

Smoky Mountain Bible Institute

History 125 Time line of Christ Life

By the estimation of Paul Maier and Andrew Steinmann, two of our best biblical history scholars, Jesus was born sometime between late 5 and early 2 BC. Maier calls this the “un-datable date” in his book “In the Fullness of Time”, where he examines, in-depth, the first Christmas and Easter, as well as the early Church.

Before we start discussing the life of Christ, let’s look at some of the other things going on in the world during the first 50 years AD (Anno Domini / the Year of our Lord). Cymbeline, King of Catuvellauni (a tribal region in southeast Britain) was recognized by Rome as the King of Britain around 5 AD. In the same year, Ovid finished “Metamorphoses”, a poetic collection of some 250 myths. The first definite reference to diamonds appears in records from 16 AD, and the Han Dynasty began in China around 22 AD. London was founded in 43 AD, and after conquering Gaul (modern-day France & Germany), the Romans learned how to use soap. (Thank goodness for that; soldiers can get really smelly!)

We finished up last month with Jesus and his family returning to Nazareth in mid to late 1 BC. Of course, Matthew & Luke are our primary sources for the early life of Christ, but after he gets to Nazareth we only get 12 more verses regarding his youth; **“The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom. And the favor of God was upon him.”** (Luke 2:40.) Verses 41-51 are the account of Jesus being accidentally left by his family at the temple for three days, and Luke closes by saying in verse 52, **“Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.”** We might like to know more about the early life of Christ, but there are no other reliable sources. The Koran repeats a second-century gnostic myth from the gospel of Thomas about Jesus turning clay pigeons into real birds, but there is no credible source for it, so it remains a myth.

Besides scripture, there are no other written sources that even mention Nazareth until around 200 AD. Some claim it did not exist, however, archeology and most scholars say that in the first century, Nazareth was home to thousands of people, including many “tecknons” (Greek for builder, contractor, carpenter, stone mason, etc.), and was a place of relative peace and prosperity. Jesus probably spent most of the first 30 years of his life there. We can even speculate that he would have been following the 4th commandment by being a good son.

All four gospels record the start of Jesus’ ministry at his baptism, which according to the best estimates, was around the summer of 29 AD. This was immediately followed by Jesus’ 40 days of temptation in the wilderness. In the fall of that year, Jesus turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana, and called the first of his apostles. On April 6th of 30 AD, Jesus celebrated his first Passover with his disciples in Jerusalem. Towards the end of that year, John the Baptizer was arrested, and Jesus traveled throughout Samaria. In the fall of 31 AD Jesus celebrated the Feast of Tabernacles in Jerusalem, and in the winter of 31/32 AD, he traveled throughout Galilee. John the Baptizer was executed in the winter of 32. Jesus was busy that year finishing up his time in Galilee, feeding the 5000 & 4000, walking on water, healing, and casting out demons in places like Tyre, Sidon, the Decapolis, Caesarea Philippi, Samaria, Juda, and Perea. He was then in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles and the Feast of Dedication in 32 AD.

This is, of course, a very rough sketch of Jesus’ three-and-one-half-year ministry, which included some 36 recorded miracles and over 350 fulfilled prophecies, and which came to a close at passion week. March 29th 33 AD was Jesus’ triumphal entry (what most Christians celebrate as Palm Sunday), April 2nd was the Last Supper, April 3rd, Good Friday, and April 5th, the first Easter. While the date of Jesus’ birth is known only within a 3 to 4-year window, thanks to the detailed accounts of Good Friday and holy week, along with evidence from external sources, archeology, history, and astronomy, they are among the most certain of dates we have in the life of Christ. Of course, we must acknowledge that events 2000 years past cannot be known with 100% certainty, but all known evidence supports this timeline and none contradicts it.

We will kick things off at Easter next month.

Till then in Christ,
Pastor Portier