

# Errors of Josephus



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By

The Precious Blood of Jesus Christ,  
The Grace of the God of the Holy Catholic Church,  
The Mediation of the Blessed Virgin Mary,  
Our Lady of Good Counsel and Crusher of Heretics,  
The Protection of Saint Joseph, Patriarch of the Holy Family,  
The Intercession of Saint Michael the Archangel  
and the cooperation of

Richard Joseph Michael Ibranyi

To Jesus through Mary

*Júdica me, Deus, et discérne causam meam de gente non sancta:  
ab hómine iníquo, et dolóso érue me*

Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam

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## Abbreviations

AJ: *Antiquities of the Jews*, by Josephus  
Wars: *The Wars of the Jews*, by Josephus

## The Works of Josephus Are Fallible and Contain Errors

As a fallible historian, Josephus made mistakes regarding events, persons, and dates in his otherwise good record of history of the Jews. The same is true of any fallible historian or chronologist. Beware, then, of those who idolize Josephus and place his fallible works above the inerrant Catholic Bible and other infallible Catholic sources.

### Erred on Nehemias' Getting the Decree in 25<sup>th</sup> Year of Xerxes instead of the 20<sup>th</sup> Year of Artaxerxes

Josephus erroneously says that Nehemias got the decree to rebuild the walls and the rest of Jerusalem from Xerxes the Great, the son of Darius the Great, and in the 25<sup>th</sup> year of his reign. But he correctly says that Artaxerxes (Longimanus) succeeded Xerxes:

AJ, 11:5:1: “UPON the death of Darius, Xerxes his son took the kingdom, who, as he inherited his father’s kingdom, so did he inherit his piety towards God, and honor of him; for he did all things suitably to his father relating to Divine worship, and he was exceeding friendly to the Jews.”

AJ, 11:5: “6. Now there was one of those Jews that had been carried captive who was cup-bearer to king Xerxes; his name was Nehemiah... 7. Now when he was come to Babylon, and had taken with him many of his countrymen, who voluntarily followed him, he came to Jerusalem in the twenty and fifth year of the reign of Xerxes.”

AJ, 11:6:1: “AFTER the death of Xerxes, the kingdom came to be transferred to his son Cyrus, whom the Greeks called Artaxerxes. When this man had obtained the government over the Persians, the whole nation of the Jews, with their wives and children, were in danger of perishing; the occasion whereof we shall declare in a little time; for it is proper, in the first place, to explain somewhat relating to this king, and how he came to marry a Jewish wife, who was herself of the royal family also, and who is related to have saved our nation; for when Artaxerxes had taken the kingdom, and had set governors over the hundred twenty and seven provinces, from India even unto Ethiopia...”

But the Catholic Bible says that Nehemias got the Decree to rebuild the walls and the rest of Jerusalem from Artaxerxes Longimanus in the 20<sup>th</sup> year of his reign and gave it to the Jews several months later:

“And it came to pass in the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes the king: that wine was before him, and I [Nehemias] took up the wine, and gave it to the king: and I was as one languishing away before his face... Then the king said to me: For what dost thou make request? And I prayed to the God of heaven, and I said to the king: If it seem good to the king, and if thy servant hath found favour in thy sight, that thou wouldst send me into Judea to the city of the sepulchre of my father, and I will build it. And the king said to me, and the queen that sat by him: For how long shall thy journey be, and when wilt thou return? And it pleased the king, and he sent me: and I fixed him a time.” (2 Esd. 2:1, 4-6)

Hence Josephus' history gives the wrong king and the wrong year of the king's reign regarding the Decree given to Nehemias to rebuild the walls and the rest of Jerusalem. He says that Nehemias got the Decree from Xerxes the Great; but the Bible says Nehemias got the Decree from Artaxerxes, son of Xerxes the Great. And Josephus says that Nehemias got the Decree in the 25<sup>th</sup> year of the king, but the Bible says Nehemias got the Decree in the 20<sup>th</sup> year of the king. Hence Josephus was off by a king and by five years regarding the year of the king in which Nehemias got the Decree.

## **Erred by Five or Six Years Regarding the Death and Reign of Judas Machabeus**

There are several errors in Josephus' history of Judas Machabeus that contradict the biblical account and his own account:

- Josephus correctly says that Judas Machabeus began his reign in 166 BC. The Bible also says Judas Machabeus began his reign in 166 BC and in the month of December.
- Josephus incorrectly says that Antiochus Eupator made Alcimus the high priest. The Bible says that Demetrius I, who succeeded Antiochus Eupator, made Alcimus the high priest.
- Josephus incorrectly says that Judas Machabeus was alive when the high priest Alcimus died. The Bible says that Alcimus died during the reign of Jonathan after Judas had been dead for 13 months.
- Josephus says that Judas Machabeus was made high priest after Alcimus died. The Bible does not say Judas was a high priest, although he may have been.
- Josephus incorrectly says Alcimus was high priest for four years, but elsewhere he says Alcimus was high priest for three years. The Bible says Alcimus was high priest for two years.
- Josephus incorrectly places the death of Judas Machabeus in 155 or 154 BC. The Bible says Judas died in Nisan 160 BC.

Hence Josephus erred by five or six years regarding the death and reign of Judas Machabeus. The Bible says Judas Machabeus died in Nisan 160 BC in the 6<sup>th</sup> year of his reign after reigning for five years and four months from December 166 BC to March/April 160 BC. Whereas, Josephus says Judas Machabeus died in 155 or 154 BC in the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> year of his reign after reigning for ten or eleven years.

## **Correct about Judas beginning his reign in 166 BC**

Josephus correctly has Judas Machabeus begin his reign when his father Mathathias died in the 146<sup>th</sup> year of the Seleucid Era:

AJ, 12:6: “4. When Mattathias had thus discoursed to his sons, and had prayed to God to be their assistant, and to recover to the people their former constitution, he died a little afterward, and was buried at Modin; all the people making great lamentation for him. Whereupon his son Judas took upon him the administration of public affairs, in the hundred forty and sixth year; and thus, by the ready assistance of his brethren, and of others, Judas cast their enemies out of the country, and put those of their own country to death who had transgressed its laws, and purified the land of all the pollutions that were in it.”

Josephus dates years of the Seleucid Era by the post-dating method and the Hebrew sacred calendar, just as the author of the First Book of Machabees does. Hence Josephus begins the 146<sup>th</sup> year of the Seleucid Era (146 SE-n) on Nisan 1, 166 BC and ends it on Adar 29, 165 BC. In 1 Machabees 2:49-70, the Catholic Bible also records the death of Mathathias in 146 SE-n and in the month of December:

“Now the days drew near that Mathathias should die... And he died in the hundred and forty-sixth year: and he was buried by his sons in the sepulchres of his fathers in Modin, and all Israel mourned for him with great mourning.” (1 Mac. 2:49, 70)

(For proof that Mathathias died in December 166 BC, see my book *Biblical Chronology of the Machabees*: “(1 Mac. 4:26-61) (2 Mac. 10:1-8) SE/Y - Judas beats Lysias, rededicates Temple on Casleu 25, 148 SE-n, in December 164 BC.”)

### **Correct about death of Antiochus Epiphanes in 149 SE-n in 163 BC**

Josephus correctly records the death of Antiochus Epiphanes in the 149<sup>th</sup> year of the Seleucid Era (149 SE-n). And he correctly teaches that Antiochus Eupator succeeded his father Antiochus Epiphanes:

AJ, 12:9: “2. ...This Antiochus [Epiphanes] died in the hundred forty and ninth year; but it was Lysias that declared his death to the multitude, and appointed his son Antiochus to be king, (of whom at present he had the care,) and called him Eupator.”

149 SE-n began on Nisan 1, 163 BC and ended on Adar 29, 162 BC. Other information from the Bible shows that Antiochus Epiphanes died on any day from Nisan 1 to Nisan 14, 163 BC. (See my book *Biblical Chronology of the Machabees*: “Antiochus Epiphanes dies in 149 SE-n in 148 SE-t in 163 BC.”) The First Book of Machabees also places the death of Antiochus Epiphanes in 149 SE-n:

“So king Antiochus died there in the year one hundred and forty-nine.” (1 Mac. 6:16)

### **Says Judas Machabeus besieged Jerusalem castle in 150 SE in 162 or 161 BC**

Josephus says that Judas Machabeus besieged the castle in Jerusalem in the 150<sup>th</sup> year of the Seleucid Era when Antiochus Eupator was king:

AJ, 12:9: “2. ...This Antiochus died in the hundred forty and ninth year; but it was Lysias that declared his death to the multitude, and appointed his son Antiochus to be king, (of whom at present he had the care,) and called him Eupator. 3. At this time it was that the garrison in the citadel of Jerusalem, with the Jewish runagates, did a great deal of harm to the Jews; for the soldiers that were in that garrison rushed out upon the sudden, and destroyed such as were going up to the temple in order to offer their sacrifices, for this citadel adjoined to and overlooked the temple. When these misfortunes had often happened to them, Judas resolved to destroy that garrison; whereupon he got all the people together, and vigorously

besieged those that were in the citadel. This was in the hundred and fiftieth year of the dominion of the Seleucids.”

150 SE-n began on Nisan 1, 162 BC and ended on Adar 29, 161 BC.

### **Incorrect about Alcimus being made high priest by Antiochus Eupator**

Josephus incorrectly says that Antiochus Eupator made Alcimus the high priest sometime after Judas besieged the castle in Jerusalem:

AJ, 12:9, How Antiochus Eupator fought against Juda and besieged him in the temple and afterwards made peace with him and departed; of Alcimus and Onias: “7. The king [Antiochus Eupator] had slain...Menelaus, and given the high priesthood to Alcimus...”

The Bible says that King Demetrius I made Alcimus the high priest after Demetrius killed Antiochus Eupator:

“Demetrius the son of Seleucus departed from the city of Rome, and came up with a few men into a city of the sea coast, and reigned there... Then the king chose Bacchides, one of his friends that ruled beyond the great river in the kingdom, and was faithful to the king: and he sent him, to see the havock that Judas had made: and the wicked Alcimus he made high priest, and commanded him to take revenge upon the children of Israel.” (1 Mac. 7:1, 8-9)

(See my book *Biblical Chronology of the Machabees*: “Demetrius makes Alcimus high priest in 151 SE-n in 150 SE-t in 161 BC.”) But Josephus has Alcimus being made high priest by King Antiochus Eupator instead of by King Demetrius I. According to Josephus, Alcimus was made high priest sometime after Judas Machabeus besieged the castle at Jerusalem in 162 or 161 BC and thus in either 162 or 161 BC.

### **Incorrect about Alcimus being high priest for four years but elsewhere for three years**

In one place Josephus says that Alcimus was high priest for three years:

AJ, 20:10:1: “Now when Jacimus had retained the priesthood three years, he died...”

Josephus tells us that Jacimus was another name for Alcimus:

AJ, 12:9:7: “After the death of Menelaus, Alcimus, who was also called Jacimus, was made high priest.”

But in another place Josephus says that Alcimus was high priest for four years:

AJ, 12:10:6: “But now as the high priest Alcimus was resolving to pull down the wall of the sanctuary, which had been there of old time, and had been built by the holy prophets, he was smitten suddenly by God, and fell down. This stroke made him fall down speechless upon the ground; and undergoing torments for many days, he at length died, when he had been high priest four years. And when he was dead, the people bestowed the high priesthood on Judas...”

But the Bible says Alcimus was high priest for two years. It says Alcimus was made high priest by King Demetrius I during the reign of Judas Machabeus in 151 SE-n and died in 153 SE-n:

“**In the hundred and fifty-first year** Demetrius the son of Seleucus departed from the city of Rome, and came up with a few men into a city of the sea coast... to see the havock that Judas had made: and the wicked Alcimus he made high priest, and commanded him to take revenge upon the children of Israel.” (1 Mac. 7:1, 9)



“Now **in the year one hundred and fifty-three**, the second month, Alcimus commanded the walls of the inner court of the sanctuary to be thrown down, and the works of the prophets to be destroyed: and he began to destroy. At that time Alcimus was struck: and his works were hindered, and his mouth was stopped, and he was taken with a palsy, so that he could no more speak a word, nor give order concerning his house. And Alcimus died at that time in great torment.” (1 Mac. 9:54-56)

Hence Alcimus died in the 2<sup>nd</sup> month of Iyyar in 153 SE-n, which falls in April/May 159 BC. And the Bible says that Alcimus was made high priest on any day from Nisan 1 to Elul 29, 161 BC, which falls within 151 SE-n. (See my book *Biblical Chronology of the Machabees*: “(1 Mac. 9:54-56) SE - Alcimus tries to destroy the Temple walls and is struck by God and dies in 2<sup>nd</sup> month of 153 SE-n in 159 BC after a two-year rule.”) Hence the Bible says Alcimus was high priest for two years. Whereas Josephus says that Alcimus was high priest for three or four years after beginning his reign in 162 or 161 BC, which places his death in 158 or 157 BC instead of the biblical account that places his death in Iyyar 159 BC.

### **Incorrect about Judas Machabeus being alive when Alcimus died**

Josephus incorrectly has Judas Machabeus being alive when Alcimus died. He says that after Alcimus died, Judas Machabeus was made the high priest:

AJ, 12:10: “6. But now as the high priest Alcimus was resolving to pull down the wall of the sanctuary, which had been there of old time, and had been built by the holy prophets, he was smitten suddenly by God, and fell down. This stroke made him fall down speechless upon the ground; and undergoing torments for many days, he at length died, when he had been high priest four years. And when he was dead, the people bestowed the high priesthood on Judas...”

But the Bible says that Alcimus died during the reign of Jonathan when Judas Machabeus had been dead for some time:

“And all the friends of Judas came together, and said to Jonathan: Since thy brother Judas died, there is not a man like him to go forth against our enemies, Bacchides, and them that are the enemies of our nation. Now therefore we have chosen thee this day to be our prince, and captain in his stead to fight our battles. So Jonathan took upon him the government at that time, and rose up in the place of Judas his brother... Now in the year one hundred and fifty-three, the second month, Alcimus commanded the walls of the inner court of the sanctuary to be thrown down, and the works of the prophets to be destroyed: and he began to destroy. At that time Alcimus was struck: and his works were hindered, and his mouth was stopped, and he was taken with a palsy, so that he could no more speak a word, nor give order concerning his house. And Alcimus died at that time in great torment.” (1 Mac. 9:28-31, 54-56)

Even though Judas Machabeus may have been the high priest, the Catholic Bible does not mention it. Nevertheless, Josephus erred by placing the death of Alcimus during the reign of Judas instead of during the reign of Jonathan:<sup>1</sup>

*Original Douay Commentary*, 1610 AD, on 1 Mac. 9:54: “(i) Josephus *li. 12. c. 17.* confesseth that Judas was high priest, but erreth in saying he succeeded after Alcimus: neither considering that Alcimus was not in deed high priest, but an usurper: nor that he lived after Judas: who was slain before this time v. 3 & 18. Whereby, and by many other such

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<sup>1</sup> Josephus seems to have corrected himself in book 20, chapter 10, section 1, in which he does not list Judas Machabeus as a high priest.

errors, we see that Josephus is rather to be corrected by this book than to disallow this book because it differeth from Josephus, or other like authors.”

*The Works of Josephus*, by William Whiston, 1989: AJ, 12:10:6, Footnote c: This account of the miserable death of Alcimus, or Jacimus, the wicked high priest, (the first that was not of the family of the high priests, and made by a vile heathen, Lysias,) before the death of Judas, and of Judas’s succession to him as high priest, both here, and at the conclusion of this book, directly contradicts 1 Macc. 9:54-57, which places his death after the death of Judas, and says not a syllable of the high priesthood of Judas.”

According to the Bible, Judas Machabeus died in 160 BC. But Josephus has Judas being alive in 158 or 157 BC when Alcimus died, and three more years after that.

### **Incorrect about death of Judas Machabeus in 155 or 154 BC, three years after the death of Alcimus**

Josephus then says that Judas Machabeus had been high priest for three years when he was slain:

AJ, 12:11: “2. ...And this was the end that Judas came to... And when he had retained the high priesthood three years, he died.”

Hence Josephus places the death of Judas Machabeus in 155 or 154 BC, three years after 158 or 157 BC when he says Alcimus died and Judas became high priest.

### **The Bible says Judas Machabeus died in 160 BC**

The Bible says that Judas Machabeus was slain in the 1<sup>st</sup> month of the 152<sup>nd</sup> year of the Seleucid Era (152 SE-n):

“In the first month of the hundred and fifty-second year they brought the army to Jerusalem... And the battle was hard fought, and there fell many wounded of the one side and of the other. And Judas was slain, and the rest fled away.” (1 Mac. 9:3, 17-18)

The first month of 152 SE-n was Nisan 160 BC. Thus the Bible records the death of Judas Machabeus in Nisan 160 BC. Whereas Josephus records the death of Judas in either 155 or 154 BC. Josephus, then, erred by five or six years regarding the reign and the death of Judas Machabeus. The Bible says Judas Machabeus died in Nisan 160 BC in the 6<sup>th</sup> year of his reign after reigning for five years and four months from December 166 BC to March/April 160 BC. Whereas, Josephus says Judas Machabeus died in 155 or 154 BC in the 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> year of his reign after reigning for ten or eleven years. Josephus likewise erred by placing the death of Herod the Great in 4 or 3 or 2 BC instead of in late 1 AD or early 2 AD.

### **Has Herod Taking Jerusalem in 36 BC, 37 BC, 38 BC, 39 BC, and 40 BC**

Josephus contradicts himself four times regarding the year that Herod took Jerusalem and began his reign. In one place he has Herod taking Jerusalem and beginning his reign in 36 BC, in another in 37 BC, in another in 38 BC, and in another in 41 BC.

## Has Herod begin his reign in 36 BC, 27 years after Pompey took Jerusalem in 63 BC

Josephus says that Pompey took Jerusalem in 63 BC under the Roman consuls Caius Antoninus and Marcus Tullius Cicero:

AJ, 14:4: “3. ...The city [Jerusalem] was taken [by Pompey] on the third month, on the day of the fast, upon the hundred and seventy-ninth olympiad, when Caius Antoninus and Marcus Tullius Cicero were consuls...”

The 179<sup>th</sup> Olympiad fell within 64, 63, 62, 61, and 60 BC. And Caius Antoninus and Marcus Tullius Cicero were consuls in 63 BC:

*Wikipedia*, “List of Roman Consuls”: “63 BC: M. Tullius Cicero – C. Antonius Hibrida.”

Josephus says that Herod took Jerusalem exactly 27 years after Pompey took Jerusalem:

AJ, 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, as if a periodical revolution of calamities had returned since that which befell the Jews under Pompey; for the Jews were taken by him on the same day, and this was after twenty-seven years’ time.”

Hence Josephus has Herod taking Jerusalem in 36 BC or 27 years after 63 BC (63 BC – 27 years = 36 BC). In this one sentence above, Josephus contradicts himself.

- He has Herod taking Jerusalem in 37 BC under the consuls Agrippa and Gallus.
- But he has Herod taking Jerusalem in 36 BC, 27 years after Pompey took Jerusalem, which he elsewhere says was in 63 BC.

## Has Herod begin his reign in 37 BC under the consuls Agrippa and Gallus

In his book *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus says that Herod took Jerusalem under the consuls Marcus Agrippa and Caninius Gallus, which was in 37 BC:

AJ, 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, as if a periodical revolution of calamities had returned since that which befell the Jews under Pompey; for the Jews were taken by him on the same day, and this was after twenty-seven years’ time...”

The 185<sup>th</sup> Olympiad began on July 17, 40 BC and ended on July 16, 36 BC. And 37 BC was “when Marcus Agrippa and Caninius Gallus were consuls of Rome”:

*Wikipedia*, “List of Roman Consuls”: “37 BC: M. Vipsanius Agrippa – L. Caninius Gallus.”

Hence in this place Josephus has Herod taking Jerusalem and beginning his reign in 37 BC.

## Has Herod begin his reign in 38 BC, 107 years before the fall of the Temple in 70 AD

In one place Josephus places Herod’s taking of Jerusalem in 38 BC. He says that Herod began his reign 107 years before the fall of the Temple in 70 AD, which is 38 BC:

AJ, 20:10: “1. ...Accordingly, the number of the high priests, from the days of Herod until the day when Titus took the temple and the City, and burnt them, were in all twenty-eight; the time also that belonged to them was a hundred and seven years. Some of these were the

political governors of the people under the reign of Herod, and under the reign of Archelaus his son, although, after their death, the government became an aristocracy, and the high priests were entrusted with a dominion over the nation. And thus much may suffice to be said concerning our high priests.”

Titus destroyed and burnt the Temple in 70 AD. And 107 years before that is 38 BC, when Josephus says Herod began his reign (70 AD – -38 BC – 1 = 107 years).

### **Has Herod begin his reign in 40 or 39 BC according to Josephus’ chronology of high priests**

In his book *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus gives a chronology of high priests. In the chronology from the time Jacimus became high priest in 162 or 161 BC to the time Herod took Jerusalem and had the high priest Antigonus killed was 122 years and 6 months, which places Herod’s taking Jerusalem and beginning his reign in 40 or 39 BC:

AJ, 20:10: “1. ...Now he and his posterity, who were in all fifteen, until king Antiochus Eupator, were under a democratical government for four hundred and fourteen years; and then the forementioned Antiochus, and Lysias the general of his army, deprived Onias, who was also called Menelaus, of the high priesthood, and slew him at Berea; and driving away the son [of Onias the third], put Jacimus into the place of the high priest, one that was indeed of the stock of Aaron, but not of that family of Onias. On which account Onias, who was the nephew of Onias that was dead, and bore the same name with his father, came into Egypt, and got into the friendship of Ptolemy Philometor, and Cleopatra his wife, and persuaded them to make him the high priest of that temple which he built to God in the prefecture of Heliopolis, and this in imitation of that at Jerusalem; but as for that temple which was built in Egypt, we have spoken of it frequently already. Now when Jacimus had retained the priesthood three years, he died, and there was no one that succeeded him, but the city continued seven years without a high priest. But then the posterity of the sons of Asamoneus, who had the government of the nation conferred upon them, when they had beaten the Macedonians in war, appointed Jonathan to be their high priest, who ruled over them seven years. And when he had been slain by the treacherous contrivance of Trypho, as we have related some where, Simon his brother took the high priesthood; and when he was destroyed at a feast by the treachery of his son-in-law, his own son, whose name was Hyrcanus, succeeded him, after he had held the high priesthood one year longer than his brother. This Hyrcanus enjoyed that dignity thirty years, and died an old man, leaving the succession to Judas, who was also called Aristobulus, whose brother Alexander was his heir; which Judas died of a sore distemper, after he had kept the priesthood, together with the royal authority; for this Judas was the first that put on his head a diadem for one year. And when Alexander had been both king and high priest twenty-seven years, he departed this life, and permitted his wife Alexandra to appoint him that should be high priest; so she gave the high priesthood to Hyrcanus, but retained the kingdom herself nine years, and then departed this life. The like duration [and no longer] did her son Hyrcanus enjoy the high priesthood; for after her death his brother Aristobulus fought against him, and beat him, and deprived him of his principality; and he did himself both reign, and perform the office of high priest to God. But when he had reigned three years, and as many months, Pompey came upon him, and not only took the city of Jerusalem by force, but put him and his children in bonds, and sent them to Rome. He also restored the high priesthood to Hyrcanus, and made him governor of the nation, but forbade him to wear a diadem. This Hyrcanus ruled, besides his first nine years, twenty-four years more, when Barzapharnes and Pacorus, the generals of the Parthians, passed over Euphrates, and fought with Hyrcanus, and took him alive, and made Antigonus, the son of Aristobulus, king; and when he had reigned three years and three months, Sosius and Herod besieged him, and took him, when Antony had him brought to Antioch, and slain there. Herod was then made king by the Romans, but did no longer appoint high priests out

of the family of Asamoneus; but made certain men to be so that were of no eminent families, but barely of those that were priests, excepting that he gave that dignity to Aristobulus; for when he had made this Aristobulus, the grandson of that Hyrcanus who was then taken by the Parthians, and had taken his sister Mariarmne to wife, he thereby aimed to win the goodwill of the people, who had a kind remembrance of Hyrcanus [his grandfather]. Yet did he afterward, out of his fear lest they should all bend their inclinations to Aristobulus, put him to death, and that by contriving how to have him suffocated as he was swimming at Jericho, as we have already related that matter; but after this man he never intrusted the priesthood to the posterity of the sons of Asamoneus. Archelaus also, Herod's son, did like his father in the appointment of the high priests, as did the Romans also, who took the government over the Jews into their hands afterward. Accordingly, the number of the high priests, from the days of Herod until the day when Titus took the temple and the City, and burnt them, were in all twenty-eight; the time also that belonged to them was a hundred and seven years. Some of these were the political governors of the people under the reign of Herod, and under the reign of Archelaus his son, although, after their death, the government became an aristocracy, and the high priests were entrusted with a dominion over the nation. And thus much may suffice to be said concerning our high priests."

Table: Josephus' Chronology of High Priests (AJ, 20:10:1)

BC	Span	High Priests
162 or 161	3 y	Jacimus (Alcimus)
159 or 158	7 y	No high priest
152 or 151	7 y	Jonathan, son of Mathathias
145 or 144	8 y	Simon, son of Mathathias
137 or 136	30 y	Hyrcanus I, son of Simon
107 or 106	1 y	Judas (Aristobulus), brother of Alexander
106 or 105	27 y	Alexander, brother of Judas
79 or 78	9 y	Hyrcanus II, son of Alexander
70 or 69	3 y, 3 m	Aristobolus, brother of Hyrcanus II
67 or 66	24 y	Hyrcanus II again
43 or 42	3 y, 3 m	Antigonus, son of Aristobolus
40 or 39		Death and end of reign of Antigonus
Total	122 y, 6 m	

Josephus places Antigonus' death and thus the end of his reign in the year that Herod took Jerusalem. Hence Josephus has Herod taking Jerusalem, procuring the death of Antigonus, and beginning his reign in 40 or 39 BC according to his chronology of high priests.

## Places the Death of Herod the Great from 6 BC to 1 BC

Because Josephus begins the reign of Herod the Great in different years (36 BC, 37 BC, 38 BC, 39 BC, and 40 BC) in different parts of his works, he likewise has Herod dying in different years according to his statement that Herod died 34 years after he took Jerusalem and began his reign:

AJ, 17:8: "1. ...When he had done those things, he died, the fifth day after he had caused Antipater to be slain; having reigned, since he procured Antigonus to be slain, thirty-four years; but since he had been declared king by the Romans, thirty-seven."

Hence Josephus places the death of Herod in 2 BC or 1 BC (36 BC – 34 y = 2 BC); and in 3 BC or 2 BC (37 BC – 34 y = 3 BC); and in 4 BC or 3 BC (38 BC – 34 y = 4 BC); and in 5 BC or 4 BC (39 – 34 y = 5 BC); and in 6 BC or 5 BC (40 BC – 34 y = 6 BC).

### **5 BC or 4 BC - Philip dies in 20<sup>th</sup> year of Tiberius after reigning for 37 years**

Philip became tetrarch when his father Herod the Great died. Josephus says that Philip died in the 20<sup>th</sup> year of Tiberius Caesar and reigned for 37 years:

AJ, 18:4: “6. Philip, Herod’s brother, 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 the Bataneans also, thirty-seven years...”

The 20<sup>th</sup> year of Tiberius Caesar began on August 19, 33 AD and ended on August 18, 34 AD. And 37 years from 33 AD is 5 BC, and 37 years from 34 AD is 4 BC. Hence Josephus places the death of Herod the Great in 5 BC or 4 BC in this part of his works, which contradicts three other parts of his works in which he places the death of Herod in 3 BC or 2 BC.

## **Josephus Usually Places Herod’s Death in January or February 2 BC**

### **Beware of the modern error that Herod died in 4 BC**

Beware of the modern and prevalent error which teaches that Herod the Great died in 4 BC and blames Josephus for this date. As you will learn, Josephus does not teach that Herod the Great died in 4 BC. But even if he did, he is not infallible. Most importantly, the Catholic Church’s ordinary magisterium condemns any birth date for Jesus that is before 3 BC. (See my book *Daniel’s Seventy-Weeks Prophecy: The Error That Herod the Great Died in 4 BC or Before*.)

### **Josephus says Herod was declared king of Jews by Romans in Rome in 40 BC**

Josephus says Herod was declared king of the Jews by the Romans in Rome in 40 BC:

AJ, 14:14: “4. ...Herod offered him [Marc Antony] money to make him king, as he had formerly given it him to make him tetrarch, and chiefly because of his hatred to Antigonus; for he took him to be a seditious person, and an enemy to the Romans. Caesar was also the forwarder to raise Herod’s dignity, and to give him his assistance in what he desired, on account of the toils of war which he had himself undergone with Antipater his father in Egypt, and of the hospitality he had treated him withal, and the kindness he had always showed him, as also to gratify Antony, who was very zealous for Herod. So a senate was convoked; and Messala first, and then Atratinus, introduced Herod into it, and enlarged upon the benefits they had received from his father, and put them in mind of the good-will he had borne to the Romans. At the same time, they accused Antigonus, and declared him an enemy, not only because of his former opposition to them, but that he had now overlooked the Romans, and taken the government from the Parthians. Upon this the senate was irritated; and Antony informed them further, that it was for their advantage in the Parthian war that Herod should be king. This seemed good to all the senators; and so they made a decree accordingly.

“5. And this was the principal instance of Antony’s affection for Herod, that he not only procured him a kingdom which he did not expect, (for he did not come with an intention to ask the kingdom for himself, which he did not suppose the Romans would grant him, who used to bestow it on some of the royal family, but intended to desire it for his wife’s brother, who was grandson by his father to Aristobulus, and to Hyrcanus by his mother,) but that he procured it for him so suddenly, that he obtained what he did not expect, and departed out of Italy in so few days as seven in all. This young man [the grandson] Herod afterward took care to have slain, as we shall show in its proper place. But when the senate was dissolved, Antony and Caesar went out of the senate house with Herod between them, and with the consuls and other magistrates before them, in order to offer sacrifices, and to lay up their decrees in the capitol. Antony also feasted Herod the first day of his reign. 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].”

The 184<sup>th</sup> Olympiad began on July 17, 44 BC and ended on July 16, 40 BC. And 40 BC was when Caius Domitius Calvinus was consul the second time and Caius Asinius Pollio was consul the first time:

*Wikipedia*, “List of Roman Consuls”: “40 BC: Cn. Domitius Calvinus II – C. Asinius Pollio.”

Hence according to Josephus, Herod was declared king of the Jews by the Romans in Rome sometime between January 1, 40 BC and July 16, 40 BC.

### **Josephus begins Herod’s reign on Sivan 23, 37 BC when Herod took Jerusalem and ruled over the Jews**

Josephus records 37 BC as the year that Herod took Jerusalem, imprisoned Antigonus (the legal king and high priest according to Josephus<sup>2</sup>), and actually ruled over the Jews as king:

Wars, 1:17: “9. When he [Herod] had thus married Mariamne, he came back to Jerusalem with a greater army. Sosius also joined him with a large army, both of horsemen and footmen, which he sent before him through the midland parts, while he marched himself along Phoenicia; and when the whole army was gotten together, which were eleven regiments of footmen, and six thousand horsemen, besides the Syrian auxiliaries, which were no small part of the army, they pitched their camp near to the north wall. Herod’s dependence was upon the decree of the senate, by which he was made king; and Sosius relied upon Antony, who sent the army that was under him to Herod’s assistance.”

AJ, 14:16: “1. The king [Herod] also came himself from Samaria, and brought with him no small army, besides that which was there before, for they were about thirty thousand; and they all met together at the walls of Jerusalem, and encamped at the north wall of the city, being now an army of eleven legions, armed men on foot, and six thousand horsemen, with other auxiliaries out of Syria. The generals were two: Sosius, sent by Antony to assist Herod, and Herod on his own account, in order to take the government from Antigonus, who was declared an enemy at Rome, and that he might himself be king, according to the decree of the Senate. 2. Now the Jews that were enclosed within the walls of the city fought against Herod with great alacrity and zeal (for the whole nation was gathered together)... 3. And now Herod having overcome his enemies, his care was to govern... 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, as if a periodical revolution of calamities had returned since that which befell the Jews under

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<sup>2</sup> According to some chronologists, Hyrcanus II was the legal ruler of the Asmonean line until 34 BC. And hence according to them, Herod did not begin to legally rule as king until 34 BC.

Pompey; for the Jews were taken by him on the same day, and this was after twenty-seven years' time. So when Sosius had dedicated a crown of gold to God, he marched away from Jerusalem, and carried Antigonus with him in bonds to Antony; but Herod was afraid lest Antigonus should be kept in prison [only] by Antony, and that when he was carried to Rome by him, he might get his cause to be heard by the senate, and might demonstrate, as he was himself of the royal blood, and Herod but a private man, that therefore it belonged to his sons however to have the kingdom, on account of the family they were of, in case he had himself offended the Romans by what he had done. 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. This family was a splendid and an illustrious one, both on account of the nobility of their stock, and of the dignity of the high priesthood, as also for the glorious actions their ancestors had performed for our nation; but these men lost the government by their dissensions one with another, and it came to Herod, the son of Antipater, who was of no more than a vulgar family, and of no eminent extraction, but one that was subject to other kings. And this is what history tells us was the end of the Asamonean family."

The 185<sup>th</sup> Olympiad began on July 17, 40 BC and ended on July 16, 36 BC. And 37 BC was "when Marcus Agrippa and Caninius Gallus were consuls of Rome."

*Wikipedia*, "List of Roman Consuls": "37 BC: M. Vipsanius Agrippa – L. Caninius Gallus."

And according to Josephus, Herod took Jerusalem in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Hebrew month of Sivan on the solemnity of the fast, which was the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of that month:

AJ, 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."

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Hebrew month is Sivan, which falls within May or June.<sup>3</sup> And the solemnity of the fast is on the 23<sup>rd</sup> day of the month, which falls in June. This annual fast was for the defection and idolatry of Jeroboam, "who made Israel to sin":

Jewish Calendar, Sivan 23: "After King Solomon's passing, Jeroboam ben Nebat, a member of the tribe of Ephraim, incited ten of the twelve tribes of Israel to rebel against Solomon's son and heir, Rehoboam. The Holy Land split into two kingdoms: the 'Kingdom of Israel' in the north, with Jeroboam as its king and the city of Samaria as its capital; and the southern 'Kingdom of Judah' with its capital Jerusalem, where Rehoboam ruled over the two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) that remained loyal to the royal house of David. The spiritual center of the land, however, remained Jerusalem, where the Holy Temple built by Solomon stood, and where every Jew was obligated to make a thrice-yearly pilgrimage for the festivals of Passover, Shavuot, and Sukkot. Seeing this as a threat to his sovereignty, Jeroboam set up, on Sivan 23 of that year, roadblocks to prevent the people's pilgrimage to Jerusalem, introducing instead the worship of two idols, in the form of gold calves, which he enshrined on the northern and southern boundaries of his realm. The barricades remained in place for 223 years, until Hosea ben Elah, the last king of the Northern Kingdom, had them removed on the 15<sup>th</sup> of Av of 574 BC. By then, the ten tribes residing there were already being expelled from the land in a series of invasions by various Assyrian and Babylonian kings. The last of these occurred in 556 BC, when Shalmanassar of Assyria completely conquered the Kingdom of Israel, destroyed its capital, exiled the last of the Israelites residing there, and resettled the land with foreign peoples from Kutha and Babylon. These peoples—later known as the 'Samaritans'—assumed a form of Judaism as their religion, but were never accepted as such by the Jewish people; they subsequently built their own temple on Mount

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<sup>3</sup> In rare cases the Hebrew month of Sivan can end in July.



Gerizzim and became bitter enemies of the Jews. The ‘Ten Lost Tribes of Israel’ were never heard from again...”

Hence, Herod took Jerusalem on Sivan 23 (June), 37 BC. And this is when most, including Josephus, begin the reign of Herod the Great. For example, *Chandler’s Encyclopedia, An Epitome of Universal Knowledge*, 1898, places the beginning of Herod’s reign in 37 BC when Herod took Jerusalem and began to rule over the Jews. And he places the death of Herod in 1 AD:

**Herod, THE GREAT, 62 B.C.–A.D. 1. Son of Antipater, an Edomite. By Roman influence he set aside the Maccabean family and was made King of Judea 37 B.C. His rule was vigorous, politic, jealous, and cruel.—His sons, ARCHELAUS and HEROD ANTIPAS, succeeded to portions of his power; the latter executed John Baptist, mocked Christ, and was exiled 39.—HEROD AGRIPPA I. reigned 37–44; his son and namesake, King of Chalcis 50, encountered St. Paul 60. See AGRIPPA.**

However, the Roman historian Cassius Dio says that Herod took Jerusalem under the consuls Claudius and Norbanus, which was 38 BC:

Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, book 49: “22. These people Antony entrusted to a certain Herod to govern; but Antigonus he bound to a cross and flogged,—a punishment no other king had suffered at the hands of the Romans,—and afterwards slew him. 23. This was the course of events in the consulship of Claudius and Norbanus.”

*Wikipedia*, “List of Roman Consuls”: “38 BC: Ap. Claudius Pulcher – C. Norbanus Flaccus.”

*Josephus counts regnal years by the post-dating method and Hebrew sacred calendar and thus begins the 1<sup>st</sup> year of Herod on Nisan 1, 36 BC*

While Josephus begins the reign of Herod the Great on Sivan 23 (June), 37 BC when Herod took Jerusalem, he begins the 1<sup>st</sup> year of Herod’s reign on Nisan 1, 36 BC. To count regnal years, Josephus uses the post-dating method and the Hebrew sacred calendar, which begins the New Year on Nisan 1. Hence he records the accession year of Herod from Sivan 23 (June), 37 BC to Adar 29, 36 BC. And he begins the 1<sup>st</sup> year of the reign of Herod on Nisan 1, 36 BC. (See my book *Dating Events by Eras and Reigns: Post-dating method*.) For example, the author of the First Book of Machabees and Josephus both record the death of Antiochus Epiphanes in the 149<sup>th</sup> year of the Seleucid era, according to the post-dating method and the Hebrew sacred calendar:

AJ, 12:9: “2. ... This Antiochus died in the hundred forty and ninth year; but it was Lysias that declared his death to the multitude, and appointed his son Antiochus to be king, (of whom at present he had the care,) and called him Eupator.”

“So king Antiochus died there in the year one hundred and forty-nine.” (1 Mac. 6:16)

If they had used the Hebrew civil calendar with Tishri 1 as the New Year’s Day, then Antiochus would have died in the 148<sup>th</sup> year of the Seleucid era, as is recorded by the author of the Second Book of Machabees, who used the Hebrew civil calendar. (See my book *Biblical Chronology of the Machabees: The Seleucid Era*.) This is one proof that Josephus used the post-dating method and the Hebrew sacred calendar with Nisan 1 as the New Year’s Day to count regnal years.

### *Josephus records the Battle of Actium in 30 BC in Herod's 7<sup>th</sup> year*

The accepted date for the victory of the famous Battle of Actium, in which Caesar Augustus defeated Marc Antony, is September 2, 31 BC. However, Josephus dates the victory in autumn 30 BC. He says that the battle began in the 187<sup>th</sup> Olympiad:

AJ, 15:5: "1. HEREUPON Herod held himself ready to go against the king of Arabia, because of his ingratitude to him, and because, after all, he would do nothing that was just to him, although Herod made the Roman war an occasion of delaying his own; for the battle at Actium was now expected, which fell into the hundred eighty and seventh olympiad, where Caesar and Antony were to fight for the supreme power of the world..."

The 187<sup>th</sup> Olympiad began on July 17, 32 BC and ended four years later on July 16, 28 BC. But Josephus narrows down the time span by saying that the Battle of Actium took place in the 7<sup>th</sup> year of Herod the Great. The 7<sup>th</sup> year of Herod the Great, according to Josephus' post-dating method and the Hebrew sacred calendar, began on Nisan 1, 30 BC and ended on Adar 29, 29 BC.

$(7 - 1) + -36$ , Nisan 1 = -30 BC, Nisan 1 to 29 BC, Adar 29

So according to Josephus the Battle of Actium was at its height within this span of time. And he narrows this down further by saying the battle was at its height in the spring:

Wars, 1:19: "3. ...Herod...in the seventh year of his reign, when the war about Actium was at the height, at the beginning of the spring."

In the 7<sup>th</sup> year of Herod the Great, spring fell in 30 BC. Hence, according to Josephus, the Battle of Actium was at its height in the spring of 30 BC. And if it ended in September, as others said, then it would have ended in September 30 BC according to Josephus. But according to others it ended on September 2, 31 BC.

Even if Josephus had used the anniversary-dating method, which he did not, the spring of the 7<sup>th</sup> year of Herod the Great would have fallen in 30 BC:

$(7 - 1) + -37$  BC, June = -31 BC, June to 30 BC, May

And the springtime of this span of time falls in 30 BC. Hence even if Josephus had used the anniversary-dating method, the spring when the Battle of Actium was at its height during the 7<sup>th</sup> year of Herod was the spring of 30 BC.

### **Josephus says Herod died 34 years after taking Jerusalem in June 37 BC**

In his books *Antiquities of the Jews* and *The Wars of the Jews*, Josephus says that Herod died 37 years after he was declared king by the Romans at Rome and 34 years after he procured the death of Antigonus on Sivan 23 (June), 37 BC, when he took Jerusalem:

AJ, 17:8: "1. ...When he had done those things, he died, the fifth day after he had caused Antipater to be slain; having reigned, since he procured Antigonus to be slain, thirty-four years; but since he had been declared king by the Romans, thirty-seven."

Wars, 1:33: "8. So Herod, having survived the slaughter of his son five days, died, having reigned thirty-four years since he had caused Antigonus to be slain, and obtained his kingdom; but thirty-seven years since he had been made king by the Romans. Now as for his fortune, it was prosperous in all other respects, if ever any other man could be so, since, from a private man, he obtained the kingdom, and kept it so long, and left it to his own sons; but still in his domestic affairs he was a most unfortunate man. Now, before the soldiers knew of

his death, Salome and her husband came out and dismissed those that were in bonds, whom the king had commanded to be slain, and told.”

- Josephus says Herod was declared king by the Romans in Rome in 40 BC and died 37 years later, which falls within 3 BC to 2 BC.

(40 BC – 37 years = 3 BC to 2 BC)

- Josephus says Herod took Jerusalem and procured the death of Antigonus on Sivan 23 (June), 37 BC and died 34 years later, which falls within Sivan 23 (June) 3 BC and Sivan 22 (June), 2 BC.

(Sivan 23, 37 BC – 34 years = Sivan 23, 3 BC to Sivan 22, 2 BC)

Hence Josephus places the death of Herod within the year from Sivan 23 (June), 3 BC to Sivan 22 (June), 2 BC.

### **Josephus places the death of Herod about one or two months before Passover**

And Josephus places the death of Herod about one to two months before Passover. The sequence of events from Herod’s death to Passover could not have taken more than two months, as recorded by Josephus in his book *Antiquities of the Jews*, book 17, chapters 8 and 9:

AJ, book 17: “8:1. Herod...died, the fifth day after he had caused Antipater to be slain... 8:3. After this was over, they prepared his funeral... 8.4. Now Archelaus paid so much respect, as to continue his mourning till the seventh day... 9:3. Now, upon the approach of that feast of unleavened bread, which the law of their fathers had appointed for the Jews at this time, which feast is called the Passover, ...the seditious lamented Judas and Matthias.”

1. Herod dies. (AJ, 17:8:1)
2. His funeral lasted seven days.
3. Archelaus had a feast for the people.
4. Jews made requests to Archelaus including vengeance for the death of Matthias and other zealots.
5. Archelaus tried to pacify them with several attempts but then killed them during Passover. (AJ, 17:9:3)

### **Hence Josephus places the death of Herod in January or February 2 BC**

Thus Josephus places the death of Herod in January or February 2 BC, about one or two months before Passover, after reigning 34 years from June 37 BC and in the 34<sup>th</sup> year of his reign, of which the 1<sup>st</sup> year of his reign began on Nisan 1, 36 BC.

## Josephus says Archelaus was banished in the 9<sup>th</sup> year of his reign in 7 AD, which places Herod's death in January or February 2 BC

Archelaus, the son of Herod the Great, succeeded his father not as king but as ethnarch of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea:

AJ, 17:11: "4. When Caesar had heard these pleadings, he dissolved the assembly; but a few days afterwards he appointed Archelaus, not indeed to be king of the whole country, but ethnarch of the one half of that which had been subject to Herod, and promised to give him the royal dignity hereafter, if he governed his part virtuously. But as for the other half, he divided it into two parts, and gave it to two other of Herod's sons, to Philip and to Antipas, that Antipas who disputed with Archelaus for the whole kingdom. Now to him it was that Peres and Galilee paid their tribute, which amounted annually to two hundred talents, while Batanea, with Trachonitis, as well as Auranitis, with a certain part of what was called the *House of Zenodorus*, paid the tribute of one hundred talents to Philip; but Idumea, and Judea, and the country of Samaria paid tribute to Archelaus."

Because Josephus records the death of Herod the Great in January or February 2 BC, he begins the 1<sup>st</sup> year of Archelaus on Nisan 1 (March/April), 2 BC even though Archelaus ascended to his ethnarch before that, which would count as his accession year. And Josephus says that Archelaus ended his reign when he was banished by Caesar to Vienna, a city of Gaul, in the 9<sup>th</sup> year of his reign:

Wars, 2:7: "3. ...And now Archelaus took possession of his ethnarchy...and in the ninth year of his government he was banished to Vienna, a city of Gaul, and his effects were put into Caesar's treasury..."

According to Josephus, then, the 9<sup>th</sup> year of Archelaus began on Nisan 1, 7 AD and ended on Adar 29, 8AD.

$(9 - 1) + -2 \text{ BC, Nisan } 1 = +6 + 1 = 7 \text{ AD, Nisan } 1 \text{ to } 8 \text{ AD, Adar } 29$

Josephus records the banishment of Archelaus about one year, more or less, before the 37<sup>th</sup> year of Caesar's victory over Marc Antony at the Battle of Actium:

AJ, 18:2: "1. WHEN Cyrenius had now disposed of Archelaus's money, and when the taxings were come to a conclusion, which were made in the thirty-seventh year of Caesar's victory over Antony at Actium..."

It had to take Cyrenius a year, more or less, to dispose of Archelaus' possessions. Hence Archelaus was banished about a year, more or less, before the 37<sup>th</sup> year of the Battle of Actium, which, according to Josephus and the post-dating method and Hebrew sacred calendar, began on Nisan 1, 8 AD and ended on Adar 29, 9 AD. Josephus places the victory of the Battle of Actium in autumn 30 BC. (See in this book "[Josephus records the Battle of Actium in 30 BC in Herod's 7th year](#)," p. 18.)

$(37 - 1) + -29 \text{ BC, Nisan } 1 = +7 + 1 = 8 \text{ AD, Nisan } 1 \text{ to } 9 \text{ AD, Adar } 29$

Therefore, Archelaus was banished about a year, more or less, before any day from Nisan 1, 8 AD to Adar 29, 9 AD, which is in the range of Archelaus' banishment in his 9<sup>th</sup> year, as recorded by Josephus, which could have been on any day from Nisan 1, 7 AD to Adar 29, 8 AD.

However, it must be mentioned that Josephus contradicts himself by teaching elsewhere that Archelaus was banished in the 10<sup>th</sup> year of his reign:

AJ, 17:13: "2. But in the tenth year of Archelaus's government, both his brethren, and the principal men of Judea and Samaria, not being able to bear his barbarous and tyrannical

usage of them, accused him before Caesar...And when he was come [to Rome], Caesar, upon hearing what certain accusers of his had to say, and what reply he could make, both banished him, and appointed Vienna, a city of Gaul...”

According to this record of Josephus, the 10<sup>th</sup> year of Archelaus began on Nisan 1, 8 AD and ended on Adar 29, 9 AD.

$(10 - 1) + -2 \text{ BC}, \text{ Nisan } 1 = +7 + 1 = 8 \text{ AD}, \text{ Nisan } 1 \text{ to } 9 \text{ AD}, \text{ Adar } 29$

By considering both contradictory records of Josephus, the range of possible years for Archelaus' banishment is from Nisan 1, 7AD to Adar 29, 9 AD. The Roman historian Cassius Dio places the banishment of Archelaus in 7 AD under the consuls Caecilius Metellus and Licinius Silanus:

Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, book 55: “27. ...Herod of Palestine, who was accused by his brothers of some wrongdoing or other, was banished beyond the Alps and a portion of the domain was confiscated to the state. ... 29. ...And when winter set in they did much greater damage, for they even invaded Macedonia again. As for these forces, now, Rhoemetalces and his brother Rhascyporis checked them by a battle; and as for the others, they did not come to the defence of their country when it was later ravaged (in the consulship of Caecilius Metellus and Licinius Silanus) [7 AD], but took refuge in the mountain fortresses, from which they made raiding expeditions whenever the chance offered.”

*Wikipedia*, “List of Roman Consuls”: “7 AD: Q. Caecilius Metellus Creticus Silanus – A. Licinius Nerva Silanus.”

This confirms Josephus' teaching that Archelaus was banished in the 9<sup>th</sup> year of his reign and about a year, more or less, before the 37<sup>th</sup> year of the Battle of Actium.

However, the best opinion that Christ was born in 2 BC and Herod the Great died in January or February 2 AD does not support Josephus' teachings that the 1<sup>st</sup> year of Archelaus began on Nisan 1, 2 BC and that he was banished in the 9<sup>th</sup> year of his reign in 7 AD. According to the best opinion, the 1<sup>st</sup> year of Archelaus began on Nisan 1, 2 AD and he was banished in the 6<sup>th</sup> year of his reign in 7 AD. Hence Josephus was off by three years according to the best opinion as to when Herod died, just as he was off by five or six years regarding the death and reign of Judas Machabeus. (See in this book “[Erred by Five or Six Years Regarding the Death and Reign of Judas Machabeus](#),” p. 6.)

## **Josephus records a lunar eclipse about 6 to 24 months before Herod the Great died**

Josephus records the occurrence of a lunar eclipse the night after Herod killed some zealots, after which Herod's pains from his mortal disease increased:

AJ, 17:6: “4. ...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. 5. But now Herod's distemper greatly increased upon him after a severe manner, and this by God's judgment upon him for his sins.”

This lunar eclipse occurred when Herod was already inflicted with his fatal disease, which increased after the eclipse. Events recorded by Josephus that took place from this eclipse to the death of Herod had to take at least 6 months and probably anywhere from 12 to 24 months to accomplish. And Josephus also places the death of Herod about one to two months before Passover. Below are key events recorded by Josephus from the time Herod got his fatal disease, to the time of the eclipse when his disease got worse, to his death, and to his son Archelaus' mourning him and celebrating Passover and going to Rome to be confirmed as ruler. For these

events, see *Antiquities of the Jews*, book 17, chapters 6 to 9, and *The Wars of the Jews*, book 1, chapter 33, and book 2, chapters 1 to 2.

1. Herod got his fatal disease and sent ambassadors to Rome. (AJ, 17:6:1)
2. Herod killed Matthias and the eclipse occurred that night and his disease increased. (AJ, 17:6:4)
3. Herod went beyond the Jordan River and bathed in the warm waters of Calirrhoe. (Wars, 1:33:5)
4. Herod bathed in a vessel of oil, which only made his disease worse.
5. Herod gave many soldiers money.
6. Herod went to Jericho.
7. Herod called all the principal men of the entire Jewish nation, and when they came Herod imprisoned them in the Hippodrome. This had to take at least 6 months. (Wars, 1:33)
8. Herod received letters from Rome from his ambassadors and was told that Caesar Augustus gave him permission to do as he pleased with Antipater, Herod's son.
9. Herod tried to kill himself, and Antipater thought he did and proclaimed himself king to his guards. Herod then killed Antipater, and Herod died five days later. (AJ, 17:7:1)
10. Herod's funeral lasted seven days. (AJ, 17:8; Wars, 2:1)
11. Archelaus had a feast for the people.
12. Jews made requests to Archelaus including vengeance for the death of Matthias and other zealots.
13. Archelaus tried to pacify them with several attempts but then killed them during Passover. (AJ, 17:9:3)
14. Archelaus left for Rome to be confirmed as king by Caesar. (AJ, 17:9:4; Wars, 2:2)

All of the events from the eclipse to Herod's death, as recorded by Josephus, could have taken from 6 to 24 months to accomplish.

*There were three eclipses that could qualify as the one mentioned by Josephus*

There were three lunar eclipses in Jerusalem from 4 BC to 1 BC:

1. March 13, 4 BC
2. January 9 or 10, 1 BC

### 3. December 29, 1 BC

*If Herod died in 3 BC or 2 BC, then the March 13, 4 BC eclipse is the one*

If Herod died in 3 BC or 2 BC, then the March 13, 4 BC eclipse is the one recorded by Josephus. This eclipse of the moon occurred shortly after midnight. Hence not many people would have seen it, which would have defeated the purpose of the eclipse that was supposed to announce an important event to all the people of Jerusalem.

Even if the March 13, 4 BC lunar eclipse were the one mentioned by Josephus, Herod still could not have died until January or February 3 BC because of all the events that occurred in Herod's life after the eclipse, which had to take at least 6 months, and the fact that he died one or two months before Passover, which would have been the Passover of 3 BC.

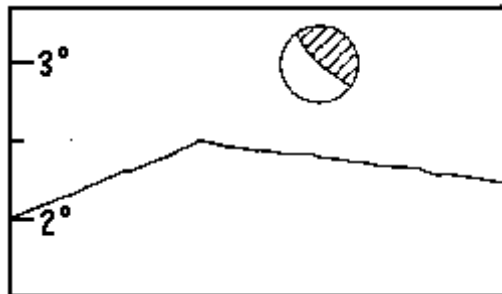
*If Herod died in late 1 BC or early 1 AD, then the January 10, 1 BC eclipse is the one*

If Herod died in late 1 BC or early 1 AD, then the January 10, 1 BC eclipse is the one recorded by Josephus. However, this lunar eclipse occurred late at night when most people were sleeping, thus defeating the purpose of the eclipse that was supposed to announce an important event to all the people of Jerusalem.

*If Herod died in late 1 AD or early 2 AD, then the December 29, 1 BC eclipse is the one*

If Herod died in late 1 AD to early 2 AD, then the December 29, 1 BC eclipse is the one recorded by Josephus. Herod, then, would have died 12 to 15 months after this eclipse. This eclipse is most probably the one recorded by Josephus because it occurred at a time when most were not sleeping and hence could see it:

*Yet Another Eclipse for Herod*, by John P. Pratt: "**Evening eclipse.** Why was Herod's eclipse the only eclipse mentioned by Josephus in his lengthy histories? A partial answer is that it occurred on the night after the execution of some Jewish patriots, and would probably have been interpreted as a sign in heaven related to their death. However, with lunar eclipses visible in Palestine every year or so, it seems strange that others are not mentioned. If Josephus had access to records of such observations, surely he would have included at least some other eclipses which coincided with historical events. It is unlikely that the execution date was chosen for dramatic impact because Herod had the offenders executed very soon after they had been apprehended. So why did Josephus include Herod's eclipse but no others? An obvious answer is that *the eclipse was widely observed* and then associated with the executions. If so, then *the eclipse occurred in the early evening*. Using this criterion, the eclipses of March 13, 4 B.C. and January 10, 1 B.C. are extremely unlikely because they both began the umbral phase more than six hours after sunset and hence would have only been seen by at most a few people. The eclipse of Sept 15, 5 B.C. began three hours after sunset, but that is also late. On the other hand, the eclipse of December 29, 1 B.C. fits this criterion very well. The full moon was nearly half eclipsed when it could first be seen rising in



the east above the distant mountains about twenty minutes after sunset. The illustration shows how the eclipse would have appeared from Jericho at that time, at an altitude of 3°. It would not have been seen much before that time, even without the mountains, due to sky brightness. At first the eclipsed half of the full moon would have been invisible, then it would have appeared dimly lit, and finally the characteristic reddening of the eclipsed portion would have become noticeable. The umbral phase continued for about an hour after first visibility. Note that a partial eclipse is more easily seen at moonrise than a total because totality delays first visibility (the entire moon is in the ‘invisible’ portion) and the shape of the missing portion would have made it obvious that it was an eclipse, especially to the Judeans who used the moon to indicate the day of the month and who expected a full moon. Of the candidates to be Herod’s eclipse, *the December 29, 1 B.C. eclipse was the most likely to have been widely observed.*”

The December 29, 1 BC eclipse is not only the most probable one but it also fits the best opinion that Christ was born on December 25, 2 BC; that the Holy Innocents were murdered about six months later in July, 1 BC; and that Herod died in January or February 2 AD.

### **Josephus was off by 3 years regarding Herod’s death according to the best lunar eclipse and opinion**

According to the most probable lunar eclipse on December 29, 1 BC as the one recorded by Josephus and according to the best opinion that Jesus was born on December 25, 2 BC and Herod died in January or February 2 AD, Josephus was off by three years regarding Herod’s death for placing his death in January or February 2 BC:

$$2 \text{ AD (Jan/Feb)} - -2 \text{ BC (Jan/Feb)} = 4 - 1 = 3 \text{ years}^4$$

Likewise, Josephus erred by placing the death of Judas Machabeus five or six years later than the biblical and thus infallible account. (See in this book “[Erred by five or six years regarding the death and reign of Judas Machabeus](#),” p. 6.)

### **Has Archelaus Banished in His 9<sup>th</sup> Year and in His 10<sup>th</sup> Year**

In his book *The Wars of the Jews*, Josephus says that Archelaus, son of Herod the Great, was banished in the 9<sup>th</sup> year of his government:

Wars, 2:7: “3. And now Archelaus took possession of his ethnarchy, and used not the Jews only, but the Samaritans also, barbarously; and this out of his resentment of their old quarrels with him. Whereupon the both of them sent ambassadors against him to Caesar; and in the ninth year of his government he was banished to Vienna, a city of Gaul...”

However, in his book *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus says that Archelaus was banished in the 10<sup>th</sup> year of his reign:

AJ, 17:13: “2. But in the tenth year of Archelaus’s government, both his brethren, and the principal men of Judea and Samaria, not being able to bear his barbarous and tyrannical usage of them, accused him before Caesar... And when he was come [to Rome], Caesar, upon hearing what certain accusers of his had to say, and what reply he could make, both banished him, and appointed Vienna, a city of Gaul, to be the place of his habitation, and took his money away from him.”

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<sup>4</sup> If using the Gregorian calendar and 2Y is an AD year and 1Y is a BC year, then subtract 1 from the result to get the Ys. Note that BC numbers are negative (-).