

To anticipate our results, this paper considers five anchor points which come together. Taken by themselves they are weak, but as they come together they constitute a strong strand of evidence. As we shall see, the five points will lead us to the following rough conclusions :

- [1] The birth of Jesus took place BC 6-7,
- [2] The age of the Lord at his Baptism was 30 years or less.
- [3] The Baptism took place in AD 26 [26-27]
- [4] the duration of his ministry was over two or three years

Anchor Point 1 - THE BIRTH OF JESUS

- 1 - Introduction
- 2 - Evidence from Matthew
- 3 - The Death of Herod The Great
- 4 - Beginnings of The Rules of Herod's Successors.
- 5 - The Eclipse of the Moon Close to the time of Herod's Death
- 6 - The Evidence from Luke

1 - INTRODUCTION

To establish the chronology of the New Testament, we first begin with the Gospels. Our first concern here is the Life of Christ. For that we focus upon three points and two intervals.

The three points are:

- 1. Jesus' birth
- 2. Jesus' baptism
- 3. Jesus' crucifixion

The two intervals are:

- 4. The interval between His birth and baptism. This concerns the age of Christ at his baptism
- 5. The interval between his baptism and crucifixion. This sets the duration of His ministry.

Because not one of these can be fixed independently, we need to consider each separately and then work them in together to compare with each other. Only then can we find a pattern of dates that is likely.

2 - EVIDENCE FROM MATTHEW

The following material is found in Matthew's Gospel

Matthew 2:1 After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem

Matthew 2:13-16 When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take

The five points

1 - THE BIRTH

Three fixed points and two intervals

Matthew's evidence

the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." {14} So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, {15} where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son." {16} When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi.

Matthew 2:19 After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt

From this material we notice that:

[1] Jesus was born in the reign of Herod the Great

[2] Herod, not more than two years after Jesus' birth, ordered the death of all the male infants in Bethlehem and around. This means that Jesus' birth could not be before Herod's death minus two years.

[3] Joseph, Mary and Jesus, went to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod the Great

[4] So, Herod's death fixes the end point [*terminus ad quem*] from which we can calculate back to the birth of Jesus.

3 - THE DEATH OF HEROD THE GREAT

Josephus¹ nowhere states when Herod died, but he does give the following information:

[a] the length of Herod's reign from two, more or less fixed, starting points.

[b] the length of his successor's reigns from their respective concluding points.

The two starting points are found by asking two questions:

[A] When was Herod actually made king?

[B] When did he start to reign?

[1] Having recorded [Antiquities: Book 14, Chap. 14, para 4] the circumstances of Herod receiving the decree from the Roman Senate to be the King over the Jews at the instigation of Caesar and Antony Josephus goes on to say:

"But when the senate was dissolved, Antony and Caesar went out of the senate-house, with Herod between them, and with the consuls and the other magistrates before them, in order to offer sacrifices, and to lay up their decrees in the capital. Antony also feasted Herod the first day of his reign. And thus did this man receive the kingdom, having obtained it on the one hundred and eighty-fourth olympiad, when Caius Domitius Calvinus was consul the second time, and Caius Asinius Pollio [the first time]."
Josephus, [Ant. 14, 14,5]

From this we see that Herod had reigned ² 37 years [*de jure*] since the Roman decree of the 184th Olympiad [mid BC 44 - mid BC 40] and in the consulship of Calvinus and Pollio; which was BC 40. From this we understand that the decree belongs to the first half of the year BC 40. Herod was made king by the Jews then. This would, by subtraction, give us a date for the death of Herod of BC 3 or 4.

The slaughter of the two year olds

Date of Herod's death - a departure point

Herod made king [de jure]

[B] When did Herod start to actually reign?

Josephus tells us, on recording the death of Herod, that:

“ So Herod, after surviving the slaughter of his son five days, died, having reigned thirty-four years, since he caused Antigonus to be slain, and obtained his kingdom; but thirty-seven years since he had been made king by the Romans.” Josephus, [Wars, 1,33,8]

When did Antigonus die?

Josephus after detailing the way that Herod captured Jerusalem, with the help of the Roman general Sosius, who was sent by Antony to help him [Ant.16,16,1], goes on to date the fall of Jerusalem and the capture of Antigonus, Herod's rival.

“This destruction befel [sic] the city of Jerusalem when Marcus Agrippa and Caninius Gallus were consuls at Rome, on the hundred and eighty-fifth olympiad, on the third month, on the solemnity of the fast, as if a periodical revolution of calamities had returned since that which befel the Jews under Pompey; for the Jews were taken by him on the same day, and this was after twenty seven years time.”

[1] The 185th Olympiad would be from mid BC 40 - mid BC 36.

[2] Agrippa and Gallus were proconsuls in the year BC 37.

[3] Pompey took Jerusalem in the Spring of BC 63. Spring, in the Northern Hemisphere is March, April, May. So, BC63 less 27 = BC 36.

[4] The third Month is March of the Roman calendar.

[5] The “fast” would be Passover, for it falls on the 14th day of Nisan [Jewish calendar] which is the same month as March.

[6] So, Herod reigned [*de facto*] after the fall of Jerusalem. Antigonus was taken prisoner and 45 of his principal men were slain [Ant.15,1,2] by Herod. Antigonus was beheaded shortly afterward in Antioch by Antony [Ant.15,1,2 quoting Strabo of Cappadocia].

[7] This means that Herod's actual reigning began in March, on Passover day, BC 36 or BC 37.

We have here two different possibilities for the death of Antigonus and the beginning of the actual reign of Herod: BC 37 and BC 36. Subtracting 34 years from the first leads us to think of Herod dying in BC 3; and from the second BC 2.

BC 2 has the difficulty that perhaps it suffers from the introduction of the Julian calendar in BC 46. Even BC 37 is inconsistent with Dio [a later, but equally well informed historian] who lists the consuls of BC 38 as Claudius and Norbanus. In this case the 34 years would expire in BC 4.

4 - BEGINNINGS OF THE RULES OF HEROD'S SUCCESSORS.

[A] Archelaus

This man was the king of Judea and he was banished in the consulship of Lepidus and Arruntius [AD 6] when in the ninth year of his reign, according to Josephus in the Wars of the Jews [WJ] but in the tenth according to Josephus in the Antiquities.[AJ].

When Archelaus was entered on his ethnarchy, and was come into Judea... But in the tenth year of Archelaus' government, both his brethren and the principal men of Judea and Samaria, not being able to bear his barbarous and tyrannical us-

Herod starts to reign [de facto]

Herod's successors : - Archelaus

age of them, accused him before Caesar, and especially because they knew that he had broken the commands of Caesar, which obliged him to behave himself with moderation among them. ... Caesar banished him, and appointed Vienna, a city of Gaul, to be the place of his habitation, and took his money away from him. [Josephus:AJ:17,13,1-2]

And now Archelaus took possession of his ethnarchy, and used not the Jews only, but the Samaritans also, barbarously; and this out of his resentment with their old quarrels with him. Whereupon, they both of them sent ambassadors against him to Caesar; and in the ninth year of his government he was banished to Vienna, a city of Gaul., and his effects were put into Caesar's treasury. [Josephus:WJ:2,7,3.]

[1] As Archelaus' accession was near the beginning of the year, if we take the ninth year reckoning, this would put it into 3 BC; and if we take the tenth year reckoning, then it would be BC 4 [possibly BC 5].

[2] If the two may be reconciled by supposing that the banishment fell early in AD 6, before the anniversary of his accession, and that the AJ reckons his second and succeeding years from January 1, then both would point to BC 4.

[3] If otherwise than this, because the AJ is the later work, and would be more likely to correct an error in the earlier work, rather than add an error to the earlier work, then BC 4 is likely.

[B] Herod Philip, tetrarch of Trachonitis.

Philip, Herod's brother, departed this life in the twentieth year of the reign of Tiberius after he had been tetrarch of Trachonitis and Gaulonitis and of the nation of the Bataneans also, thirty seven years. He had shown himself a person of moderation and quietness in the conduct of his life an government. [Josephus AJ:18,4,6]

[1] he reigned 37 years and died in the twentieth year of Tiberius

[2] Reckoning from Augustus' death in August AD 14, Philip died between August AD 33 and August AD 34. By subtracting 37, then his year of accession would be BC 3 or BC 4.

[C] Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Galilee and Perea

He was issuing coins as late as his 44th year, and as his banishment by Gaius Caligula cannot have been later than AD 30, then his rival and nephew Herod Agrippa, left Palestine after him, and was apparently at Lyons with the Emperor in the winter of AD 39 -40. Then, Herod Antipas' second year would go back to BC 4, and since the Jewish princes reckoned their years from Nisan 1, then it would be to the year preceding Nisan 1, which is BC 4.

An eclipse of the moon on the night of the death of Herod the Great

Josephus, in recording the barbarity of Herod's temper, notes that there was time during the high priesthood of Matthias, when the High Priest, Matthias, on the night before the fast, was deprived, by Herod of his high priesthood. Josephus records that on that night there was an eclipse of the moon. [AJ17,6,4.]

In the next paragraph [AJ17,6,5] Josephus goes on to record the illness which led to the death of Herod. On the night of the eclipse, he was lying ill in Jericho and he partially revived. He was taken to the baths at Callirrhoe across the Dead Sea: but when all remedies failed, he was brought back to Jericho. As a last planned act of tyranny, he

*Herod's successors : -
 Herod Philip*

*Herod's successors : -
 Herod Antipas*

*The lunar eclipse when
 Herod the Great died*

summoned all the leading Jews of Palestine to his bed, intending that they should all be massacred on his death. Then, the long awaited authorisation from Augustus arrived, which ordered the execution of Antipater. This was acted upon, and five days later Herod died. After a week of funeral rites, Josephus tells us that the Passover is at hand. [AJ 17,6,4 to 9,3].

The only lunar eclipses visible in Palestine between BC 5-3. were the following;

[a] March 23 BC 5,

[b] Sept 15, BC 5,

[c] March 12-13 BC 4.

It is very unlikely that the events we have detailed above, can be spread over the 13 months from March 12 BC4 to March 31 [the Passover of] BC3. In which case the year BC 3 is excluded for Herod's death.

However, one month seems too little to do all the above. The eclipse may have been that of Sept BC 5 and the kings' death falling six months afterwards about March BC 4.

The birth of the Lord must be placed before this, and as Matthew's account indicates, some time before it. For the age limit of two years, for the young ones killed by Herod, and also for the sojourn of the Lord's family in Egypt have to be allowed for. The birth of Christ may be placed one, two or even three years before Herod's death - between BC 7-5.

5 - THE EVIDENCE FROM LUKE

Luke dates the birth of Jesus according to the general census which was ordered in the reign of Augustus and carried out in Syria by the legate Quirinius. Syria was made into a Roman imperial province in 64 BC with Antioch as its capital and it included Judea in its administration until AD 70.

Publius Sulpicius Quirinius became consul in 12 BC. At some point during the next twelve years he subjugated the Homonadeneses, a race of brigands on the southern border of Galatia. [See Tacitus: Annals 3,48] He acted as guide and supervisor to the young prince Gaius Caesar in Armenia in AD 3-4, and he was legate of Syria AD 6-9. He died in AD 21.

This took place as a first enrolment, when Quirinius was governor of Syria Luke 2.2

This remark of Luke's is made, we take it, to distinguish this census from a census which was taken in AD 6-7, when Quirinius certainly was governor of Syria and conducted a census [See Acts 5.37 and Josephus AJ18,1,1 and 2,1]. From BC 9-6 Sentius Saturninus was governor, and from BC6-4 Quinctilius Varus. After that time not much is clear until AD 6 when Quirinius is governor and does hold the census of Acts 5.37.

It is possible that this governorship of AD 6-9 was not the first governorship of Quirinius. Some scholars held that he had such a position in the interval between BC4 and AD 6. But the difficulty would still be that it is hard to understand how he could be governor *before* the death of Herod, which is what the text requires.

It is significant perhaps that Justin Martyr [AD100-165] calls Quirinius ἐπιτρόπος which equates to the Latin "procurator" ¹³ not legate [*legatus*] as he was in AD 6. The word which Luke uses is indefinite ἡγεμονεύω and could be employed of any type of rule; but in the only other place where Luke does use it, it is of the procurator, Pontius Pilate. Until Judea became a Roman province in AD 6 there would have been no procurator in the strict sense, but Quirinius may have held some military position in Syria before the

Luke's evidence

Quirinius governor of Syria

¹ ³ The term "procurator" is a military designation. It issues from the army. The name "legate" and "proconsul" issues from the Senate. These changes take place as the Roman empire first conquered, and then settled an area.

death of Herod.

Anchor Point 2 - INTERVAL BETWEEN BIRTH AND BAPTISM OF JESUS

2- THE INTERVAL BETWEEN THE BIRTH AND THE BAPTISM

Αὐτὸς ἦν Ἰησοῦς ἀρχόμενος ὡσεὶ ἐτῶν τριάκοντα

"...Jesus Himself was about thirty years of age" Luke 3.23

[NASV]

1. The participle ἀρχόμενος does not qualify the description of Jesus' age; it refers to the commencement of His ministry. This is the usage in Luke in Luke 23.5, Acts 1.22, 10.37.

2. The expression ὡσεὶ ἐτῶν τριάκοντα [about thirty years of age] is the expression which speaks of how old He was.

1. Some think, on the basis that in the Old Testament a man could not be a teacher until the age of 30, that this means that Jesus waited until he was exactly² thirty years of age. However this is not so clear as some think.

[a] the minimum age for the Levitical service is set at 30, and a maximum of 50 in Numbers 4.3,47; 1 Chronicles 23.3.

[b] this is stated as a minimum of 25 and a maximum of 50 in Numbers 4.3 [LXX], 8.25

[c] it is found to be 20 as the minimum in 1 Chronicles 24.24 and King David is listed as the source of this change [1Chronicles 23.27].

2. The phrase ὡσεὶ ἐτῶν τριάκοντα is an elastic one covering any age between 28-32 years old.

Calculating from a birth date in the area BC 7-5, the limits in which we would think for the Baptism are AD 22-27. We must now turn to the evidence for the Baptism itself to see if we can fix this more accurately.

Anchor Point 3 - THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

3- THE BAPTISM OF JESUS

1- Introduction

1. In looking for the latest possible date [*terminus ad quem*] we need to consider the synchronisation of the Passover mentioned next after the Baptism with the years taken for the building of the Temple.

2. In finding the earliest possible date [*terminus a quo*] we consider the synchronisation of the beginning of the ministry of John Baptist with the years of the Roman Emperor Tiberius [Luke 3.1]

2- Latest possible date

1. Considering John 2.20

The Jews therefore said, "It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?" John 2.20
[NASV]

In this text the Jews are saying:

2- The building of the Temple

² The setting for the standards of entry to the Christian ministry as being 30 years of age is derived from the understanding of this text in Luke. See the Council of Neo-Caesarea, Canon 11.

[1] Not that Herod's temple had taken 46 years from commencement to completion at some time in the past

[a] because the Aorist tense used here implies that at the time of speaking the 46 years are up.

[b] Josephus [AJ 20,9,7] writes that the Temple was just complete in the time when the Jewish revolt broke out.

[2] but that at the time of speaking, the Temple had been under construction for 46 years.

2. Herod's Temple was begun.

Josephus writes

"Accordingly, in the fifteenth year of his reign, Herod rebuilt the temple, and encompassed a piece of land around it with a wall." [BJ 1,21,1]

However, Josephus also writes

"And now Herod, in the eighteenth year of his reign, and after the acts already mentioned, undertook a very great work of himself the temple of God, and make it larger in compass, and to raise it to a most magnificent altitude..." [AJ15,11,1]

We see this discrepancy, the 15th year in BJ, and the 18th year in AJ. In both books Josephus summarises the dates of Herod's reign as beginning *de jure* in BC 40 and *de facto* in BC 37.

However, when Josephus gives a date, he invariably gives it from the *de facto* kingship only.³ The following three examples show;

[a] The Battle of Actium, between Octavius Caesar and Antony, [September BC 31] is put in the seventh year of Herod. [AJ 15,5,2]

[b] Augustus' second visit to Syria, which cannot be earlier than BC 21 is dated in the 17th year of Herod's reign.

[c] Completion of Caesarea Sebaste is fixed in the 92nd Olympiad [BC 12-8] and also the 28th year of Herod [AJ 16,5,1]

So the date in AJ, his later work, must be a correction of that in the earlier work BJ; so we take that date for the starting of the building of the Temple to be the 18th year of Herod, beginning his reign in BC 37. So we arrive at the year BC 20-19.

The Passover of the first year will have most probably been BC 19, and so the Passover of the 46th year will be AD 27.

This means that the latest date for the Baptism of Jesus to be AD 27.

3- The earliest possible date

Luke 3.1

"Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene" [NASV]

1. The fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar calculated from the death of Augustus on August 19, AD 14 would be Aug AD 28 to Aug AD 29. This seems very late compared with the results we have above.

2. However, it is true that Emperor's prerogatives were due to the offices they held,

3 In this way it is not acceptable to consider the obvious solution which some have proposed to this discrepancy. They thought that by counting the 15th year from the later date, and the 18th year from the earlier date, we would simply converge on AD 23. But Josephus' usage is against this simple solution.

not to some line of descent. In dating events therefore, such as in coins and subscriptions, they would set forth the number, not of the years of their reign, but of their consulships, imperatorships and their years of power as a tribune.

Luke may have taken his starting point from the time that Tiberius was given the special elevation during the lifetime of Augustus as being equal to the Emperor in the government of the provinces. Provincial custom may have taken that starting point in respect of Tiberius as the starting point of his reign. Some think this took place in the time when he was made a tribune for life in AD 13; others date the provincial rule from AD 11.

3. If this is possible, then it supports Luke's chronology of the Baptist's ministry starting in [AD 11+15) AD 26 and the Baptism of Christ would be assigned to Ad 26-27. Then the first Passover of the 46th year of the temple building project would be in the Spring of AD 27.

Anchor Point 4 - INTERVAL BETWEEN THE BAPTISM OF JESUS AND THE CRUCIFIXION

1- Mark's Gospel

1. Has a few examples of imprecise time such as "straightway", "after not many days", and "after many days".

2. At the Feeding of the Five thousand [Mark 6.39/Matthew 14.15/Luke 9.12] most would say that his expression which refers to the "green grass" refers to the fresh grass of the early Spring.

3. Plucking of the ears of Grain [Mark 2.33/Matthew 12.1/Luke 6.1].

"And it came about that He was passing through the grainfields on the Sabbath, and His disciples began to make their way along while picking the heads of grain" NASV

This refers to the harvest which is ripe, but not yet cut. If the ears were barley, they would fall at the earliest in April; if they were wheat, in June at the latest. Here then, a spring or early summer is succeeded by an early Spring in chapter 6. So we have a record of a lapse of one year.

4. The events of 6.56-10.52 it would seem take another year. For within this time there are:

[a] journey to districts of Phoenecia

[b] travels to Upper Galilee and Perea [7.24,8.27,10.1]

5. It is not possible for the miracle of the feeding of 5000 and the Passover of the Crucifixion can belong to the same Spring. So it would seem that with these three data, the late Spring of one year, the early Spring of another, and the Passover time of a third suggest a ministry of about two years would underlie the record of Mark.

2-Luke's Gospel

Luke divided the Ministry into two portions:

[a] 4.14-9.50 which follows the common material to the synoptic Gospels and

[b] 9.51-19.28 which is more peculiar, but having a methodological arrangement

1. In the first portion, which is the Galilean ministry of the common tradition there are the Galilean places named; Galilee [4.14], Nazareth [4.16], Capernaum [4.31], Lake of Gennesaret [5.1], Capernaum [7.1], Nain [7.11], Mary of Magdala [8.2ff], Joanna is wife of Herod's steward [8.22,26], the lake of Galilee and its opposite shore.

4- THE INTERVAL BETWEEN THE BAPTISM AND THE CRUCIFIXION

Mark's evidence

Luke's evidence

Mention is made, as there is in Mark, of the coming of hearers from Judea, Jerusalem, and Tyre and Sidon. Nowhere is the Lord removed from Galilee except in the reference [4.44] that he was “preaching in the synagogues of Judea” 4 And the way Luke uses the word Judea is to denote the whole province in respect of the Roman rule from Syria. 5

2. The second portion opens with the Lord firmly resolving to go toward Jerusalem [9.51]; He journeys through cities and villages making his way toward Jerusalem [13.22], passing through the middle of Samaria and Galilee [17.11], he is going up to Jerusalem [18.31], and is “near Jerusalem” [19.11].

3-John’s Gospel

Has careful statements of six references to time, five of them are Jewish festivals, between the Baptism and the Crucifixion.

1. “And the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.” ... Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, beholding His signs, which He was doing.” [John 2.13, 23 NASV]

2. “Do you not say, “There are yet four months and then comes the harvest?” [John 4.35 NASV]

3. “After these things there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.” [John 5.1 NASV]

4. “Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand.” [John 6.4 NASV]

5. “Now the feast of the Jews, the feast of Booths, was at hand.” [John 7.2 NASV]

6.” At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem.” [John 10.22 NASV]

[1] Of these the first, and numbers five and six require no comment, they are straightforward.

[2] The second could be referring to the actual harvest time or four months before it.

[3] The third, whether we take it as “the feast” or “a feast”; it is not clear what feast is intended.

[4] The fourth carries with it the addition or subtraction of a whole year of difference in the Ministry.

[a] If the reading which includes the words “the Passover” are not accepted, then “the feast” of the Jews which “near at hand” may be identified with the Feast of Tabernacles which is stated in 7.2, then the Ministry can be arranged on a single year basis. It would go like this: 7

2.13,22 Passover in March or April

4.35 Harvest in May

5.1 Pentecost in May, early June OR Trumpets in September

6.4,7.2 Tabernacles in October

10.22 Dedication in December

4 Although the Textus Receptus has a textual variant here which is significantly “Galilee” for Judea.

5 Traces of this Lukan usage in the broader sense would be Acts 26.29, 10.37, Luke 23.5.

6 Many MSS read “the feast” = Passover.

7 Because it appeared to harmonise the material with the Synoptic Gospels, although less so with Mark, it was a favoured resolution by many early scholars. The difficulty is that the shorter reading, ie without “the Passover”, is highly unlikely.

11.55 Passover again

[b] If the words [τὸ πάσχα] "the Passover" are retained then three Passovers are mentioned by John, [2.13,6.4,11.55] and this would mean that the ministry extends over two years.

However, nearly every known MSS and Version has the reading "the Passover" included. In this way, John's Gospel excludes anything less than a two year ministry. The order of events for the second half of the Gospel would be as follows:

6.4-11.56 The space covered is exactly a year, the autumn Feast of Tabernacles [7.2] and the Feast of Dedication [10.22] being included.

The earlier sections 2.13-6.4 are more complicated and they depend on the meaning of the "season" in 4.35 and "the feast" in 5.1.

This first half gives for us

[a] a Passover 2.13,23

[b] a note of time, either May or January 4.35

[c] an unnamed minor feast 5.1

[d] a second Passover 6.4

These could be combined to fit in a single year in more than one way. We could have either

[i] Passover, May, any lesser feast, Passover

[ii] Passover, January, Purim in Feb, Passover.

But this leads us to the question, "Is the minimum of two years also the maximum?"

If 2.13-6.4 can be co-ordinated into a single year, and 6.4-11.55 into a second, is there no further latitude possible? There are many considerations here, but one way to see the possibility is to compare the Johannine material with the more tentative material of Mark's and see if they can be fitted together.

An attempt to integrate the Markan and the Johannine chronology.

[1] The Markan text has been shown to imply, like John's, a two year ministry.

[2] Mark 6.39=John 6.4. The Spring of the miracle of feeding the 5000, Mark's second note of time corresponds exactly to the Passover mentioned as "near"

[3] Mark's first note of time, the harvest of the grainfields [Mark 2.23] must, if it is recorded in its proper place belong to the months immediately following the Passover of John 2

[4] It would follow then, that the visit welcomed by the Galileans [Jn 4.45], as being the first visit to Galilee after Jn 2, must precede Mark 2.23. If this is so then John's note of time in Samaria [Jn 4.35] must be placed between the Passover and the grainfields incident. [Mk 2.23] ie at the actual harvest season.

[5] Soon after the Passover, with room allowed for the visit of Nicodemus [perhaps about April 20, for Passover fell on April 11/12 in AD 27] the Lord leaves Jerusalem and moves to the land of Judea while John the Baptist is still preaching, but the arrest of John is immediate, and may be the reason for the Lord moving through Samaria and into Galilee at a time when the barley was ripe [say, the middle of May]. John 3.22,24;4.1. would be Mark's description of the same

Integrating Mark and John?

Up to this point it seems clear. that the real question now is whether the period of six weeks [which is the greatest time to allow between the middle of May and the end of the wheat harvest] are enough to cover the opening stages of the Galilean ministry down to Mk 2.23. If not, then the episode of Mark 2.23 must be transposed to a second year and placed after the feeding of the 5000.

Anchor Point 5 - THE CRUCIFIXION

5 - THE CRUCIFIXION

1. The Dating with reference to the Roman and Jewish Officials

We need to consider two officials at the time. They were

[1] the Roman Governor

[2] The High Priest at the time.

[1] The Governor

the Gospels and the Acts and some letters of the New Testament name the Roman governor at the time of Jesus' Crucifixion as Pontius Pilate. [Matthew 27.2, Acts 4.27 and 1 Timothy 6.13].

The Roman Governor at the time

Josephus [AJ 18,2,2] tells us that at the time when Cyrennius had disposed of Archelaus' money [AD 6] Coponius was exercising the office of procurator in Judea. He was followed by Marcus Ambivius, who was followed by Annius Rufus during whose time Tiberius came to power when Augustus died AD 14. Tiberius sent Valerius Gratus to succeed Annius Rufus. Valerius held the post for 11 years [AD 25] when he was succeeded by Pontius Pilate.

Further, Josephus relates [AJ 18,4,2] that Pilate had put down a Samaritan uprising by killing many of them. He goes on,

"Vitellius, a man who had been consul, and who was now the president of Syria, and accused Pilate of the murder of those that were killed; for that they did not go to Tirabnatha in order to revolt from the Romans, but to escape the violence of Pilate. So Vitellius sent Marcellus, a friend of his, to take care of the affairs of Judea, and ordered Pilate to go to Rome, to answer before the Emperor the accusation of the Jews. So Pilate, when he had tarried ten years in Judea, made haste to Rome, and this in obedience to the orders of Vitellius, which he durst not contradict; but before he could get to Rome, Tiberius was dead." [AJ18,4,2]

[1] Tiberius died in March AD 37.

[2] Pontius Pilate had been in Judea 10 years.

[3] He could hardly then, have been there before AD 27.

So, we know that Valerius Gratus held the post until AD 25 and that Pilate had not come before AD 27.

Luke 13.1,23.12, 3.1 indicates that Pilate was not a recent arrival at the time of the Crucifixion, so the possible Passovers for the Crucifixion are reduced to nine, AD 28-36.

[2] The High Priest.

As High Priest Caiaphas is named by Matthew 26.3,57 and John 11.49, 18.13,24.

The High Priest at the time

Josephus tells us

"Valerius Gratus.. procurator of Judea..deprived Ananus of the high priesthood, and appointed Ismael...he also deprived him

in a little time and ordained Eleazar, the son of Ananus, who had been high priest before, to be high priest.: which office, when he had held it for a year, Gratus deprived him of it, and gave the high priesthood to Simon, the son of Camithus; and, when he had possessed that dignity for no longer than a year, Joseph Caiaphas was made his successor. When Gratus had done those things, he went back to Rome...”[AJ 18,2,2]

After Vitellius had sent Pilate to Rome,

“Vitellius came into Judea and went up to Jerusalem...he deprived Joseph, who was called Caiaphas, of the high priesthood and appointed Jonathan, the son of Ananus, the former high priest, to succeed him. After which he took his journey back to Antioch.” [AJ 18,4,3]

Some time later, Vitellius was making war against Aretas, and journeyed to Petra via Ptolemais. He took a side journey to Jerusalem and while there

“he made a stay there for three days, within which time he deprived Johnathan of the high priesthood and gave it to his brother, Theophilus; but when on the fourth day, letters came to him, which informed him of the death of Tiberius...” {AJ18,5,3}

[1] Caiaphas was appointed under Gratus, before Pilate’s time,

[2] He was deposed by Vitellius, legate of Syria, on the occasion of a visit to Jerusalem, the year of which can be established in limits. For

[a] his successor Johnathan, was deposed by the same Vitellius during one of the festivals of AD 37. Probably Pentecost, because in AD 37 the Passover fell on March 20-21. For the news of Tiberius’ death [March 16, AD 37] to come to Vitellius we allow about eight weeks - this would mean Pentecost on May 8-9. At the latest, Caiaphas’ deposition was at the latest AD 36, and the crucifixion at the Passover of AD 35.

[b] the death of Herod Philip in the 20th year of Tiberius [AD 33-34] is mentioned a little further on by Josephus [AJ18,6,1] and mentioned along with Caiaphas’ demise as “at that time”. If this is so, then the Passover of AD 34 is the *terminus ad quem* for Caiaphas’ deposition, and if that, then the AD 33 for the crucifixion.

The Crucifixion under Pilate and Caiaphas can hardly lie outside AD 28-33.

2 The dating by the Calendar

We need to consider both

[1] the day of the week

[2] the day of the Jewish month

[1] The day of the week

Since the resurrection falls on the “first day of the week” = Sunday, the Crucifixion which was, according to Jewish reckoning, on the “third day” before, took place on the Friday.

[2] The day of the month

The Passover was kept at the full moon in Nisan, the first month of the Jewish year. These are months which commence with the new moon - so the full moon fell on the 15th of the Month.

The day of the week at the time

The day of the month at the time



On the 14th, the paschal lamb was slain and eaten in the evening of that day. But because the Jewish day begins at sunset, that day would already be Nisan 15.

Whether the Crucifixion fell on the 14th or the 15th; whether that is, it is the Passover plus a few hours or Passover minus a few hours, has always been a question. While the evidence of John is for Nisan 14, the Synoptics could be construed as supporting Nisan 15. In which years then, within the established limits of AD 28-33 could Friday have fallen on the 14th Nisan as well as thinking of the less probable Nisan 15? It turns out that three years satisfy the criteria - they are AD 29, 30 and 33.

Considerations of the Jewish date, the civil month and day, drawn from pagan and Christian material point to AD 29 in the joint consulate of the two Gemini L. Rubellius Geminus and C. Fufius Geminus who were the consuls of the year AD 29.

We come to the end of the Gospel enquiry then: and we see that there are five strands which come together. Taken by themselves they are weak, but as they come together they constitute a strong strand of evidence. They are :

- [1] The birth in BC 6-7,
- [2] the age of the Lord at Baptism 30 years or less.
- [3] the Baptism in AD 26 [26-27]
- [4] the duration of the ministry between two or three years

Conclusions