

Life of Christ

Appendix B - The Date of Christ's Birth and Death

I. Alternatives

Event	Option A	Option B	Option C
Birth	5 B.C.	5 B.C.	Spring 5 B.C.
Wise Men Visit	Spring 4 B.C.	5 B.C.	Late 5 B.C.
Return to Nazareth	Summer 4 B.C.	Summer 4 B.C.	Summer 4 B.C.
Passover when 12	A.D. 9	A.D. 7	A.D. 8 or A.D. 9
Beginning of Ministry	A.D. 29	A.D. 26	A.D. 29
Crucifixion	A.D. 33	A.D. 29	A.D. 33

II. Historical and Scriptural Support

A. Option A

- Christ had to have been born prior to the death of Herod which occurred April 4, 4 B.C.
- Luke states in Luke 3:1 that Christ began His ministry in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius. This would be the date A.D. 29 since Tiberius' reign began at the death of Augustus on August 19, A.D. 14.
- Eusebius indicates that Christ suffered during the nineteenth year of the reign of Tiberius. This would place Christ's crucifixion in the year A.D. 33.

B. Option B

- John indicates in John 2:20 that the Jews said that Herod had been building the temple for 46 years. Josephus places this in the year B.C. 19, thus making Christ's first passover appearance A.D. 27.
- In Luke 3:23 we read that Jesus was about 30 years old when He began His ministry. This would be the year A.D. 26 according to this chronology.

C. Option C

- Christ was born in late 6 or early 5 B.C. which allows time for the travel of the wise men (a trip of several months) from Mesopotamia to Jerusalem. The wise men would have arrived late in the year of 5 B.C. (or early in 4 B.C.) at which time Jesus would have been several months old. Thus a little over one year would have elapsed since Christ's birth which is why Herod had all children two years old and under killed.
- Luke only states that Jesus was *about* thirty years of age when He began His public ministry. According to this chronology, Christ would have been 33 years old when He began His ministry.

- The Jews in John's account could have approximated the building of the temple. They do not say that it was *exactly* 46 years. Also, this assumes that the time they considered the temple construction began and the time Josephus thought the temple construction began was the same.
- Following Sir Robert Anderson's calculations in *The Coming Prince*, one arrives at the year A.D. 33 for the triumphal entry and crucifixion. A.D. 29 is much too early.

III. Some Additional Questions/Considerations

A. The Decree of Augustus

- According to Roman records the census was taken every fourteen years. The dates of the censuses in the first century are A.D. 6, 20, 34, 62, and 90. This would mean that the actual decree for the census in Luke 2:1-2 occurred in 8 B.C., a time much too early for the birth of Christ.
- The above problem is answered by asserting that the actual decree was made in 8 B.C., but not carried out in Palestine until A.D. 5. This, by the way, is not an unreasonable assumption.

B. The Visit by the Wise Men

- Many assert that Christ was almost two years old by the time the wise men visit. This would mean that Christ had to have been born in late 7 or early 6 B.C., since we know for a fact that Herod died April 4, 4 B.C.
- The above problem is answered by asserting that Christ was born in early 5 B.C. and visited by the wise men when He was several months old. Herod's destruction of all children 2 and under could have merely been an "insurance policy." Also, we are not told when the star appeared to the wise men. It could have appeared prior to Christ's birth for them, thus allowing them to make the several month trip to Judea.

C. Luke 2:39 and the Wise Men

- According to Luke 2:39, Joseph and Mary returned to Nazareth immediately after Jesus was dedicated at the temple (or very soon thereafter). If this is true, when did the Wise Men visit, since we know they found Jesus in Bethlehem?
- We can answer the above by asserting that Joseph and Mary did return to Nazareth only to gather their belongings and return to Bethlehem. It was then that the wise men showed up to worship Jesus. The wise men could not have visited prior to Jesus' dedication since we are told in Matthew that Joseph and Mary had to leave in haste. This would have made it impossible to journey to Jerusalem for the dedication.