

# Beauties of the Truth

A Forum for the Publication of Scriptural Viewpoints  
Thought to be Harmonious with God's Plan of the Ages  
Volume 1, Number 2, December 1980

---

The Irony of "Desolation" in the Gospel Age Covenants  
Jesus' Birth & Herod's Death  
What Was the Star of Bethlehem?  
Confirmation on a Fall Birth Date

---

## ***The Irony of "Desolation" in the Gospel Age Covenants***

One benefit of the Apostle's argument in Galatians 4:21-31 is his demonstration of the fact that *two* covenants are operable during the Gospel Age. As Jesus ignored the Highway of Holiness (Matt 7:13,14) because it was not an option when he spoke, Paul here ignores the Keturah Covenant because it was not an option for the Gospel Age. This clearly demonstrates that the Law Covenant *was* yet an option - a Covenant which would continue in *some form* of existence until its antitype (the New Covenant) would begin. Paul knew well that Abraham had *more* than two sons (compare Gal 4:22 with Gen 25:1,2), but their representation of New Covenant factors was not relevant to Paul's argument.

Galatians 4:24 might be paraphrased thus: "These women represent the two covenants now in operation. The one originates from Mount Sinai which generates or gives birth to slavery. This is represented by Hagar."

In verse 25 is hidden a lovely play on words apparently designed to impress on the Galatian churches the barrenness of the Law Covenant. The reading of the King James Version is questionable. The Sinaitic reads, "For Sinai is a mountain in Arabia." The first word to notice with care is "for." It means "because." By it Paul is linking verse 24 with verse 25. He is saying the Hagar Covenant gives birth to slavery BECAUSE Sinai is a mountain in Arabia. *Strange reasoning?* Not at all! Note: *Smith's Bible Dictionary* defines Arabia as meaning desolate or barren - an etymology akin to the Hebrew "Arabah" (desert). Linking this meaning with our standard symbolism for mountain, the verse says: The Hagar Covenant gives birth to slavery BECAUSE Sinai (*i.e.* the Law) is a kingdom of desolation. (*I.e.*, it cannot produce life or *freedom* from sin.) If we go further and translate Sinai (see *McClintock and Strong*) which means either "thorny" (*i.e.*, cleft with ravines) or "devoted to sin," Paul's play on words is even more forceful. How could you expect a covenant concluded in a place named "devoted to sin" located in a "kingdom of desolation" to bear fruitage? Paul then identifies which *Kingdom* this represents.

Kingdoms are symbolized by their capitals, even to our day. Thus Paul introduces his new terminology. "*Jerusalem which now is*" -i.e., the kingdom of Israel under the Law Covenant as represented by its capital city. This gives him the opportunity for another etymological "trick." Jerusalem has a plural ending in Hebrew. *There is more than one Jerusalem.* Therefore, Paul (verse 26) tells us about the other kingdom - the kingdom built on the Sarah Covenant, and that we are the children of that kingdom, represented by its capital, Jerusalem *above*.

Paul then concludes his point with the ironic reference in verse 27 to Isaiah 54:1. He wants to show prophetically that *this* Covenant is NOT barren. Sarah has been called BARREN and DESOLATE in prophecy when it is really the Law (concluded in ARABIA = "desolation") that is desolate. But the prophecy proves the point: The Law produced life for only one individual, the man Jesus (and that life was sacrificed). But the Sarah Covenant, produces life for "many more children" - Jesus as the Christ, and all of his disciples.

The lesson, of course, is obvious; the world sees the fruitful as barren and the barren as fruitful.  
- *Contributed*

## ***Jesus' Birth & Herod's Death***

Bible Students have long believed that Jesus was born in 2 BC (SS, Vol. 2, pp. 54-62). But most modern historians have dated his birth at from 4-7 BC. The reason for this is that Jesus was born before Herod died (Matt. 2:1), and it has been thought that Herod died in the spring of 4 BC, following an eclipse of the moon early in that year. Early Christian writers, however, testify against such an early date:

"Virtually all Christian historians and chronologers who lived from the second to the sixth centuries (and even later) put the birth of Christ *after* the eclipse of 4 BC. Iranaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian, Orosius, and Cassiodorus Senator said Christ's birth was in a year we now recognize as 3 BC. (Footnote - In Pyramidology, Volume 2, pp. 309-312, Bro. Adam Rutherford states that Iranaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian support the 2 BC date. His references from their writings make this sound reasonable. We have not independently checked the first-hand sources however.) The early Christian chronologist Julius Africanus said it was in the year from 3 to 2 BC. This same year was accepted by Hippolytus of Rome. Origen, *the Chronicon Cypianicum*. Eusebius of Caesarea, John Chrysostom, Jerome, Hippolytus of Thebes, Photius Patriarch of Constantinople, the Greek historian Zonaras, and Bar Hebraeus, who quoted Syrian, Armenian, and Greek sources. Ephiphanius and the early Syrian chronological work called the *Chronicon Edessenum* indicate it was 2 BC. Almost all the early Christian fathers of whom we have record said Christ's birth was in either 3 or 2 BC.?" (Footnote - Ernest L. Martin. "The Celestial Pageantry Dating Christ's Birth." *Christianity Today*, pg. 17, December 3, 1976.)

The Scriptures support the later date. Jesus began his ministry as he turned 30, being baptized by John. (Luke 3:23) Since John had begun his ministry in the 15th year (Footnote - To reconcile this with the 4-7 BC dates, some assume this 15th year is reckoned from some co-regency with Augustus prior to Augustus' death. So far as we know, this is an arbitrary assertion without historical support.) of Tiberius Ceasar (Luke 3:1), 29 AD, Jesus turned 30 years of age no earlier

than 29 AD. So Jesus could not have been born *any earlier* than 2 BC. (Footnote - For those wishing to calculate this, remember there is no year numbered "0" - the year preceding AD 1 is BC 1. This means any arithmetic between AD and BC dates must be adjusted by 1 to secure the correct result.)

This suggests that there has been an inaccurate deduction by many historians about the date of Herod's death. What is their reasoning? Where is the flaw? In an article by William Filmer, published in the October, 1966 issue of *Journal of Theological Studies*, "The Chronology of the Reign of Herod the Great," the evidence is reviewed in detail. Filmer concludes that Herod died early in 1 BC. We here summarize his findings.

Most of the primary information on Herod's reign is from Josephus, and Jewish historian of the first century AD. He states that Herod died shortly after a lunar eclipse, but before passover. Eclipses which could be the one referred to occurred on 15 September 5 BC, 12/13 March 4 BC, 9 January 1 BC, and 29 December 1 AD. To determine which of these four was meant, we look at other evidence.

Josephus indicates that Herod was appointed king of Judea by the Romans, Mark Antony specifically, three years before Herod actually conquered Jerusalem, deposing the previous king, Antigonus. He states that Herod reigned 37 years from his *appointment*, but 34 years from the death of Antigonus. (Footnote - *Ant.* XVII viii 1, Wars 1 xxxiii 8. Bro. Adam Rutherford in Volume 2 of his work *Pyramidology* forwards the thought that the 37 years dates from Herod's victory at Jerusalem, and the 34 years from the death of Antigonus 3 years after that. While at first inclined to the argument, and examination of the balance of Josephus' data to us obviates that possibility.) Therefore, if we could date any year of either span positively, we could compute the date of Herod's death. Josephus does give data which enable dates to be assigned. The problem is that some of the data yields one date, and the balance of the data another.

On the one hand he states of Herod's appointment, "Thus did this man receive the kingdom, having obtained it on the hundred and eighty-fourth olympiad, when Caius Domitius Calvinus was consul the second time, and Caius Asinius Pollio." (*Ant.* XIV xiv 5) "This makes it 40 BC, but in this he is contradicted by Appian, who mentions Herod's appointment in a context that can be dated from Dio's Roman History to 39 BC." (Filmer, JTS pg. 285; Appian, Civil Wars, v. 75, chap. viii) And Josephus said of Herod's victory at Jerusalem that he took it with help from General Sosius, "when Marcus Agrippa and Caninius Gallus were consuls at Rome, on the hundred eighty and fifth olympiad . . .," which gives 37 BC, but continues ". . . on the third month, on the solemnity of the fast, as if a periodical revolution of calamities had returned since that which befell the Jews under Pompey; for the Jews were taken by him on the same day, and this was after twenty-seven years' time." (*Ant.* XIV xvi 4) But Pompey conquered Jerusalem in 63 BC, giving 36 BC for Herod's victory. Filmer also quotes Dio's writings to show that Sosius was inactive in 37 BC, for "the Romans accomplished nothing worthy of note in Syria . . . Sosius . . . spent the time devising means, not for achieving some success and incurring [Antony's] enmity, but for pleasing him without engaging in any activity." (Dio, xlix, 23, 1-2)

Filmer supports the later dates (39/36 BC) with six more arguments: (1) a difference between Roman and Jewish new year dates may have led Josephus to err one year on relating Jewish records

with Roman consular years; (2) "Apart from this, several other consular dates given by Josephus are impossible to reconcile with one another." (Pg. 287); (3) the 27 year span between Jerusalem's fall to Pompey and to Herod is confirmed by Josephus' mention of Hycanus (installed by Pompey) and his successor Antigonus (removed by Herod) holding the office of high priest for 24 years, and 3 years 3 months, respectively. (Footnote - Filmer later shows by a listing of 6 priestly rulers that Josephus uses an accession-year reckoning, meaning that a straight total of individual periods of office does result in a correct number of overall years.) (5) the history of Antony's activities for six years from the Battle of Philippi (at the end of 42 BC) are much more consistent with the 39/36 BC dates; (6) Josephus refers to a shortage of food at the time of Jerusalem's fall to Herod, caused by a sabbath year. Concluding that a previous sabbath was recorded in 135/134 BC, one would also have fallen in 37/36 BC. So at the close of 36 BC there would indeed have been a shortage of food due caused by a sabbath year.

### ***WHERE ARE WE?***

What this evidence tells us is that Herod's appointment to be king was in 39 BC, and his actual assumption of kingly power by conquering Jerusalem was in 36 BC, 37 and 34 years respectively bring us to 2 BC. So neither the eclipse of 5 BC nor that of 4 BC can be the one Josephus referred to as just preceding Herod's death. The next possible eclipse would be that of 9 January BC 1. But isn't that too late? Should't Herod have died in 2 BC? No. We can adjust our dates by one year, if we assume (as the previous footnote suggested) that Josephus considers the first fractional year of reign as the "accession" year, and the next as year "one" (which was a common method of reckoning). Filmer also shows that both Herod's appointment and victory at Jerusalem occurred after Tishri 1 of whatever year. Therefore, year "one" of Herod would be either Nisan 35 BC to Nisan 34 BC, or Tishri 35 BC to Tishri 34 BC, and Herod's 34th (and last) year of kingship would end at either Nisan (spring) or Tishri (fall) BC 1 (depending on what month the regnal years began).

### ***THE OTHER OPTION***

Those who use the 40/37 BC dates can place Herod's death in 4 BC only by assuming "(1) That Josephus always reckons reigns or periods of time inclusively, that is by the non-accession-year rule. (2) That Herod's regnal years began on 1 Nisan. (3) That Herod died after 1 Nisan in BC 4, and that Josephus reckoned the odd day or two of the new year as a full regnal year. The first assumption converts the fraction of a year into a whole, while the last two make a couple days count as a year." (Filmer, JTS, pp. 293-294) The first assumption is contrary to Josephus' usual reckoning, and the second is not provable. The third is impossible! If Herod died after 1 Nisan BC 4, there would be only 14 days left to Passover, which must accommodate a funeral procession which William Whiston (the translator) puts at "no less than twenty-five days," and the quelling of a Jewish riot. (*Ant.*, XVII viii-ix) (Footnote - This argument is nearly fatal in any case for the BC 4 date, as between the eclipse (March 12/13) and Passover (April 11) are only 4 weeks, which is still not adequate time.) The third assumption is therefore disproved, and the date must fall.

## ***THE MEGILLAT TA'ANIT***

The Megillat Ta'anit, compiled shortly before AD 70, was a list of days, associated with notable events, on which the Jews were not to fast. The reason for the holiday is given in every case but two, 7 Kislev and 2 Shebat. According to Jewish tradition these were the dates of the deaths of two hated kings, Herod and Jannai. But which died on 7 Kislev, and which on 2 Shebat? 7 Kislev fell earlier in the year than all the eclipses of 1 and 4 BC; 2 Shebat was before that of 4 BC, but 15 days after both eclipses of BC 1. So, if there is validity to the tradition, Herod must have died on 2 Shebat, and it could not have been in 4 BC.

## ***HEROD'S AGE***

Josephus said Herod died at about 70 years of age. (*Ant.* XVII vi 1; *Wars* 1 xxxiii 1) As most understand Josephus to mean that Herod was 25 when his father Antipater made him governor of Galilee (Footnote - "The Greek text reads fifteen, but this must be an error, for otherwise Herod could never have reached the age of seventy." (Filmer, footnote, pg. 293) Whiston's translation gives "25".) in 47 BC, Herod would have been 70 in 2 or 1 BC.

## ***CONCLUSIONS***

The eclipse marking the approximate time of Herod's death was evidently that of 9 January BC 1, putting Jesus birth *before the end* of 2 BC. Scriptural evidence indicates Jesus was *born no earlier* than 2 BC. Therefore Jesus was born *in* 2 BC, and his ministry began in 29 AD. That this was the same year in which John began his ministry, and that John was 5-6 months older than Jesus (Luke 1:35-38), are consistent with the usual reasoning on Daniel 9:27 indicating that Jesus' birth was in the fall of the year.

## ***WHAT WAS THE STAR OF BETHLEHEM?***

We now know that Herod died in January of BC 1, and that Jesus was born in the fall of BC 2. (See previous article.) Since the wise men from the east visited Jesus between these two events, it settles an otherwise debatable matter concerning the date of their visit and of Joseph's flight to Egypt to escape Herod's decree. Now we know that the wise men saw Jesus just weeks, at the most 2-3 months, after his birth, before he was taken to Nazareth.

After Herod inquired "diligently" of the wise men, he set the age limit of the boys to be slaughtered at 2 years. (Matt. 2:7, 16) Assuming that he allowed some margin of time previous to the wise men's first special notice of the "star," it is safe to say that the "star" appeared to the wise men not earlier than 3 BC, and they found Jesus not later than about the end of 2 BC.

With this information Ernest L. Martin ("The Celestial Pageantry Dating Christ's Birth," *Christianity Today*, pp. 16-22, December 3, 1976.) looked back into astronomical history to determine what natural celestial appearances would have been visible to the learned astrologers

from the east, and has found that during this period Jupiter was very active in striking a number of close conjunctions:

- 1) Aug. 1, BC 3      Jupiter becomes a morning star
- 2) Aug. 12, BC 3    Jupiter/Venus conjunction (.23 degrees)
- 3) Sept. 1, BC 3     Venus/Mercury conjunction (.36 degrees)
- 4) Sept. 14, BC 3    Jupiter/Regulus conjunction (.63 degrees)
- 5) Feb. 17, BC 2     Jupiter/Regulus conjunction (1.19 degrees)
- 6) May 8, BC 2        Jupiter/Regulus conjunction (1.06 degrees)
- 7) June 17, BC 2     Jupiter/Venus conjunction (.02 degrees)
- 8) Aug. 27, BC 2     Jupiter/Mars conjunction (.14 degrees)
- 9) Dec. 25, BC 2     Jupiter "stood still" over Bethlehem at Pre-Dawn observation.

Noting that "Jupiter was often associated with the birth of kings and therefore called the King-planet," (Hendriksen, *Mathew*, p. 153). Martin gives detailed suggestions on the probable, and notable, meanings the other luminaries Jupiter conjoined with would have had to the wise men of the east. Then he adds:

"When [the wise men] reached Jerusalem, the Magi were told to look toward Bethlehem for the newborn king. This happened at a time when the New Testament says the star came to a definite halt in the heavens - it "stood over where the young child was"(Matt. 2:9). And indeed, the planet Jupiter [the other planets as well] does become stationary in its motion through the fixed stars. This happens as its times of retrogression and progression. It could well be that Matthew was referring to such a thing.

Jupiter had come to the point of retrogression . . . The precise time for the retrogression of Jupiter of December 25, 2 BC (Footnote - He does not suggest that Christ was born that night) . . . at the ordinary time of the Magi's predawn observations, Jupiter would have been seen in meridian position (directly of Bethlehem) sixty-five degrees above the southern horizon. This position would have shown the planet shining right down on Bethlehem! . . . Jupiter was then situated in the constellation of Virgo the Virgin."

If the "star" was Jupiter, or a natural luminary which had gained the attention of the wise men because of its special movements, it is easy to see why the common populace would not have noticed it. If it were a miraculous, super-bright star, or a natural super nova, Herod would not have required to ask the wise men of it. A planetary movement of symbolic significance seems to fulfill the requirements of the case.

We think the visit of the shepherds the night of Jesus' birth, and the wise men shortly thereafter, were typical of events pointing to our Lord's second advent. As there they viewed our Lord 30 years before he was prepared to present himself as the Messiah at Jordan, so 30 years before our Lord's arrival as the new King of earth, many "shepherds" pastoring their flocks in the early 1800's came to view the new King's approach in 1844. And "the wise" who were privileged to "understand" (Daniel 12:10) some of the fulfillments of Daniel's prophecies approached that date expectantly also. But the time was not yet to behold our Lord's return as King. They merely saw the foregleams of prophecy, 30 years before the destined time.

## ***CONFIRMATION OF A FALL BIRTH DATE***

Luke's gospel tells us that after Elizabeth conceived John the Baptist, she "hid herself five months . . . and in the sixth month" Mary was told that she also would bear a son. (Luke 1:24-26, 36) The inference of Luke 1:5-24 is that Elizabeth conceived at the end of Zacharias' "days of . . . ministrations" -if we can determine what time that was, we can compute roughly the time of year Jesus was born.

We find two differing approaches to the matter, but both resulting in nearly the same conclusion. The Edgar brothers (*Great Pyramid Passages*, Vol. 2, pp. 56-57) reason that since twelve divisions (of servants to the king - two examples; 1 Kings 4: 7; 1 Chron. 27:1-15) served in monthly rotations, the 24 courses of the priesthood would each serve half a month to fill out the year. Of the 24 courses, that of Abia (the course Zacharias served in - Luke 1:5) was the 8th. (1 Chron. 24:5-19) Assuming the first course serves first each year, Zacharias' service would have ended 4 months after the Jewish New Year. Adding to this 5+ months to Mary's conception and 9+ months to Jesus' birth brings us to early Tishri on the Jewish calendar.

Bro. Adam Rutherford begins with a different premise. He states, ". . . it is known that each course officiated at the Temple in turn for a week" (*Pyramidology*, Vol. 2, pg. 334 - he does not give his supporting source). He continues: "From the Talmudical statements and Josephus we learn that the Temple at Jerusalem was destroyed by Titus on 5th August AD 70 and that the 1st course of priest . . . had just taken office . . . [this] period of service [ended] . . . the evening of the following Sabbath on 11th August."

On this basis his conclusions are:

Abia's summer, BC 3 course ended: 13th July

Jesus conceived: beginning of 4th week of December, BC 3

Jesus born: beginning of 5th week of September, BC 2.

As the date is close, he suggests the evening of September 29th as the time of Jesus' birth, which he states was 1st Tishri in BC 2, the day of the Feast of Trumpets, and supports this with a quote from *The Companion Bible*:

"[Christ's] birth took place on . . . September 29. An overwhelmingly strong argument in favour of the correctness of this view lies in the fact that the date of "the Festival of Michael and All Angels" has been from the very early times the 29th of September on Gentile (Western) reckoning. But "the Church" even then had lost sight of the reason why this date rather than any other in the Calendar should be so indissolubly associated with the Great Angelic Festival."

Bro. Rutherford's note on this is also of interest: ". . . The *Companion Bible* applies this on a wrong year and a wrong Hebrew date and feast (Tabernacles) but on a Julian date (Sept. 29) that turns out right. It is more impressive of course when applied to the true Hebrew dating (Feast of Trumpets)." (Pg. 337)

Whether September 29 is the right date or not, it is reassuring that both views of the priestly rotation indicate a late September or early October birth of Jesus.

---

At this point there was a Scriptural index for the issue

---

We urge that the presentations of this journal be tried thoughtfully by all readers. "Prove all things, hold fast to that which is good." We do not necessarily endorse every expression of contributed articles appearing herein. Information on the authorship of any article is freely supplied on request. Address all correspondence to: Beauties of the Truth, 9159 Via de Amor, Santee, CA 92071. Published through Millennial Morning.