chronological. A harmonizing of the Gospel of John with the Synoptics leads to the following conclusions:

1. The Passover events described in the section John 2:13~25 correspond to the crucifixion Passover.
2. The Passover alluded to in John 6:4 was subsequent to the feeding of the five thousand and Christ walking on water, which also corresponds to the crucifixion Passover. (Matt 14:16~21, Mark 6:38~44; Luke 9:13~17)
3. The Passover of John 11:55, refers to the crucifixion Passover of John 12 and would be more appropriate as the introduction in chapter 12.

An indication of the length of Christ's ministry can be deduced from John 10:22, which speaks of Christ being in Jerusalem during the Feast of Dedication in winter. Since the Synoptics preclude Christ's presence in Jerusalem during the winter preceding his crucifixion, then the incident describes in John 10:22 must have occurred in a previous winter.

Another piece of evidence in determining the length of Christ's ministry is provided by John 3:22~23, which shows an overlap with John's ministry during the spring/summer baptizing period.

Putting together the above data we can propose a likely framework for Christ's Ministry of almost two years as follows:

- Christ was baptized by John in spring/summer of AD 26
- He visited Jerusalem during the Feast of Dedication in the winter of AD 26
- His ministry overlapped John's during the spring/summer of AD 27
- Christ called Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John after the Feast of Tabernacles in AD 27 and began his closing ministry
- He was crucified in Jerusalem at Passover on Wed April 28, AD 28. (Julian)

Though the traditions of the 'Church Fathers' show almost as many variations as there are 'Church Fathers', one that supports the AD 28 crucifixion is ascribed to Clement of Alexandria, who stated that Jerusalem was destroyed forty-two years and three months after Christ was crucified<sup>[41]</sup>. The temple was destroyed on the Jewish month of Av, corresponding to July/August<sup>[42]</sup>, while Jerusalem was taken in the Jewish month of Elul in AD 70<sup>[20]</sup> [6.10.1] <sup>[41, 42]</sup>, corresponding to August/September. These dates support a late April AD 28 date of the crucifixion.

An aside to the discussion is the question of authorship of the gospel of John. Both Filson<sup>[43]</sup> and Phillip<sup>[44]</sup> have provided evidence that John Zebedee could not be the 'disciple Jesus loved' and suggested Lazarus as the main author. Other candidates have been proposed, including Matthias<sup>[45]</sup>. This does not preclude John Zebedee as being the editor of the gospel, certifying the writings of another author (John 21:24) and also adding significant commentary and biography.



### 5.3.3 The Time of Christ's Birth

Though the birth of Christ is commonly celebrated on December 25th, it has long been held that the selection of that day was an adoption of the pagan feast of the Saturnalia for the purposes of winning converts to the new religion<sup>[46]</sup>. The principal objections to a winter birth are:

- a) December and January are the rainiest months of the year, accounting for approximately half the annual rainfall<sup>[47]</sup> (Ezra:9, 13). They are also the coldest months of the year<sup>[48]</sup> with nighttime temperatures of almost 0°C and therefore, not a likely period for mass population movement for the purpose of taxing or otherwise. (Luke 2:1 ~ 3; Matt 24:20; Mark 13:18)
- b) December and January are the height of the lambing season<sup>[49]</sup> when mangers are in high demand. During lambing, full dams are brought in from the fields to deliver and nurse newborn kids for a few days, till the kids are strong enough to follow their mother. For Christ and his parents to stay in a manger, one would expect that it was unused and therefore some time before the peak of the lambing season. (Luke 2:7;16)
- c) In stipulating a time for the collection of taxes, authorities would avoid disrupting pre-harvest activities and would likely wait until the harvest is in and people have the wherewithal to pay their taxes. The early harvest in Israel was in May/June in time for Pentecost, while the later harvest was in September/October before the Feast of Tabernacles.
- d) Luke 2:3 stipulates that everyone went to their city of registration to be taxed. This negates against the taxation occurring precisely during the pilgrim feasts of Passover, Pentecost or the Feast of Tabernacles, since the inhabitants of all Israel would converge on Jerusalem during those periods (Deut 16:16). The taxation would therefore have to be prior to or following the time of these Feasts. The fact that none of the Gospels mention any aspect of the pilgrim feasts in connection to Christ's birth supports a birth outside these periods. In considering possible dates for the taxation, November is a rainy month<sup>[47]</sup>, while the time for the pre-Pentecost harvest is short. The most convenient times for the taxation would therefore be either after Pentecost in May/June or prior to the Feast of tabernacles in September/October.

Thus the likely period of the birth of Christ is from summer to early autumn.

A possible scriptural indication of the birth of Christ is given Luke 1:26 which states that Gabriel visited Mary in the sixth month. If this is taken to be the sixth month of the Jewish year rather than the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, this points to a conception in the period August to October, and the birth of Christ during the period May to July.

### 5.3.4 The death of Herod

A common date ascribed to the death of Herod the Great is March/April BC4, based on the observation by Josephus that an eclipse of the moon occurred before his death and that he died before Passover that year<sup>[50, 51]</sup>. Filmer<sup>[52]</sup> however, proposed March/April BC1, based on the Lunar eclipse that occurred on 9<sup>th</sup> Jan 1 BC. Both Barnes<sup>[53]</sup> and Bernegger<sup>[54]</sup> have attempted to discredit the Filmer proposition using various dating assumptions, but the

clearest indication of Herod's death remains the Josephus record as interpreted by Filmer. The death of Herod places the birth of Christ at least two years prior, especially when considering that he spent some time in Egypt. (Matt 2:16; 13; 19 ~ 23)

These two possible dates of Herod's death provide the likely dates for Christ's birth as given in Table 3.

**Table 3: Relationship between Christ's birth and Herod's death**

<b>Alternative dates for Herod's Death</b>	<b>Consequent <i>latest</i> date of Christ's Birth</b>
March/April BC4	Summer/Autumn BC7
March/April BC1	Summer/Autumn BC4

In Sec 5.3.1, the commencement of Christ's ministry was determined to be the spring/summer of AD 26. Since Christ was about thirty years old at that time, the year of Christ's birth works out as 5 BC. This negates the commonly held view that Herod died in BC 4 and lends support for the BC 1 date.

### 5.3.5 The Census of Quirinius

There has been some uncertainty over the explanation of Luke 2:2, since Josephus places the governorship of Quirinius from AD 6 ~7<sup>[50]</sup> [XVII, 13,5]. Brindle<sup>[55]</sup> however, makes the case that the use by Luke of the word 'first' in reference to the taxing census at the birth of Christ, lends credence to a translation indicating that the census at the birth of Christ was before the one conducted by Governor Quintilius, many years later, with no indication that the first census was also carried out by Quintilius.

## 6 Conclusion

The chronology of the life of Christ is as follows:

Birth – Summer/autumn BC5.

Left for Egypt – Summer/autumn BC 3.

Returned to Nazareth after death of Herod – Spring BC 1.

Baptized by John and began his ministry – Spring/summer AD 26.

Called Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John – Autumn AD 27.

Crucified - Wed April 28, AD 28 (Julian).

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