

Vicarious Sacrifice: Isaiah's Report of the Gospel, Isaiah 53:2: First Advent of Messiah and Cross; Investigation and Documentation of the Death of Herod the Great: Between Total Lunar Eclipse, Jan 9/10, 1 B.C. & Passover, Apr 8, 1 B.C.; Principles of Astronomy

III. Isaiah's Report of the Gospel

C. Isaiah 53:2–12

1. The First Advent of Messiah and the Cross, vv. 2–4:

Isaiah 53:2 - For He [the true humanity of Jesus] grew up before Him [God the Father] like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. (NASB)

1. The verb “grew up” is the Hiphil imperfect of **עָלָה** (*'alah*): “He shall be caused to grow up” before the Father.
2. This introduces the moment that the Incarnation of Messiah begins in Bethlehem with the virgin birth.
3. In 2010, we did research to discover the exact date and year of our Lord's entry into human history in hypostatic union.
4. Our investigation resulted in the conclusion that Jesus was born on June 17, 2 B.C.
5. I have been quizzed recently about how this was determined. Although the research is on the Web site, I want to revisit that study. Before doing so, I want to make clear that the generally accepted date for the Lord's birth is c. 5 or 4 B.C.
6. This assumption is based on research done by experts in biblical chronology. Their conclusions are drawn from ancient manuscripts that include dates of certain historical events in the Roman Empire.
7. One of the primary sources for this research is Flavius Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews*.[†] A scribal error in this work has led to centuries of miscalculation regarding the dates of Herod's death and the birth of Christ.
8. Once the error was discovered, recalculations began as chronologists entered the process of determining if the new dates would hold up against the scrutiny of ancient resources.
9. We will not go into the minute detail of their research but we will note the critical points that confirm the two dates in question: the Lord's birth date Herod's death.
10. We begin our study with the work of Jack Finegan:

The most respected work on biblical chronology has been done by Jack Finegan (1908–2000), former professor of New Testament History and Archaeology at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. The first edition of *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* was published in 1964 by Princeton University Press.

[†]“Josephus, c. A.D. 37–100. Jewish historian. Studied Hebrew and Greek literature; joined Pharisee sect. Chosen as governor of Galilee by Sanhedrin in Jerusalem; took part in the Jewish revolt against Romans (66); surrendered to Vespasian, who he predicted would become emperor; won his favor and accompanied him to Alexandria. Subsequently freed; remained under the patronage of Vespasian and his successors Titus (whom he accompanied to Rome after fall of Jerusalem, 70) and Domitian. His works included a *History of the Jewish War* and *Antiquities of the Jews*” (*Merriam-Webster's Biographical Dictionary*, 1995, s.v. “Josephus”).

Over the course of the next thirty-five years Finegan continued to update his research, culminating in a revised edition published in 1998 by Hendrickson Publishers. This edition makes reference to two pieces of critical information that Herod's death occurred late in the first quarter of 1 B.C.

The first discovery concerns the death of Herod's son Philip which *current* copies of Josephus's *Antiquities* indicate occurred "in the twentieth year of the reign of Tiberius."

Finegan's revised edition of his *Handbook* clearly documents that pre-1544 copies of *Antiquities* place the death of Philip "in the twenty-second year of Tiberius." Thus, post 1544 copies of Josephus clearly omitted the word "second." This exclusion resulted in the conclusion that Philip became "tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis" (Luke 3:1) in c. 4 B.C. Our next discovery will confirm that Herod's death actually occurred in early 1 B.C.

Confirmation of the scribal error in Josephus manuscripts resulted in renewed scholarship regarding the death of Herod and subsequently to Jesus' birth.

The widely accepted dating of the death of Herod the Great (is) 4 (or possibly 5) B.C. W. E. Filmer raised a serious question about the 4 B.C. date and proposed a date in 1 B.C. instead, and in 1978 and 1996 Ernest L. Martin advanced detailed arguments for the same date of 1 B.C. The subject of the date of Herod's death was thus brought to the front again, and much discussion has ensued. (p. 298)

Josephus tells us that an eclipse of the moon took place shortly before Herod died, and that the Jewish Passover came not long after his death. If the death of Herod is placed in 4 B.C. the eclipse in question can be identified with a partial lunar eclipse on March 12/13, allowing twenty-nine days until the Passover on April 11.

Or if the death of Herod is placed in 5 B.C. the eclipse can be identified with a total lunar eclipse on September 15/16 [6 B.C.], allowing some seven months until Passover on April 17, 5 B.C. If the death of Herod was in 1 B.C.—the year we are now exploring as probable for the death of Herod—the relevant eclipse of the moon was a total eclipse on the night of January 9/10, and the full paschal moon of Nisan 14 was on April 8, [7 on the Gentile calendar] twelve and a half weeks later. (p. 299)

In the last period of Herod's life, between the eclipse shortly before he died and the Passover soon after his death, Josephus narrates many events. These are the following: (1) on the night of the eclipse Herod had two rabbis burned alive for involvement in the destruction of his golden eagle at the temple gate; (2) with his health worsening he traveled from Jericho to the hot baths of Callirrhoe \ka-lir'-ra-wē \ near the northeast end of the Dead Sea, (3) when numerous baths and additional immersion in a vat of warm oil failed to bring relief he returned to Jericho; (4) at Jericho, knowing that death was near and being well aware that most of the Jewish people hated him, he sent officers into all areas of his kingdom to bring prominent Jewish elders to Jericho where he had them shut up in the hippodrome with instructions that upon his demise they be executed; (5) receiving a letter from Augustus allowing him to either exile or execute his son Antipater, Herod sent his bodyguards to do the latter; (6) he then altered his will and designated Archelaus to have Judea, Samaria, and Idumea; Antipas to be tetrarch of Galilee and Perea; and Philip

to be tetrarch of Gaulanitis and related regions; and (7) on the fifth day after having Antipater killed, he died. It is plain that it would have been difficult for all this to transpire within the twenty-nine days between the eclipse of March 12/13 and the Passover of April 11 in the year 4 B.C. The seven months in 5 B.C. would of course be more than sufficient, but that date is not otherwise strongly supported.

In 1 B.C. the time would be adequate and not excessive, and this fact is an additional reason for preferring the 1 B.C. date for the death of Herod the Great.²
(p. 300)

This adjustment in the timing of Herod's death enables us to go to the skies in 3 and 2 B.C. and examine the activity of the planets in the two constellations of Leo and Virgo. When we do this, we discover the keys to identifying the Star of Bethlehem and confirming the date of the virgin birth.

Our study reveals that the star is just the first chapter in a celestial drama played out in the skies. By means of signs silently broadcast by the stars and planets, the discerning Magi were able to perceive not only the birth of the Messiah but Mary's pregnancy.

At the time of the Lord's birth, the Parthian Empire was the dominant power east of the Euphrates River, the boundary established by a treaty with Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus following Mark Antony's defeat at the hands of the Parthians. The victory was more the result of attrition than battlefield prowess, but the retreat by Antony brought a period of peace between the two powers that extended from 36 B.C. to A.D. 58 which included the period of the Lord's incarnation.³

Some background is needed and that leads us to an overview of astronomy:

Astronomy (Greek *ástron*, "star"; *nómos*, "law") is the scientific study of all objects outside the Earth and its immediate environment, including the Moon, Sun, planets, stars, the Galaxy and similar external star systems, interplanetary and interstellar matter, and the universe as a whole. It must be distinguished from astrology, which has no scientific bases.

Compared with other experimental sciences, astronomy has certain limitations. First, apart from meteorites, the Moon, and the nearer planets, the objects of study are inaccessible and cannot be manipulated, although nature sometimes provides special conditions, such as eclipses and other temporary effects. The astronomer must usually content himself with studying radiation emitted or reflected from celestial bodies.

Second, from the Earth's surface these are viewed through a thick atmosphere that completely absorbs most radiation. (p. 245)

Astronomy has been carried on from the earliest times by amateurs using their spare time and resources and by professionals working in universities and institutions financed by governments or privately.

The governmental tradition goes back to antiquity, when priests and other high officials already were engaged in astronomy to fix the seasons and calendar and to study celestial omens.⁴ (p. 246)

These ancient professionals included the Parthian Magi whose observance of the heavenly bodies was a part of their function as the empire's priests. Observations by ancient astronomers led to the discovery of the luminaries' repetitive cycles and the order of their movements. From this celestial order, the Magi and others like them were able to bring order to their societies.

The skies forecast the arrival and passing of seasons which in an agrarian society was most important. From this information were developed calendars and methods of timekeeping.

Astronomy is the study of observable objects in outer space, the charting of their clocklike rotation, and the predictability of those movements. From a biblical worldview, astronomy is the study of God's extraterrestrial creation and recognition that its orderly arrangement serves as a testimony that He exists as an all-knowing, all-powerful deity.

² Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology: Principles of Time Reckoning in the Ancient World and Problems of Chronology in the Bible*, rev. ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 298–300.

³ A detailed description of the battles between the Romans and the Parthians in 36 B.C. is found in Plutarch's "Antony" in *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans in Great Books of the Western World* (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), 14:748–779.

⁴ Bernard E. J. Pagel, "Astronomy and Astrophysics," in *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Macropaedia*, 15th ed. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1979), 2:245–46.

Before mankind was blessed with written revelation from God, He communicated to them by several means: (1) theophanies, (2) dreams, (3) visions, and (4) angels.

There is a fifth means by which God communicated to man and that is by means of His creation. This is technically referred to as the Teleological Argument:

The observation of the structure of the universe indicates the need for a designer. Both microscopic and telescopic phenomena, from the structure of an atom to the configuration of galaxies, display order, design, arrangement, purpose, and adaptation that demand both a Creator and a Preserver (Col. 1:16–17). The probability that an orderly universe emerged from primordial chaos, even over a period of billions of years, is about the same as a Shakespearean sonnet appearing in a can of alphabet soup!⁵

⁵ R. B. Thieme, Jr., *Heathenism*, 3d ed. (Houston: R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 2001), 16–17.