

THE REIGN OF HEROD THE GREAT POINTS TO THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

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This chart shows the years of Herod the Great who began his reign in 40 BC and ended his life in 4 BC. All the texts from the Jewish historian Josephus verifying the dates are quoted at the end of the chart.

Years BC AD	Reign of Augustus	Reign of Herod	Life of Jesus	Reign of Tiberius	Reign of Philip Herod's son	Reign of Antipas Herod's son	Reign of Archelaus Herod's son
40		1	Herod became King at Rome				
39		2					
38		3					
37		4	1	Herod became King of Judea			
36		5	2				
35		6	3				
34		7	4				
33		8	5				
32		9	6				
31		10	7	Battle of Actium & earthquake in Judea in 7 th year of Herod			
30		11	8				
29		12	9				
28		13	10				
27	1	14	11				
26	2	15	12				
25	3	16	13				
24	4	17	14				
23	5	18	15				
22	6	19	16				
21	7	20	17				
20	8	21	18				
19	9	22	19				
18	10	23	20				
17	11	24	21				
16	12	25	22				
15	13	26	23				
14	14	27	24				
13	15	28	25				
12	16	29	26				
11	17	30	27				
10	18	31	28				
9	19	32	29				
8	20	33	30				
7	21	34	31				

6	22	35 32					
5	23	36 33	0	Jesus born in fall of 5 BC			
4	24	37 34	1	Left row reign	1	1	1
3	25	Herod and	2	of Tiberius	2	2	2
2	26	Antipater III	3	Agrees with Luk	3	3	3
1	27	co-regent	4	3:1 - Baptism of	4	4	4
1	28	since 7 BC	5	Christ - Tiberius	5	5	5
2	29	both died in	6	co-regent with	6	6	6
3	30	spring 4 BC	7	Augustus from	7	7	7
4	31		8	12 AD.	8	8	8
5	32		9	Right row reign	9	9	9
6	33		10	of Tiberius	10	10	10
7	34		11	Agrees with Jos	11	11	deposed
8	35		12	Ant 18:4:6 -	12	12	
9	36		13	Philip's reign -	13	13	
10	37		14	Not counting	14	14	
11	38		15	co-regent years	15	15	
12	39		16	1	16	16	
13	40		17	2	17	17	
14	41 died		18	3 1	18	18	
15			19	4 2	19	19	
16			20	5 3	20	20	
17			21	6 4	21	21	
18			22	7 5	22	22	
19			23	8 6	23	23	
20			24	9 7	24	24	
21			25	10 8	25	25	
22			26	11 9	26	26	
23			27	12 10	27	27	
24			28	13 11	28	28	
25			29	14 12	29	29	
26	Jesus baptized 15 th yr of Tiberius		30	15 13	30	30	
27	fall of 26 AD age 30 - Luk 3:1,21		31	16 14	31	31	
28			32	17 15	32	32	
29			33	18 16	33	33	
30	Death of Jesus	33 1/2	19	17	34	34	
31	The Hebrew year 29 AD began in the fall		20	18	35	35	
32	(Tishri) of 29 AD and ended in the fall		21	19	36	36	
33	(Elul) of 30 AD. The Passover of Jesus'		22	20	37 died	37	
34	. death, Wednesday, April 5, 30 AD, was		23	21		38	
35	in the middle of this year		24	22		39	
36			25	23		40	
37			26 died	24		41	
38						42	
39						43 exiled	
40							

1.

Herod was Made King at Rome

* Jos Ant 14:14:5 “And 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 [the first time].”

Note: An Olympiad is four years long and is reckoned from July to July. The 184th Olympiad extended from July 1, 44 BC, to June 30, 40 BC. Calvinus and Pollio were consuls in the year 714 AUC (years from the founding of Rome), which was 40 BC (Finegan, Handbook of Biblical Chronology, p. 96) or see list of consuls of Rome

http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bl_consuls_table.htm Since the 184th Olympiad ended on June 30, 40 BC, and the consuls took office on January 1 of that year (the year for consuls was reckoned from January 1 to December 31) Therefore Herod was made king sometime during the six-month period from January through June of 40 BC.

2.

Herod was Made King of Judea

* Jos Ant 14:16:4 “Out of Herod's fear of this it was that he, by giving Antony a great deal of money, endeavored to persuade him to have Antigonus slain, which if it were once done, he should be free from that fear. And thus did the government of the Asamoneans cease, a hundred twenty and six years after it was first set up. ... and it (the government) came to Herod, the son of Antipater, who was of no more than a vulgar family,”

Note: In 40 BC Antigonus, the son of Aristobolus II led a rebellion against Rome, allied himself with the Parthians and took control of Jerusalem. In 37 BC Herod conquered Jerusalem, became King of Judea and persuaded Mark Antony to have Antigonus slain.

* Jos Ant 14:15:14 “When the rigor of winter was over, Herod removed his army, and came near to Jerusalem, and pitched his camp hard by the city. Now this was the third year since he had been made king at Rome;”

Note: Herod was made King at Rome in 40 BC. The third year was 37 BC when he conquered Jerusalem.

* Jos Ant 14:16:4 “This destruction befell the city of Jerusalem when Marcus Agrippa and Caninius Gallus were consuls of Rome on the hundred eighty and fifth olympiad, on the third month, on the solemnity of the fast,”

Note: The 185th Olympiad extended from July 1, 40 BC, to June 30, 36 BC. Agrippa and Gallus became consuls in 717 AUC or 37 BC. See list of consuls of Rome: http://ancienthistory.about.com/library/bl/bl_consuls_table.htm The fast of the third month was the 23rd of Sivan, or June 22. Herod completed the conquest of Jerusalem in the summer of 37 BC, the third year after he had been made King at Rome, and began to reign as king in Jerusalem.

3.

The Battle of Actium and Earthquake in Judea in the Seventh Year of Herod

* Jos Ant 15:2:5 “At this time it was that the fight happened at Actium, between Octavius Caesar and Antony, in the seventh year of the reign of Herod and then it was also that there was an earthquake in Judea, such a one as had not happened at any other time, and which earthquake brought a great destruction upon the cattle in that country.”

Note: Disagreement between Octavian (the future Augustus) and Mark Antony erupted into a civil war, in 31 BC. Antony was defeated at the naval Battle of Actium. This battle and a

great earthquake in Judea occurred in the seventh year of Herod. These events confirm the year 31 BC as the seventh year of Herod's reign.

4.

Events Surrounding the Death of Herod

* Jos Ant 17:6:4 "Now it happened, that during the time of the high priesthood of this Matthias, there was another person made high priest for a single day, that very day which the Jews observed as a fast. The occasion was this: This Matthias the high priest, on the night before that day when the fast was to be celebrated, seemed, in a dream, to have conversation with his wife; and because he could not officiate himself on that account, Joseph, the son of Ellemus, his kinsman, assisted him in that sacred office. But Herod deprived this Matthias of the high priesthood, and burnt the other Matthias, who had raised the sedition, with his companions, alive. And that very night there was an eclipse of the moon."

Note: The High Priest, Matthias, asked his kinsman, Joseph son of Ellemus, to officiate on the fast of the Day of Atonement. This was on Sept 11, 5 BC. Several days later, Herod removed the High Priest Matthias and burnt alive another Matthias who had caused a sedition on the occasion of an eclipse of the moon. This total eclipse occurred on Sept 15 at 10:30 PM, 5 BC, the night before the Feast of Tabernacles. (Please see endnote regarding verification of lunar eclipses for 5 BC) Of all the eclipses that took place in surrounding times and years, this is the only eclipse that took place only a few days from the fast of the Day of Atonement. It was sometime after this eclipse that Herod died.

* Jos Ant 17:6:5 "But now Herod's distemper greatly increased upon him after a severe manner... He also sent for physicians, and did not refuse to follow what they prescribed for his assistance, and went beyond the river Jordan, and bathed himself in the warm baths that were at Callirrhoe... and came again to Jericho, where he grew so choleric, that it brought him to do all things like a madman; and though he were near his death, he contrived the following wicked designs. He commanded that all the principal men of the entire Jewish nation, wheresoever they lived, should be called to him... he ordered them to be all shut up in the hippodrome... He desired therefore, that as soon as they see he hath given up the ghost, they shall place soldiers round the hippodrome, while they do not know that he is dead; and that they shall not declare his death to the multitude till this is done, but that they shall give orders to have those that are in custody shot with their darts;"

Note: This text follows immediately after the text about the events of the eclipse telling us that Herod's health declined greatly after he had removed the High Priest Matthias and executed the other Matthias on September 15, 5 BC. So he left Jerusalem and went beyond Jordan for his health, but to no avail. Finally he went to his winter palace in Jericho. He became such a madman that he gave orders to slay all the principle men of the Jewish nation in the Hippodrome upon his death.

* Jos Ant 17:18:1 "When he (Herod) had done those things, he died, the fifth day after he had caused Antipater to be slain;..."

Note: Antipater III was Herod's oldest son. Herod divorced his commoner mother Doris in 32 BC to marry Mariamne, grand-daughter of Hyrcanus II, the Hasmonean High Priest. Her two sons Alexander & Aristobulus IV received eight years of schooling in the emperor's household in Rome (20-13 BC). When they returned, Herod was displeased with their behavior. Antipater and his Aunt Salome [Herod's sister] encouraged his displeasure by feeding him gossip about their disloyalty. So Herod had Alexander & Aristobulus tried for treason and strangled in 7 BC. After this Herod intended for Antipater to reign after his death and he became Herod's co-

regent, ruling equally with him. But Antipater foolishly prematurely plotted to remove Herod whose health was rapidly declining. Herod therefore ordered Antipater's execution only 5 days before his own death.

* Jos Ant 17:8:1 And now Herod altered his testament upon the alteration of his mind; for he appointed Antipas, to whom he had before left the kingdom, to be tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, and granted the kingdom to Archclaus. He also gave Gaulonitis, and Trachonitis, and Paneas to Philip, who was his son, but own brother to Archclaus by the name of a tetrarchy;

Note: After Herod had ordered Antipater to be executed, he immediately changed his will and appointed three of his sons to inherit his Kingdom. His will could not take effect until ratified by Augustus. Antipas, Archelaus; and later Philip, went to Rome to see that their claims were properly represented. The Emperor's final decision was:

Antipas was to rule Galilee and Peraea as Tetrarch.

Archelaus was to receive Judaea (including Samaria and Idumaea) as King.

Philip ruled the territory that Herod had received from Augustus east and north-east of the Lake of Galilee as Tetrarch.

* Jos Ant 17:18:1 "When he (Herod) had done those things, he died, ... having reigned, since he procured Antigonus to be slain, thirty-four years; but since he had been declared king by the Romans, thirty-seven."

Note: Adding thirty four years to 37 BC when he had procured Antigonus to be slain (and became King of Judea) comes to 4 BC. And adding thirty seven years to 40 BC when he had been made king at Rome also comes to 4 BC as the year of Herod's death.

* Jos Ant 17:9:3 "Now, upon the approach of that Feast of Unleavened Bread...the seditious lamented Judas and Matthias...And as Archelaus was afraid lest some terrible thing should spring up by means of these men's madness, he sent a regiment of armed men, and with them a captain of a thousand, to suppress the violent efforts of the seditious before the whole multitude should be infected with the like madness; and gave them this charge, that if they found any much more openly seditious than others, and more busy in tumultuous practices, they should bring them to him."

Note: Josephus does not give us the exact date of Herod's death. But here at the Feast of Unleavened Bread from April 11-18 4 BC, we see that Archelaus, Herod's son, was reigning and endeavoring to quell any uprising that would occur during the crowded Feast on account of Herod's deed of burning alive Matthias the previous fall. So Herod's death took place sometime between the fall of 5 BC when the eclipse occurred and before the Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread in April of 4 BC.

CONCLUSION

We know that Jesus was born during the reign of Herod.

* Mat 2:1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

* Mat 2:13 And when they were departed, behold, the angel of the Lord appeareth to Joseph in a dream, saying, Arise, and take the young child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child to destroy him.

We know from the above references that the death of Herod took place sometime between the eclipse of September 5 BC and the Feast of Unleavened Bread in April of 4 BC.

So we can narrow down the time of Jesus' birth by considering the following facts.

- We know the death of Herod did not occur near to September 5 BC because sometime after he had removed the High Priest at that time, his health began to decline and he left Jerusalem to go beyond Jordan for his health. From there he went to Jericho where he died. His death took place closer to April of 4 BC.
- We know Jesus could not have been born in the spring of 4 BC because this was the same time as Herod's death. He was born while Herod was still in Jerusalem and had not yet left to go beyond Jordan for his health. He received the wise men in Jerusalem who informed him of the birth.
- We know Jesus could not have been born in the winter months of 4 BC because his birth was announced to the shepherds abiding in the field on the day he was born. And in Judea shepherds do not allow their flocks to be in the fields during the cold winter months.
* Luk 2:8, 11 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.... For unto you is born this day
- We know Jesus could not have been born earlier than September 5 BC because the time of his baptism tells us that he was born in the fall. He 'began to be about 30 years of age' when he was baptized. (Luk 3:21-23) This tells us that he was baptized very close to his birthday. We know this was in the fall because immediately after his baptism he went into the wilderness to be tempted for 40 days. Then after the winter he went up to Jerusalem for the first Passover of his ministry in the spring of 27 AD (Jhn 2:13-25). Thus, after his baptism in the fall of 26 AD, he had a three and a half year ministry until his death at the Passover in the spring of 30 AD.
* Luk 3:21 Now when all the people were baptized, it came to pass, that Jesus also being baptized, and praying, the heaven was opened,
Luk 3:22 And the Holy Ghost descended in a bodily shape like a dove upon him, and a voice came from heaven, which said, Thou art my beloved Son; in thee I am well pleased.
Luk 3:23 And Jesus himself began to be about thirty years of age,
- September 5 BC as the birth of Christ agrees with the fact that Jerusalem was very crowded at that time because of the Feast of Tabernacles as well as the census so that there was no room for Mary and Joseph at the inn.
* Luk 2:7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.
- The Course of Abijah when Zecharias, the father of John the Baptist worked in the temple, also points to September 5 BC as the time Jesus was born. (Please see study on the Course of Abijah)

Endnote:

Two total lunar eclipses are verified for the year 4 BC by the NASA Catalog
[^ NASA lunar eclipse catalog Lunar Eclipses: -0099 to 0000 \(100 BCE to 1 BCE\)](#)

Cat Num	Calendar Date	TD of Greatest Eclipse	Luna Num	Saros Num	Ecl. Type
04811	-0004 Mar 23	21:17:09	-24784	61	T
04812	-0004 Sep 15	23:07:42	-24778	66	T
Data acknowledgment: "Eclipse Predictions by Fred Espenak and Jean Meeus (NASA's GSFC)"					

Why are these eclipses listed under the year 04 BC and not 05 BC? This is explained when you click on the Saros number and scroll to the heading 'calendar'.

It states:

"The Gregorian calendar is used for all dates from 1582 Oct 15 onwards. Before that date, the Julian calendar is used. The Julian calendar does not include the year 0. Thus the year 1 BCE is followed by the year 1 CE. This is awkward for arithmetic calculations. Years in this catalog are numbered astronomically and include the year 0. Historians should note there is a difference of one year between astronomical dates and BCE dates. Thus, the astronomical year 0 corresponds to 1 BCE, and astronomical year -1 corresponds to 2 BCE, etc.."

So the two lunar eclipses listed in the NASA Catalog under the year 04 BC actually took place in 05 BC.