

When was Jesus born? #1, Things you probably didn't know – 20191123

Hi all,

There are as many theories on when Jesus was born as there are theories on the Loch Ness Monster, but did you know the Bible comes very close to telling us when?

For me, I go to the core of things and that is why Jesus' birthday meant nothing to the apostles who lived with Him for some 3 1/2 years. Why did His birthday mean nothing through the 30 years of Acts, which documents the spread of disciples of Jesus throughout the Roman Empire? Why is there no mention of His birthday in any of the letters of the New Testament? And finally, why did only Matthew and Luke record the event and Mark and John did not? Clearly it wasn't important to them, and in the final analysis, it shouldn't be important to us either.

But it is helpful and educational to know the approximate time of His birth because it sets the context for the days in which He was born. It helps us understand the culture and society and politics of the day.

Theories, theories

I am surprised at the boldness of some, the 'know it all' attitude of so many who assert with great confidence that He was born in such and such time of year because of such and such. Most of them however leave out other considerations to focus on their 'pet' belief.

There are theories based on the Star of Bethlehem ranging from the supernova the Chinese record in about 10BC that was visible in daytime even to the time of the resurrection. There are star theories about the constellations that were considered Jewish and the planets that crossed path with them.

There are attempts at dating the time of Herod's death, date the time of the census which was why Joseph and Mary were in Bethlehem, and date when shepherds were in the fields with their flocks.

Some careful researchers even understand that ancient Israelites being oriental, counted birthdays from conception, in what is known as 'age reckoning', not from birth. "Age reckoning" is still in use in parts of the Orient today - China, Tibet, Korea, and in some Japanese ceremonies. (Israel is considered Oriental, the Bible an Oriental book - the Far East and Middle East both oriental.)

And once in a while someone will consider the culture of the day that was looking for Messiah and what the Rabbi's taught about the season He would appear.

Putting it all together

Can we put all these elements together? If we simply follow the clues Dr. Luke leaves us in his narrative, all these other things fall into place. But so few actually examine what Luke wrote.

But first: Looking for Messiah

In Daniel 9:21 the angel Gabriel appears to Daniel, and tells him 70 weeks of years, or 490 years is the total until Messiah brings in everlasting righteousness.

In v25 Gabriel states that Messiah will come at week 69 or 483 years, and then 'die, but not for Himself.' Gabriel said the countdown of those 483 years to Messiah would start at the command to rebuild Jerusalem.

The command to rebuild Jerusalem came in 455BC from Artaxerxes in the 20th year of his reign. (Nehemiah 2:1-8) Counting 483 years forward from 455BC we arrive at the year 28 or 29AD - when Jesus died on the cross 'but not for Himself', just as Gabriel had said.

Realizing that priests in Israel could not start their ministry until age 30 but could not be over age 50 (Numbers 4:3), ancient Israel started looking for Messiah to be born around the 10BC time frame. Israel was expecting Messiah!

Second: Star talk

From the Roman point of view several things were happening in the stars which would seem to point to their divine appointment as the heavenly blessed Empire. They considered the planets to be

predictors of events as did much of Europe and the Orient. In that time frame from 10 to 3BC there was a 'gathering' of planets. Jupiter, Saturn, Mars, Venus, Mercury, all seemed to be gathering in the same general area of the sky, so they agreed there was a purpose for that and something was about to happen.

In 3BC the path of Jupiter, which was to them the 'King planet', appeared over weeks to circle the 'King star' which was Regulus. That the King planet circled the King star seemed to confirm Augustus Caesar as 'the anointed king'.

This circling of the King planet around the King star in 3BC was the 25th year of Augustus' rise to power as Caesar. It was the 750th (priestly/ceremonial) anniversary of the founding of Rome, and is the year the Senate of Rome conferred the title on Augustus of 'Father of the Country'. To Rome it seemed even the universe agreed Augustus was THE King and Rome had divine right to conquer the world.

So when Rome was concluding the stars confirmed Augustus and Rome as divine, the True Messiah was being born in a humble stable in Israel. In another part of the world the 'wise men' saw the confirming of Gabriel's words to Daniel in the stars, which caused them to skip the celebrations in Rome, understanding the True King was in Israel. And that's where we'll pick it up next week. Until then, blessings,

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When was Jesus born? #2, When Gabriel appeared – 20191130

Hi all,

From last week: We know the Romans thought the stars and planets were aligning to confirm Augustus was divine king and Rome the divinely appointed Empire. We know Israel had counted down the years from Gabriel's revelation that Messiah could be expected 483 years after the command to rebuild Jerusalem. Israel was expecting Messiah to make His appearance some 30 or so years before that date, 'in the fullness of time'* which is the time frame of Jesus' birth. *Galatians 4: 4

Some final star comments

Ignatius of Antioch was a disciple of the apostle John, and died a martyr about 30 years or so after John died of old age. (Ignatius was thrown to lions and mauled to death in Rome). He had written that a star had appeared in the constellation Virgo and its related constellation, Coma, the Desired, (the son of the virgin), saying, "It sparkled brilliantly above all stars." (I have a series called 'the Gospel in the Stars' with handout if interested in learning the true zodiac signs).

Contributing to the 'star' theories are these: Ptolemy, about 150 years after Jesus, said the star was only faintly visible in his time. After his time no mention is made of it. It is also written in the historian Josephus that around the time associated with the birth of Jesus there were repeated conjunctions of Saturn and Jupiter in Pices, which was then known to be associated with Israel. Halley's comment was visible in 12BC, Egyptian records show a star appearing 5-2BC, and the Chinese reported a bright new star in 4BC. And so much more!

It would seem there was a star that appeared around the birth of Jesus, but which faded from view so that it is not visible in our day. This renders some modern theories rather incomplete, for they are looking back at stars and planets of that day, but there is no way to calculate for a star which was momentarily visible for that time in earth's history, but is no more.

My intent in providing this star background isn't to figure out what the Star of Bethlehem was, just that Rome saw things in the stars and planets that made them think Augustus was the divine king. Satan always counterfeits the true, and Israel was looking for the True. Who would think the Messiah, the Creator of the Universe, would be born in a stable instead of a palace? Jesus truly is what He claimed to be: "I am meek and lowly of heart." Matthew 11: 29

Now to what Luke tells us

If we can determine when Gabriel appeared to John the Baptist's father (Zechariah the priest), then we can move forward 6 months to when we are told, Gabriel visited Mary that she might be the mother of the Lord, and then move forward 9 months to Jesus' birth. So when did Gabriel appear to John the Baptist's dad?

Luke 1:5 tells us Zechariah was a priest in the course of Abijah. In I Chronicles 24 King David had organized the priests into 24 groups or courses, each course serving in a rotating manner through the year, and the course of Abijah was the 8th course. I find that interesting because 8 is the number of new beginnings, originally derived from the 8th day being the first day of the new week. John the Baptist was the start of something new...

The ancient practice was for each course to serve for 1 week in the first half of the year, and 1 week in the second half of the year. Additionally, all the courses served during Unleavened Bread/Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles. (Deuteronomy 16:16)

IF Gabriel appeared to him in the spring time of service:

The first course and all the others served the first week of the sacred calendar, which is Unleavened Bread/Passover. The second course alone served the second week, and so on. In week 8 the course of Abijah served. Additionally, Zechariah would have served at Pentecost, so we add 9-10 weeks from Unleavened Bread to see when he was in the temple, which would be roughly late June time frame. Additionally, a priest could not have sexual relations for 2 weeks following his service in the temple, so that puts us to 11-12 weeks from Passover, which is the end of June or first week of July.

In Luke 1: 26-33 we are told when Elizabeth, John the Baptist's mother, was 6 months pregnant Gabriel was sent to Mary that she might agree to carrying Messiah in her womb. 6 months from July puts us in December. Going forward 9 months puts Jesus' birth in September, roughly the time of the Feast of Tabernacles.

That's IF Gabriel appeared to Zechariah during his first course of service in spring. IF Gabriel appeared to him in his autumn rotation, it would mean Jesus was born in spring, close to Unleavened Bread/Passover week. Is there cultural information as to whether 1st century Israel was looking for Messiah at Passover in spring or Tabernacles in autumn?

Besides the cultural expectations of Israel at that time, we need to look at things including the age group of children Herod ordered murdered, the life and death of Herod, when shepherds were in the fields, and more. So we'll close it out next week, until then, blessings,

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When was Jesus born? #3, Spring or fall? - 20191207

Hi all,

Last week I shared how Jesus was born either in the autumn during the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, which was the September-October time frame, or the spring, around Unleavened Bread/Passover. The 6 month difference is because John the Baptist's father was serving in either his spring or autumn rotation when Gabriel appeared to him, but we don't know which.

We've gone as far as we can with the order of the services of the priests, so let us look first at cultural expectations.

That Messiah would die 'but not for Himself' is seen in Passover, and there was a basic understanding the lamb killed on Passover was a type of God covering our sins. Messiah wasn't expected to be born at that time, rather to die at that time. (For those who understood the types/shadows).

So we turn to the autumn festival of Tabernacles (Sukkot), also called 'the Feast of Dedication' in the September-October time frame. Tabernacles was when Solomon dedicated his temple, celebrating God's presence dwelling with man. It is also called the 'Season of our Joy'. Tabernacles was also called 'The Festival of Lights'.

There were 4 large lamps in the temple called 'the light of the world', and it was at a later Feast of Tabernacles Jesus stood up to say: "I am the light of the world." John 8: 12

During the Feast of Tabernacles certain passages are read, and there is a certain liturgy that was followed. Those passages and that liturgy are echoed in what the angels told the Shepherds on the night of the Lord's birth as the bright and awe-inspiring glory of God shone all around them. Shepherds were in the field in spring and fall, but his helps narrow it down:

"And the angel said to them, Fear not, for I bring you good news of great joy, which shall be to all people. Unto you is born in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." Again, this was announced in the midst of the great light of the glory of the Lord.

These passages are read: "I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness...I will give you as a covenant for the people, as a light to the nations." and "...I will make you a light to the nations that my salvation shall extend to the ends of the earth" and "...nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising." Isaiah 42:6; 49: 6; 52: 10; 60: 3.

This was prayed at the end of meals during Tabernacles: "May the merciful One let us inherit all that is good. May the merciful One restore the tent/tabernacle (sukkah) of David." Perhaps the shepherds had just finished a meal when the angels came?

What the angel said contains elements of those passages spoken at Tabernacles - essentially saying God is living with man. I have shared before that these shepherds were in all likelihood priests, for as the population grew in the cities, priests began raising flocks and herds for the city dwellers to purchase for sacrifice. Their area was known to be around Bethlehem, the 'house of bread'. The true manna from heaven was born there.

Traditionally the 'wise men' are thought to have visited Jesus when He was about 18 months old, but that is wrong. Matthew 2: 11 tells us they visited Him in a house in Bethlehem not the stable typically shown in nativity scenes. But there are other considerations.

For instance, Luke tells us Joseph and Mary had Jesus circumcised on his 8th day, and after her 40 days of purification they presented Him in the temple. So nearly 6 week old Jesus was with Joseph and Mary were in the temple in Jerusalem 40 days after His birth. We are told after this the family returned to their home city of Nazareth - not Bethlehem. (Luke 2: 22-23 39; Leviticus 12: 3-8)

That means Herod had to have killed the babies in Bethlehem before Jesus was 40 days old. It means the young family would have to have gone to and returned from Egypt before His 40th day. That means somewhere between His birth and 40 days, Herod died, for they were told to return for Egypt for Herod was dead, and they were not in fear either in the temple when Jesus was 40 days old nor when they returned to Nazareth.

The order of events then is that Jesus was born in Bethlehem and laid in a manger. The Shepherds visit Him just after His birth. The wise men arrived after the young family had moved into a house in Bethlehem, but are warned after seeing the Lord not to return to Herod.

Joseph is similarly warned to leave the country, to Egypt. Herod orders the deaths of the innocents. The English Bible says he figured from 2 years and younger, but knowing as already stated that ancient Israel counted age from conception in 'age reckoning' as mentioned previously, it means Herod's actual order was for 1 year olds (as we figure it) and under.

When did Herod die?

The Jewish historian Josephus states that Herod became very ill at the time of an eclipse of the moon. The only eclipse in the year of Herod's illness was on March 13, 4BC. Herod's illness lasted several months, the details of which are well documented. Josephus states Herod died in what would be our month of September, in what is our 4BC.

Therefore we can confirm Jesus was born in September, 4BC.

At least, that's how I see it. When He was born isn't important, but that He WAS.
New subject next week, until then, blessings,
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