

New Testament Survey

Chronological Keys

I. Some Important Dates¹

Most events in the New Testament are very difficult to date. The only time we can assign accurate dates is when a New Testament event intersects with a verifiable historical date. The following are some of the more important dates.

A. Christ's birth - 5 or 6 B.C.

Christ was born shortly before Herod the Great's death in 4 B.C. We date this from a lunar eclipse which occurred in March 12 or 13 of 4 B.C. at which time Herod died. We are also told in Matthew 2 that Herod ordered that all children two and under be killed. He did this after asking about the time the star appeared to the wise men from the east. This would place Christ's birth around the year 6 B.C.

We also know that Quirinius was governor of Syria in 8-7 B.C. Thus, Christ could not have been born prior to that time.

B. The Beginning of Christ's Ministry - A.D. 26 or 29

The rebuilding of the temple was started by Herod in approximately 20 B.C. In John 2:20 we read that at that time the project had been going on for about 46 years, which would put the start of Christ's ministry around A.D. 26. However, since the word used is "about", there very well could be a two or three year latitude in John's dating.

Another possibility is that Luke 3:1 tells us Christ began his ministry during the 15th year of Tiberius' reign. This would correspond to the year A.D. 29.

It is probably best to assume that the date of Christ's public ministry began in A.D. 29 since Luke tells us that the purpose of his book is to present an orderly account of Christ's ministry. It would seem best to say that Luke wanted to be as precise as he could regarding the actual dates that he mentions.

C. The Crucifixion - A.D. 29 to A.D. 30

This depends on when we begin Christ's public ministry. The most likely date is A.D. 32 or A.D. 33 if we take Luke's date as the starting date of Christ's public ministry.

D. Death of Herod Agrippa I (martyrdom of James the brother of John) - A.D. 44

We know from Josephus that Herod Agrippa I died during his seventh year of rule. Since he began his rule in A.D. 37, we have the date of A.D. 44 as his death.

E. Famine in Jerusalem - A.D. 46

¹ James Borland, *A General Introduction to the New Testament*, (Lynchburg: University Book House, 1986), pp. 92-102.

Josephus mentions the famine during the procuratorship of Fadus and Alexander (A.D. 44 to A.D. 48). This would place Paul's famine visit around the year A.D. 46.

F. Gallio's Procounselship in Corinth - A.D. 51-52

A stone uncovered in Delphi mentions Gallio with the number 26. In August of A.D. 52 the number 27 was used on Claudius' inscriptions. This would place Paul's 18 month stay in Corinth during the years A.D. 50 - A.D. 53.

7. Procuratorship of Festus - A.D. 58 - A.D. 60

This places Paul's Roman imprisonment during A.D. 60 - A.D. 62.