

Timeline from the Lord's Birth to Settling in Nazareth: Tracking the Scribal Error in Josephus's *Antiquities*; Herod died in 1 B.C.; Jesus Was 10-months Old on His Arrival in Nazareth, Luke 2:39–43; Jesus at Age 12: Discusses Doctrine with the Rabbis, vv. 46–47; Mary's Anxiety over Jesus' Absence, vv. 48–49

We now have accumulated enough information to determine when the holy family left Egypt and the Lord's age at the time.

Matthew 2:19 informs us that *after* Herod died, the angel appeared to Joseph in a dream with instructions to depart from Egypt back into Israel.

We have documented from the research of three men the approximate time of Herod's death, their findings analyzed by Jack Finegan in the 1998 revised edition of his *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, pages 298–301.

W. E. Filmer's *The Chronology of the Reign of Herod the Great*, Ernest L. Martin's *The Birth of Christ Recalculated*, "The Nativity and Herod's Death," and *The Star that Astonished the World*, and David W. Beyer's "Josephus Reexamined: Unraveling the Twenty-second Year of Tiberius," present the irrefutable evidence that, beginning in 1544, copies of Flavius Josephus's *Antiquities of the Jews* omit the word "second" in describing the year of death of Herod's son Philip.

These flawed copies state:

Philip departed this life, in the twentieth year of the reign of Tiberius, after he had been tetrarch of Trachonitis and Gaulanitis, and of the nation of Bataneans \bat-a-nē'-ans\ also, thirty-seven years.²

This reference is from my personal copy of Josephus's two major works. It shows no copyright date but the source document is obviously after 1544. A footnote regarding the above quote comments on the perceived validity of the passage:

This calculation, from all Josephus's Greek copies, is exactly right; for since Herod died about September, in the fourth year before the Christian era [i.e., 4 B.C.], and Tiberius began, as is well known, Aug. 19, A.D. 14, it is evident that the thirty-seventh year of Philip, reckoned from his father's death, was the twentieth of Tiberius, or near the end of A.D. 33 or, however, in the beginning of the next year, A.D. 34.³

Finegan's presentation clearly documents that pre-1544 copies of Josephus's *Antiquities* place the death of Philip in "the twenty-second year of Tiberius. Thus, Herod died circa 1 March 1 B.C. which would make the Christ Child, born on 17 June 2 B.C., about nine months old at the time Gabriel appeared in a dream instructing Joseph to return to the land of Israel.

We have also consulted Luke 2:39–43 where verse 40 confirms that Jesus was a **παιδίον (*paidion*)**, a small child between 1 and 7 years of age. In verse 41 we are informed that Joseph and Mary "went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover."

¹ "Bashan \bā'-shan\ (בַּשָּׁן), describes the kingdom of Og, the most northerly part of the land east of the Jordan. It stretched from the border of Gilead in the south to the slopes of Hermon in the north" (William Ewing, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed. James Orr [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1956], 1:411.

² Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, in *The Life and Works of Flavius Josephus*, trans. William Whiston (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, nd), 538 (bk. XVIII, chap. 4, par. 6).

³ *Ibid.*, 538n.

Matthew 2:22 informs us that once back in Israel, Joseph learns that Archelaus has succeeded his father, Herod, holding the position tetrarch over the district of Judea. He is instructed in yet another dream to avoid Bethlehem and Jerusalem and proceed to Galilee and Nazareth.

During the Passover of April 8, 1 B.C., the troops sent by Archelaus killed over 3,000 Jews at the temple which indicated that the new tetrarch would behave much like his homicidal father. It was most likely this news is what alerted Joseph to the danger of returning to Jerusalem.

Therefore, Joseph took the Coastal Route up to Caesarea where he turned eastward through the Valley of Jezreel and then northward up to Nazareth. The next year, April of A.D. 1, he and Mary went down to Jerusalem for Passover.

The family's arrival in Nazareth was the spring of 1 B.C. with the Lord nearing His first birthday. In Matthew 2:41 we are informed that Joseph and Mary went down to Jerusalem every year for the Passover but apparently Jesus did not accompany them, staying in Nazareth with relatives or friends of the family.

We do learn that it was customary at age 12 for the male child of a family to observe Passover:

Luke 2:42 - When Jesus was twelve years old [A.D. 11], they went up to the Feast, according to the custom.

v. 43 - After the Feast was over, while His parents were returning home, the boy [*παῖς*, *pais*: a youth aged 7 to 12] Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it.

Entering Manhood: The Jewish boy was recognized as entering manhood at thirteen years of age. By New Testament times a boy of thirteen became a "son of the law." The significance of the account of Jesus' being left behind at the Temple is that it showed he was leaving his childhood. It was the last time he would attend Passover as a child. Only after age thirteen did the child qualify to become one of the ten men who could constitute a synagogue.⁴

This was the final year of preparation for a boy to become responsible for keeping the Law. Beginning at age 5, a boy was instructed in the Law by his father. At age 12 the boy was making preparation to become a man at age 13. Our Lord made rapid progress in his understanding of Scripture:

Luke 2:40 - The Child [*παιδίον*, *paidion*: up to seven years of age] grew and became strong; he was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was upon him.

It was this precocious wisdom that enabled the Lord at age 12 to participate in deep theological discussions with the rabbis:

Luke 2:46 - After three days Joseph and Mary found Jesus in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions.

v. 47 - Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers.

At age twelve boys began preparing to take their places in the religious community during the following year (Luke 2:42)

⁴ Ralph Gower, *The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Moody Press, 2005), 60.

The “teachers” were rabbis, experts in Judaism. In Jesus’ day it was not unusual for students to gather at the feet of their rabbis to discuss theology, often in a question-and-answer, discussion format. (Luke 2:46)⁵

It was at this point that the Lord clearly understood who He was and the purpose of His mission, concepts that his parents did not yet grasp:

Luke 2:48 - When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, “Son [τέκνον, *teknon*: a tender term of address for a child] why have you treated us like this? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.”

v. 49 - “Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?”

⁵ *NIV Archaeological Study Bible: An Illustrated Walk through Biblical History and Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 1671nn2:41; 2:46.