

# *Smoky Mountain Bible Institute*

## *History 124 Timeline leading to Christ Birth*

Last month we covered the time between the testaments, and though we touched on some things on the “AD” side of history, this time we’ll begin with the birth of Christ. There are a number of reasons why the exact date of Jesus’ birth is not known, but Chapter 11 of Andrew Steinmann’s book “From Abraham to Paul” gives the question a very thorough treatment. I will try to give a summary of the many historical elements that affect how we understand the date of Jesus’ birth.

The traditional view (based on a biblical chronology) places Jesus’ birth somewhere between 3 and 1 BC, while the modern consensus view puts it before 4 BC. The consensus view is primarily based on an estimate which places Herod the Great’s death at 4 BC. Unfortunately, there are a number of dating contradictions and inconsistencies between ancient sources that one must contend with when trying to nail down a reliable chronology of Herod the Great. Without getting into great detail here is a summary of datable events in Herod’s reign based on Steinmann’s well-argued chronology:

- Late 39 BC: Herod is appointed King.
- 38 BC: Herod begins his first full regnal year.
- 36 BC: Herod conquers Jerusalem.
- 35 BC: Herod begins his first full reign year in Jerusalem.
- 31 BC: The battle of Actium takes place on September 2<sup>nd</sup>.
- 20 BC: Caesar is in Syria and Herod begins work on the Temple.
- Late 19 or Early 18 BC: work on the Temple is completed.
- 12 BC: work on the temple precincts are completed.
- By 10 BC: work is completed on Caesarea Sebaste, and its port city Caesarea Marittima.
- 5 BC: the magi observe the star.
- 4 BC: Pheroras is murdered, Antipater is deposed, and Archelaus is named Herod’s heir.
- 3 or 2 BC: the tax Revolt of Judas occurs.
- Mid 3 BC: John the Baptist is born.
- Late 3 Early 2 BC: Jesus is born.**
- 40 to 50 days later: Jesus’ family escapes to Egypt.
- First quarter of 1 BC: Herod dies.
- Later in 1 BC: Jesus’ family returns to Nazareth.

Because of the fragmented and conflicting nature of the ancient evidence associated with the life and times of Herod the Great, no one can assert with absolute certainty the accuracy of a given timeline. We can, however, affirm the sound scholarship that lays behind it. We can also say, with all the evidence in consideration, that Jesus was born sometime between 6 and 2 BC. In my mind, it is still quite amazing that we can narrow it down to such a small window of time for an event which occurred two millennia in the past.

Next month we will examine the Chronology of the life of Christ.

Till then,  
Pastor Portier