

Excerpts from

When Was Jesus Born, Baptized, and Buried?

A Review of LDS and Non-LDS Educated Guesses

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Introduction

During my mission, I read *Jesus the Christ* by Elder James E. Talmage (1915). He said Jesus was born on April 6th, 1 BC, baptized a short time before his thirtieth birthday, and buried on or about his thirty-third birthday. After my mission, I noticed that some LDS scholars agree with Talmage while others agree with Elder Hyrum Smith (1923) who said there are reasons for believing that the Nativity occurred 5/4 BC. What are the reasons for each of these views?

When we are working on our own genealogy, we look for *primary* sources like birth, baptism, marriage, and death certificates of our ancestors. If these documents are not available, we look for journals or other records based on eyewitness accounts recorded at or near the time of the event. Unfortunately, we do not have any primary sources for Jesus' birth, baptism, or death. Therefore, scholars work with *secondary* evidence or records made years later by people who were not eyewitnesses. The books of the New Testament were written about 50 or more years after Jesus' birth by men who were not present for the birth and who focused on recording important events without giving specific dates. Without *direct* evidence (e.g., a record of the date Jesus was born), scholars must rely on *indirect* evidence (e.g., Jesus was born in the days of Herod, baptized in the 15th year of Tiberius, and buried during a Passover week). This New Testament evidence requires other records to determine the corresponding dates. Without *original* evidence (e.g., the original writings of the New Testament or Josephus), scholars use *derivative* evidence (e.g., copies, translations) that is derived from the original. When handwritten copies were made of the original writings or of other copies, copying errors were likely. Even if the copies were correct, printed copies made over 1000 years later could have typesetting errors. Those who translated the ancient documents into English may have made some translation errors.

“Attempts to determine the exact date of Christ's birth or death are complicated by a dearth of pertinent historical information and multiple dating systems.”¹ As a result, scholars interpret differently the indirect, secondary, and derivative evidence that is available. When evidence is inconsistent or ambiguous, scholars evaluate and select pieces of evidence that they feel come from the same historical puzzle. They put the puzzle pieces together where possible, reinterpret or change pieces to make them fit, exclude pieces that do not fit, and use their imaginations to fill in the missing pieces. Since scholars evaluate and interpret the evidence differently, they tell different stories about events related to the birth, baptism, and burial of Jesus. These stories are educated guesses based on historical evidence. We could rewrite “history” as “his-story” to emphasize that history is often based on educated guesses and not on direct, primary, original evidence.

When scholars share their stories with non-scholars, they often express their opinions as if they were fact. They do not tell us which parts of their stories have been challenged. When they write articles in academic journals, they defend their stories and attack the stories of other scholars. The stories taught in the majority of academic programs are often treated as the “academically correct” view. Some scholars may even attempt to silence dissent. Since their beliefs are certain, firmly established or proven beyond a reasonable doubt, they question the intelligence, scholarship, or understanding of minority scholars.

Chronologies of Non-LDS Scholars

Since the 1896 publication of Schürer's *History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, most scholars agree that King Herod died in 4 BC and that Jesus was born between 7 BC and 5/4 BC. Before Schürer, scholars had placed the birth of Jesus in every year from 7 BC to 1 BC.² Since about 1960, some scholars have been challenging the Schürer consensus. Scholars base their conclusions on different interpretations of some key events in the New Testament and in Roman history.

1. The four gospels agree that Jesus was born before king Herod died.
2. Josephus (c. AD 37–100), an ancient Jewish and Roman historian, said that Herod died after a lunar eclipse and before a Passover (Mar/Apr). Between 8 BC and 1 BC, the only six lunar eclipses visible in Jerusalem occurred on the dates shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Lunar Eclipses (8 BC to 1 BC)

8 BC	5 BC	4 BC	1 BC
18 Nov.	23 Mar. and 15 Sept.	13 Mar.	10 Jan. and 29 Dec.

3. Josephus said, “Herod ... died, having *reigned thirty-four years* since he had caused Antigonus to be slain, and obtained his kingdom; but *thirty-seven years* since he had been made king by the Romans” (*War* 1.665 [I.33.8]). Scholars agree that Josephus referred to calendar years but some believe a year started in the Spring and others in the Fall. Scholars also disagree about when to start counting Herod's reign and how to count partial years. For example, if a king started to reign a few days before the start of a new year and reigned for the next 13 months, were the few days before or after the full year included in the count as a full year? Did this king reign 1, 2, or 3 years? Depending on how one answers these questions, Herod's 37th year started between 4 BC and 2 BC and ended a year later. Does “having reigned” 37 years mean Herod died during or after his 37th year?
4. John the Baptist began baptizing in the 15th year of Tiberius (Lk 3:1) which was either AD 26/27 or 28/29.
5. Sometime later, John baptized Jesus who “began to be *about* thirty years of age” (Lk 3:23). Scholars believe this means that Jesus was almost 30, 29–31, or 26–34.
6. Jesus died during the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, or 4th Passover week after his baptism.³
7. Most scholars agree that Jesus died on a Friday afternoon a few hours before the Passover meal that Sabbath evening. Between AD 27 and 34, this occurred in 30, 33, and possibly in 27 or 29.

Finegan's *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*⁴ (HBC) summarizes the evidence, interpretations, and arguments of scholars for the different options listed above and for other related evidence. In his 1964 edition (HBC₆₄), Finegan accepted three chronologies that assumed Herod died in 4 BC. In 1966, Filmer wrote an article that argued against 4 BC and for 1 BC.⁵ In 1968, Barnes⁶ wrote what Brown called a “convincing refutation.”⁷ These articles started a debate among scholars in which each refutation was met with a rebuttal. Each refutation and rebuttal was “convincing” to the convinced. After referring to articles in this debate, Raymond Brown (1993) said that “recent discussions offer no compelling reason to change.”⁸ However, Finegan in his 1998 revised edition (HBC₉₈) summarized this debate in more detail and accepted two chronologies that assume Herod died in 1 BC. Non-LDS scholars generally accept one of the five chronologies in Table 2 from HBC₆₄ and HBC₉₈. Jesus was crucified at his fourth Passover after baptism in three chronologies and at his first or second Passover in the other two. The age of Jesus at each Passover is shown because it is relevant to evidence that Jesus was “about thirty” when he was baptized before the first Passover (Lk 3:23), and that Jesus died during Passover at the start of the 34th year after his birth (3 Ne 8:3, 5; 2:8). The evidence, interpretations, and reasoning for and against these chronologies are summarized in the book *When Was Jesus Born, Buried, and Baptized?*

Table 2: Non-LDS Chronologies

Event	* HBC ₆₄			HBC ₉₈	
	5 BC–AD 30	5 BC–AD 33	5 BC–AD 30	2 BC–AD 33	2 BC–AD 30
Jesus born	Dec 5 BC	Dec 5 BC	Dec 5 BC	Jan 2 BC	Jan 2 BC
Herod died	4 BC	4 BC	4 BC	1 BC	1 BC
John began baptizing	AD 26 (age 30)	AD 29 (age 33)	AD 28 (age 32)	AD 29 (age 31)	AD 29 (age 31)
Jesus was baptized**	AD 26 (age < 30)	AD 29 (age < 33)	AD 28 (age < 32)	AD 29 (age < 31)	AD 29 (age < 31)
1 st Passover***	AD 27 _{31st P} ^{30.3}	AD 30 _{34th P} ^{33.3}	AD 29 _{33rd P} ^{32.3}	AD 30 _{32nd P} ^{31.3}	AD 30 _{32nd P} ^{31.3}
2 nd Passover	AD 28 _{32nd P} ^{31.3}	AD 31 _{35th P} ^{34.3}	AD 30 _{34th P} ^{33.3}	AD 31 _{33rd P} ^{32.3}	
3 rd Passover	AD 29 _{33rd P} ^{32.3}	AD 32 _{36th P} ^{35.3}		AD 32 _{34th P} ^{33.3}	
4 th Passover	AD 30 _{34th P} ^{33.3}	AD 33 _{37th P} ^{36.3}		AD 33 _{35th P} ^{34.3}	

* HBC = *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*

** Age assumes Jesus was baptized a month or so before his birthday. John was about 6 months older.

*** _{31st P}^{30.3} means the 31st Passover (Apr.) when Jesus was 30.3 years old.

_{1st P}^{0.3} is the 1st Passover after Jesus was born (age 0.3).

LDS Scriptures and Authorities

Additional clues are found in the LDS scriptures, and in the writings of LDS prophets, and apostles.

LDS Scriptures

3 Nephi. “The Nephites began to reckon their time from this period when the sign was given, or from the coming of Christ” (3 Ne 2:8). The sign of the crucifixion was observed “in the thirty and fourth year, in the first month, on the fourth day of the month” (3 Ne 8:3, 5).⁹

LDS scholars have at least three differing opinions about these verses.

1. Jesus was crucified during Passover on or about his 33rd birthday almost exactly 33 “Nephite years” after he was born during the Passover season.¹⁰ April 6th is normally within two weeks of Passover each year. Orson Pratt said Jesus died in AD 30 based on learned opinion of his time and then subtracted 33 years to conclude that Jesus was born in April 4 BC.¹¹
2. “Jesus probably died on or around his *thirty-fourth* birthday.”¹² This interpretation supports an April 5 BC (birth) and April AD 30 (death) chronology in Table 2.
3. Some scholars say that “using Book of Mormon chronology to measure the length of Jesus’ life, especially in terms of Old World calendar systems, must fail simply because we do not know what calendrical arrangements were employed by the Nephites.”¹³

The book *When Was Jesus Born, Buried, and Baptized?* discusses in more detail the interpretations and implications of these verses for LDS chronologies. It also discusses calendar systems that may have been used by the Nephites and how they relate to Jewish calendars.

D&C 20:1. On April 6, 1830, the Church was organized 1,830 “years since the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the flesh” (D&C 20:1).

LDS Prophets and Apostles

The statements of LDS prophets and apostles in Table 3 generally agree that Jesus was born on April 6th. However, some LDS scholars believe Christ was born in 1 BC, exactly 1,830 years before 6 April 1830, while others believe the phrase 1,830 “years since the coming of our Lord” simply expressed the current year as being 1830.

Table 3: Statements by LDS Prophets and Apostles

Year	LDS Prophets and Apostles
1830	The Prophet Joseph Smith's explanation of D&C 20: "In this manner did the Lord continue to give us instructions from time to time, concerning the duties which now devolved upon us; and ... we obtained of Him the following, by the spirit of prophecy and revelation; which not only gave us much information, but also pointed out to us the precise day upon which, according to His will and commandment, we should proceed to organize His Church once more here upon the earth." (HC ¹⁴ 1:64)
1833	The Prophet Joseph Smith: (April 6 th) "The day was spent ... in giving and receiving knowledge ... it being just 1800 years since the Savior laid down His life that men might have everlasting life." (HC 1:357)
1872a	Elder Wilford Woodruff: (April 6 th) "According to the best knowledge we have, 1842 years ago to-day [AD 30], the Lord Jesus was crucified on Mount Calvary for the sins of the world." (JD ¹⁵ 15:7)
1872b	Elder Orson Pratt: "It is also acknowledged by the greater portion of the learned men of the day, who have carefully examined the subject, that Jesus was crucified on the 6 th day of April [AD 30]; and according to the true Christian era it was precisely eighteen hundred years from the day of his crucifixion until the day that this Church was organized." (JD 15:45 [4/07/1872])
1872c	Elder Orson Pratt: "I have seen several accounts—some of them published in our periodicals—of learned men in different nations, in which it is stated that, according to the best of their judgment from the researches they have made, Christ was crucified on the 6 th of April. ... [Joseph] had a revelation to organize the Church precisely 1800 years from that great event." (JD 15:256, 260 [12/29/1872])
1872d	Elder Orson Pratt referring to D&C 20:1 "We are not on this account to take this as the real date, but it is adapted to our present mode of reckoning." (JD 15:262 [12/29/1872])
1915	Elder James E. Talmage: "We believe that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judea, April 6, 1 BC." ¹⁶
1923a	Elder Hyrum M. Smith: "In all probability the 6 th of April is the anniversary of the birthday of our Lord." ¹⁷
1923b	Elder Hyrum M. Smith: "There are reasons for believing that ... the Nativity occurred four years before our era [5/4 BC]. ... All that [D&C 20:1] means to say is that the Church was organized in the year that is commonly accepted as AD 1830." ¹⁸ Note: This quote was omitted from the revised edition (1950) prepared by Joseph Fielding Smith, Harold B. Lee, and Marion G. Romney.
1954	President J. Reuben Clark: "Some may sharply disagree" with scholars who say that Jesus was born "at the end of 5 BC, or the beginning or early part of 4 BC. The Church has made no official declaration of the matter, beyond" D&C 20:1. "In the early editions of the <i>Doctrine and Covenants Commentary</i> ... this verse was interpreted as follows: ... [see quote 1923b above]. This statement has been omitted in the latest edition of the <i>Commentary</i> . <i>I am not proposing any date as the true date</i> . But ... I have taken the date of the Savior's birth ... [as] late 5 BC, or early 4 BC, because Bible commentaries and the writings of scholars are frequently keyed upon that chronology and because I believe that so to do will <i>facilitate ... the work of those studying the life and works of the Savior from sources using this accepted chronology</i> ." ¹⁹
1958	Elder Bruce R. McConkie: "Apparently Christ was born on the day corresponding to April 6 (D&C 20:1) ..." ²⁰
1965	Elder Bruce R. McConkie: "It appears that the latter-day kingdom formally came into being on the [1830 th] anniversary of our Lord's birth. In other words, Christ was born on April 6, 1 BC. (D&C 20:1)" ²¹
1971	President N. Eldon Tanner: "Members of the Church also believe that Christ was born on April 6 in the year 1 BC. (See D&C 20:1)." ²²
1973	President Harold B. Lee: "April 6, 1973 ... commemorates not only the anniversary of the organization of The Church ..., but also the anniversary of the birth of ... Jesus Christ." ²³
1975	President Spencer W. Kimball: "Christ was born on the sixth of April." ²⁴
1979	Elder Bruce R. McConkie: "We do not believe it is possible with the present state of our knowledge ... to state with finality" the year Jesus was born. He then included the 1915 (Talmage), 1923b (Smith), and 1954 (Clark) quotes. Then he said that "in this present work" (i.e., <i>The Mortal Messiah</i>) he would follow the same course as President Clark. "Christ could have been born on April 6 of 5 BC. We repeat ... that this is not a settled issue." ²⁵
1980	President Spencer W. Kimball: "Today [April 6, 1980] we not only celebrate ... the organization of the Church, but also ... the birth of Christ on this day 1,980 years ago." ²⁶
1986	Elder Neal A. Maxwell: "April 6 is the date of Jesus' birth. It is also the date of birth of his latter-day Church. (See D&C 20:1)." ²⁷
1997	Elder Richard G. Scott: "It is April 6 th . Modern scripture records that Jesus Christ was born on this day." ²⁸
1997	President Gordon B. Hinckley: "It is the season of the winter solstice. ... While we now know through revelation the time of the Savior's birth [April 6], we observe the 25 th of December with the rest of the Christian world." ²⁹

Scholars who believe Herod died in 4 BC have offered explanations to support a non-literal interpretation of D&C 20:1 and frequently, they quote Elder McConkie's 1979 quote in Table 3.

“Is it not just as likely that the phrase ‘one thousand eight hundred and thirty years since the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the flesh’ constitutes a passing acknowledgment by the Lord of the date on which, according to our current calendrical system, the Church was being organized? Why should it mean more than that?”³⁰

“The persons whose expressions were recorded in Section 20:1–4 were the two young men ... to whom the inspired thoughts were given. ... Clearly, Section 20:1–36 is divinely inspired testimony and praise expressed from a human point of view. It is not a revelation spoken from the Lord’s perspective: ‘Thus saith the Lord.’ ... Once the human perspective of Section 20 is recognized, the young writers’ use of *their own calendar* according to their customs is understandable. In light of the importance of Section 20 as a document to govern the Church, one would expect that they would choose a lofty phrase like ‘since the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the flesh’ instead of the more common ‘in the year of our Lord.’”³¹

“The writing of [D&C] 20 was begun as early as 1829 and was authored by Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. Therefore, the language of section 20 is based on the inspiration of the Prophet Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery, but the wording was not dictated directly by the Lord, as evidenced by an earlier draft of the section that was written in 1829. The wording of [D&C] 20:1 likely reflects standard dating conventions of the day rather than the Lord’s revealed endorsement of His birth date.”³²

Chronologies of LDS Scholars

Many LDS scholars use an HBC₆₄ chronology from Table 2 that assumes Jesus died during the 4th Passover after he was baptized. President J. Reuben Clark used the 5 BC – AD 30 chronology to “facilitate ... the work of those studying the life and works of the Savior from sources using this accepted chronology.” By so doing he was “not proposing any date as the true date.”³³ Some LDS writers (e.g., Elder Bruce R. McConkie) use “accepted” chronologies for the same reason, while others accept the evidence, interpretation, and reasoning that supports these chronologies.

Some LDS writers like President Clark use the 5 BC – AD 30 chronology with slight modifications. For example, Jesus was baptized in AD 27 instead of late AD 26;³⁴ or Jesus was born on 6 April 5 BC³⁵ or perhaps spring 5 BC.³⁶ Other LDS writers use the 5 BC – AD 33 chronology with slight modifications (e.g., Jesus born in 7–5 BC).³⁷ I have not found any LDS chronology that is based on the 2 BC – AD 33 chronology in Table 2.

Many LDS scholars believe Jesus was born on April 6th. Elder Talmage used a 6 April 1 BC – AD 33 chronology.³⁸ Elder Orson Pratt used a 6 April 4 BC – AD 30 chronology.³⁹ Other scholars use a 6 April 5 BC – AD 30 chronology (see Table 5). Table 4 shows how the chronologies in Table 2 change if we assume that Jesus was born in April (nine months earlier). The last two columns show the chronologies of Elder Orson Pratt and Elder James E. Talmage. This table places Herod’s death after a following lunar eclipse as stated by Josephus (see Table 1).

Table 4: April 6th Chronologies

Event	*HBC ₆₄		HBC ₉₈	Orson Pratt	Talmage
	5 BC–AD 30	5 BC–AD 33	2 BC–AD 33	4 BC–AD 30	1 BC–AD 33
Jesus born	5 BC Apr 6 th	5 BC Apr 6 th	2 BC Apr 6 th	4 BC Apr 6 th	1 BC Apr 6 th
Herod died	4 BC	4 BC	1 BC	1 BC/AD 1	AD 1
John began baptizing	AD 26 (age 31)	AD 29 (age 34)	AD 29 (age 32)	AD 26 (age 30)	AD 29 (age 30)
Jesus was baptized**	AD 26 (age < 31)	AD 29 (age < 34)	AD 29 (age < 32)	AD 26 (age < 30)	AD 29 (age < 30)
1 st Passover***	AD 27 _{32nd P} ^{31.0}	AD 30 _{35th P} ^{34.0}	AD 30 _{33rd P} ^{32.0}	AD 27 _{31st P} ^{30.0}	AD 30 _{31st P} ^{30.0}
2 nd Passover	AD 28 _{33rd P} ^{32.0}	AD 31 _{36th P} ^{35.0}	AD 31 _{34th P} ^{33.0}	AD 28 _{32nd P} ^{31.0}	AD 31 _{32nd P} ^{31.0}
3 rd Passover	AD 29 _{34th P} ^{33.0}	AD 32 _{37th P} ^{36.0}	AD 32 _{35th P} ^{34.0}	AD 29 _{33rd P} ^{32.0}	AD 32 _{33rd P} ^{32.0}
4 th Passover (buried)	AD 30 _{35th P} ^{34.0}	AD 33 _{38th P} ^{37.0}	AD 33 _{36th P} ^{35.0}	AD 30 _{34th P} ^{33.0}	AD 33 _{34th P} ^{33.0}

* HBC = *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*

** Age assumes Jesus was baptized a month or so before his birthday.

*** _{31st P}^{30.0} means the 31st Passover when Jesus was 30.0 years old.

_{1st P}^{0.0} is the 1st Passover season when Jesus was born (age 0).

Table 5 gives a summary of the chronologies used in various books and articles written by LDS authors. I checked current New Testament books in the BYU Bookstore and books in the reference section of the BYU Library. The table does not include books that discussed New Testament events without giving any dates. Some authors give a range of years, while others don't give a year.

Table 5: New Testament Dates in Writings of LDS Authors

Author	Year	Birth*	Baptism	#Po	Death
LDS BD ⁴⁰	1981			4	
Book of Mormon ⁴¹	1981	AD 1			AD 34
Talmage ⁴²	1915	<i>1 BC Apr 6th</i>	AD 30	4	Fri AD 33
McConkie ⁴³	1965	<i>1 BC Apr 6th</i>		4	Fri
Sperry ⁴⁴	1968	<i>1 BC Apr 6th</i>			Fri AD 33 Apr 1 st
Rel 211-212 ⁴⁵	1979	<i>1 BC Apr 6th</i>	AD 30	4	Fri AD 33 Apr 1 st
Lefgren ⁴⁶	1980	<i>1 BC Apr 6th</i>			Fri AD 33 Apr 1 st
John Pratt ⁴⁷	1985ab	<i>1 BC Apr 6th</i>	AD 28/29?	4	Fri AD 33 Apr 1 st
John Pratt ⁴⁸	1994	<i>1 BC Apr 6th</i>	AD 29/30?	4	Fri AD 33 Apr 1 st
Orson Pratt ⁴⁹	1872	4 BC Apr 11 th			Fri AD 30 Apr 6 th
Huber* ⁵⁰	1982	4 BC Apr 11 th or 5 BC Sept/Oct	AD 26/27	4	Fri AD 30
Clark ⁵¹	1954	5 BC Dec	AD 27 Jan	4	Fri AD 30
McConkie ⁵²	1979	5/4 BC Dec–Apr 5 BC Apr 6 th ?	AD 27 Jan	4	Fri AD 30
Spackman ⁵³	1993	<i>5 BC Mar 21st</i>	AD 26–30	2–4	Fri AD 29 Mar 16
Wayment ... ⁵⁴	2005	5/4 BC Apr-Dec	AD 27	4	Fri AD 30
Holzapfel ... ⁵⁵	2005	5 BC Apr (6?)	AD 27	4	Fri AD 30
Holzapfel ... ⁵⁶	2006	5 BC Apr-Dec			Fri AD 30
Welch, Hall ⁵⁷	2002	7–5 BC	AD 29–30	4	AD 33
Ogden ... ⁵⁸	2006	6–4, 1 BC Apr 5 th		4	Fri AD 33?
Ridges ⁵⁹	2007		AD 29		Fri
Hall ⁶⁰	1992	Apr 6 th	AD 28/29		

* Gregorian dates. Passover birthdates are in *italics*. #Po = number of Passovers. Shaded cells indicate no year was given or implied.

Summary and Conclusion

When putting a puzzle together, we put together the side pieces first, and then the other pieces must fit within the puzzle border. Similarly, scholars look at the evidence and then pick their anchor pieces. If other pieces of evidence do not seem to fit, they reinterpret the evidence to make it fit or justify ignoring it.

Scholars agree that Jesus was born before Herod died, but they disagree about when Herod died. Scholars agree that Jesus was baptized, but differ as to how many years before his death. Scholars agree that Jesus died, but differ as to the year and day of the week. *When Was Jesus Born, Baptized, and Buried?* summarizes the evidence and arguments for the differing conclusions of both LDS and non-LDS scholars. Below is a very brief summary. If you would like an electronic copy of this work-in-progress manuscript, email the author (monte_shelley@byu.edu).

According to Josephus, Herod died: (a) after a lunar eclipse and before a Passover, and (b) “having reigned thirty-four years since he had caused Antigonus to be slain, and obtained his kingdom; but thirty-seven years since he had been made king by the Romans” (*War* 1.665 [I.33.8]). Most scholars believe Herod died before the Passover in 4 BC, 1 BC, or AD 1. The positions of each group of scholars are summarized below.

4 BC Scholars

When did Herod die? The key anchor piece for most scholars is that Herod died after the lunar eclipse of 15 Sept. 5 BC or 13 Mar. 4 BC and before the Passover of 4 BC. This fits well with other related evidence. Some scholars say Herod died a few days after the start of the Jewish New Year (Mar./Apr.) in 4 BC so that these few days can be included as the 37th year of Herod's reign. However, some scholars do not believe there are enough days between the March eclipse and Passover for all of the events described by Josephus, while others believe there are too many days between the September eclipse and April Passover. Some accept a Jewish tradition that Herod died in December 5 BC which is after the September eclipse, while others argue that Herod must have died a few days after the start of the New Year in March so that the few days can be included as the 37th year of Herod's reign. The 4 BC scholars believe there are good reasons to believe that Herod died in 5/4 BC.

When was Jesus baptized? Luke says John started baptizing in the 15th year of Tiberius and that Jesus was "about thirty" when he was baptized by John. Since Tiberius became the sole ruler in AD 14, the 15th year refers to AD 29 when Jesus was 32.7–33.3 years old if he was born in December or 33.5–34.0 years old if born nine months earlier in April. Since these ages do not fit well with "about thirty," some scholars say Luke is not a reliable witness and some say "about thirty" must mean 26–34 which rounds up or down to 30. Other scholars say the 15th year of Tiberius refers to AD 26 based on the year he became a joint ruler with Augustus. This would mean that Jesus was 29.7–30.3 years old if born in December or 30.5–31.0 years old if born nine months earlier in April. Thus, "about thirty" could mean "almost thirty" or 29–31. If the 15th year of Tiberius is based on when he became a joint ruler, the other pieces fit better. However, with only one apparent exception, "ancient sources do *not* count Tiberius's own reign from what was only his joint rule with Augustus."⁶¹

When was Jesus born? Since Herod died in 5/4 BC, Jesus was born a few months or years earlier. Most non-LDS scholars believe Jesus was born a few months before Herod died. If Jesus had been born too much earlier, Jesus would no longer be considered "about thirty" at baptism. A December birth is preferred by those who believe (a) "about thirty" means Jesus was "almost thirty" when he was baptized, and (b) Jesus began his public ministry at the next Passover when he was 30.3 years old. An April 5 BC birth does not fit well because Jesus would have been 31 at the Passover after his baptism. An April 4 BC birth is not possible if one believes Herod died before 11 April 4 BC, but it is possible if one believes Herod died a year or more later as Orson Pratt and others have suggested.

When was Jesus buried? Most non-LDS scholars believe Jesus died and was buried in April, AD 30 or 33. If Jesus was born in Dec. 5 BC, he would have been 33.3 or 36.3 when he died. If he was born in Apr. 5 BC, he would have been 34 or 37 when he died. Since the Gospels imply at most four Passovers after Jesus was baptized, scholars who believe Jesus was baptized in AD 26 usually pick a burial year of AD 30, while those who believe Jesus was baptized in AD 29 usually pick a burial year of AD 33.

How do 3rd Nephi dates fit? Jesus died on the fourth day of the first month of the 34th year after the sign of his birth (3 Ne 8:3, 5; 2:8) at Passover. This suggests that Jesus was also born during Passover (Apr) which does not fit well with Jesus being "about thirty" when he was baptized. Since a child becomes one year old at the start of his second year, Jesus would have turned 33 at the start of his 34th year. Since this puzzle piece does not fit well with the other pieces, some LDS scholars imply that this verse should be ignored because we do not know how the Nephite year compared to the Jewish year. Others say Jesus died in AD 30 and interpret this verse to mean that Jesus died when he was 34 years old. One argues that Jesus died in AD 29 instead of AD 30, while another argues that Jesus was born during the Passover on 11 Apr. 4 BC instead of 5 BC and Herod died after the eclipse of 4 BC and before the Passover of 3 BC, a year later.

2 BC Scholars

When did Herod die? Herod died after the lunar eclipse of 10 Jan. 1 BC and before the Passover of 1 BC. This allows enough days between the eclipse and the Passover for the events described by Josephus. They feel the 4 BC scholars allow too many or too few days. Josephus did *not* consider a few days as a full year in his count of the years of Herod's reign. The reigns of Herod's successors that suggest Herod died earlier must have been recorded incorrectly (e.g., Philip⁶²) or included years before Herod died. There is evidence that other kings before and after Herod started counting the years of their reign before the death of the previous king. These scholars believe there are good reasons to believe Herod died in 2 BC and to doubt that Herod died in 5/4 BC.

When was Jesus born? Since Herod died in 2 BC, Jesus was born a few months earlier in 3/2 BC. This fits with most of the dates indicated by early Christian writers and with other evidence.

When was Jesus baptized? Luke says John started baptizing in the 15th year of Tiberius and that Jesus was "about thirty" when baptized by John. With only one apparent exception, the first year of Tiberius is counted from when he became the sole ruler. Therefore, Jesus was baptized in AD 29 when he was almost 31, and "about thirty" means 29–31.

When was Jesus buried? Jesus died and was buried in April, AD 30 or 33. If Jesus was born in Dec. 2 BC, he would have been 31.3 or 34.3 when he died. If he was born in Apr. 2 BC, he would have been 32 or 35 when he died. Those who believe Jesus died in AD 30 also believe he died at the first Passover after he was baptized. Those who believe he died in AD 33 also believe he died at the fourth Passover after he was baptized.

How do 3rd Nephi dates fit? Jesus died on the fourth day of the first month of the 34th year after the sign of his birth (3 Ne 8:3, 5; 2:8). This puzzle piece does not fit well. Non-LDS scholars do not believe this piece of evidence. I am not aware of any LDS scholars who believe Herod died in 2 BC.

AD 1 Scholars

When was Jesus born? Jesus was born 6 April 1 BC on Passover night.

When was Jesus baptized? Luke says John started baptizing in the 15th year of Tiberius and that Jesus was "about thirty" when baptized by John. With only one apparent exception, the first year of Tiberius is counted from when he became the sole ruler. Therefore, Jesus was baptized in AD 29 when he was "almost thirty." He turned thirty at the next Passover and began his public ministry at the same age that Levites began their temple service (Num 4:3). Before he was thirty, Jesus "could not have assumed the right or privilege of a teacher without contravening established customs."⁶³

When was Jesus buried? Jesus died and was buried in April, AD 33, when he was 33 years old. Scholars agree that AD 33 is one of the two most likely years that Passover was on a Friday as indicated in the Gospels.

How do 3rd Nephi dates fit? Jesus died on the fourth day of the first month of the 34th year after the sign of his birth (3 Ne 8:3, 5; 2:8). Since a child becomes one year old at the start of his 2nd year, Jesus died 3 days and 33 'Nephite years' after the sign of his birth. A 'Nephite year' appears to have been 365-days a year during the life of Christ. Therefore, Jesus lived 12,048 days which is exactly the number of days between 6 Apr. 1 BC and 3 Apr. AD 33 when he died at Passover.

When did Herod die? The "academically correct" interpretation of the evidence for Herod's death in 5/4 BC does not fit well. If Jesus was born 6 Apr. 1 BC, Herod must have died after the 29 Dec. 1 BC eclipse and before the Passover in AD 1. This allows enough time between the eclipse and the Passover for the events described by Josephus. Josephus did *not* consider a few days as a full year in his count of the years of Herod's reign. Herod died after "having reigned" 37 years not during his 37th year. The reigns of Herod's successors that suggest Herod died earlier must have been recorded incorrectly (e.g., Philip⁶⁴) or included years before Herod died. There is evidence that other kings before and after Herod started counting the years of their reign before the death of the previous king. These scholars believe there are good reasons to believe the Herod died in AD 1 and to doubt that Herod died in 5/4 BC.

Conclusion

Most scholars present their reasons to believe that Herod died in 5/4 BC. However, other scholars give their reasons to believe that Herod died in 1 BC or AD 1. Since Jesus was born before Herod died, there are reasons to believe that Jesus was born in 5/4 BC as Elder Hyrum M. Smith stated in 1923. There are also reasons to believe Jesus was born on 6 Apr. 1 BC as Elder Talmage stated in 1915.

What are the correct interpretations for the evidence we do have? What evidence is based on incorrect records, copies, or translations? What are the missing pieces? Scholars who are aware of the evidence have come to different conclusions. They attack the conclusions of others while defending their own. It reminds me of Joseph Smith's comment about the religions of his time.

“The [4 BC scholars] were most decided against the [1 BC and the AD 1 scholars], and used all the powers of both reason and sophistry to prove their errors, or, at least, to make the people think they were in error. On the other hand, the [1 BC and the AD 1 scholars] in their turn were equally zealous in endeavoring to establish their own [opinions] and disprove all others. In the midst of this war of words and tumult of opinions, I often said to myself: Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it?” (JS—H 1:9–10)

Elder Bruce R. McConkie (1979) said, “We do not believe it is possible with the present state of our knowledge ... to state with finality” the year Jesus was born. After reviewing the evidence, arguments, and interpretations of LDS and non-LDS scholars, I realize that their differing opinions are educated guesses and not statements of fact. Someday, in this life or the next, we will learn when these events actually took place. Until then, I am content to know that Jesus was born, baptized, and buried. As my wife correctly pointed out, knowing when these events occurred is not important for anyone's salvation. Clearly, the scriptures focus our attention on what is important: the life, teachings, atonement, and resurrection of Christ.

Endnotes

¹ Hall, John Franklin. 1992. “April 6,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, edited by Daniel H. Ludlow, 62.

² Charles F. Deems, *The Light of the Nations*, 28 appended note; quoted in Talmage, James E. 1915. *Jesus the Christ* (1915–1978), 109, chap. 8, n. 6 [p. 103]. In 1982, Deseret Book reset the type and repaginated the book. The new page numbers are in brackets.

³ Matthew, Mark, and Luke mention only one Passover but seem to imply a second one. John mentions three Passovers and implies a fourth. (HBC₉₈, ¶597–¶600).

⁴ Finegan, Jack. 1964/1998 rev. ed. *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

⁵ Filmer, W. E. 1966, “The Chronology of the Reign of Herod the Great,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, vol. 17.2 (Oct. 1966), pp. 283–298.

⁶ Barnes, Timothy D. 1968. “The Date of Herod's Death,” *Journal of Theological Studies*, (April 1968) vol. 19.1, pp. 204–209.

⁷ Brown, Raymond E. 1977/1993. *The Birth of the Messiah*, (1977, 1993 updated), 166–167

⁸ Brown, R., 1977/1993, 607.

⁹ After the birth of Jesus, all dates in the footnotes correspond to the year in the text, e.g., the 34th year has AD 34 in the footnotes.

¹⁰ Ogden, D. Kelly and Andrew C. Skinner 2006. *Verse by Verse, the Four Gospels*, 773, 458; Pratt, John P. 1985a. “The Restoration of Priesthood Keys on Easter 1836, Part 1: Dating the First Easter,” *Ensign*, June 1985, pp. 59–68, §3.2; Spackman, Randall P. 1993. Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology, (Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1993), 52, 61; Talmage 1915, 722 [p. 671].

¹¹ Orson Pratt, *Journal of Discourses* 15:259–261.

¹² Holzapfel, Richard Neitzel, Eric D. Huntsman, and Thomas A. Wayment. 2006. *Jesus Christ and the World of the New Testament*, 112; Holzapfel, Richard Neitzel and Thomas A. Wayment. 2003–2006, *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ*, 1:393.

¹³ Brown, S. Kent; C. Wilfred Griggs, and H. Kimball Hansen 1982 “Book Review: Lefgren, John C. *April Sixth*,” *Brigham Young University Studies*, vol. 22, no. 3, (Summer 1982), 381–382.

¹⁴ Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*.

¹⁵ *Journal of Discourses*.

¹⁶ Talmage 1915, 104 [p. 98].

- ¹⁷ Smith, Hyrum M. and Janne M. Sjodahl. 1923. *The Doctrine and Covenants*, see note on D&C 20:1 in 1923 and revised edition (1950) prepared by Joseph Fielding Smith, Harold B. Lee, and Marion G. Romney.
- ¹⁸ Smith and Sjodahl, see note on D&C 20:1 in 1923 edition.
- ¹⁹ Clark, J. Reuben 1974. *Our Lord of The Gospels*, vi–vii.
- ²⁰ McConkie, Bruce R. 1958/1966. *Mormon Doctrine*. [1958: 1st edition, 1966: 2nd edition], see “Christmas.”
- ²¹ McConkie, Bruce R. 1965. *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary*, I:91.
- ²² President N. Eldon Tanner, “Resurrection and Restoration,” *Ensign*, Apr. 1971, 2.
- ²³ Harold B. Lee, “Strengthen the Stakes of Zion,” *Ensign*, July 1973, 2 (General Conference).
- ²⁴ President Spencer W. Kimball, *Ensign*, May 1975, 4.
- ²⁵ McConkie, Bruce R. 1979. *The Mortal Messiah*, 1:349–350.
- ²⁶ Spencer W. Kimball, “Remarks and Dedication of the Fayette, New York, Buildings,” *Ensign*, May 1980, 54 (General Conference).
- ²⁷ Elder Neal A. Maxwell, “A Choice Seer,” *Ensign*, Aug. 1986, 6.
- ²⁸ Elder Richard G. Scott, “Jesus Christ, Our Redeemer,” *Ensign*, May 1997, 53.
- ²⁹ President Gordon B. Hinckley, First Presidency Christmas Devotional, 7 December 1997, “News of the Church,” *Ensign*, Feb. 1998, p. 74.
- ³⁰ Brown, Griggs, and Hansen 1982, 383.
- ³¹ Spackman 1993, 73–74.
- ³² Wayment 2005, *LTJC* 1:385.
- ³³ Clark 1974, vi–vii; quoted in McConkie 1979, 1:349–350.
- ³⁴ Clark 1974, 37.
- ³⁵ McConkie 1979, 1:349–350; Ogden and Skinner 2006, 55.
- ³⁶ Holzapfel, Huntsman, and Wayment 2006, 44, 112.
- ³⁷ Welch, John W. and John F. Hall 2002. *Charting the New Testament*, chart 13-1, 8-4.
- ³⁸ Talmage 1915, 104, 166 n. 3, 697 n1, 722 [98, 156 n. 3, 648 n1, 671].
- ³⁹ Pratt, Orson. 1872, “True Christmas and New Year,” in *Journal of Discourses*, (29 Dec. 1872), 15:253.
- ⁴⁰ See “Gospels” in the LDS Bible Dictionary. Events are listed without dates.
- ⁴¹ *Book of Mormon*, 1981, 408; 423 footnotes (1st – 34th year=[AD 34])
- ⁴² Talmage 1915, 104, 166 n. 3, 697 n1, 722 [98, 156 n. 3, 671].
- ⁴³ McConkie 1965, 91, 838.
- ⁴⁴ Sperry, Sidney B. 1968. *Book of Mormon Compendium*, 399 n2
- ⁴⁵ *The Life and Teachings of Jesus and his Apostles*, (1978) 22; 213.
- ⁴⁶ Lefgren, John C. 1980, 11, 39, 46.
- ⁴⁷ Pratt, J. 1985a, 1985b.
- ⁴⁸ Pratt, John P. 1994. “Passover: Was it Symbolic of His Coming?,” *Ensign*, Jan. 1994, 38–45.
- ⁴⁹ Pratt, O. 1872, *JD* 15:253. Elder Pratt assumed Jesus died in AD 30 and subtracted 33 years as indicated in the Book of Mormon.
- ⁵⁰ Huber, Jay H. 1982, “Lehi’s 600-Year Prophecy and the Birth of Christ,” *FARMS Preliminary Report*. [This was distributed for critique but was not published.], 34; 33; 32. (Eclipse was in 4 BC and the Passover in 3 BC.)
- ⁵¹ Clark 1974, 33; 37; 120.
- ⁵² McConkie 1979, I:350; 382; 469; IV:19.
- ⁵³ Spackman 1993, 57, 61.
- ⁵⁴ Holzapfel and Wayment 2003–2006, 1: 383–394.
- ⁵⁵ Holzapfel and Wayment 2003–2006, 1:94,114, 165–6 n22, 168, 176; 2:399. John born Oct. 7/6 BC (1:94), birth at Passover (1:114), John starts AD 27 (1:168, 176), John killed AD 28/29 (1:165–6 n22), crucifixion AD 30 (2:399).
- ⁵⁶ Holzapfel, Huntsman and Wayment 2006, 49, 112.
- ⁵⁷ Welch and Hall 2002, chart 13-1.
- ⁵⁸ Ogden and Skinner 2006, 55, 770–73; 549; 480 (picture), 507 (year of Matt. 24), 458.
- ⁵⁹ Ridges, David J. 2007. *Your Study of The New Testament Made Easier*, pt. 1, 240, 455.
- ⁶⁰ Hall 1992.
- ⁶¹ HBC₉₈ ¶578.
- ⁶² Beyer (1995) reported “his personal examination in the British Museum of forty-six editions of Josephus’s *Antiquities* published before 1700.” (HBC₉₈ ¶518) All editions of Josephus published before AD 1544 read that Philip died in the 22nd year (AD 35/36) of Tiberius instead of the 20th year (AD 33/34).
- ⁶³ Talmage 1915, 153, 166 n. 3 [156 n. 3].
- ⁶⁴ Beyer (1995) reported “his personal examination in the British Museum of forty-six editions of Josephus’s *Antiquities* published before 1700.” (HBC₉₈ ¶518) All editions of Josephus published before AD 1544 read that Philip died in the 22nd year (AD 35/36) of Tiberius instead of the 20th year (AD 33/34).