

The Birth of Christ

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There are several significant insights to be gained from an in-depth study of the life of Christ, starting with historical events before His birth and proceeding to His death and resurrection. While Christian scholars have studied the life of Christ for centuries using the Bible, the Restoration Scriptures give additional information that provides valuable spiritual insight, as well as giving us a more detailed historical understanding.

This article is by no means a comprehensive study of the life of Christ. It is primarily devoted to the events surrounding Christ's birth and how these events relate to the Book of Mormon history.

A. Jesus was God before and after His earthly life.

Many Christians acknowledge that Christ reigned as God in heaven from before creation to the time of His birth, and again returned to heaven after His earthly life. However, the Book of Mormon clearly demonstrates this idea.

A sign had been promised to signify the birth of the Messiah, and the unbelievers had decreed to kill all those who believed in the prophecy, claiming that the time of the prophecy was past. Nephi prayed to the Lord for His protection, and the voice of the Lord came to him saying,

"Lift up your head and be of good cheer, for behold, the time is at hand, and on this night shall the sign be given, and on the morrow come I into the world, to shew unto the world that I will fulfill all that which I have caused to be spoken by the mouth of my holy prophets..." (3Ne 1:12-15).

Jesus Christ spoke to Nephi from heaven just hours before he entered into His physical body as an infant. This Book of Mormon account gives a vivid portrayal of Christ as God prior to His birth. In addition, Christ declared that **He** was the one directing the words of the holy prophets throughout the Old Testament as they prophesied to Israel and testified of the coming Messiah. While we might obtain these ideas from careful Biblical scholarship, the Book of Mormon makes this very plain.

Again, after the crucifixion of Christ, the Book of Mormon gives us another picture of Him as an omnipotent Lord. The inhabitants of the Americas experienced the terrible earthquakes which served as a sign that the Messiah had been crucified over in Jerusalem. The more wicked part of the people were killed in the destruction, and the ones who remained were not altogether righteous. Following the earthquakes there were three days of darkness. We know from the field of seismology that this darkness can be explained by large quantities of gases and debris that are released after a major earthquake.

Sometime during the early part of the three days of darkness, Jesus Christ again spoke from heaven. Many heard Him across all the face of the land as He called them to repentance and to belief,

"O all ye that are spared, because ye were more righteous than they, will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you? Yea, verily I say unto you, If ye will come unto me, ye shall have

eternal life. Behold, mine arm of mercy is extended towards you, and whosoever will come, him will I receive..." (3Ne 4:26-59).

We know from the Bible that after Jesus' crucifixion, His spirit went to Paradise, because He said to the thief on the cross, "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise" (Luke 23:44). We also know that during the three days Christ was in the grave He went to hell, or the prison house, to preach to the captive spirits (Eph 4:8-10; Matt 12:34; Acts 2:27,31-32; 1Pet 3:18-19; 4:6). Now the Book of Mormon tells us that another thing Christ did was speak to some of His lost sheep of the House of Israel, and call them to repentance just hours after His crucifixion.

After Christ's resurrection, He appeared to His disciples for a period of 40 days, and then ascended into heaven (Acts 1:3). The Book of Mormon tells us that later in the year, "in the ending of the 34th year", Jesus Christ made a personal appearance to the Nephites for several days and taught them the same gospel that He had taught in Jerusalem (3Ne 4:74). In the land Bountiful the people heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Behold, my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, in whom I have glorified my name; hear ye Him" (3Ne 5:8). Then they witnessed Christ as He descended from heaven and heard Him say, "Behold I am Jesus Christ...the light and the life of the world, and I have drunk out of that bitter cup which the Father hath given me, and have glorified the Father in taking upon me the sins of the world..." (3Ne 5:11-12).

These three accounts of Jesus Christ given in the Book of Mormon are just a few of the testimonies of His interaction with the people on the American continent. These testimonies reinforce the teachings in the Bible that Jesus is real, and that He has been an omnipotent Lord from the beginning of time. He has always been actively involved in ministering to His people and calling them to repentance.

B. Jesus' family was the victim of prejudice.

Luke 2:7 in the King James Version says that when Mary and Joseph came to Bethlehem "there was no room for them in the inns". If there were truly no room in the inns, we could hardly blame the citizens of Bethlehem for not giving Joseph and Mary a place to stay. The Passover was approaching, and it seems likely that many people would have been coming to Bethlehem for the festivities. However, the Inspired Version rendition of Luke 2:7 gives a little different perspective on this event, that seems to be deeply significant. "There was none to make room for them in the inns". Note the difference. It doesn't say that there was no room, but that there was none to make room for them.

We know that Jesus' family was very poor, because of the sacrifice brought to the Temple by Joseph and Mary after her purification. The law on purification in Lev 12:2-8 told them to bring a lamb and one bird (turtledove or pigeon) for the sacrifice; but if they were unable to bring a lamb, then they were commanded to bring two birds. Luke 2:22-24 indicates that the family brought "two turtledoves or two young pigeons" for the sacrifice in accordance with the law, showing that they probably could not afford to bring a lamb. This sacrifice in the Temple was for the purpose of ritual purification according to the Law of Moses, and was 40 days after the birth of Christ, according to Lev 12.

Jesus' family lived in the northern city of Nazareth. It appears from the scriptural record that citizens in the Jerusalem area looked on Nazareth with a great degree of scorn. Nazareth is located in Galilee, which is called "Galilee of the Gentiles" in Matthew 4:14. The Pharisees declared that no prophet ever arose out of Galilee, evidencing their contempt for the entire region (John 7:52). Furthermore when Nathanael, who was a resident of Galilee, was told about Jesus he asked the question, "Can there any good

thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:46). Even within Galilee there seemed to be a general contempt for the city of Nazareth.

We don't know for sure what motivated the townspeople in Bethlehem to turn the family out on the street. Based on the above evidence, it is very likely that strong prejudice had something to do with it. Perhaps in modern terminology the family was looked upon as "poor white trash" from Nazareth. We can see the effects of strong cultural and economic bigotry, that would even cause people to turn away a husband and his wife about to give birth and leave them out on the street.

In today's society people excuse all manner of wickedness because of their upbringing. They may use excuses, such as, "I wasn't given a fair chance. I was brought up in a poor family in the ghetto. I was the victim of discrimination. How can I be expected to overcome such circumstances?" But Christ was born to a poor family and was the victim of prejudice even from before His birth as well as later in life. He showed by His example that no matter what our circumstances, we are called to live our lives to the fullest instead of always finding someone or some circumstance to blame for our failures in life. There is no place for feeling sorry for ourselves. The Son of God has showed us by His example that we can overcome every negative situation.

C. Jesus comes to the lowly

Have you ever thought, "Why was Christ born in a stable?" Why was this Son of God born in a filthy stable, with dirty animals and manure all around, with the cool night air causing him to shiver in the cold? Why was He not born in a place of dignity that He deserved, such as a royal palace or a mansion? Why would God send His only begotten Son into a place so undignified and even humiliating as a smelly stable?

God purposely sent Christ to be born in such circumstances to teach us about His love. If Christ had been born in a royal palace in luxury, we could use the excuse, "It was easy for Him; He had it easy because He was the Son of God. He doesn't understand my troubles." But Christ laid down His entire life and "became of no reputation", and He endured every trial and hardship that we will ever have to endure, so He could understand our pain and show us how to overcome our trials (Phil 2:7-8; Alm 5:20-23; Lectures of Faith 5:2g-h).

Christ came into a lowly stable to teach another invaluable lesson. David wrote in the Psalms, "Though I make my bed in hell, Thou art there" (Psa 139:8). No place is too undignified for the Son of God to make His entrance, whether it be a dirty stable or a sinful heart. No life is so dirty that Christ will refuse to minister. Throughout His life Jesus continued to demonstrate this principle, in such ways as eating with publicans and sinners, and in traveling to Samaria for the purpose of ministering to a woman divorced five times and living with another man (Matt 9:11; John 4:6-26).

Do you or someone you know feel like they've been too bad even for Christ to forgive? Then learn the lesson of the stable -- Christ is willing to come to you and lift you out of your pitiful circumstances and sinful life. He is not ashamed of your outward appearance or reputation or even your past sins, but He is seeking those who are meek and lowly in heart to do a great work for Him.

Following this same idea, we might also understand why the angels appeared first to shepherds in the field, announcing Christ's birth. These lowly shepherds were chosen by God to be the first witnesses of the miracle of Christ's birth; and they went out and "made know abroad the saying [of the angels] which was told them concerning His birth" (Luke 2:17). God is not only willing to accept the lowly, He often chooses the weak and the simple to confound the mighty and strong so that "no flesh should glory in His presence" (1Cor 1:27-29).

D. When was Jesus born?

Knowing the exact date of Christ's birth is not as important to our belief as knowing that He was indeed born of a virgin, and was crucified for our sins and resurrected from the dead. Nevertheless, there are some substantial insights that can be gained once a correct knowledge is obtained of when Christ was born. Secular scholars, as well as some Christian ones, have supposed that the Bible is inaccurate when it comes to the historical details regarding Christ's birth, especially some of the references provided in the book of Luke.

However, the knowledge now exists to determine fairly precisely the actual date of Christ's birth. Much of this information comes from the Bible and can be substantiated by a knowledge of history. It is still impossible, though, to determine even the correct year without several historical details given in the Book of Mormon. To Book of Mormon believers, the evidence on this subject provides exciting proof that the Book of Mormon is true as a second witness of Jesus Christ and also as a historical record.

While popular culture has for centuries celebrated the birth of Christ at Christmas, or "Christ Mass", on December 25, it is certain that this is not the actual date. According to legend, Rome was founded in 753 BC by the infant brothers Romulus and Remus. In 525 AD Dionysius Exiguus, a Roman theologian and mathematician, issued "Easter Tables" which incorrectly gave the birth date of Jesus as December 25, 753 years after the founding of Rome -- or the year 1 AD in the current calendar. The Gregorian calendar, which is in use throughout most of the world, was sponsored by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582 as a corrected version of the Julian calendar. The Gregorian calendar divided history into BC and AD, basing the division on the wrongly calculated date of Dionysius.

1. Length of Jesus' Life

Some important details that we are given in the Book of Mormon are the miraculous signs witnessed at the time of Christ's birth and death. Samuel the Lamanite had prophesied that before Christ's birth, it would be light all night long in the land of Zarahemla.

"Therefore there shall be one day and a night, and a day, as if it were one day, and there were no night; and this shall be unto you for a sign; for ye shall know of the rising of the sun, and also of its setting...and it shall be the night before he [the Christ] is born. And behold there shall be a new star arise, such an one as ye have never beheld; and ... there shall be many signs and wonders in the heavens" (Hel 5:58-60).

He also prophesied that at Christ's crucifixion there would be earthquakes followed by three days of darkness:

"In that day that he shall suffer death, ... there shall be no light upon the face of this land ... for the space of three days, to the time that he shall rise again from the dead and the earth shall shake and tremble..." (Hel 5:75-83).

After the sign was given of Christ's birth, the people knew that Christ was going to be born in Jerusalem, and they began to number their calendar from that day (3Ne 1:45). From this we would assume that the day Christ was born became the first day of the first year in the new Nephite calendar. Prior to this, their calendar had been based on the reign of the judges which began sometime around 90-100 BC.

Another crucial piece of information given in the Book of Mormon is the length of Jesus' life. In accordance with the prophecy of Samuel, the earthquakes which were the sign of Jesus' crucifixion began "in the 34th year, in the first month, on the fourth day of the month" (3Ne 4:6). This means that Jesus lived a total of 33 years and 3 days. (Adding 33 years to the first year of the Nephites gives the beginning of the 34th year. Adding three days to the first day of the Nephite calendar, when Christ was born, takes us to the 4th day of the 1st month in the 34th year.) Without the knowledge that Christ lived 33 years and 3 days, it would be impossible to accurately determine the date of His birth.

The Bible provides some evidence that the Book of Mormon is correct as to the length of Jesus' life. Luke tells that when Jesus began His ministry He was "about thirty years of age" (Luke 3:30), which was typically the age when a Hebrew man would begin his public ministry. Yet this verse doesn't tell us if He was exactly thirty years old, but just "about thirty". Biblical scholarship usually puts the length of Jesus' ministry at three years. This very nearly corroborates the Book of Mormon account.

2. Date of His crucifixion

The Bible (John 18:28; 19:31) indicates that Christ was crucified on the eve of a Passover, and we know that it was sometime around the year AD 30. With some additional clues from history, we can exactly determine the date when Christ was crucified.

The Hebrew Sabbath is held on Saturday. There was a Sabbath the day after Jesus was crucified which prevented the women from anointing His body until Sunday morning (Luke 23:54 - 24:1). The Passover is also a special Sabbath held on the 15th day of Nisan, the first month of the Jewish religious year. Thus, Jesus must have been crucified either on a Friday afternoon before the regular Sabbath; or on a Thursday, in which case there would have been two Sabbaths in a row--the Friday Passover and the regular Sabbath on Saturday.

The traditional Christian observance of the crucifixion is on "Good Friday". However, many scholars favor a Thursday crucifixion, for the following reasons:

- 1) The day that followed Jesus' crucifixion was a "high day", which may indicate a special Sabbath, such as the Passover (John 19:31);
- 2) Jesus prophesied that He would be in the grave for "three days and three nights" (Matt 12:34). The Hebrew custom when numbering days is to count part of a day as a whole day. Yet, from Friday afternoon to early Sunday morning would have been at most two days and two nights.

Pontius Pilate arrived in Judea at the beginning of the civil year, in September of AD 26. It is known that Pilate was the governor of Judea for ten years, from AD 26 to AD 36. Thus, in this ten year period we can identify several dates when the Passover fell either on a Thursday or a Friday, as follows:

AD 26, March 22, which falls on a Friday;

AD 27, April 10, which falls on a Thursday;

AD 30, April 6, which falls on a Thursday

AD 33, April 3, which falls on a Friday (this is the traditional date for most Christians)

and AD 34, April 22, which falls on a Thursday.

Knowing the length of Christ's life to be 33 years and 3 days, we can begin with these five dates of Passover and count backward to find the possible dates for His birth. One important fact to keep in mind when counting from AD to BC is that there was not a year zero. The Romans did not have a zero and

Western civilization did not know the concept of zero until the eighth century. Allowing for this unusual fact, we can use the following list of years as a guide in counting (zero is omitted):

BC 15 14 13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 BC AD 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12
13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29 30 31 32 33 34 35 36

We can eliminate several of the five possible dates right away. The first date in March of AD 26 would have Jesus being crucified before Pontius Pilate even arrived in Judea, which was in September of that year. This cannot be true, since Jesus was tried before Pontius Pilate.

It was sometime after Jesus' birth that King Herod ordered the young children in Bethlehem to be killed. This Herod, known to history as "Herod the Great", was a brutal ruler who had no regard for human life. After his death in April of 4 BC, his son Archelaus became tetrarch over the region of Judea (Matt 3:22). In the next section we will discuss some important events in the life of Herod that help us understand the account of Joseph, Mary, and baby Jesus.

Knowing that Herod died in April of 4 BC, we can count forward 33 years and 3 days, arriving in April of AD 30. If the book of Matthew is correct, Jesus had to be born sometime prior to the day Herod died; and if the Book of Mormon is correct, Jesus' crucifixion could have occurred no later than April of AD 30. This eliminates the last two Passover dates from our list since they occur after AD 30.

This leaves us with two dates remaining for the crucifixion of Christ; April 10, AD 27, and April 6, AD 30. Counting backward from these dates brings us to the two possible dates for Christ's birth:

April 7, 7 BC

April 3, 4 BC

The decree that went out from Caesar Augustus that all his empire should be taxed was "when Cyrenius was governor of Syria" (Luke 2:1-2). This statement has presented some difficulties for Biblical scholars, since Cyrenius, or Quirinius as he is also known, was governor of Syria in AD 6 when a universal tax was implemented that caused major uprisings in the Roman provinces. Other details that have caused scholars a problem include the universal nature of a tax at that early date; the requirement that a family return to their home town to be taxed; and the requirement that Mary return with Joseph for the census.

Luke's history has been written off as (at best) inaccurate, or at worst a deliberate fraud written to give the appearance of historical support for Jesus' birth. Fortunately we now know that all of the details Luke provided us are indeed correct, including the detail regarding Cyrenius. Historians have discovered that Cyrenius was actually governor of Syria twice: once in AD 6-8, and an earlier time in approximately 11-6 BC (William M. Ramsay, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*, 1979, pp. 222-300). We should note here that Luke doesn't say Cyrenius was governor when Joseph and Mary came to Bethlehem; just that he was governor when the tax was implemented.

The tax, which would have been the first such tax in the history of the Roman Empire, probably was ordered by Caesar Augustus in about 8 BC. However it would have taken quite a bit of time for the decree to be distributed, for tax collectors and census takers to be trained, and for the system to be fully implemented in the provinces which were remote from Rome. The requirement to return to one's home city for the census was chosen as imperative to ensure the completeness of the monumental task of taking a census of an entire empire with a large migratory population. Requiring all citizens to return to their home city would have placed a great burden on the people in those days; not to mention the fact that they were already discontent with having to pay a new tax to the foreign government of Rome. Rather than have

everyone's tax be required on a certain day, such as April 15 in the United States, the historical precedent shows that the citizens were often allowed a whole year in which to return to their home town and pay the tax.

The date of the tax being ordered in 8 BC would still allow for either of our two remaining dates to be the correct one for Christ's birth. The date of 7 BC has a few problems, however. The tax probably would have taken at least two years to be implemented in the provinces. Also, Judea was not annexed by Rome until the year 6 BC, which means that the tax might not have been required of Joseph and Mary until after that date.

Fortunately there is more evidence that gives conclusive proof of the date of Christ's crucifixion. It has already been mentioned that Pontius Pilate didn't become governor of Judea until September of AD 26. Luke says that John the Baptist began his ministry "in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea..." (Luke 3:1). Shortly after this, Jesus came to John to be baptized and began His ministry.

Therefore, Pontius Pilate was governor not only at the crucifixion of Christ, but also at the start of His ministry. If Christ were crucified in April, AD 27, then His ministry could have been at most 7 months long. There is no way that Biblical scholarship can reconcile all the events in Christ's ministry into a seven month time period.

In addition, we need to determine when Tiberius Caesar began his reign. Augustus Caesar had adopted Tiberius and had designated him as his successor. Augustus reigned as emperor of Rome from 44 BC until his death in the year AD 14, and Tiberius began his reign shortly thereafter. Counting AD 14 as the first year of Tiberius' reign, then his 15th year would have been in AD 28.

The only possible date of the crucifixion, then, is April 6, AD 30, which puts the beginning of Jesus' ministry in the year AD 28 and His birth on April 3, 4 BC. This means that He was 31 years old at the start of His ministry, which correlates nicely with the statement in Luke 3:30 that Jesus was "about thirty".

The only remaining problem is the fact that Biblical scholars generally believe Jesus' ministry was three years in length, but this analysis would mean that it was only about two years long. This slight discrepancy certainly must be able to be reconciled by taking a fresh look at the recorded accounts of Jesus' life in the Scriptures.

Additional Evidence

Besides the historical evidence already presented that Jesus was crucified in AD 30, and was born in April of 4 BC, there are several other evidences that support this conclusion.

a) One part of the Jewish ceremony Yom Kippur involved the sacrifice of a scapegoat. A live goat was released into the wilderness, symbolically carrying away the sins of Israel. A crimson sash was tied to the horns of the scapegoat and another was tied to the gate of the temple. The people watched the sash on the gate, which reportedly turned white miraculously as the scapegoat met its death in the wilderness. The death of the scapegoat symbolized Israel being forgiven, and the sash turning white symbolized the people being cleansed of their sins (Isa 1:18).

The Mishna reports that **forty years** before the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70, the sash no longer turned white. Jesus was crucified in April of AD 30, and in the fall of that year the crimson sash stopped turning white! It was a direct indication from God that He no longer honored the sacrifice of the scapegoat. His Son had already been offered as the perfect sacrifice for the sins of the people and He was the perfect fulfillment of the Law of Moses.

b) The date of April 6 seems to have a divine significance in many instances as being a day of deliverance. The crucifixion of Christ, which provided all mankind deliverance from sin, was on the afternoon of April 6, AD 30. From a study of Herod's life, we will find that the heads of the leading Jewish families were probably delivered from death on April 6, 4 BC, after the death of Herod.

Members of the Restoration Movement recognize April 6, 1830, as the day when the Church of Jesus Christ was restored in the latter days through the prophetic leadership of Joseph Smith, Jr. This represented the deliverance of the church from the bondage of the Apostasy. Again on April 6, 1860, the church was reorganized under the leadership of Joseph Smith III, after many in the church had followed Brigham Young to Utah and fallen into many gross sins and doctrinal errors.

Another interesting evidence comes from computer studies of new moons which go back thousands of years. These studies reportedly put the date of the first Passover on April 6, when the Israelites were delivered from the bondage of Egypt (Where is the Promise of His Coming, Book Two, by Jan Fountain; page 46). The house of Israel had gone down to Egypt in order to be delivered from the famine and stayed there for 430 years. The Bible declares that when the Israelites were released from Egypt, "it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the selfsame day" (Exod 12:41). If the date of April 6 is correct for the first Passover, then the house of Israel was also delivered from famine 430 years earlier on April 6.

c) We read in Luke 1:5 that Zacharias served in the "course of Abia". Back in the Old Testament the sons of Levi had been divided into 24 families, and each family served in the Temple for two weeks during the year (1Chron 24:10). Each of the 24 families served one week, and then the cycle began again in the last half of the year --a total of 48 weeks. The remaining 4 weeks of the year were during the feast times of Passover and Rosh Hashanah, when all of the priesthood served in the Temple two additional weeks for each feast.

Abijah, the Hebrew form of the Greek "Abia", was the 8th in the list of 24 families. This means that Zacharias would have served two weeks during Passover and again during the 10th week of the year. Later in the year he would serve two weeks during Rosh Hashanah, and then one more week during the 36th week of the year. For purposes of illustration we can assume that the Jewish calendar began in April of that year. The two weeks of Zacharias' normal course of service would be in early June and early December of 6 BC.

John the Baptist was conceived miraculously shortly after his father, Zacharias, was serving in the Temple (Luke 1:23-24). Let's assume that the service in early December was when Zacharias had his experience with the angel Gabriel. Shortly after this time, John the Baptist was conceived -- possibly in January of 5 BC. Six months later, in July of 5 BC, the angel Gabriel came to Mary and told her that she would be with child of the Holy Ghost (Luke 1:36). Nine months after that Jesus was born, which would take us to around the first part of April, 4 BC.

d) A later section will discuss scientific evidence for the appearance of a spectacular star in the spring of 4 BC. This event was recorded in the Chinese star catalog, and explains all of the star's characteristics seen by the wise men and also the spectacular events recorded in the Book of Mormon at the birth of Christ. This was the only unusual heavenly event recorded by the Chinese between the years 7 BC and 4 BC that fits the description of a new star.

3. Events in 4 BC

In order to more fully understand the time period surrounding the birth of Christ, it is important to examine events in the life of Herod the Great during the month before he died. This writer is indebted to Neal Simmons for much of the following information, in his paper entitled "He Was Born".

Herod was a brutal ruler with no regard for human life. He was a convert to Judaism who had been appointed king of Judea by the Romans in 40 BC, and was despised by the fundamentalist Jews. Herod began rebuilding the Jewish Temple in 19 BC, which wasn't completed until 82 years later in AD 64. Toward the end of his life, he became insanely suspicious of opposition. He murdered his wife, had his mother-in-law executed for treason, and killed his brother-in-law (who was a legitimate heir), fearing that he might succeed Herod to the throne.

Herod was 69 years old when he died. Toward the end of his life he had fallen ill to a fatal disease which caused fever, ulceration of the skin, unconsciousness or coma, and gangrenous genitals. Historians are undecided as to what kind of illness he had, but some speculate that it may have been severe diabetes. We know that the last month of his life began in March, because on March 13 in 4 BC he ordered the Jewish reformer Matthias executed, and that evening there was an eclipse of the moon. The next month was Passover and Herod, already dead, had been mourned for a week before the Passover.

After the murder of Matthias, Herod's illness became much worse and some young Jewish conservatives decided it was time to act to purge the Temple. A group of young men went into the temple and tore down a large golden eagle that Herod had erected, which they believed was violating the Jewish law against graven images. These young men were caught and Herod immediately had them sentenced and executed by being burned alive.

Directly afterward Herod, still gravely ill and hoping for a cure, was taken by boat across the Dead Sea to the warm sweet water spring at Callirrhoe to be immersed in the waters. However, when they had put warm oil on his body and dipped him into the water, he nearly died. He returned immediately to Jerusalem, where he ordered all the leading heads of families in the entire nation of Judea to be imprisoned in the Hippodrome, or Roman circus. Herod wanted the nation to mourn his death, but knew that they would probably rejoice because he had been such a cruel leader. His plan was to have all the heads of families killed after his death, so that the nation would shed tears of mourning.

A few days after he had given this order, he tried to commit suicide by stabbing himself while peeling an apple, but his cousin happened to catch him soon enough and prevented the suicide. An uproar was raised throughout the palace as word spread that Herod had tried to kill himself.

One of Herod's sons, Antipater, was in prison because Herod had suspected him of sedition. He heard incorrect rumors that Herod had attempted suicide and succeeded. Antipater tried to bribe the prison guard to let him go, promising a position of political power after he (Antipater) succeeded Herod to the throne. The guard, however, refused the offer and told Herod about the attempted bribe. Herod, who was always jealous of losing his authority, sent soldiers to kill Antipater immediately. Herod lived only five days after having his son killed. During that time he changed his will to name another son, Archelaus, to succeed him as king.

After Herod died on April 5, 4 BC, Archelaus and Salome kept his death secret until they could talk to the Jewish citizens who were imprisoned in the Hippodrome. They made a deal with the citizens to let them go free, if in return they would pledge their political support to Archelaus. The people agreed, and were quietly released. Then the nation was told of Herod's death and a week of mourning began. After the mourning period the Jews celebrated their feast of Passover.

Because the Passover came so soon after Herod's death and his time of mourning, the Jews did not have time to mourn the deaths of the forty men murdered for attempting to cleanse the Temple. During Passover riots broke out because Archelaus refused to proclaim a time of national mourning for these forty

young men. Archelaus sent soldiers to put down the rebellion to stabilize the city and show that he was now in command. In the process, about 3000 protesters and many soldiers died in the confrontation.

After the Passover, Archelaus set out for Rome to secure his place as Herod's successor. Other members of the family had already gone, each trying to get the throne for themselves. Caesar confirmed Herod's latest will, and named Archelaus to rule over Judea. Two other sons of Herod were given positions of authority as tetrarch; Herod Antipas in Galilee and Herod Philip in the region of Iturea. Archelaus was even worse than his father, and in the tenth year of his reign he was banished to Britain, which occurred in AD 6. In that year Judea was made a province of Rome and put under the charge of Roman governors. Herod Antipas was the one who later had John the Baptist beheaded.

Having narrowed down the date for the birth of Christ, and knowing the above information about the last days of king Herod, we can put together the scenario of events that occurred at Christ's birth. We recall that five years before Christ's birth, the prophet Samuel was sent to the Nephites, calling them to repent. In his prophecy, he told them of signs that would be given at the birth of the Christ, or Messiah. He prophesied that on the night before Christ's birth, it would be light all night long in the land of Zarahemla, and a new star would also appear in the sky (Hel 5:55-60). Samuel also prophesied that at the death of Christ, there would be earthquakes and then three days of darkness (Hel 5:75-83).

We know from the Book of Mormon history that these events did actually occur exactly as Samuel had said. Is there any evidence to support these Book of Mormon claims? If so, does this evidence correspond to information about the birth of Christ given in the Bible and the history already presented? In fact, there is startling evidence that the historical facts presented in both the Bible and Book of Mormon are true. For Book of Mormon believers, this represents significant proof that the Book of Mormon is a true historical account.

The Chinese were active astronomers and kept a star catalog in which they recorded unusual celestial events. In the year 4 BC between the dates March 10 and April 7, there is record of the appearance of a "Ho-Ku-Po" star. The term "po" is Chinese for a rayed or sparkling bright star. The po stars are what we now call "nova" stars. Nova describes a star that suddenly expands and releases energies several times the usual amount. This event which occurred in 4 BC may have been not only a nova, but what is called a supernova, which occurs when the star actually explodes. The exploding star produces energies which are immeasurably more than those of a simple nova.

The "po" star would have been clearly visible in Jerusalem and Bethlehem and all other locations in this latitude, including the land of Zarahemla. The latitude of Jerusalem is 31.8 degrees north. This celestial event was located in the sky so that, "if an observer looks from the Old South Gate of Jerusalem, the gate through which the Bethlehem road passed,...just before sunrise in April of 4 BC this nova would be high in the sky, about 70 degrees above the horizon, in the direction of Bethlehem" (The Star of Bethlehem, by David Hughes, p. 209).

With this information about the nova or supernova it is now possible to bring together all of the historical information we have obtained, and speculate on a possible explanation for the new star recorded in the Bible and Book of Mormon and also the unusual night without darkness.

If the star of Bethlehem was a supernova, the titanic forces released by the explosion of the star would have sent a shock wave of unimaginable energy into space in all directions. It is possible that this wave of energy and blinding light of the explosion passed over the earth, and was first seen by the inhabitants of Zarahemla beginning at sunset and continuing through the night. The brilliant explosion and resulting atomic energies may create a streak of light in the atmosphere, and could have lighted the night

sky so that it seemed that it were as light as midday. It is also possible that the wave of energy which is created when a star explodes may have created a disturbance in the ionized part of our earth's atmosphere, resulting in a tremendous and extraordinary display of events in the heavens.

While this display would be worldwide, it could only have been seen where it was night, and consequently inhabitants of Jerusalem would not have noticed it at first. But in Zarahemla the lights might have played in the heavens until the light of the dawn faded their brilliance. The next day Jesus was born in Jerusalem, as the prophecy had been given by Samuel.

As the earth rotated and night fell in China, they would see the light of the supernova and record it in their star catalog. Several hours later evening came to Jerusalem, and by this time the spectacular lights in the heavens had reduced to a very bright star. The star rose up over the horizon during the night until it was directly over Bethlehem, leading the wise men from Jerusalem to Bethlehem where Jesus lay. The earth continued to rotate until the Book of Mormon lands were again brought under the direct light of the supernova, this time giving the appearance of a bright star, thus fulfilling the other prophecy of Samuel regarding the appearance of a new star. The Chinese recorded this event for 70 days before the light of the star was no longer visible to the naked eye.

Christian tradition has for centuries identified the "Wise Men" as Magi from the East. Their statement "we have seen his star in the east" (Matt 3:2) has been taken to mean that they saw a star in the heavens and followed it to Jerusalem. With the information presented above about the appearance of the star and the prophecy of Samuel, it is clear that the star couldn't have appeared prior to the birth of Christ. Many have interpreted that the wise men took two years to arrive in Jerusalem; thus they visited Jesus in a "house" (Matt 3:11) instead of a stable. There are some problems with this idea, which will be discussed below along with a possible identification of the wise men.

Another interpretation is possible for the statement of the wise men about seeing the star. Their statement "we have seen his star in the east" meant that on that very evening they had seen the new star (resulting from the supernova) rising up from the horizon in the eastern sky. They must have known of a prophecy that a king or Messiah would be born and that a star would mark his birth, and they were looking for the appearance of that star.

After seeing the new star, the wise men came to Herod at a time when Herod was in great pain and was just a few days away from his death. They came asking about the birth of a new king of the Jews. Just previous to their arrival, Herod had ordered his son Antipater to be killed because of his attempts to take over the government. Their question to Herod about a king of the Jews must have enraged him because of his jealousy.

As with other cultures of that time, the Jews were good observers of nature. This star was so new that neither Herod nor his scholars had yet noticed it, indicating that the star had just appeared. It would have taken some time to get an answer from the Sanhedrin as to the location of the birth of the Messiah, but it was important enough that a special session was probably called that night. After learning of Bethlehem as the location of the Messiah's birth, cunning Herod planned to have the child killed and sent the wise men to locate him and report back. It must have been late in the evening when the wise men finally received their answer from the Sanhedrin and set out for Bethlehem. During the 2-3 hour walk from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, the star would be rising in the night sky and reach its zenith almost directly over their heads by 4:00 AM.

That night the shepherds also arrived, telling of their glorious vision of angels. After paying their devotion to the child, the shepherds went out and told everyone what had happened (Luke 2:17). We can conjecture that the shepherds arrived early in the night before the wise men came, because they found the baby wrapped and lying in a manger of the stable. When the wise men came to Bethlehem very late in the

night they found Mary and the baby in a house. We may rightly suppose that after the rejoicing and excitement at the birth of Jesus, there were neighboring people who took the family into their house. After all, this was the Messiah who had been anticipated by the Jews for centuries!

When the wise men were warned in a dream to return by a different route, Joseph was commanded to take his family and flee to Egypt, which was not under the rule of the Roman Empire. Thus on the 4th of April, Joseph and Mary were on their way to Egypt. Within a week they could have traveled to one of the border towns of Egypt and still arrived in time to celebrate Passover. Herod, seeing he had been mocked by the wise men, ordered the deaths of all young children in Bethlehem. Herod must have died the next day, on April 5, because there was a week of mourning for him before the Passover which began that year on April 11. During that Passover many of the soldiers, who could have still been looking for the baby Jesus, were killed in the riots with Jewish protesters.

According to the law, Jesus was circumcised at the age of eight days (Luke 2:21). The scripture does not say that this was done in the Temple; and if this analysis is correct, the circumcision would have taken place while the family was in Egypt. Within a short time after arriving in the country of Egypt, Joseph received word from the angel that it was safe to return, because **those** who had sought the life of the child had all died (Matt 3:20). This may have referred not only to Herod but also to the soldiers killed in the riots in Jerusalem.

After the family returned to Jerusalem and after the days of Mary's purification, they brought Jesus into the Temple to offer sacrifice; and He was blessed by Simeon (Luke 2:22). According to the law of Moses, this sacrifice was to be made 40 days after the birth of a man-child (Lev 2:1-8). This would have occurred on May 13 in the year 4 BC. It was in late May that the Emperor of Rome, Caesar Augustus, formally announced that Archelaus would be the new king of Judea. When Joseph heard that Archelaus was confirmed as king and knowing the brutal reputation of the Herod family, he returned with his family to Galilee, to their home city of Nazareth (Matt 3:22-23; Luke 2:39).

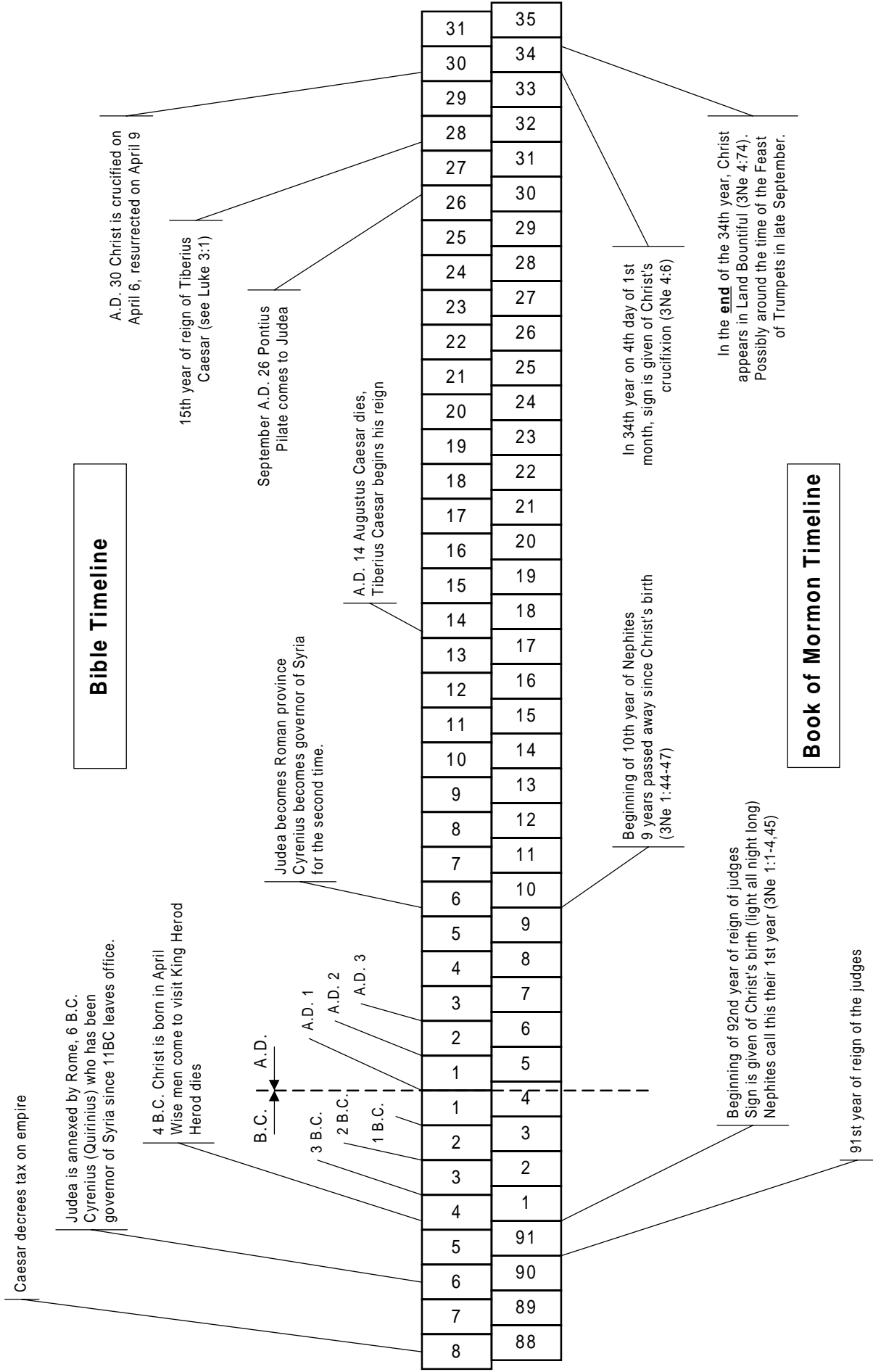
4. Conclusions

In summary, then, Matthew records that after the visit of the wise men and the return of Jesus' family from Egypt, they went to the city of Nazareth to live. Luke records that after Jesus' birth and the blessing in the Temple, they returned to their home in Nazareth. Each story gives different details, but they end the same way -- the family returned to Nazareth. The date of April 3, 4 BC, for Christ's birth and the corresponding historical evidence solves every difficulty in Biblical interpretation and completely reconciles the accounts in Matthew, Luke, and the Book of Mormon.

Following are drawings that help to illustrate this outline of history. The first drawing shows the years between the birth and death of Christ with the major events identified. The Bible year is based on our current calendar, as compared with the Nephite year that was changed to coincide with the date of Christ's birth in April.

The second drawing gives more detail between the visit of the angel to Zacharias and the return of Jesus' family to their home in Nazareth. The third narrows down the focus to April 2-6, allowing for the 8-hour time difference between Jerusalem and the Book of Mormon lands.

Timeline of the Life of Christ



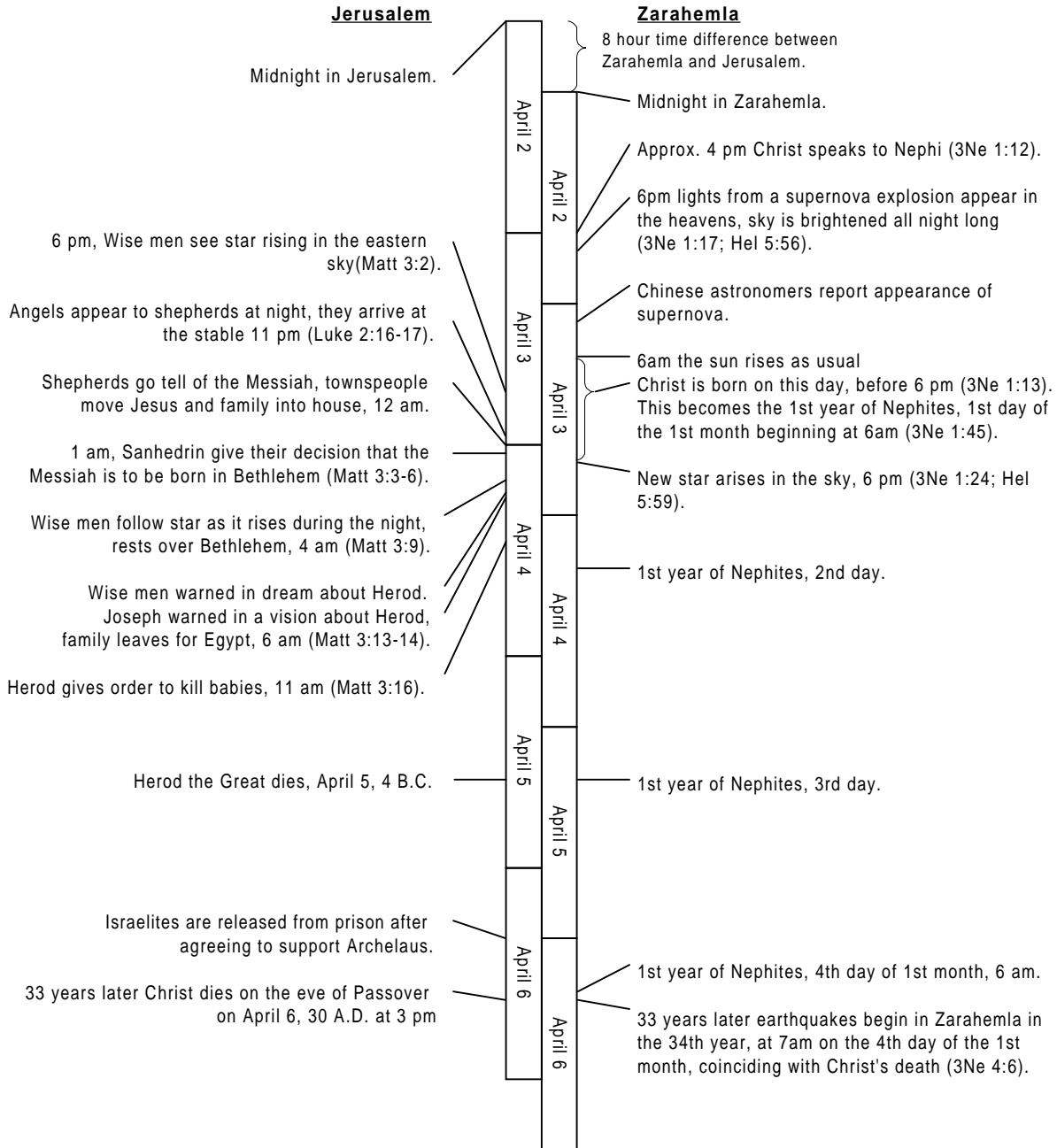
Bible Timeline

Book of Mormon Timeline

Events surrounding the birth of Christ, 6 B.C. to 4 B.C.

Zacharias serves in Temple (Luke 1:5-22).	—	<u>6 B.C.</u>	
		December	
Elizabeth conceives John the Baptist (Luke 1:24).	—	<u>5 B.C.</u>	
		January	
Elizabeth hides herself for 5 months (Luke 1:24).	—		February - June
Angel comes to virgin Mary, she visits Elizabeth, Jesus is conceived (Luke 1:26-43).	—		July
Elizabeth delivers John the Baptist (Luke 1:55-56).	—		October
		<u>4 B.C.</u>	
Matthias is murdered by Herod the Great. Josephus records a partial eclipse of the moon on that night.	—		March 13
Forty young men attempt to remove Golden Eagle from temple, they are executed by command of Herod.	—		March 14-18
Herod goes to the Springs to try the cure for his illness. He nearly dies and returns to Jerusalem. Herod orders the execution of leaders of Hebrew families to be carried out at his death, so his death will be mourned.	—		March 18-25
Israelite prisoners arrive. Herod receives authorization from Caesar to either free or kill his son Antipater.	—		March 25-30
Herod attempts suicide. After hearing that Antipater tried to bribe prison guard, Herod orders him executed.	—		April 1
Jesus is born on the evening of April 3, 4 B.C.	—	April 2	} See Detail
		April 3	
Herod dies	—	April 4	
		April 5	
Herod is mourned by his friends and family. Joseph and Mary arrive in border town of Egypt.	—	April 6	
		April 6-11	
Jesus is circumcised (Luke 2:21).	—		April 11
Passover begins. Archelaus sends soldiers to put down rebellion, 3000 Jewish protesters & many soldiers killed.	—		April 11-18
Angel tells Joseph to return home because <u>those</u> (Herod and soldiers?) who sought the child's life are dead (Matt 3:19).	—		April 18-May 5
After arriving in Jerusalem Mary is purified in the Temple, Jesus is blessed at 40 days old (Luke 2:22-38; Lev 12:8).	—		May 13
Word comes that Archelaus is appointed ethnarch of Judea, Jesus' family returns to their home in Nazareth (Matt 3:22; Luke 2:39).	—		May 20

**Comparison of events in Jerusalem and Zarahemla
about the time of Christ's birth, April 2-6, 4 B.C.**



5. Answer to objections

The above evidence has been presented as the best possible explanation of the events recorded in scripture about Christ's birth, and probably the only one which can adequately reconcile all of the scriptures with the facts of history. Some objections may be raised to the conclusions obtained from this approach, which are answered as follows:

a) As those who do not accept the Book of Mormon may point out, the fact of Jesus living exactly 33 years and 3 days is only found in the Book of Mormon, and may not be historically accurate. Aside from the Biblical evidence presented to support this (Luke 3:30), we can also point out numerous facts of science and archaeology that support the validity of the Book of Mormon. Most of this knowledge was not available to Joseph Smith in 1830, which lends support to the belief that he was a true prophet who truly translated this ancient record as he claimed.

The men who wrote the Book of Mormon were not only historians but also men of God. As a translation of an ancient document, the Book of Mormon stands equal with the Bible in its testimony of Jesus Christ and in its accurate description of historical events.

b) As mentioned above, scholars have criticized Luke's history for, among other things, putting Cyrenius as governor of Syria prior to 4 BC. But the archaeological evidence is now available to show that Cyrenius was governor twice -- once in about 11-6 BC, and again in AD 6-8. Luke was right, and the scholars were wrong.

c) Many Christians who have studied the story of the wise men have concluded that they didn't actually arrive at Jesus' birth, but rather two years later. This author held such opinion until being presented with the evidences discussed in this article. Some reasons for this interpretation include:

- Herod ordered all children under the age of two to be killed (Matt 3:16).
- If the wise men saw the star appear when Jesus was born, it would have taken them a few years to travel from their country to Jerusalem.
- Jesus was in a "house" rather than a stable when the wise men came (Matt 3:11).
- Jesus is called a "child" rather than an infant in Matthew, implying that he was older.

An interesting question is, if Jesus was two years old when the wise men came, why did they go to Bethlehem instead of Nazareth? The scripture indicates that the wise men took the counsel of the scribes and headed to Bethlehem, being led by the star (Matt 3:6-16). There are some who believe that the wise men started for Bethlehem, but the star led them to where Jesus actually was; that is, His home in Nazareth. If that were true, then why would the family have been required to flee to Egypt? The order from Herod was to kill the children in Bethlehem, but if Jesus had been living in Nazareth then He wouldn't have been in immediate danger.

In ancient times a child's age was calculated from conception, and a baby was considered one year old when born. Herod required all the children in Bethlehem two years old and younger to be executed. By our modern method of counting, this means that Herod was ordering the killing of all children from birth to one year of age. This number may have been as high as thirty children, based on the estimated Bethlehem population of 1000-2000 inhabitants and a rate of live birth of fifteen babies per thousand inhabitants per year. Herod, the cruel tyrant, was more concerned with protecting his position of authority than with killing thirty innocent young children.

From the history already presented, it becomes clear that they only historically valid date for Jesus' birth can be in the year 4 BC. This means that if the wise men arrived even one year later, Herod would have already been dead, and the story in Matthew would be incorrect.

The "house" where they found Jesus could be easily explained by the fact that the excited citizens, knowing that the Messiah had just been born, would have come to worship him and opened their home to the family. If this is true, it gives a good illustration of how the Son of God is able to lift the lowly out of their humble circumstances and place them in a position of honor.

The fact that Matthew calls Jesus a "child" doesn't mean that He was older than a newborn infant. In Luke chapter 2, where Jesus is called a "babe", He is also called a "child" numerous times (Luke 2:17,21,27). The Greek word for "child" in both books is the same.

d) Another objection to the belief that Jesus was born in 4 BC is raised by some Restoration members based on D&C 17. Section 17:1a tells that the church was restored "one thousand eight hundred and thirty years since the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the flesh". If this statement were literally true, it would mean that Christ was born in AD 1 rather than 4 BC.

This conclusion cannot be true, based on historical facts already presented. Another explanation must be possible for the statement in D&C 17. Note the following:

- The facts of history do not agree that Christ was born 1830 years prior to 1830. If so, Herod would have already been dead by AD 1, which invalidates the 3rd chapter of Matthew.
- If Christ was born on April 6 of AD 1, then He couldn't have been crucified on April 6, 30 AD; because the Book of Mormon says that He was 33 years old and 4 days at his crucifixion. Nor could He have been crucified on the other two possible dates of April 3, AD 33 or April 22, AD 34.
- With this historical approach, we are not questioning the reliability of the Doctrine and Covenants in general. However, the statement "1830 years since the coming of our Lord" is based on the common understanding that our modern calendar starts at the birth of Christ, which is not the case. Our calendar was changed by Pope Gregory XIII in 1582, and was based on the incorrect calculation of Dionysius Exiguus for the year of Christ's birth.
- Was that statement in D&C 17 stated word for word from the mouth of the Lord? It does not appear to be so, because the verse says "since the coming of OUR Lord in the flesh". Did Christ give this wording? If so, then Christ is His own Lord!
- No, the answer is that Section 17 was a compilation of revelations given on different dates, and when they were assembled in the 1835 Doctrine and Covenants, the introduction was written by someone (possibly Joseph Smith). Since this portion of this introductory verse was actually phrased by a mortal, rather than direct from God's mouth, there is a possibility of error in its details.
- The purpose of the introductory phrase "1830 years..." is to identify the year in which the church was organized (based on the common calendar), rather than to make a definitive historical statement on the exact date of Christ's birth.

E. Wise men seek Him

Who were the Wise Men? For several centuries traditional Christianity has regarded the Wise Men as "Magi" from the east, who observed the stars, saw the sign of Christ's birth, and came to bring Him gifts and worship Him. Several interesting questions might be asked to challenge this traditional belief:

Were these men Magi? Magi were the priestly class of Persia who headed the pagan religion of Zoroastrianism.

Why would pagan Magi come to worship a newborn Jewish Messiah? The Inspired Version says that they came to worship a "Messiah", or Savior, not just a King (Matt 3:2 IV).

Why would seeing a star tell them anything about a king in Israel? If they observed a spectacular event in the stars, why would this tell them anything about the small, insignificant nation of Israel thousands of miles away, much less compel them to go worship another nation's God?

Why didn't people in Jerusalem see the star two years earlier? The Jews seemed to be unaware that a new star had appeared, because Herod had to inquire of the wise men as to the time the star made its appearance (Matt 3:7). In addition, according to the Book of Mormon, the new star didn't appear until after Christ had been born (3Ne 1:24).

With the understanding that the wise men arrived to visit the baby Jesus on the same night that He was born, and the knowledge that the star didn't appear until about the time of His birth, it seems reasonable to assume that the wise men must have previously known of a prophecy foretelling the birth of the Messiah. They knew from the prophecy that Jesus would be born in the land of Jerusalem and approximately the time of His birth so that they could arrive there in time to pay their devotion..

The Book of Mormon possibly gives us some clues as to the identity of the wise men. Samuel the Lamanite prophesied that the Christ, or Messiah, would be born in five years after his prophecy. He left the land of Nephi and "was never heard of more among the Nephites" (Hel 5:120). We recall that in the Americas two years prior to the birth of Christ it is recorded that,

"angels did appear unto men, wise men, and did declare unto them glad tidings of great joy" (Hel 5:125-126).

Note the wording of this verse and its similarity to the message of the angel in Luke: "For behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be unto all people" (Luke 1:10).

Some time before the sign was given of Christ's birth, Nephi, son of Helaman, departed out of the land and was never seen again by the Nephites (3Ne 1:2). Nephi had been preaching about Christ and experiencing many spiritual manifestations, and his brother Lehi "was not a whit behind him as to things pertaining to righteousness" (Hel 4:22-23). The text doesn't say that Lehi left the land at the same time as Nephi, but his name never appears again after that time either.

It seems reasonable that these men who knew of the prophecies of the coming Messiah would want to be there to worship Him. They knew the time of His arrival based on Samuel's prophecy, and would have had time (up to five years) to make their journey to the land of Jerusalem. But why did they go to Jerusalem instead of to Bethlehem? Didn't they know of the prophecy in Micah?

Although the Book of Mormon people had the brass plates containing Old Testament scriptures up to the time Lehi left Jerusalem, presumably the book of Micah was not included with them. A prophecy concerning Jesus' birthplace that Nephi, Lehi, and Samuel would have known is found in Alma 5:19: "He shall be born of Mary at Jerusalem, which is the land of our forefathers." This may have been the reason they went first to Jerusalem to look for Christ.

This provides a very interesting link between Book of Mormon and Bible histories. According to legend, one of the Wise Men was dark skinned. This could easily be explained by the fact that Samuel was a Lamanite and his skin would have been darker than his Nephite brothers. The idea that the Wise Men

came from the New World cannot be proved exactly, but it does explain things much better than pagan priests who were merely studying the stars. It also gives a good object lesson: those who are truly wise are those led by the Spirit and the word of God to come seek Jesus. As a modern phrase expresses, "Wise men still seek Him."

F. God has perfect timing

As we have seen, the light from the star of Bethlehem was likely the result of a supernova explosion. Astronomers use the term "light-year" to describe the distance that light travels in a year, which equals 5.878 trillion miles. The star in our galaxy that is nearest to Earth is Alpha Centauri, which is a little over four light-years away, meaning that light from Alpha Centauri takes about four years to reach the earth. Other stars in our galaxy are many times farther away, up to 100,000 light-years.

Think of the monumental implications of this: the light resulting from the supernova explosion occurred years and perhaps centuries before the birth of Christ. The light traveled through space and arrived on Earth just prior to the birth of Christ, fulfilling the prophecies of Samuel and guiding the wise men to the Savior! Conceivably God may have caused the supernova explosion to occur even before the fall of Adam and Eve, so that at the right time the sign would appear to provide a testimony of salvation through His only begotten Son!

If you ever wonder whether God is in control, remember the star of Bethlehem. This illustration gives a powerful reinforcement to the scripture, "All things work together for good to them that love God" (Rom 8:28). If God is in control of the universe to this extent, then He can certainly help us overcome our obstacles in life no matter how large they seem to us. We may wonder why God has allowed things to happen to us, but we will see that He has it all in His control. This is particularly true when we have yielded ourselves to His will and are working for Him rather than against Him. Just as the unbelievers in the Book of Mormon who sought to kill the believers in Samuel's prophecy, we may not believe that God has fulfilled His promises, and we may not understand how He possibly could; but God will fulfill His word perfectly for His glory.

God knew from before the beginning of this world the day and hour when Christ would be born. He timed the supernova perfectly, as well as many other signs and prophecies testifying of Christ. If this is true of Jesus' birth, then it is also true of the Second Coming. The scripture says that, "of that day and hour no one knoweth; no, not the angels of God in heaven, but my Father only" (Matt 24:43). Christ's coming will not be a moment sooner or later than God has decreed.

Think of how this relates to Zion. People often wonder, when will Zion be? An interesting scripture is found in Psa 102:13; "The time to favor [Zion], yea, the set time is come." Zion will be, and there is an appointed time when it will happen! God has already set in motion the cultural, social, economic, and spiritual forces that will all come together in the culmination of Zion; as well as signs in the heavens such as the sun being darkened and falling stars, which will bear witness to the work of God.

Often Restoration preachers are heard to say, "Zion will be--the question is, will we be a part of it or not?" That statement is very true; but do we believe it? It is easy to say those words as an admonition to righteousness. However, if we are honest with ourselves we may realize that we don't really believe that Zion might come and we would be left out. Zion truly will be in the Lord's own time, and our inheritance will be given to another people if we are not spiritually prepared when that time comes. Since we do not know God's timetable for Zion, it is imperative that we are constantly diligent in our preparations, no matter what the circumstances around us or the actions of others.