SECTION X

THE DATES OF CHRIST'S BIRTH, BAPTISM, AND CRUCIFIXION

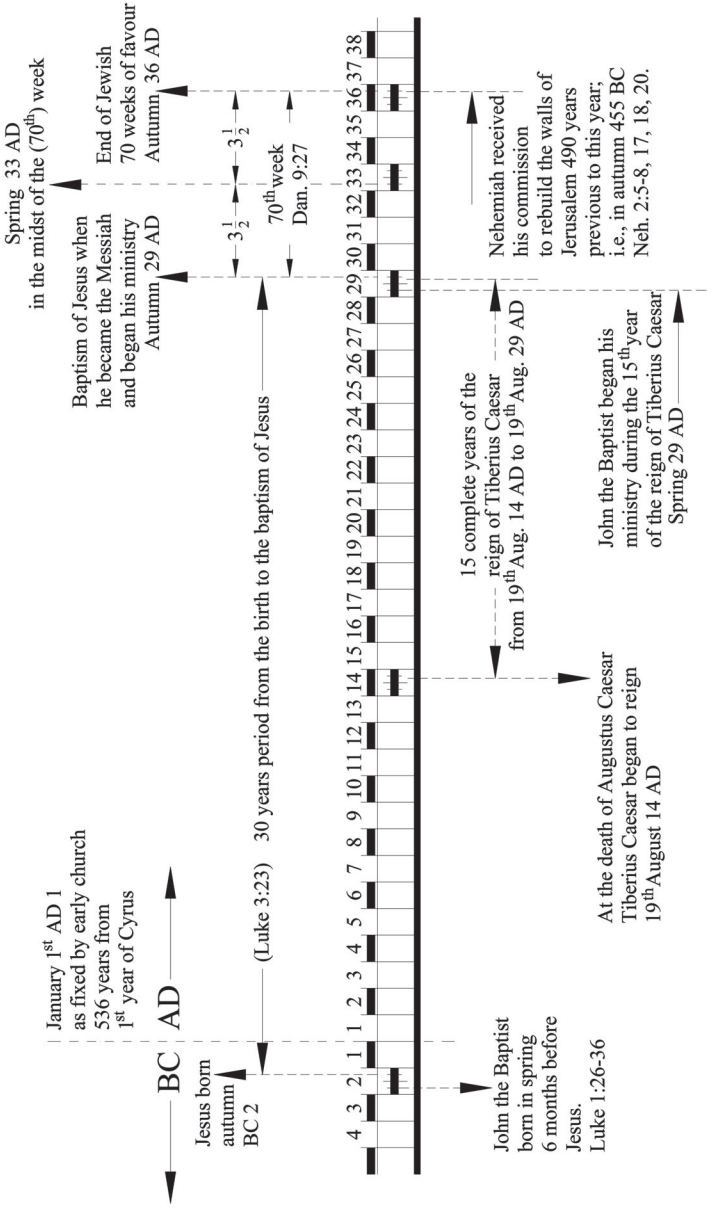
THE Scriptures contain sufficient data to enable us to accurately determine the year when Jesus was born, and also the dates of his baptism and crucifixion. The present A.D. date, as fixed in the 6th century by Dionysius Exiguus for the beginning of the Christian Era, is now generally recognised to be in error by those who have given the matter careful study. Ussher's scheme of chronology, given in the margins of many Bibles, places the date of Jesus' birth *4* years earlier than A.D. *1*; but we believe that the true date was only *1¼* years earlier, *i.e.*, in Autumn *2* B.C.[5] The Scriptural data proves, also, that Christ was baptised in Autumn *29* A.D., and crucified in Spring *33* A.D. These dates are corroborated by symbolical time-measurements in the Great Pyramid.

90 When John came preaching the baptism of repentance, all men were in expectation of the advent of the long-promised Messiah, and reasoned within themselves whether or not John was the Christ (Luke 3:15); but John answered them, no, that Christ would come after him (John 1:15-45).

91 It was when Jesus was *30* years of age that he came forward to be baptised by John (Luke 3:21-23), and from that time, being anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power, he began his ministry (Acts 10:36-38).

92 Luke states (3:1-3) that it was in the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar that John the Baptist started his ministry. Tiberius began to reign at the death of Augustus on the 19th of August in the year *14* A.D., and his 15th year, therefore, extended

[5] It is well to notice that the now commonly accepted date for the birth of Jesus, *i.e.*, *4* B.C., is based upon the supposition that king Herod the Great died in the year *4* B.C. If *4* B.C. was the true date of Herod's death, then undoubtedly, according to Matt. 2:16, Jesus must have been born in either *4* or *5* B.C. But there is no ancient authority for this date of Herod's death, except a mistake of Josephus the Jewish historian, who placed the beginning of the *37* years of Herod's reign from his *prospective* appointment by the Senate of Rome in *40* B.C., instead of from his *actual* appointment as king on the death of Antigonus in *37* B.C. (Ant. XVII, 8:1). This error of Josephus is not followed by Eusebius nor by any of the early Christian writers.



The purpose of this diagram is to show that Jesus Christ was born in Autumn 2 B.C., or 1¼ years before the formerly accepted A.D. date, and that he was baptised in Autumn 29 A.D.; and crucified in Spring 33 A.D.

from 19th August *28* A.D., till 19th August *29* A.D. (See page 50).

93 Certain writers have taken as the starting point for Luke's reckoning the year *12* A.D. in which, they say, Tiberius was made co-regent with Augustus. There is no proof, however, that such a method of reckoning was ever used. None of the ancient ecclesiastical writers ever imagined that to be the meaning of the evangelist. Nowhere in histories, monuments, or coins of unquestioned authority, is there a trace of any other reckoning of the years of Tiberius Cæsar, than from the death of Augustus on the 19th of August, *14* A.D.

94 By comparing verses 13, 24–31, and 36, of the 1st chapter of Luke, it will be seen that Jesus was about *5* months younger than his cousin John the Baptist. According to the requirement of the Law Jesus could not begin his ministry until he was *30* years of age (Num. 4:3; Luke 3:23). As this requirement must have been equally binding upon John, it means that John began his ministry at *30* years of age *5* months before Jesus.

95 It cannot be supposed that Luke would have been so careful to fix the exact date of the commencement of John's ministry, had he not understood that he was at the same time fixing the date of the most important event in the history of the world, namely, the Advent of the Messiah. Just as in the 1st chapter he connects the *birth* of Jesus with that of John, so in the 3rd chapter he connects the *beginnings of their ministry*. A more literal rendering of Luke 3:23, which supports this view, is given in Wilson's Emphatic Diaglott. After informing us (in the first three verses) when John began his ministry, Luke now desires to draw attention to the commencement of Jesus' own ministry, and (in verse 23) says: "Also Jesus himself [like John] was about thirty years old [when he] began [his ministry]." (The literal word for word rendering requires the insertion of the words in the brackets, in order to bring out the sense of the verse. The Greek word *kai* may be equally well translated "and" or "also.")

96 Now, as we have seen, John's ministry, beginning in the 15th year of Tiberius, must have dated from some time within the year commencing 19th August *28* A.D., and Jesus' ministry, therefore, *5* months later, must have dated from some time within the year commencing 19th January *29* A.D. It can be more particularly shown, however, that it was in the middle of the Israelitish year, *i.e.*, in Autumn *29* A.D., that Jesus was baptised and his ministry began. Luke 1:5 states that John's father, Zacharias, was a priest of the course of Abia. On referring to 1 Chron. *24*:5–19 we find that the priests were divided into 24 courses, Abia being the 8th in order. During the twelve months of the year, which according to the commandment of God began in Spring (Deut. 16:1; Exod. 12:2—Sec. V), each course in its order would require to serve in the

temple for two weeks. (For a similar arrangement see 1 Kings 4:7; also 1 Chron. 27:1–15.) This would make Zacharias' term of office expire at the close of the 4th month.

97 Luke 1:8–13 states that it was while Zacharias was "executing the priest's office in the order of his course," that an angel appeared and informed him that his wife would have a son whom he was to name John; and verses 23 and 24 go on to say: "And it came to pass that as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own home. And after those days his wife Elizabeth conceived and hid herself five months." The succeeding verses show that at this time, at the commencement of the 6th month (*i.e.*, at the commencement of the 10th month from the beginning of that year), the annunciation was made to the virgin Mary; and that when "the days were accomplished that she should be delivered" (or *9* months later), she "brought forth her first-born son," Jesus (Luke 2:6–7).

98 According to the above Scriptural data Jesus must have been born in Autumn of the year 2 B.C., *18* months (*4+5+9=18*) after the commencement of the (Israelitish) year in which the angel appeared to Zacharias as he performed the priestly office in the order of his course; and he was baptised *30* years later, in Autumn *29* A.D., or *5* months after John the Baptist began his ministry in the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar (See diagram, page 50).

99 Although it is difficult to gather definitely from the records of the Gospels alone what was the exact duration of Christ's ministry, the information found in the Old and New Testaments is sufficient to establish that period as *3½* years.

In the first three Gospel notes of time are not frequent; but the Gospel of John carefully enumerates seven notes of time from the baptism to the crucifixion of Christ. Three of these are direct references to *passovers,* while a fourth passover appears to be referred to. These references are:

1. John 2:13—"the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem."
2. „ 5:1—"there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem."
3. „ 6:4—"the passover, a feast of the Jews, was nigh."
4. „ 13:1—"before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of the world unto the Father,"

100 The name of the feast mentioned in No. 2 is not specified, but it may safely be maintained to have been a passover, otherwise the interval between the passovers Nos. 1 and 3 would only be a year. But one year is altogether too short a period for the

many events, including the three separate tours through the cities of Galilee, which the other Gospels show to have occurred during that interval.[6] We believe that all the evidences warrant our counting the unnamed feast in John 5:1 to be a passover; and in this case the duration of our Lord's ministry from his baptism in Autumn *29* A.D., till his death at the 4th passover when he was slain as the antitypical passover lamb, would be *3½* years; and the date of the crucifixion Spring *33* A.D. This is the date adopted by Ussher.

101 Of the foregoing facts by which the dates of the birth, baptism, and crucifixion of our Lord have been deduced, the historical parts are specially helpful to the student of God's Word at *this* time. Secular history identifies the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius, and hence enables the dates of the commencement of John's ministry and the baptism of our Lord to be ascertained. This, together with the historical knowledge gained from the Scriptures of the age of Jesus at his baptism, furnishes the date of his birth. Furthermore, as it is clear from the historical narratives in the Gospels that the duration of Christ's ministry was *3½* years, ending at the time of the passover, the date of his crucifixion can be determined.

102 At the first Advent other evidences would be necessary to aid the student of the Scriptures of *that* period to identify in Jesus the long-looked-for Messiah. Our Lord himself knew beforehand that in order to fulfil the type of the passover lamb he must be slain on the 14th of Nisan (Matt. 26:2), and that as the antitypical firstfruits unto God he would be raised on the third day (Luke 24:6, 7); but it was not until after his resurrection, when he had recalled to the memory of his disciples these and other Scriptures, that they began to fully realise that he was indeed the Messiah. Luke, in chapter 24, verses, 27, 44–46, says: "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." "These are the words which I spake unto you while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me. Then opened he their understanding that they might understand the scriptures. And he said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day."

[6] Some, in their endeavour to bend the testimony of the Gospel narratives to support the theory of a one-year ministry, not only maintain that the feast in John 5:1 was not a passover, but state that the words "the passover" in John 6:4 should be omitted, thus reducing the number of passovers to two. But on no grounds can the omission of the reference to a passover in John 6:4 be defended as genuine; every known manuscript, whether of the original Greek, or of the versions, contains the phrase or its rendering.

103 Among other prophecies concerning himself, our Lord would greatly convince his disciples by showing them how he had fulfilled the prophecy of the "*70* weeks," by having been proclaimed the "Messiah," and having been "cut off" at the very times foretold by Daniel (9:24–27). He would no doubt draw their attention to Daniel's prophecy: "from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto Messiah the Prince shall be seven weeks, and threescore and two weeks," and point out that these *69* weeks had been fulfilled symbolically, a day for a year (Ezek. 4:3–6). That from the time Nehemiah had received his commission and built the walls of Jerusalem (Neh. 2:1–17), *69* times *7*, or *483* years, had elapsed when he came forward to be baptised in Jordan and there became the Messiah, or the "Anointed" (See John 1:41, margin). Continuing the passage, which reads: "And after [the] threescore and two weeks, shall Messiah be cut off, but not for himself . . . And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and oblation to cease," he would show them how this also had been fulfilled by himself. That after ministering for three years and a half, he had been cut off in death exactly in the middle of the *70*th or last week of years (See diagram, page 50). He would then explain how his death was not for himself, but was a sacrificial death on behalf of the whole world, by means of which "everlasting righteousness" had been brought in, thus causing the typical sacrifices to cease (Heb. 10:1–18).