

## AN INTRODUCTION TO A CHRONOLOGICAL OUTLINE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

Many people have read the New Testament from Matthew's gospel through the Revelation given to John on the isle of Patmos. Yet many have never read or even viewed the Scriptures in chronological order. The purpose of this series will be to do just that, view the gospels & the book of Acts in historical sequence. One may ask two questions. First, "Why bother to read the sacred scriptures in the order in which they occurred?", and secondly, "Why is this chronology better than or different from any other timeline available?" We will attempt to answer these questions and bring some clarity to the reasons for this writing.

Why should anyone read the scriptures in chronological order? There are many answers to that question. Reading the Word in the order in which it happened can, oftentimes, bring clarity to the Word. It doesn't take very long to realize the gospels are not all written in the same order. Many believe Mark's gospel, along with John's, are written, basically, in the order in which events occurred. Matthew's gospel has been said by many to be in written in chronological order, while Luke's gospel is not. Others have stated Luke's gospel is in chronological order, while Matthew's is not. This author believes the events in Mark's gospel are written in the order in which they happened, as is also John's gospel. Matthew's is written, for the most part in order, while Luke was concerned with setting his writings in topical order.

What is the purpose of four gospels? Couldn't one have worked as well? The answer to that is yes and no. Yes, one gospel would have made things much clearer than four. But there is a problem with focusing on one gospel rather than four. Think of the gospels in light of a modern police investigation. None of us were eyewitnesses to the events mentioned in the gospels. We must, therefore, rely on those who were. Aren't four witnesses better than one? Four witnesses will give a much clearer picture of what really happened than one will, because each witness will mention details that are important to that witness while omitting details that weren't. Four pictures are always better than one.

Another reason for four gospels rather than one, is that Matthew, Mark, Luke & John were writing their respective works to reach diverse groups of people with different facts and details. Matthew's writings were meant to reach Jews. This can be shown by his usage of the word, "Fulfilled." Luke, the only Gentile writer of the gospels, was attempting to confirm to Theophilus, a gentile, the truth of the Word he had come to believe in. Much more can be said concerning the reasons for multiple gospels, but we will leave that for others to discuss, or discuss ourselves in another work.

This brings us to our second question. The author will make no statement to attempt to say this chronology is better than any other. There have been several different timelines proposed in the past by different people or groups and most have been used by many to gain a clearer perspective of the life of the Messiah. Yet many "Conservative scholars" have said the gospels do not line up perfectly with historical facts. It is the belief of this author the Scriptures do NOT HAVE to line up with "Historical facts", but, rather, "Historical facts" SHOULD LINE UP WITH THE WORD! We will attempt to use several historical facts and prove the Scriptures are, indeed, accurate and can be placed, with some degree of accuracy, in chronological order. For this, we are indebted to the one man who is most often cited in secular writings as being the one whose gospel is not accurate, Luke, the beloved physician.

The first historical reference in our timeline is the death of Herod the Great, king of Judea. The second chapter of Matthew's gospel tells the story of the visit of the wise men to pay homage to the newborn King of the Jews. They are told by Herod to return to him after their trip to Bethlehem, so he can also go to worship the king. Herod is fooled by the wise men who do not return to Jerusalem, but use a different route to return to their own country. He then issues orders to his soldiers to kill all the male children in Bethlehem under two years of age. But Joseph has already taken Mary & the child and flees to Egypt. Sometime after this, Herod dies and Joseph and his family return to Israel. Many scholars use these facts to prove the story of Herod's infanticide cannot possibly be real for Herod died in 4 B.C., four years before our Lord was even born! Let's put this puppy to rest and show how the Scripture and history can line up.

There are enough historical documents to prove Herod the Great died in the year we refer to as 4 B.C. In fact, some scholars have used these same documents to show Herod died the night of April 14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> in the year 4 B.C. We will not dispute this fact. If Herod died 4 years before Jesus was born, how then could the story of the Wise Men and the subsequent murder of the infants in Bethlehem be real? This is a very simple question to answer. The truth is Jesus was NOT born when we believe he was but was, in fact, born BEFORE 4 B.C. The Scripture is not wrong and neither is history if we believe He was born in Bethlehem 5 years before our present calendar says he was. History is not wrong in saying Herod died in 4 B.C., nor is the Scripture wrong in saying Joseph and his family were in Egypt at that time. IT IS OUR CALENDAR THAT IS WRONG! End of point 1.

The next date we will attempt to coincide with true history has to do with the onset of the ministry of John the Baptist. Luke starts off the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter of his gospel with the statement, "Now in the 15<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar," John the Baptist begins his ministry. History tells us Tiberius Caesar began his reign on the death of Octavius, a.k.a. Augustus Caesar. There is no doubt Octavius died in the year we know as 14 A.D. Doing the math, we come to the conclusion the year is 29 A.D. This date coincides with our present calendar but does not coincide with the date previously mentioned, that of the death of Herod the Great. If Jesus was born before Herod's death (5 B.C.) how could he possibly be around 30 years old, as Luke 3:23 says he was? Wouldn't he be around 34 years old at this time? ( $29+5=34$  even without using Common Core math) The answer to this perplexing problem can be solved just as simply as the previous dilemma was, if we use a few historical facts.

Octavius Caesar began his illustrious rule over the Roman Empire in the year 40 B.C., no questions asked. After Julius Caesar was assassinated in 44 B.C., war raged for 4 years between the forces of Octavius, Caesar's rightful heir, and Marc Antony's forces before Antony's forces were finally defeated in Egypt. Octavius began a long and prosperous reign over the Roman Empire that would last 54 years (yes, he was a young man when he began to rule). Near the end of his reign, he began to look for a worthy successor who would carry on after his death. He chose one of his most capable generals, Tiberius Claudius Nero, known to the world simply as Tiberius. Tiberius politely refused, forcing the emperor to look elsewhere. Octavius found and, on different occasions, named successors. These successors either died or fell into disfavor. Around 10 A.D. Octavius once again approached Tiberius as a successor. Tiberius, realizing there was no one else who would be an able emperor, accepted.

At this point we will inject a little detail into our story on Tiberius' character. Later in his reign, he would lose interest in ruling the empire, but at this point he had one overwhelming character trait many do not possess in this day and age. Tiberius had, above all else, a servant attitude. He did and would do everything in his power for the benefit of others. Realizing no one who could be emperor was still alive, he reluctantly stepped forward and acceded to Octavius' request to succeed him. Tiberius' decision came at a great cost to this servant heart. It was customary for the next emperor to be the son of the reigning emperor. Octavius had to adopt Tiberius as his son in order for him (Tiberius) to become the next emperor. Tiberius was also forced to divorce his wife (by his own admission, the one true love in his entire life) in order to marry Octavius' choice for him as a wife.

What has all this to do with our historical/scriptural discussion? Simply this one fact. Around 10 A.D. Augustus signed a decree naming Tiberius second princeps (ruler) in the empire. At this point, Tiberius took over the day-to-day operation of the empire, under the guidance of the aging Octavius. We ask again, what has this all to do with our discussion? Luke, in the opinion of this writer, viewed the year 10 A.D. as the first year of the reign of Tiberius as did the rest of the empire, not 14 A.D. The year 25 A.D. then becomes the 15<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Tiberius (which is also the 1<sup>st</sup> year of Pontius Pilate's governorship over Judea) and the Lord Jesus Christ is now about 30 years old, just as Luke says. See, no discrepancies so far. Thank You for recording all the details, Luke!

There are 3 more dates we will discuss then start our chronology. The book of Acts contains very little detail concerning our timeline of Scripture, yet, the little we find in Acts is all we need in order to form a timeline of Scripture (Thank You again, Luke!). Acts chapter 12 gives us the details of the death of James, the imprisonment and subsequent release of Peter and, most importantly, the death of Herod Agrippa I. History tells us Agrippa I died in the year 44 A.D. This date is perfectly acceptable to our Scriptural timeline and can be used to help determine and verify other events in the book of Acts.

Acts 18:2 gives us another facet of our timeline. The meeting between Paul, Aquilla and wife Priscilla seems to be only a passing reference at first. But we find, upon closer examination, a very important detail, often overlooked. Luke states the couple recently came from Rome BECAUSE CLAUDIUS HAD COMMANDED ALL JEWS TO DEPART FROM ROME! Claudius Caesar issued a decree around February 49 A.D. calling the Jews a very "Pestilent people" and banning them from the imperial capital of Rome. This date places Acts 18 shortly after.

The final, and most important, date to the timeline concerning Acts is also mentioned in Acts 18:12. The Scripture tells us Gallio (Lucius Junius Gallio Ananianus) was procurator of Achaia at this time. This is another Scripture which, seems to be simply a matter of fact, but, in reality, is the one date we can use to place everything else in Acts in its proper time sequence. We know from history, Gallio was appointed procurator to the newly formed district of Achaia in the spring of 51 A.D. He was procurator of this area for 1 year only, and was recalled the following year due to ill health. A set of inscriptions found in Delphi in the 1960's mentions him by name. The Delphi inscriptions, as they are known, are a set of letters or letter written by the emperor Claudius to the area of Delphi and informing the people he was well aware of their misfortunes because of "My dear friend, Gallio."

We now begin the timeline of the New Testament, using these dates as guideposts.