

Astounding New Evidence --

When Was The True BIRTH of Yeshua Messiah (Jesus Christ)?

What was the year and time of year when Yeshua the Messiah was born? Millions think He was born on December 25th, Christmas day -- yet ancient history shows this was the day of worship of the birth of the SUN-GOD, Mithras! Some say He was born in 2 or 3 B.C., some say 6 or 7 B.C. But what is the truth? What does HISTORY reveal, and what does Biblical prophecy indicate?

William F. Dankenbring

When was Yeshua (Jesus) Christ born? What was the year -- and the most likely month -- of His birth? These questions have been argued about for centuries, and even today there is great disagreement over them.

What is the truth? Let us carefully investigate these problems and paradoxes, and see what we can learn.

The Scriptures show us that Jesus Christ was born "in the days of *Herod the king*" (Matt.2:1). Herod was so fixated on the fact that wise men from the East queried him about a child born to be "King of the Jews," that he pretended that he, too, desired to worship him (Matt.2:7-8). The wise men were warned not to return to Herod, and departed into their own country, and Joseph and Mary took Jesus and fled to Egypt.

When the wise men did not inform Herod of where the prophesied King was, Herod "was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men" (verse 16).

Jesus, then, had to be born before the death of Herod the Great. The gospel of Luke confirms this fact. Luke recorded, "There was *in the days of Herod*, king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zecharias" (Luke 1:5). During this time, the gospel continues, John the Baptist and Jesus

the Christ were born.

The Death of Herod

What year, then, did Herod die? Was he still alive in 3 B.C.? Let's notice the evidence. In *Peloubet's Bible Dictionary*, we read: "Herod died of a terrible disease, at Jericho, in April, 4 B.C., at the age of 69, after a long reign of 37 years" ("Herod," p.252).

The *New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* points out, "The birth of Jesus Christ took place at the close of Herod's life . . . Seized at length with loathsome and mortal disease, he repaired to Callirhoe, the hot sulphur springs on the e. part of the Dead Sea. . . . Then, about 4 B.C., he died . . ." (p.382).

Noted historian Will Durant, in *The Story of Civilization*, volume III, titled *Caesar and Christ*, declares plainly: "Meanwhile the old king was breaking down with disease and grief. He suffered from dropsy, ulcer, fever, convulsions, and loathsome breath. After frustrating so many attempts against his life he tried to kill himself, but was prevented. Hearing that Antipater had sought to bribe the guard to free him, Herod had him slain. Five days afterward he too died (4 B.C.), in the sixty-ninth year of his age, hated by all his people. It was said of him by his enemies that 'he stole to the throne like a fox, ruled like a tiger, and died like a dog'" (p.534-535).

Herod was so cruel that he jealously murdered Hyrcanus, the grandfather of his favorite wife, Miriamne; then murdered Miriamne whom he passionately loved; then his two sons by her, Alexander and Aristobulus; and just five days before his own death, his oldest son, Antipater! To be sure there would be universal mourning at his own death, he ordered the deaths of all the nobles assembled around him after his decease. He was such a monster, that Augustus Caesar, upon hearing he had put to death "boys under two years" of age, an obvious reference to the innocents he had murdered at Bethlehem to prevent the birth of the Messiah, said of him, "that it were better to be Herod's swine than his son."

When did Herod die? Says the *Critical-Experimental Commentary*:

"As Herod is known to have died in the year of Rome 750, in the *fourth year before the commencement of our Christian era*, the BIRTH OF CHRIST MUST BE DATED FOUR YEARS BEFORE THE DATE USUALLY ASSIGNED TO IT, *even if He were born within the year of Herod's death*, as it is next to certain that he was"
(Commentary on Matt.2:1-12).

Hastings Bible Dictionary also points out "Herod called the great . . . He died B.C. 4" ("Herod," vol.2, p.353). Says *The New Bible Dictionary*, "Herod the Great, king of the Jews 40-4 BC" ("Herod," p.521).

The year Herod died there was an eclipse. Josephus records, during Herod's final year, that at the time he slew the high priest Matthias, "that very night there was an eclipse of the moon" (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVII, VI, 4). Says the editor, William Whiston, in a footnote:

"This eclipse of the moon (which is the only eclipse mentioned by Josephus) is OF THE GREATEST CONSEQUENCE FOR THE DETERMINATION

OF THE DEATH OF HEROD and Antipater, *and for the BIRTH and entire chronology of JESUS CHRIST. It happened March 13th, in the year of the Julian period 4710, and the 4th year before the Christian era*" (*Anti.*, XVII, vi, 4, footnote).

Paul Johnson, in *A History of the Jews*, also confirms that Herod died in 4 B.C., and not any later than that. He writes:

"Herod was already sick, in his palace near Jericho, but he acted with characteristic energy and ruthlessness. The high priest was removed from office. The students were identified, arrested, dragged down in chains to Jericho, tried in the Roman theater there, and burned alive. With the smoke of this sacrifice to his wounded generosity and self-esteem still rising, Herod was taken by litter to the hot springs at Callirrhoe, where he DIED IN SPRING 4 B.C." (p.118).

Emil Schurer, in his multi-volume *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, paints a vivid picture of Herod's last years, his domestic troubles and family intrigues, and his own suffering and disease, and "madness." He declares:

"The days of the old king were now at an end. The disease was already becoming worse, and dissolution rapidly approached. The baths of Callirrhoe, on the other side of the Jordan, to which the king had gone, no longer benefited him. . . . At last, five days after the execution of Antipater, Herod died at Jericho in B.C. 4, unwept by those of his own house, and hated by all the people" (vol.1, p.464, "Herod the Great").

Further Evidence on Herod's Death

In commenting on the date of the death of Herod, Schurer provides several proofs that it had to be 4 B.C. He writes:

"1. "Shortly before Herod's death an eclipse of the moon occurred (*Ant.*, xvii, 6, 4). This only corresponds to the year B.C. 4, in which on the night of March 12-13 an eclipse of the moon took place; whereas *in the years three and two B.C. in Palestine generally there was no such phenomenon* . . .

"2. The chronology of two successors of Herod, Archelaus and Antipas, requires B.C. 4 = A.U.C. 750, as the year of Herod's death.

(a) Archelaus. He was, according to Dio Cassius, Iv. 27, deposed by Augustus in the year A.U.C. 759, during the consulship of Aemilius Lepidus and L. Arruntius, in the tenth year of his reign. So also says Josephus . . . Hence his reign began in A.U.C. 750 [that is, 4 B.C.].

(b) Antipas. He was deposed by Caligula in the summer of A.D. 39 = A.U.C. 792. Since we still have coins of his bearing date the forty-third year of his reign, the year of the beginning of his reign must at latest have been A.U.C. 750.

"All these facts therefore yield this result, THAT HEROD DIED IN THE YEAR B.C. 4 = A.U.C. 750, SHORTLY BEFORE THE PASSOVER. *This result, at least so far as it relates to the YEAR, is now accepted by most modern scholars*" (Schurer, p.465-466).

Further, in Philip Schaff's *History of the Christian Church*, volume 1, concerning the birth of Christ, we read concerning the death of king Herod:

"According to Matthew 2:1 (compare Luke 1:5, 26), Christ was born 'in the days of king Herod' I, or the Great, who died, according to Josephus, at Jericho, A.U. 750, just before the Passover, being nearly seventy years of age, after a reign of thirty-seven years. *This date has been verified by the astronomical calculation of the eclipse of the moon, which took place March 13, A.U. 750, a few days before Herod's death. Allowing two months or more for the events between the birth of Christ and the murder of the innocents by Herod, the Nativity must be put back at least to February or January, A.U. 750 (or B.C. 4), if not earlier*" (vol.1, p.112).

The Birth of Christ Reconsidered

When, then, was Jesus Christ born?

The actual day of the birth of Christ is not known for certain, *but we can know the approximate time of year when He was born.* In the book of Luke we read that the father of John the Baptist was Zacharias, and he was a priest who served at the temple in Jerusalem. He was "of the course of Abia" (Luke 1:5). While serving at the temple, he was informed by an angel that his wife was to have a son, who was to be named "John." After this, Zacharias finished "the days of his ministration," and "departed to his own house" (v.23). "And after those days, his wife Elizabeth conceived . . ." (v.24).

The names of the different courses of priests that served at the Temple are given in I Chronicles 24:1-19. "Abia" or "Abijah" was the EIGHTH course. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, each one of these courses served at the Temple for *one week*, the first course serving the first week of Nisan, in the spring (compare I Chron.27:1-2), and then each course in its own order. All the priests served during the annual festivals (Passover in spring, Pentecost, and then Tabernacles in the fall). After six months, the order would be repeated, thus each "course" would serve two weeks during a year.

Let's notice the chronology of events. Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, served in the Temple twice a year, with his course, the course of Abijah (Luke 1:5-7), which was the eighth course (I Chron.24:7-19). There were 24 courses in all. Each course served for one week, in succession (except for weeks when annual Festivals fell, when all priests served together). Josephus tells us:

"But David being desirous of ordaining his son king of all the people, called together their rulers to Jerusalem, with the priests and the Levites; and having first numbered the Levites . . . He divided them also into courses; and when he had separated the priests from them, he found of these priests twenty-four courses . . . and he ordained that one course should minister to God eight days, from Sabbath to Sabbath. And thus were the courses distributed by lot . . . and that course which came up first, was written down first, and accordingly the second, and so on to the twenty-fourth; ***and this partition hath remained to this day***" (*Antiquities*, VII, xiv, 7).

The course of Abijah, then, would have served the eighth week in the rotation. The eighth

week from Nisan 1, leaving out the week of Passover, when all the priests served, would have been IYAR 27 to SIVAN 5, the day just before Pentecost, which generally fell on Sivan 6. The eighth week in the fall rotation would have been CHESHVAN 26 to KISLEV 2.

If Zacharias received his angelic message during his first rotation, then, after serving a week in the Temple, Zacharias would have remained another week in Jerusalem, because of the Feast of Shavuot. Then, he would have returned home shortly after this, and his wife then would have conceived. This would have been about June. If we add nine months to this date, the normal time for the gestation of a human baby in the womb, John the Baptist would have been born about March, in the spring, shortly before the Passover. But if Zacharias had been serving during his SECOND rotation, in Cheshvan-Kislev, he would have returned home immediately after the service, in early Kislev. Then John the Baptist's birth would have been around August.

Jesus was conceived about six months after John (Luke 1:24-31, especially verse 26). This would suggest that Jesus Christ was conceived either about Kislev in the winter, or Sivan in the spring. Nine months from Kislev (approximately December) would place His birth about the middle of September. Nine months from Sivan would place His birth in SHEVAT (corresponding to February!).

The first course began serving the first week in Nisan. After six months, the order of courses would be repeated, beginning the first week in Tishri. Thus Zacharias served approximately the first week in June, and six months later, the first week in December. Shortly after he served his assigned duties, his wife conceived (Luke 1:5-13, 23-24). Nine months later John was born. So if we add 9 months to these dates, we find that *John was either born in around February, or August-September.*

Jesus Christ was born six months after John (Luke 1:26, 36). *Thus Christ could have been born either around August-September, or around February! -- just the opposite from John! Was Christ born around February, or September? How can we know?*

Crucial Events Surrounding Christ's Birth

We know that when Christ was born, He was born in a manger in Bethlehem. Shepherds, told by an angel of His birth, visited Him and found Him "wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger" (Luke 2:12-17). Eight days later Mary and Joseph had Him circumcised, according to the commandment (Luke 2:21). Mary then fulfilled the days of her purification -- which culminated 40 days after His birth (Luke 2:22-24; compare Lev.12:2-8). Joseph and Mary were obviously poor, for the offering they offered at this time was a pair of turtledoves or two young pigeons (Luke 2:24; Lev.12:8).

Sometime not too long after His birth, the wise men visited Him, and gave Him gifts (Matt.2:1-11). When they arrived, they found him as a "young child" (Matt.2:9, 11). He was no longer a swaddling baby, but now a "young child." The Greek word translated "young child" is *paidiske* and means "an infant or by extension, a half grown boy or girl." *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon* shows it can refer to a young infant recently born, a more advanced child, or even a mature

child or partly grown children. The chronology of Christ's birth, however, shows the family of Joseph was no longer in a manger when the wise men visited them --for we read, "when they were come into the *house*, they saw the young child" (Matt.2:11).

Their visit could have been around 30 days after His birth, or sometime before the time of His being taken to the Temple, 40 days after His birth! Immediately after this visit, and the Temple visit, Joseph was warned to take the child and Mary, and to "flee into Egypt, and be thou there until I bring thee word: for Herod will seek the young child, to destroy him" (Matt.2:13).

"When he arose, he took the young child and his mother *by night*, and departed into Egypt: and was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son" (Matt.2:13-15).

Meanwhile, sickly, old Herod, seeing the wise men had ignored his command to return to him after they found the child, became enraged, and had every child in Bethlehem killed up to two years of age, "according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men" (v.16).

Shepherds WERE in the Fields in WINTER!

What does this chronology of events tell us of the birth of Christ? For years, many of us have assumed and believed that Christ was born in the autumn of the year. The major proof offered for this was that shepherds were abiding in the fields when He was born, and several ancient authorities tell us that shepherds did not abide in the fields during the winter time. This of course ruled out a "Christmas" birth! Since there were shepherds *abiding in the fields by night* when He was born (Luke 2:8), we assumed that this ruled out any birth from the months of November through February. This seemed conclusive evidence for a fall birth.

Supporting this view is a comment by Werner Keller in *The Bible As History*, who quotes a remark in the Jewish Talmud which says in effect that "in that neighborhood the flocks were put out to grass in March and brought in again at the beginning of November. They remained out in the open for almost eight months" (p.332).

Since the shepherds were "abiding in the fields by night" when Christ was born, therefore, His birth had to occur between March and September. However, Herod died shortly before Passover in B.C.4. Before his death, he had hundreds of infants slain in Bethlehem. During the last few months of his life, he was desperately ill, and abode at a hot springs near the Dead Sea, and otherwise in Jericho, just north of the Dead Sea -- not at Jerusalem. Furthermore, when the wise men visited him, he was still at Jerusalem (Matt.2:1-3). He was troubled by what the wise men told him, "and all Jerusalem with him" (v.3).

This visit, therefore, occurred sometime after the birth of Christ -- probably about 30 to 40 days afterward. At the very least, this would push the birth of Christ back to at least the middle of February.

Could Christ have been born in February?

What about the fact that shepherds did not abide in the fields during the winter months?

This supposed "fact" turns out to be more "old wives' tales" and fiction than true fact. Alfred Edersheim in *The Life and Times of Jesus The Messiah*, points out this fascinating fact:

"At the outset it must be admitted, that absolute certainty is impossible as to the exact date of Christ's Nativity -- the precise year even, and still more the month and the day. But in regard to the year, we possess such data as to invest it with such probability, as almost to amount to certainty.

"1. The first and most certain date is that of the death of Herod the Great. Our Lord was born before the death of Herod, and, as we judge from the Gospel-history, very shortly before that event. Now the year of Herod's death has been ascertained with, we may say, absolute certainty, as shortly before the Passover of the year 750 A.U.C., which *corresponds to about the 12th of April of the year 4 before Christ*, according to our common reckoning. More particularly, shortly before the death of Herod there was a lunar eclipse (Josh. *Ant.* xvii. 6. 4), which it is astronomically ascertained, occurred on the night from the 12th to the 13th of March of the year 4 before Christ. Thus the death of Herod must have taken place between the 12th of March and the 12th of April -- or say, about the end of March (comp. *Ant.* xvii. 8. 1). Again, the Gospel history necessitates an interval of, at the least, seven or eight weeks before that date for the birth of Christ (we have to insert the purification of the Virgin -- at the earliest six weeks after the Birth -- the Visit of the Magi, and the murder of the children at Bethlehem, and, at any rate, some days more before the death of Herod)" (p.704).

My own calculations, using the principles of mathematics devised to ascertain ancient dates of the Jewish calendar, indicates that Passover eve (Nisan 14) during the year 4 B.C. would have been April 11. Edersheim says Passover day (Nisan 15) was April 12th. We are in complete agreement!

If Passover occurred around April 12 that year, and Herod died a few days before that event, the murder of the children at Bethlehem could have occurred in the first week or ten days of April. The flight of Joseph and Mary to Egypt could have occurred during the last week of March. The 40 days of purification could have been from about February 15 to March 26. Thus according to this scenario, Christ could have been born in mid-February, 4 B.C.

But what about the shepherds "abiding in the fields"? Edersheim discusses this issue, as well. He informs us:

"And yet Jewish tradition may here prove both illustrative and helpful. That the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, was a settled conviction. Equally so, was the belief, that He was to be revealed from *Migdal Eder*, 'the tower of the flock.' This *Migdal Eder* was not the watchtower for the ordinary flocks which pastured on the barren sheepground beyond Bethlehem, *but lay close to the town, on the road to Jerusalem*. A passage in the *Mishnah* leads to the conclusion, that *the flocks, which pastured there, were destined for Temple-sacrifices*, and, accordingly, that *the shepherds, who watched over them, were not ordinary shepherds*. The latter were under the ban of Rabbinism, on account of their necessary isolation from religious ordinances, and their manner of life, which rendered strict legal observance unlikely, if not absolutely impossible. *The same Mishnaic passage also leads us to infer, THAT THESE FLOCKS LAY OUT ALL THE YEAR ROUND, since they are spoken of as IN THE FIELDS THIRTY DAYS BEFORE THE PASSOVER -- THAT IS, IN THE MONTH OF FEBRUARY*, when in Palestine the average rainfall is nearly greatest. Thus, Jewish tradition in some dim manner apprehended the *first revelation of the*

Messiah from that Migdal Eder, where shepherds watched the Temple-flocks ALL

THE YEAR ROUND. Of the deep symbolic significance of such a coincidence, it is needless to speak" (Edersheim, p.186-187).

For 40 years, I assumed that shepherds did not abide in the fields around Jerusalem or Bethlehem during the winter months, from October-November till March-April. Herbert Armstrong insisted on this being one of the strong proofs that Christ could not have been born in the month of December.

Well, Christ was not born in December. But that does not mean He could not very well have been born in FEBRUARY, 4 B.C.!!!

Isn't it about time we wake up, and wash the filmy gloss from our eyes, and rinse them in the Word of God, so that we can see -- clearly? *Shepherds DID ABIDE in the fields around Bethlehem in the winter months -- the TEMPLE FLOCKS of the Migdal Eder watchtower, pastured on or near the road to Jerusalem the YEAR AROUND!*

Since the serving and officiating of Zacharias, as a priest at the Temple, shows John the Baptist had to be born either February-March or August-September, and since Christ was begotten six months later, His birth would have been six months later. Thus a February birth for Jesus Christ is altogether very probable! The rush of events in Herod's last days, and his growing paranoia and insanity and wrathful temper, also places the birth of Christ as being sandwiched in amongst all those other sanguinary events!

But can it be proved? Let us proceed.

Another Proof -- the "Star of Bethlehem"

In the book of Numbers we read of the coming Messiah of Israel, the Redeemer and Saviour of the world, this mysterious prophecy:

"I shall see him, but not now: I shall behold him, but not nigh: there shall come a *star out of Jacob*, and a *sceptre* shall rise out of Israel, and shall smite the corners of Moab, and destroy all the children of Sheth" (Num.24:17).

All commentators see this as a prophecy of the coming Messiah figure of Israel. But few have noted that it seems to be speaking of a Messiah who comes *twice* -- the first time, as a "star" out of Jacob, and a second time as a "scepter" -- that is, as a ruling king, who will subdue His enemies, smiting the Moabites, and destroying all who oppose Him.

This prophecy is clearly Messianic. Isaiah speaks of this Messiah who comes as a conquering king: "And he shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth. . . But they shall fly upon the shoulders of the Philistines toward the west; they shall spoil them of the east together: they shall lay their hand upon Edom and Moab; and the children of Ammon shall obey them" (Isa.11:12-14).

But why is the Messiah associated with a "star"? Why does the prophecy say a star shall come "out of Jacob"? This certainly means that the Messiah would be descended from Jacob. But why is He connected with a "star"? Why is He referred to in the prophecy as a "star"?

How was this famous prophecy fulfilled? According to the writers of the New Testament, there was a "star" that was distinctly associated with the birth of Jesus Christ -- that acted as a herald, and a beacon, of His impending birth. Matthew tells us the story:

"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, saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have *seen his star in the east*, and have come to worship him" (Matthew 2:1-2).

The expression "in the east" in the King James Version is not precisely correct. The literal term in the Greek language is *anatole* and means "a rising of light," "dawn," "dayspring," "rising," or by implication, "east." Literally, they saw his "star *rising*." The root word means to "cause to arise," "rise up." They had seen this unique star at its "rising," a sidereal appearance, which they regarded as betokening the birth of the Messianic King of the Jews.

The Fulfillment of Prophecy

The word "star" in this verse has been abundantly proved to mean not only a literal "star," but is also used of "constellations," "comets," "meteors," -- in short, it has the widest possible application to the heavenly bodies.

The "wise men" were clearly distinguished men, "magi," who were learned and scholarly, especially in astronomy, mathematics, the sciences and history. They were familiar with the Hebrew prophets. They may have been descendants of the "wise men" of Babylon, during the time of Daniel. On the other hand, they may have been wise men from the dispersed northern ten tribes of Israel, who had been taken into captivity toward the east and northeast, and whose descendants comprised many of the inhabitants of the Parthian empire. The common belief that there were "three" wise men is mere supposition. The Scriptures nowhere tell us how many there were.

Notice the fact that the sudden appearance in Jerusalem of these impressive visitors from the east -- possibly Babylon, or Persia, or the Parthian empire -- had a powerful effect on the residents of Jerusalem, and especially on king Herod. The king himself was greatly disturbed to learn that there was another "king" whose birth had been predicted, who was to rule over the Jews.

"When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.

"And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.

"Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the *star appeared*. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search

diligently for the young child: and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him.

"When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, *the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was.* When they saw the *star*, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy" (Matt.2:3-10).

The wise men found the boy Jesus, in a house, and presented gifts to Him, gold, frankincense, and myrrh, and then departed into their own country, being warned in a dream not to return to Herod (v.11-12). Joseph, the supposed father of the child, was also warned in a dream to flee into Egypt, for Herod would attempt to kill the infant (v.13). He did so, and remained there until after the death of Herod, which occurred in the spring of 4 B.C., just before Passover.

Herod, furious when he saw that the wise men had not returned to him, was exceedingly angry:

"Then Herod, when he saw that he was mocked of the wise men, was exceeding wroth, and sent forth, and slew all the children that were in Bethlehem, and in all the coasts thereof, *from two years old and under, according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the wise men*" (Matt.2:16).

Notice that originally Herod inquired as to the *time* when the wise men first saw the "new star" in the heavens -- when it first *appeared* in the night sky (Matt.2:7). Apparently, they first saw it "two years" previously (verse 16). Was this celestial phenomenon the fulfillment of the prophecy of Balaam in Numbers 24:17, the "star of Jacob"?

Rabbinical Sages

Throughout the ages, rabbinical sages and scholars have written about a certain type of "star" -- a tri-planetary conjunction -- that they said would appear in the constellation of Pisces near the time of the birth of the Messiah -- just before the time of His coming.

Dr. Alfred Edersheim, a famous Bible scholar of the nineteenth century, points out that there is one illustrative Jewish statement which, "though not astrological, is of the greatest importance, although it seems to have been overlooked." In his book *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Edersheim mentions the well known Jewish commentator Abarbanel, or Abrabanel, who writes of the importance of the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of Pisces, in his Commentary on the book of Daniel.

Says Edersheim:

"In his Commentary on Daniel, that Rabbi laid it down, that the conjunction of *Jupiter and Saturn in the constellation of Pisces* betokened not only the most important events, but referred especially to Israel (for which he gives five mystic reasons). He further argues that, as that conjunction had taken place *three years before the birth of Moses*, which heralded the first deliverance of Israel, *so it would also precede the birth of the Messiah*, and the final deliverance of Israel" (p.211).

Edersheim points out that one of the smaller *Midrashim*, called the "Messiah Haggadah" (*Aggadoth Mashiach*) begins as follows:

"A star shall come out of Jacob. There is a Boraita in the name of the Rabbis: The heptad in which the Son of David cometh -- in the *first year* there shall not be sufficient nourishment; in the *second year* the arrows of famine are launched; in the *third*, a great famine; in the *fourth*, neither famine nor plenty; in the *fifth*, great abundance, and *the Star shall rise forth from the East, and this is the Star of the Messiah*. And it will shine from the East for fifteen days, and if it be prolonged, it will be for the good of Israel; in the *sixth*, sayings (voices), and announcements (hearings); in the *seventh* wars, and at the close of the seventh Messiah is to be expected" (quoted by Edersheim, p.211-212).

This "heptad," or period of "seven," undoubtedly refers to the final "WEEK" of Daniel 9:24-27 -- the final seven years leading up to the coming of the Messiah -- the final seven years of this present age of misrule and misconduct. Notice that at the end of this "week" of seven years, the Messiah is to be "expected."

Notice that the "star" of the Messiah is predicted to rise in the East, in the fifth year -- that is, two or three years before His final coming!

Edersheim goes on to discuss three other ancient Jewish *Midrashim*, which are entitled "The Book of Elijah," "Chapters about the Messiah," and "The Mysteries of R. Simon, the son of Jochai" --

-- where we read that a Star in the East was to appear *two years before the birth of the Messiah*. The statement is almost equally remarkable, whether it represents a tradition previous to the birth of Jesus, or originated after that event. But *two years* before the birth of Christ, which, as we have calculated, took place in . . . [year] 5 before the Christian era, brings us to the year 747 A.U.C., or 7 [years] before Christ [B.C.], in which such a Star should appear in the East.

"Did such a Star, then, really appear in the East seven years before the Christian era? **Astronomically speaking, and without any reference to controversy, THERE CAN BE NO DOUBT THAT THE MOST REMARKABLE CONJUNCTION OF PLANETS -- THAT OF JUPITER AND SATURN in the constellation of Pisces, which occurs ONCE IN 800 YEARS -- DID TAKE PLACE NO LESS THAN THREE TIMES in the year 747 A.U.C., or TWO YEARS BEFORE THE BIRTH OF CHRIST (in May, October, and December). This conjunction is admitted by all astronomers. It was not only extraordinary, but presented the most brilliant spectacle in the night sky**, such as could not but attract the attention of all who watched the sidereal heavens. . . . In the year following, that is, in 748 A.U.C., another planet, Mars, joined this conjunction. The merit of first discovering these facts -- of which it is unnecessary here to present the literary history -- belongs to the great Kepler . . ." (p.212-213).

"Signs and Seasons"

In the book of Genesis, chapter one, God gives us a profound insight, if we are willing to believe it, as to the purpose behind His creation of the sun, moon, and stars. We read: "And God said, let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for *SIGNS, and for seasons, and for days and years*" (Gen.1:14).

What is the significance of a conjunction of the planets of Saturn and Jupiter in the constellation of Pisces? The Hebrew name for the constellation of Pisces is *Dagim*, "the Fishes," and is connected with "multitudes," as in Genesis 48:16 where Jacob blesses Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, saying, "Let them grow into a multitude, in the midst of the earth." The margin says, "Let them grow *as fishes do increase*."

Says Bullinger of this marginal notation, "It refers to the fulfillment of Genesis 1:28, 'Be fruitful and multiply.' The *multitude* of Abraham's seed is prominent in the pronouncement of the blessings, where God compares his future posterity to the *stars of the sky*, and the sand upon the seashore. 'A very great multitude of fish,' as in Ezek.47:9" (Bullinger, *The Witness of the Stars*, p.93). Thus the constellation of Pisces is connected with Israel, and the "seed" of Abraham. It also, therefore, is connected to that special "seed," who was to be the Messiah.

As Paul wrote in the book of Galatians, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one. And to thy seed, which is Christ" (Gal.3:16). Therefore, Paul went on, "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (v.29). Thus the constellation Pisces is directly connected, in every way, with the prophecy of the coming of the "seed of Abraham" -- the Anointed One, the Messiah -- Jesus Christ!

Jupiter is the "royal" planet, and is connected with the tribe of "Judah," from which the royal Messiah was to descend. In the prophecy in Genesis, we read: "The sceptre [symbol of royal power and authority] shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him [Shiloh -- the Messiah] shall the gathering of the people be. Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes" (Gen.49:9-11). Isaiah confirms that this Messianic king was to descend from David, of the tribe of Judah (Isaiah 11:1-10). Thus Jupiter is the Messianic planet.

Saturn, also, is a royal planet. Its very name means, however, "the hidden one." And who is the true "hidden one"? The Messiah Himself! He was prophesied to be "hidden" from the purview of this world's leaders (I Cor.2:7-8). During His ministry, Jesus "departed, and *hid himself* from them" (John 12:36). When Israel sins, God says, "I will *hide* my face from them" (Deut.31:17). He adds, "And I will surely *hide my face* in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods" (Deut.31:18). Isaiah says, "I will wait upon the LORD, that *hideth his face* from the house of Jacob, and I will look for him" (Isaiah 8:17). The prophet speaks of the Messiah, saying, "Verily thou art a God that *hideth thyself*, O God of Israel, the *Saviour*" (Isa.45:15).

It should be apparent that when Jupiter, a Messianic planet, goes into conjunction with Saturn, a Messianic planet, in the sign of Pisces, a Messianic constellation, we have *three signs of the Messiah meeting together in the heavens* -- and the number "three" is the number of "decision," "the signature of God," and "finality." Furthermore, the incredible fact that this sign appeared in the heavens *three times in one year* in 7 B.C. is even more testimony that something very *established, certain, and with finality, was shortly to occur with vast Messianic implications!*

No wonder the wise men -- however many of them there were -- who were students of astronomy, as well as ancient Hebrew prophecy, were startled, thrilled, excited, and decided to take a long, expensive, arduous journey, to Jerusalem, to inquire further about this expected Messianic king, whose portent they had seen in the heavens!

Heavenly Portent of the Messiah

Edersheim continues discussing the discovery of this conjunction by the great astronomer Johannes Kepler (1571-1630 A.D.). Kepler discovered the three laws of planetary motion, which later formed an indispensable part of Sir Isaac Newton's discovery of the law of universal gravitation. Edersheim writes of Kepler, saying:

"Kepler, who was led to the discovery by observing a similar conjunction in 1603-4, also noticed, that when the three planets came into conjunction, *A NEW, EXTRA-ORDINARY, BRILLIANT, and peculiarly coloured EVANESCENT STAR was visible between Jupiter and Saturn*, and he suggested that a similar star had appeared under the same circumstances in the conjunction preceding the Nativity" (*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, p.213).

The fact that there was such a conjunction, which created a fleeting, temporary, "evanescent star" at that time, is certainly amazing!

But incredibly, there is even more proof that such a "star" really burst into temporary existence *in the very year Christ was born, 4 B.C., and in the VERY MONTH!*

This very "star" was seen and born witness to by the *astronomical tables of the ancient Chinese*. Says Alfred Edersheim:

"In the astronomical tables of the Chinese -- to whose general trustworthiness so high an authority as *Humboldt* bears testimony -- *the appearance of an evanescent star was noted*. Pingre and others have designated it as a comet, and *calculated its first appearance IN FEBRUARY 750 A.U.C.[which is the year 4 B.C.!!!], which is just the time when the Magi would, in all probability, LEAVE JERUSALEM FOR BETHLEHEM, since this would have preceeded the death of Herod, which took place in March 750.*"

Edersheim adds this very important observation. Notice!

"Moreover, it has been astronomically ascertained, that *such a sidereal apparition, WOULD BE VISIBLE TO THOSE WHO LEFT JERUSALEM, and that it would POINT -- almost seem to GO BEFORE -- in the direction of, and STAND OVER, BETHLEHEM*. Such, impartially stated, are the facts of the case -- and here the subject must, in the present state of our information, be left" (Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, book II, page 213).

Take careful note: The wise men "saw" an evanescent star at its "rising," or appearance, in the east, two or three years before the birth of Christ, in 7 B.C. They then arranged to go to Jerusalem, to find out from the Jewish authorities more information about the birth of the "king of the Jews," which they believed the heavenly sign predicted. Then, after being informed that an ancient Biblical prophecy foretold His birth *in Bethlehem*, they left the presence of Herod and the

Jewish authorities, to go to Bethlehem, in search of the newborn king. At this time they saw *another* sidereal apparition in the heavens! Matthew tells us:

"When they had heard the king, they departed; and *lo, the STAR which they had seen in the east, WENT BEFORE THEM, till it came and stood over where the young child was.* When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy" (Matt.2:9-10).

How incredible! This very "evanescent star" -- which the Magi saw over Bethlehem, about four miles south of Jerusalem -- was also witnessed and verified by Chinese astronomers in China -- thousands of miles to the east -- *in the very month of February, 4 B.C. -- the very month in which we have shown Jesus Christ was most likely born!*

Franklyn M. Brantley, in his book *The Christmas Sky*, commented on Moses, the Exodus, the constellation Pisces, and the planets Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. Brantley writes:

"Records of the planets tell us that there were three planets in the evening skies of the fall . . . and that these planets moved closer together as the months went by. The three planets were Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. Saturn, in the constellation of Pisces, the fish . . . The magi knew about the planets. They were astrologers, the astronomers of that time and place. They studied the planets, and they knew of their positions and their motions. They also knew that these three planets were in a constellation where centuries earlier, according to Jewish scholars, planets had appeared around the time of the birth of Moses. Moses was the prophet who led the Israelites out of Egypt to the eastern borders of the Promised Land. *Pisces was therefore considered the constellation of the Jews. The appearance of the planets in Pisces may have been a SIGN to the Magi that an event of great importance was occurring in the land of the Jews. The Star of Bethlehem might have been these THREE PLANETS that had moved close together. . .*" (Franklyn M. Brantley and Stephen Foster, *The Christmas Sky*, New York: Harper Collins, 1960, 1996, p.43-44).

Moses himself was a "figure" or "TYPE" of the Messiah promised in the Scriptures. He delivered Israel out of Egypt, and brought them to the Promised Land. God led and inspired him to prophesy, "And the LORD said unto me . . . I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words into his mouth: and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which *he shall speak in my name*, I will require it of him" (Deut.18:17-19).

The Beginning of Christ's Ministry

Another line of evidence proving the year of Christ's birth is to work backward from the date or year of the beginning of His ministry. To calculate the beginning of the ministry of Christ, we use the amazing prophecy found in Daniel, chapter 9, the "seventy weeks prophecy." This astounding prophecy predicted the very year the true Messiah would begin His ministry. Incredibly, the rabbis of the Jewish nation have overlooked the Messianic implications of this staggering prophecy, made 500 years before the time of Christ! Notice!

The Septuagint version of the Old Testament Scriptures was translated into Greek about 250 years before the time of Christ, and therefore was uncontaminated by any later "Christian editing," or, for that matter, any later "Jewish rabbinical editing" after the time of Christ, to "deny"

how He fulfilled the incredible prophecy found in Daniel, chapter 9. So let's notice this prophecy in the Septuagint:

"Seventy weeks have been determined upon thy people, and upon the holy city, for sin to be ended, and to seal up transgressions, and to blot out the iniquities, and to make atonement for iniquities, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal the vision and the prophet, and to anoint the Most Holy.

"And thou shalt know and understand, that from the going forth of the command for the answer and for the building of Jerusalem *UNTIL CHRIST THE PRINCE there shall be seven weeks, and sixty two weeks*: and then the time shall return, and the street shall be built, and the wall, and the times shall be exhausted.

"And after the sixty two weeks, the ANOINTED ONE [Christ] shall be destroyed [Heb., "cut off"], and there is no judgment in him . . ." (Dan.9:24-26).

Now notice! A "day" is a year in being fulfilled in terms of Biblical prophecy (see Numbers 14:34 and Ezekiel 4:4-6). Seventy "weeks" equals 70 sevens, or $70 \times 7 = 490$ "days" or "years" in total complete fulfillment. However, only 7 weeks and 62 weeks were to pass until the coming of "CHRIST THE PRINCE"! This means that we multiply 69 weeks by 7 days per week and come up with 483 "days" or "years" in being fulfilled.

Notice again. This period of time of the prophecy is to be counted from "the going forth of the command" for the building of Jerusalem! Daniel was given this prophecy in 538 B.C., the first year of Darius, king of the Medes (Daniel 9:1-2).

Three decrees were made by Persian kings regarding the building of Jerusalem and the Temple. The first was by Cyrus, in 537 B.C. (Ezra 1:1-4). But 483 years later would bring us to 54 B.C. Nothing significant occurred on that year at all. The next decree was that of Darius in 520 B.C. (Ezra 6:1-11). If we subtract 483 from 520, we come to the year 37 B.C. Nothing of any importance concerning a Messiah appearing occurred that year either. No Messiah is reported to have come at either of those two times! But notice! We read in Ezra these words:

"And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia" (Ezra 6:14).

This leaves only the commandment that went forth from king Artaxerxes. Artaxerxes also made a decree concerning the rebuilding and refurbishing of Jerusalem. In the seventh year of his reign, he sent Ezra the scribe up to Jerusalem with a copy of his decree (Ezra 7:7, 12-28). This was in 457 B.C. If we count 483 years from 457 B.C., we come to the fascinating year of 27 A.D.! (Remember, there is no year "zero," so when passing from B.C. to A.D., or vice versa, you have to "add one year" for the chronological dates to come out correctly.)

What occurred in 27 A.D.? That is the very prophesied year the Messiah was to "appear" and to began His ministry! Who began His ministry in 27 A.D.? None other than Jesus Christ!

Christ the LAMB of God

When Christ was baptized, the Spirit of God came upon Him like a dove. We read of His baptism in the book of Matthew:

"Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to Jordan unto John, to be baptized of him. But John forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now: for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him. And Jesus, when he was baptized, went up straightway out of the water: and lo, the heavens were opened unto him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and lighting upon him: And lo, a voice from heaven, saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt.3:13-17).

John's gospel gives us more information about this event. John records:

"The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold, *the Lamb of God*, which taketh away the sin of the world. . . . And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not; but he that sent me to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Spirit. And I saw, and bare record, that this is the Son of God. Again, the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; and looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold, the Lamb of God! (John 1: 29-36).

Notice that twice John refers to Christ as the "Lamb of God" (John 1:29, 36). The apostle Paul refers to Christ as our "Passover lamb" in I Corinthians 5:7. In the book of Revelation, Christ is also referred to as the "Lamb of God" (see Rev.5:5-6; 13:8; 14:1-4; 17:14). Peter tells us that we were redeemed by "the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (I Peter 1:19).

Now, since Jesus Christ is the "lamb" of God, the question naturally arises, *when are lambs born?* That is, when do ewes bear lambs in the Middle East? What time of year? Do they bear lambs on December 25, Christmas day? Not at all! Do they bear lambs in the fall -- around September or October? The answer is, No.

When do sheep bear their lambs? The fact is, lambs in the Northern Hemisphere -- including Palestine -- are born *beginning in the month of February, and into the springtime!*

Thus this fact also strongly supports a FEBRUARY birth for Christ, not long before Passover -- and NOT the fall of the year, or Rosh Hashanah or the Feast of Tabernacles, as so many seem to think!

From Baptism to Public Ministry

Christ's baptism, and the Holy Spirit descending upon Him, symbolized His being "anointed" for His ministry in a special way by God's Spirit (John 1:32-36). After Jesus was baptized (Luke 3:21-23), He departed into the wilderness for forty days, fasting and drawing close to God (Luke 4:1-2). During this time He met and defeated Satan the devil and his temptations (verses 3-13), and then returned in the power of God's Spirit into Galilee (verse 14).

The very next day after this, Jesus set about to begin His ministry. He began calling His disciples, to follow Him, calling Andrew, Peter's brother (John 1:40-41). The next day He called Philip, who found Nathaniel (v.43-49). The third day there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee, which Jesus attended, where He performed His first public "miracle" (John 2:1-11). Afterwards, he abode in Capernaum, "he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples: and they continued there not many days" (v.12).

This probably brought the story to the beginning of March. Jesus was ready -- primed and filled with God's anointing and His Spirit -- to commence His official public ministry. John tells us that His ministry began with controversy, even as it ended, three years later. We read the account in John's gospel:

"And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, and found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; and said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise" (John 2:13-16).

At this Passover, Jesus was asked, "What sign shewest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things?" (John 2:18). Jesus answered: "Destroy this temple, and in *three days* I will raise it up" (v.19). What did Jesus mean? First, we know He was literally in the grave for three days. However, using a "day" for a "year" principle, He also implied that *three years* from that time, or three Passovers hence, He would be killed, and resurrected! "Three years"! In other words, this statement is further proof that Jesus' ministry lasted exactly *three years!*

Notice: "Then said the Jews, *Forty and six years* was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days? But he spake of the temple of his body" (John 2:20-21).

The Temple of Herod

When did Herod begin construction on the Temple?

Says *The NIV Harmony of the Gospels*, "According to secular history, Herod initiated the work sometime in 20 B.C. or 19 B.C. This statement was addressed to Jesus at the *first passover* after he begins his public ministry. The 'forty six years' therefore furnishes *another means for identifying the year when his ministry began*" (p.317). The authors continue, "Hence the first passover of Jesus' ministry must have been in the spring of A.D. 27" (*ibid.*).

Emil Schurer in *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Christ* adds, "The rebuilding was begun in the eighteenth year of Herod, corresponding to B.C. 20-19 . . ." (vol.1, p.438).

The *Unger's Bible Dictionary* concurs, saying, ". . . though Herod began the rebuilding B.C. 20, as a whole it was literally true that the temple was 'built in forty and six years,' when the Jews so asserted to Jesus (John 2:20). But the end was not yet, for the work was really continued until A.D. 64, just six years before the final destruction of the temple by the Roman soldiers of Titus"

("Herod," p.471).

Counting 46 years, then, from 20 B.C., brings us to 26 A.D. by simple subtraction. But, since there was no year zero, we again must add a year -- bringing us to A.D. 27 -- the very year Jesus Christ began His ministry, and celebrated the first Passover of His ministry!

The Final Clinching Proof

In 27 A.D., as we have seen, Jesus Christ began His ministry. But what does this fact tell us about the date and time of His *birth*?

Luke says that the ministry of Jesus Christ began when "Jesus himself *began to be about thirty years of age*" (Luke 3:23). What does this mean? The word "about" here is *hosei* in the Greek and means "as if, as it had been, as it were, like as." In other words, Jesus was thirty years old -- He had passed His thirtieth birthday. Says *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, the word means "as it were (had been), as though, like as, like." This is its primary definition, though it can also mean "about, nearly." The implication is that He was over thirty.

However, it is clear that He was over thirty, for in order to be "registered" and to begin their ministry, the Levites and priests had to be at least "thirty" years of age (Num.4:3,, 23, 30, 35, 39, 43, 47). Since Jesus was a "priest" after the order of Melchisedek (Heb.7:15-21), it follows that His ministry had to begin after His thirtieth birthday. Since other evidence shows His ministry began about Passover in the spring of 27 A.D., and He was about 30 years old at that time, His birth had to be a few months before Passover! A February birth would fit in very nicely with all the historical and Biblical facts!

The conclusion that Jesus had passed His 30th birthday is validated by Ireneus, in *Against Heresies*. Ireneus lived A.D. 120-202. He wrote concerning the passage in Luke of Jesus:

"Being thirty years old [i.e., over thirty, not less than thirty] when He came to be baptized, and then possessing the full age of a Master [that is, thirty years, no less], He came to Jerusalem, so that He might be properly acknowledged by all as a Master" (*Against Heresies*, 2, xxii, 4).

"And how could He have taught, unless He had reached the age of a Master? For when He came to be baptized, He had not yet completed His thirtieth year. . ." (*ibid.*, part 5).

Thus when Luke says Jesus was "about thirty," this means, in modern English, He had passed His thirtieth birthday, and was in His thirtieth year. He had just turned thirty. The baptism of Jesus must have been not long before Passover in 27 A.D.

Thus this passage also reveals that Jesus was born in late winter and was about "30" when He was baptized, before Passover in 30 A.D.! *If He were born in December, or in August-October, He would NOT have been "about thirty" when He was baptised, shortly before PASSOVER!* If He were born in the fall of the year, then He would have been about 29 and a half, or 30 and a half -- not "nearly 30" or "just over 30"!

Only a Messiah born in early 4 B.C. -- *about the month of February* -- would have fulfilled all the above criteria. Also, only a Messiah born in early B.C. 4 would have been born at the inauguration of the *fifth millennium* from the Creation of Adam and Eve in 4004 B.C. -- that is, *4000 years* from Creation -- to usher in the "Messianic age," as Jewish traditions and prophecies predicted would occur.

With all this evidence, it becomes clear -- and plain as day -- that many who profess the name of Christ, and who believe He was born on December 25 -- the day the pagans worshipped the "reborn sun-god" -- and celebrated the "birthday" of *Sol Invictus* -- are seriously in error.

Also, those who believe that He was born in the *fall* of the year, around September-October, are equally mistaken. This new evidence clearly points to a birth in February, or late winter, just before spring, in 4 B.C.!

Thank God for His precious, wonderful TRUTH!