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When Did Herod the Great Reign?

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Abstract

For about 100 years there has been a consensus among scholars that Herod the Great reigned from 37 to 4 BCE. However, there have been several challenges to this consensus over the past four decades, the most notable being the objection raised by W.E. Filmer. This paper argues that Herod most likely reigned from late 39 BCE to early 1 BCE, and that this reconstruction of his reign can account for all of the surviving historical references to the events of Herod's reign more logically than the current consensus can. Moreover, the reconstruction of Herod's reign proposed in this paper accounts for all of the datable evidence relating to Herod's reign, whereas the current consensus is unable to explain some of the evidence that it dismisses as ancient errors or that it simply ignores.

Keywords

Archelaus; Antipas; Herod the Great; Josephus; Philip; Schürer

The dates for the reign of Herod seem to be well-established: He was named king of Judea by the Romans in 40 BCE, began his reign in Jerusalem after conquering the city in 37 BCE and died in 4 BCE. This is the consensus of the majority of scholars, and has been for at least a century since the publication of Schürer's *History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*. The logic for this position is as follows:¹

1. Herod was named king by Antony and Octavian "in the one hundred eighty-fourth Olympiad, the consuls being Gnaeus Domitius Calvinus for the second time and Gaius Asinius Pollio."² The one

¹ Emil Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, 5 vols. (New York: Scribner's, 1896; reprint, revised G. Vermes and F. Millar, eds. 3 vols. in 4; Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1973-1987) 1.281 n. 3; 1.2 84 n. 11; 1.327, n. 1.

² Josephus, *Ant.* 14.389.

hundred eighty-fourth Olympiad ran from July 1, 44 BCE to June 30, 40 BCE and Calvinus and Pollio were named consuls in 40 BCE. Thus, Herod was named king in 40 BCE.

2. Herod took Jerusalem “during the consulship at Rome of Marcus Agrippa and Caninius Gallus, in the one hundred eighty-fifth Olympiad.”³ The one hundred eighty-fifth Olympiad ran from July 1, 40 BCE to June 30, 36 BCE and Agrippa and Gallus were named consuls in 37 BCE. Thus, Herod began his reign in Jerusalem in 37 BCE.
3. Herod died shortly after a lunar eclipse, but before the Passover.⁴ The eclipse is usually taken to be the partial lunar eclipse on March 13, 4 BCE, twenty-nine days before the Passover on April 11.

In addition to these reasons, the reigns of Herod’s sons and successors also appear to indicate that he died in 4 BCE. Archelaus was banished in 6 CE after a reign of ten years over Judea, Samaria and Idumea.⁵ Herod Antipas lost the tetrarchy of Galilee and Perea in the second year of Gaius (38/39 CE) after a reign of forty-three years according to numismatic evidence.⁶ Herod Philip died in the twentieth year of Tiberius (33/34 CE) after a reign of thirty-seven years over Gaulanitis.⁷ All of these point to their taking office in 4 BCE.

Despite this widely held opinion that Herod reigned from 40 (37) to 4 BCE, this was neither the consensus before Schürer nor has it gone unchallenged in the last half-century. Most disturbingly, the Schürer consensus assigns only thirty-six years to Herod’s reign, thirty-three of them in Jerusalem, whereas Josephus reports the figures as thirty-seven and thirty-four respectively.⁸ All early Christian sources place the birth of Jesus after Pass-

³) Josephus, *Ant* 14.487-488, *War* 1.343.

⁴) Josephus, *Ant*. 17.167, 213; *War* 2.10.

⁵) Josephus, *Ant*. 17.342.

⁶) Josephus, *Ant*. 18.252; Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, Rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998) 300, §516.

⁷) Josephus, *Ant*. 18.106.

⁸) Josephus, *Ant*. 17.191. Schürer claimed that Josephus used inclusive reckoning (1896 edition 1.200-201, Vermes and Millar edition, Schürer, *History* 326-327). If Josephus used inclusive reckoning to arrive at thirty-seven and thirty-four years (i.e., the years 40—4 BCE inclusive totals thirty-seven), such inclusive reckoning is not indicated elsewhere in Josephus. The reasoning is weak, since all of the supposed “inclusive reckoning” adduced in Schürer, *History* 1.200-201 disappears if 38 BCE is taken as Herod’s first official regnal year.

over in 4 BCE, with most of them placing it in sometime in late 3 or early 2 BCE.⁹ Since Jesus was born before the death of Herod according to Matt 2:1-19, these sources imply that Herod died after 4 BCE. Since the mid-1960's several scholars have challenged the consensus dating of Herod's reign.¹⁰ These challenges led Finegan to abandon the Schürer consensus and to endorse a date of 3/2 BCE for the birth of Christ and a date of 1 BCE for the death of Herod in the revised edition of his *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*.¹¹ In keeping with the information supplied by Josephus, this revised end date for Herod's reign is chosen to align Herod's death with a total eclipse of the moon on January 10, 1 BCE, about twelve weeks before the Passover on April 11 that year.¹² Since Herod reigned thirty-seven years, he would have been appointed by the Romans in 39 BCE (counting his first official year from the following Tishri, 38 BCE)¹³ and begun to reign in Jerusalem in late summer 36 BCE (counting his first official year from Tishri, 35 BCE).

While some have sought to answer the challenges in order to defend the Schürer consensus,¹⁴ there remain several unresolved problems with it. In the following discussion, I will seek first to explain the problems others have noted with the 40 (37)—4 BCE dating of Herod's reign, adding a new observation from Josephus that has not heretofore been used in the debate. Then I will note that there is a passage in Josephus that has gone largely unexamined, but that also bears upon the dating of Herod's reign and challenges the Schürer consensus. Where applicable, I will also deal with the arguments used by Barnes and Bernegger to defend the Schürer consensus.¹⁵

⁹ Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, 284-291, §486-500 and table 139.

¹⁰ Ormond Edwards, "Herodian Chronology," *PEQ* 114 (1982) 29-42; W.E. Filmer, "Chronology of the Reign of Herod the Great," *JTS* ns 17 (1966) 283-298; Paul Keresztes, *Imperial Rome and the Christians: From Herod the Great to About 200 A.D.* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1989) 1-43; Ernest L. Martin, *The Birth of Christ Recalculated*, 2nd ed. (Pasadena, CA: Foundation for Biblical Research, 1980); "The Nativity and Herod's Death," in *Chronos, Kairos, Christos: Nativity and Chronological Studies Presented to Jack Finegan*, ed. Jerry Vardaman and Edwin M. Yamauchi (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989) 85-92; Schürer, *History* 326-327.

¹¹ Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* 291, §500 and 301, §518.

¹² There were no lunar eclipses in 3 or 2 BCE.

¹³ Filmer, "Reign of Herod," 295.

¹⁴ Timothy David Barnes, "The Date of Herod's Death," *JTS* ns 19 (1968) 204-219; P.M. Bernegger, "Affirmation of Herod's Death in 4 BCE," *JTS* ns 34 (1983) 526-531.

¹⁵ These objections are confined arguments about the end of Herod's reign, so no discussion of them will appear in the sections discussing the early part of Herod's reign.

However, when using Josephus we must exercise caution, since it is well documented that he was not always accurate in his portrayal of events. Like many other ancient historians, he at times modified events to suit his rhetorical and ideological purposes.¹⁶ Josephus' accounts especially need to be examined when he reports speeches, which are not verbatim transcripts of what was said, but often contain the historian's account of what should have been said, could have been said, or what the historian wanted to have been said given his ideological biases. In addition, when Josephus reports on people's motives or is attempting to convince his audience of the reasons for a person's actions, he may well be embellishing the truth in order to accomplish his rhetorical goal of persuading his readers to adopt his view of events and their causes.

Nevertheless, there is one area in which everyone who attempts to reconstruct the chronology of Herod's reign agrees: Josephus' chronological notices are more-or-less reliable. This can be seen in that all chro-

¹⁶ The literature on the subject is quite extensive. A modest list relating to historiography is: Robert T. Anderson, "Josephus' Accounts of Temple Building: History, Literature or Politics?" *Proceedings of the Eastern Great Lakes and Midwest Bible Societies* 9 (1989) 246-257; Harold W. Attridge, "Josephus and His Works," in *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period*, ed. Michael E. Stone (CRINT; Assen: Van Gorcum, 1984) 185-232; Miriam Pucci Ben Zeev, "The Reliability of Josephus Flavius: The Case of Hecataeus' and Manetho's Accounts of Jews and Judaism: Fifteen Years of Contemporary Research (1974-1990)," *JSJ* 24 (1993) 215-234; Pieter J.J. Botha, "History, Rhetoric and the Writings of Josephus," *Neot* 31 (1997) 1-20; Magen Broshi, "The Credibility of Josephus," *JJS* 33 (1982) 379-84; Louis H. Feldman, "Flavius Josephus" in *Ancient Greek Authors*, ed. Ward W. Briggs (Dictionary of Literary Biography 176; Detroit: Gale Research, 1997) 234-240; "Josephus (C.E. 37—c. 100)," in *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, ed. William Horbury, W.D. Davies, and John Sturdy (1999) 901-921; Philip Edgcumbe Hughes, "The Value of Josephus As a Historical Source," *EvQ* 15 (1943) 179-83; Eric D. Huntsman, "The Reliability of Josephus: Can He Be Trusted?" in *Masada and the World of the New Testament*, ed. John F. and John W. Welch Hall (BYU Studies; Provo, UT: Brigham Young, 1997) 392-402; Steve Mason, "Will the Real Josephus Please Stand Up?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 23, 5 (1997) 58-68; Andre Paul, "Flavius Josephus' 'Antiquities of the Jews': An Anti-Christian Manifesto," *NTS* 31 (1985) 473-480; Tessa Rajak, "The Sense of History in Jewish Intertestamental Writing," in *Crises and Perspectives: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Polytheism, Biblical Theology, Palestinian Archaeology and Intertestamental Literature*, ed. A.S. Van der Woude (*OrSt*; Leiden: Brill, 1986) 124-145; Donna R. Runnalls, "The Rhetoric of Josephus," in *Handbook of Classical Rhetoric in the Hellenistic Period 300 BCE-A.D. 400*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 1997) 737-754; Solomon Zeitlin, "A Survey of Jewish Historiography: From the Biblical Books to the 'Sefer ha-Kabbalah' with Special Emphasis on Josephus," *JQR* 59 (1969) 171-214.

nologies, both those underlying the Schürer consensus as well as those that have challenged it, make extensive use of these notices and treat most of them as accurate, challenging only a few that are deemed for various reasons to be Josephan mistakes. In the treatment below, I will examine Josephus' chronological statements for accuracy when this can be tested. When it cannot, we will simply have to rely on Josephus' statements and whether they fit well with his other chronological assertions, since he is our only source for these chronological notices.

There is a difference, however, in how those who follow the Schürer consensus and those who challenge it reckon the Josephus' dating of the years of Herod's reign. The Schürer consensus reckons the dating as inclusive dates. That is, both the beginning years and the ending years are counted when Josephus reports years of Herod's reign. Thus when some event is reported as happening after three years of Herod's reign, only two actual years have elapsed, since the year Herod became king is counted as one year, his first year of his actual reign, the second year and his second actual year as the third year. This is why, as noted above, the Schürer consensus assigns only thirty-six years to Herod's reign, thirty-three of them in Jerusalem, whereas Josephus reports the figures as thirty-seven and thirty-four respectively. However, those who challenge the Schürer consensus note that there is little evidence that Josephus used inclusive reckoning, and they cite the figures given for the reigns of the high priests contemporary with Herod that are always to be reckoned in actual years.¹⁷

Bernegger challenged the assertion that Josephus always counted the reigns of the high priests as given in actual years.¹⁸ As proof he cites Josephus' discussion of the Roman tax registration in Syria in 6 CE during which Joazar was deprived of the high priesthood. Josephus states that this took place in the thirty-seventh year after the Battle of Actium.¹⁹ Bernegger then calculates this way: The Battle of Actium took place in 31 BCE. Therefore, one must add only thirty-six years to arrive at 6 CE. However, Bernegger's reasoning only works if one forgets about the date of the Battle of Actium, September 2, 31 BCE. Years after Actium commenced on September 3, not on the following January 1, as Bernegger's calculations assume.²⁰

¹⁷ Filmer, "Reign of Herod," 291-293.

¹⁸ Bernegger, "Herod's Death," 529.

¹⁹ Josephus, *Ant.* 18.26.

²⁰ Barnes, "The Date of Herod's Death," 209 is more nuanced in his treatment of Actian years noting that they overlap parts of two Julian years. Since he dates the twenty-fifth

This is confirmed by the Actian Games, which were founded by Augustus in honor of his victory at Actium and held on September 2 every four years. Josephus states that the census “happened during the thirty-seventh year of Caesar’s victory over Antony at Actium” (αἱ ἐγένοντο τριακοστῇ καὶ ἑβδόμῃ ἔτει μετὰ τὴν Ἀντωνίου ἐν Ἀκτίῳ ἦν ταν ὑπὸ Καίσαρος). Since the first year after Actium ran from September 2, 31 BCE to September 1, 30 BCE, the thirty-seventh year ran from September 2, 6 CE to September 1, 7 CE. Thus, in this case Josephus was not counting inclusively, since one-third of the thirty-seventh year after Actium took place in 6 CE.

Moreover, Bernegger claims “Josephus did not consistently use any one convention of counting through his works.”²¹ Yet both the Schürer consensus and the challenge to it rely on Josephus consistently reckoning Herod’s reign by the same method, whether that is inclusive or actual reckoning. To hold that Josephus was inconsistent undermines both attempts to date Herod’s reign.

Throughout the discussion below, we need to keep in mind that much depends on whether Josephus was using inclusive or actual reckoning and that, despite Bernegger’s protest, there is no firm evidence that Josephus used inclusive reckoning for the reigns of the high priests or anyone else during this period.

Problems with 40 BCE as the Starting Date for Herod’s Reign

Josephus describes the appointment of Herod as follows:²²

Upon this, the senate was irritated, and Antony informed them further that it was to 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. 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 to 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 as few as seven days in all. This young man Herod afterward took care

Actian year to 7/6 BCE, he would agree with me that the thirty-second Actian year would have been 6/7 CE.

²¹) Bernegger, “Herod’s Death,” 529.

²²) Josephus, *Ant.* 14.385-389.

to have slain, as we shall show in its proper place. But when the senate was adjourned, 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 on the first day of his reign. Thus did this man receive the kingdom, *having obtained it in the one hundred eighty-fourth Olympiad, the consuls being Gnaeus Domitius Calvinus for the second time and Gaius Asinius Pollio.*

The chronological information given by Josephus is problematic. There are at least three reasons to doubt Josephus' chronology at this point:

1. The one hundred eighty-fourth Olympiad ended on June 30, 40 BCE. However, Calvinus and Pollio were not appointed consuls until after the Treaty of Brundisium on October 2, 40 BCE.²³ Thus, Josephus is in error.
2. Moreover, Appian contradicts Josephus. He mentions Herod's appointment by Antony, along with a number of other kings. From the context, it is clear that Appian places Herod's appointment in 39 BCE.²⁴
3. Even Vermes and Millar in their edition of Schürer note some problem with Josephus' dating, since another passage in Josephus implies that Herod did not journey to Rome until winter, making the earliest date for his appointment late 40 BCE during the one hundred eighty-fifth Olympiad.²⁵

Thus, Josephus' notice of Herod's appointment is somehow in error. Either Herod was appointed late in 40 or sometime in 39 BCE, but not in the first half of 40 BCE as Josephus' Olympian synchronism would imply. Relying on *Antiquities* 14.389 to date the beginning of Herod's reign is a dubious proposition.

Filmer supplements this reasoning with other evidence.

It is agreed that Julius Caesar was murdered in 44 BCE, and that his assassins were defeated by Octavius Caesar and Antony at the battle of Philippi towards the end of

²³) Edwards, "Herodian Chronology," 30.

²⁴) Appian, *Civil Wars* 5.8.75. Sections 69-76 cover the year 39 BCE, which can be determined by comparison to Dio's *Roman History*. This was first noted by Filmer, "Reign of Herod," 285.

²⁵) Josephus, *Ant.* 14.376; Schürer, *History*, 1.281 n. 3.

42 BCE. Now Josephus mentions this battle and records that Antony then marched into Asia where he met and fell in love with Cleopatra. This must have been in 41 BCE, and he goes on to relate how Antony at this time appointed Herod and his brother Phasaelius tetrarchs. It was two years after this, he says, after the Parthians had meanwhile conquered Syria, that they deposed Hyrcanus as high priest, and made Antigonus both king and high priest. Two years after 41 BCE is 39 BCE, and it was only then that Herod went to Rome where he interviewed Antony, and got himself appointed king in place of Antigonus. Once again Josephus does not support his own consular dates.²⁶

Problems with 37 BCE as the Date for Herod's Conquest of Jerusalem

Although Herod had been named king by the Romans, the Parthians had placed the Hasmonean Antigonus on the throne as king and high priest in Jerusalem. Thus, Herod had to raise an army and, with the help of the Romans, conquer Jerusalem and depose Antigonus. This was accomplished three years later with the help of the Roman general Sossius. Josephus provides the following chronological notice connected with Herod's conquest:²⁷

... this destruction befell the city of Jerusalem *when Marcus Agrippa and Caninius Gallus were consuls in Rome on the one hundred eighty-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. *This was after twenty-seven years' time*. So when Sossius had dedicated a crown of gold to God, he marched away from Jerusalem, and carried Antigonus with him in bonds to Antony. However, Herod was afraid lest Antigonus should be kept in prison by Antony, and that when he was carried to Rome by him, he might get his cause to be heard by the senate. He 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 done, he should be free from that fear. *And thus did the government of the Hasmoneans cease, one hundred twenty-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

²⁶) Filmer, "Reign of Herod," 287; Josephus, *Ant.* 14.301, 324, 330.

²⁷) Josephus, *Ant.* 14.487-491.

was of no more than a common family and of no eminent extraction, but one that was subject to other kings. This is what history tells us was the end of the Hasmonean family.

The consular year and Olympiad given by Josephus indicates that Herod took Jerusalem in 37 BCE. It was the Day of Atonement (“the fast”) on 10 Tishri in the Jewish calendar, but the third month (September) in the Greek calendar. However, there are two other data given by Josephus in this passage that contradict this:

1. Jerusalem fell to Herod exactly twenty-seven years after it fell to Pompey. Since Pompey took Jerusalem on the Day of Atonement in 63 BCE, the fall of Jerusalem to Herod should be placed on the Day of Atonement in 36 BCE.²⁸
2. Josephus states that shortly after Jerusalem’s fall Antigonus was taken to Antony, who had him executed. This ended 126 years of the government set up by the Hasmoneans.²⁹ As far as I know, no one has taken this datum into account. If Herod took Jerusalem and then persuaded Antony to execute Antigonus in 37 BCE as the Schürer consensus holds, then the government set up by the Hasmoneans should have started in 163 BCE. However, no such government is mentioned in any of the sources. On the other hand, if Herod took Jerusalem in 36 BCE, the Hasmonean government should have been founded in 162 BCE. In fact, this is exactly what is reported in both Josephus and 1 Maccabees. In this year Antiochus V made peace with Judas Maccabeus: “...the king sent to Judas, and to those that were besieged with them, and promised to give them peace, and to permit them to make use of, and live according to the laws

²⁸) See also the discussion in Filmer, “Reign of Herod,” 285-286. Filmer believes that Josephus is stating that Jerusalem not only fell on the feast day to both Pompey and Herod, but also on the same day of the week. If he is correct, then Jerusalem must have fallen in 36 BCE, as this was not possible in 37 BCE, the date proffered by the Schürer consensus.

²⁹) *Ant.* 17.162 states that Herod claimed that he benefited the Jews by rebuilding their temple, something the Hasmoneans had not done in 125 years of their rule. If Herod was counting the end of this period as his official appointment by Rome, which I date to 39 BCE, then it can be said that the Hasmoneans controlled the temple for 125 years. They recaptured it in 164 BCE from the forces of Antiochus IV Epiphanes and controlled it until 39 BCE. Of course, if one follows the Schürer consensus procedure and reads the 125 years inclusively, this would support 40 BCE as the year when Herod was appointed by Rome.

of their fathers.”³⁰ Thus, it was in 162 BCE that the Hasmoneans first were acknowledged as authorities who could govern according to traditional Jewish law. Subsequently, Judas behaved as if he had such authority over a sovereign state—as exemplified by his treaty of “the Jewish nation” with Rome.³¹

Thus, it would appear that Josephus’ own statements contradict his assertion in the very context where he gives the consular year for the beginning of Herod’s reign in Jerusalem. Nonetheless, the Schürer consensus could hold that the data given by Josephus here were reckoned by inclusive reckoning, making no conflict. However, that Josephus was not using inclusive reckoning and that these data should be seen as reporting actual years is demonstrated by three more considerations.

First, Josephus also contradicts his own consular year for Herod’s conquest of Jerusalem by his chronology of the high priests.³² He states that Pompey reinstated Hyrcanus II as high priest in 63 BCE and Hyrcanus reigned twenty-four more years (to 39 BCE), followed by Antigonus’ reign of three years and three months (or three years and six months).³³ The total is twenty-seven years, three months (or six months). Since Hyrcanus would have been reinstated in September (Tishri) 63 BCE, Antigonus would have been executed in December 36 BCE (or March 35 BCE).³⁴ This fits well into the sequence of events if Herod conquered Jerusalem in September 36 BCE. The three (or six) additional months would have been the time needed to take Antigonus to Antony, for Antony to receive Herod’s bribe and request that Antigonus be killed, and to arrange for Antigonus’ execution. Even if the account of Herod’s bribe to Antony is discounted as part of Josephus’ anti-Herodian, pro-Hasmonean polemic, it is unlikely that Antigonus was immediately executed upon the conquest of Jerusalem, making

³⁰) Josephus, *Ant.* 12.382; cf. 1 Macc 6:59.

³¹) Josephus, *Ant.* 12.414-419; 1 Macc 8.

³²) This argument was first adduced by Filmer, “Reign of Herod,” 287.

³³) Josephus, *Ant.* 20.244-245 reports three years and three months, *Ant.* 14.97 reports three years and six months. Filmer does not note the discrepancy.

³⁴) Note that if Josephus was using inclusive reckoning, Antigonus’ reign would have lasted from Tishri 40 BCE to Tishri 38 BCE, and he would have been executed in December 38 BCE or March 37 BCE. However, the Schürer consensus holds that Herod conquered Jerusalem on 10 Tishri 37 BCE, too late to have been during Antigonus’ lifetime if inclusive reckoning was employed by Josephus.

Josephus' overall chronology valid, even if he has embellished the account for his own purposes.

Second, Dio's *Roman History* casts doubt on the Schürer consensus that the conquest of Jerusalem occurred in 37 BCE. Concerning 37 BCE Dio states:³⁵

...during the following year [37 BCE] the Romans accomplished nothing worthy of note in Syria. For Antony spent the entire year reaching Italy and returning again to the province, and Sossius, because anything he did would be advancing Antony's interests rather than his own, and he therefore dreaded his jealousy and anger, spent the time in devising means, not for achieving some success and incurring his enmity, but for pleasing him without engaging in any activity.

Thus, Sossius would not have helped Herod—a man favored by Antony—capture Jerusalem in 37.³⁶

Finally, it should be noted that Herod besieged Jerusalem at the end of a Sabbatical year when food supplies were running low.³⁷ This was the same situation in mid-162 BCE near the end of a sabbatical year.³⁸ Thus, Tishri 163-Elul 162 was a Sabbatical year. Since the summer of 162 BCE fell during a Sabbatical year, the summer of 37 BCE could not have been a Sabbatical year. Instead, Tishri 37 BCE-Elul 36 BCE was also a Sabbatical year.³⁹ Since food supplies would have been adequate at the beginning of the Sabbatical year, Jerusalem could not have fallen to Herod in Tishri 37 BCE as the Schürer consensus holds. Instead, Jerusalem fell at the beginning of the following year (Tishri 36), with the siege taking place during the summer of the Sabbatical year (summer of 36 BCE).

³⁵) Dio, *Roman History* 49.23.1-2.

³⁶) This argument was first adduced by Filmer, "Reign of Herod," 286.

³⁷) Josephus, *Ant.* 14.475; see the discussion in Filmer, "Reign of Herod," 289-291.

³⁸) 1 Macc 6:49, 53. That this took place in the summer during the end of a Sabbatical year is necessary, since supplies would have been adequate if it were the fall or winter near the beginning of a Sabbatical year.

³⁹) Filmer, "Reign of Herod," 289-291. This is confirmed by Ben Zion Wacholder, "The Calendar of Sabbatical Cycles During the Second Temple and the Early Rabbinic Period," *HUCA* 44 (1973) 153-193, esp. 87, 89. In addition, Rodger Young has shown that a proper reading of the *Seder Olam* confirms Wacholder's schedule of Sabbatical years. Rodger C. Young, "Seder Olam and the Sabbaticals Associate with the Two Destructions of Jerusalem: Part I," *JBQ* 34 (2006) 173-179; "Seder Olam and the Sabbaticals Associated with the Two Destructions of Jerusalem: Part II," *JBQ* 26 (2006) 252-259.

Problems with 4 BCE as the Date of Herod’s Death

The Eclipse

Unlike the dates for the beginning of Herod’s reign, Josephus simply relates that Herod died after a lunar eclipse, but before the Passover. Between 7 BCE and 1 BCE there were three total and one partial lunar eclipses:⁴⁰

Table 1. Lunar Eclipses Between 7 BCE and 1 BCE

Date	Type of Eclipse	Period Between Eclipse and Passover
March 23, 5 BCE	Total	29 days
September 15, 5 BCE	Total	7 months
March 13, 4 BCE	Partial	29 days
January 10, 1 BCE	Total	92 days

Since the eclipse in March of 5 BCE would require Herod’s death to have taken place in April of 5 BCE, too early even for the Schürer consensus, that eclipse is not a possible candidate. While the eclipse of September of the same year is possible and has its defenders, it is highly unlikely.⁴¹ It would mean that Herod died in late 5 BCE. Since Josephus reports that Herod was nearly seventy years old shortly before his death, and that he was twenty-five years old when his father Antipater named him governor of Galilee in 47 BCE, it follows that Herod was born about 72 BCE. He would have been only 66 or 67 in 5 BCE.⁴² Moreover, Josephus gives a detailed discussion of

⁴⁰⁾ Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* 295, Table 142.
⁴¹⁾ Barnes, “The Date of Herod’s Death,” 204-209; Bernegger, “Herod’s Death,” 526-531. A good argument against this eclipse as being the one referenced by Josephus is found in Paul L. Maier, “The Date of the Nativity and the Chronology of Jesus’ Life,” in *Chronos, Kairos, Christos: Nativity and Chronological Studies Presented to Jack Finegan*, ed. Jerry Vardaman and Edwin M. Yamauchi (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989) 117-118.
⁴²⁾ See Filmer, “Reign of Herod,” 293. At death: Josephus, *Ant.* 17.148; *War* 1.647. At when made governor of Galilee: Josephus, *Ant.* 14.158. The Greek text reads fifteen years, but this must reflect a scribal mistake for twenty-five years, as generally acknowledged by all, include scholars on both sides of the debate (Barnes, “The Date of Herod’s Death,” 209; Filmer, “Reign of Herod,” 293). It is difficult to understand Barnes’ logic about the date of Herod’s death, which he places in 5/4 “with no difficulty at all.” He also agrees that Herod was probably twenty-five in 47 BCE and then states that he had to have died before 2 BCE. However, if Herod was twenty-five in 47 BCE, he would have only been 67 or 68 in 5/4 BCE, not “nearly seventy” as Josephus states (σχεδὸν ἑτῶν ἑβδομήκοντα, *War* 1.647; περὶ ἑτος

the events between the eclipse and the Passover during the year of Herod's death (see discussion below), and seven months appears to be an excessive amount of time for these to have taken place, even if one discounts some of Josephus' discussion of these events as tainted by Josephus' rhetorical and ideological tendencies.

The Schürer consensus holds the eclipse to be the one of March 13, 4 BCE. This also presents a problem for Herod's age, since he would have been only 67 or 68 in 4 BCE. But there are more pressing problems for this date. Josephus reports the following events surrounding Herod's death:⁴³

1. The day before the eclipse Herod had two prominent Jewish rabbis burnt alive for tearing down a golden eagle he had erected over the temple's eastern gate.
2. The day after the eclipse Herod's chronic illness worsened, and his physicians tried many remedies but were not able to reverse his decline.
3. On the advice of his physicians, Herod traveled from Jericho to Callirrhoe, east of the Dead Sea, to bathe in the mineral waters.
4. When the treatment at Callirrhoe failed Herod returned to Jericho.
5. Now acknowledging that he was dying, Herod sent messengers to summon prominent Jewish elders from all areas of his kingdom. His plan was to place them in custody and order their execution when he died. This would ensure that there was mourning (instead of celebration) following his death.
6. Soon after the elders arrived, Herod received letters from Rome giving him authority to execute his son Antipater for the murder of Pheroras and other treasonous acts. Herod had Antipater killed immediately.
7. Five days later Herod died.
8. Herod had ordered that his burial be at Herodium, about twenty-three miles from Jericho. Arrangements for the funeral procession were begun after Herod died. Before it began the crown jewels and royal regalia were brought from Jerusalem. The military throughout Herod's realm as well as relatives gathered for the procession. Spices to treat the body, requiring 500 domestics to carry them, were acquired.

ἐβδομηκοστόν, *Ant.* 1.647). For Barnes' argument to make sense one must read "nearly" (σχεδόν/περί) in very broad terms, in which case Josephus' notice is useless for deciding between 4 BCE and 1 BCE for Herod's death.

⁴³) Josephus, *Ant.* 17.156-191.

9. Following Herod's burial there was the normal seven-day period of mourning (Num 19:11-12).
10. After the end of the mourning period there was the customary feast in honor of the dead.
11. After the funeral feast was over Archelaus as the new king held an audience for the people. He made changes in the ranks of the military, conferring promotions on some. He liberated many men made prisoners by his father. He decided a number of legal cases. He also did "many other things."⁴⁴ These activities must have required at least several days.
12. The Passover came and immediately afterward, Archelaus left for Rome to have his authority to rule confirmed by Augustus.⁴⁵

Unless one were to hold that Josephus' account of this period was simply manufactured from whole cloth by him or his sources (which would mean that the Schürer consensus is as weak as any other proposal, since it also depends on at least some of the events, such as the eclipse, having happened), we must examine his account of this period closely to see whether or not it could fit into the twenty-nine day period between the eclipse of 4 BCE and the following Passover. Martin estimated that these events would require a minimum of fifty-four days between the eclipse and the Passover if every event outlined above were accomplished as quickly as possible.⁴⁶

⁴⁴) Josephus, *Ant.* 17.233.

⁴⁵) Barnes, "The Date of Herod's Death," 207-209 argues that since Archelaus could not have arrived in Rome until May or later, and since Josephus reports that Gaius Caesar was present in Rome when Archelaus was before Augustus (*War* 2.25; *Antiquities* 17.229), this could not have taken place in mid-1 BCE. According to Barnes, Gaius had to have left Rome in early 1 BCE. However, Barnes' reconstruction of Gaius' movements depends on a highly speculative synchronization of the reports about Gaius in Dio, Orosius, Pliny and Suetonius. Not only does he not consider whether or not all of these sources are completely accurate in their reports about Gaius, but he must admit that there are no temporal indicators of Gaius' movements. In addition, he tries to argue (n. 6) that Gaius may have arrived in Syria earlier than January 1, 1 CE, but has only supposition to substantiate his claim. In addition, Barnes argues that this had to happen when Gaius was first made one of Augustus' counselors, and he again cites Dio, who notes that Gaius was introduced into the Senate in 5 BCE. However, Dio is noting when Gaius entered the Senate, and his notice does not say anything about Gaius being invited to be among a select group of counselors as Josephus describes.

⁴⁶) Martin, *The Birth of Christ Recalculated*, 29-34; "The Nativity and Herod's Death," 88-89. Even Barnes, who places Herod's death sometime between December 5 BCE and

However, Martin does not give any indication that he considered whether any of these events might have been embellished by Josephus or by his primary source for Herod’s reign, Nicolaus of Damascus. Of the twelve events enumerated above, the most likely candidates for rhetorical tinkering would have been Herod’s plan to execute the elders (#5) and the lavish arrangements for his funeral (#8).

The account of Herod’s plot to ensure mourning at his death could be typical Josephan anti-Herodian rhetoric. However, the general character of this plot is in keeping with what is known about the cruel and bloodthirsty acts of Herod at the end of his reign. Even if it is exaggerated (e.g., Herod planned on killing only a few elders, not the entire group), it is probably not totally invented.

The lavish arrangements for Herod’s funeral may have been embellished by Nicolaus of Damascus, a close daily companion of Herod whose account of his reign was unquestionably pro-Herodian. This might account for some of the seemingly overblown lavishness of the funeral (i.e., the fetching of the crown jewels, the large amount of spices and attendants), but cannot be completely fabricated. Surely for what amounted to a state funeral the important military leaders as well as Herod’s relatives would have been given the opportunity to be in attendance. Thus, while we might discount some of the rhetorical flourishes of the account of Herod’s funeral, we can hardly discount the entire description as fictionalized.

Let us then tally the number of days needed to accommodate the events between the eclipse and the Passover:

Table 2. Tally of Days Elapsed Between the Eclipse and Passover

Event	Days Elapsed	Total Minimum Days Elapsed
2. Herod’s physicians tried many remedies.	1 day minimum (more likely 2-3 weeks) ⁴⁷	1 (more likely 14-21)
3. Travel from Jericho to Callirrhoe (about 50 miles)	3 days minimum ⁴⁸	4

early April 4 BCE in order to defend the Schürer consensus, admits that more than sixty days are needed for all these events.

⁴⁷⁾ Even with contemporary medicine, a number of days or even weeks are needed to know in the case of serious maladies whether a particular therapy is efficacious.

⁴⁸⁾ This would have been at the normal rate of travel. It may have taken longer given Herod’s frail condition.

Table 2. (cont.)

Event	Days Elapsed	Total Minimum Days Elapsed
4a. Treatment at Callirrhoe	1 day minimum (more likely 1 week or more)	5 (more likely 11 or more)
4b. Return to Jericho	3 days minimum	8
5. The Jewish elders throughout Herod's realm are summoned	6 days minimum ⁴⁹	14
6. Herod receives permission to execute Antipater and has him executed	1 day minimum	15
7. Herod's death five days later	5 days	20
8. Funeral arrangements and funeral	5 days minimum ⁵⁰	25
9. Seven days of mourning	7 days	32
10. Feast in Herod's honor	1 day	33
11. Archelaus' initial governance	7 days	40
12. The Passover	1 day	41

Thus, at least forty-one days are needed for the events between the eclipse and the Passover. A more likely tally that would take into account reasonable medical practice by Herod's physicians would add at least about three weeks, bringing the tally to sixty-two days minimum. This fits well within the ninety-two days between the 1 BCE eclipse and the Passover allowing for a less compressed schedule than the absolute minimum assumed above. But even at the very rushed pace assumed for the events in the tally of forty-one days, the twenty-nine days between the 4 BCE eclipse and the Passover is inadequate.

Moreover, the Schürer consensus requires that Josephus' sources would have had to take note of a relatively minor partial eclipse of 4 BCE where at

⁴⁹⁾ It would have taken at least three days for the word to have reached the extremities of Herod's realm, and another three days for the most distant elders to travel to Herod, if they left immediately upon receiving the summons.

⁵⁰⁾ This assumes most of Herod's family and military officers were within two or three days travel of Herodium and that Josephus or Nicolaus exaggerated the procession. Under this scenario Herod's family and officers traveled directly to Herodium while the procession took place with only a few family and officers who were present with Herod when he died. If the account is followed as narrated in Josephus, add at least another three days.

its height only about one-third of the moon was eclipsed.⁵¹ Given the other total eclipses during this period, this lone partial eclipse seems highly unlikely to have been taken by anyone to be a major portent of coming events.

Martin also points out that the day that Herod would have had the rabbis executed, March 13, 4 BCE, was 15 Adar in the Jewish calendar—the second day of Purim.⁵² As upset as Herod was about the act of the two rabbis, he certainly would not have been so politically insensitive as to have two popular leaders executed during the celebration of Purim when he could have waited a day and avoided any number of political problems created by the timing of these executions.

None of these problems attend the January 10, 1 BCE eclipse, however. All of the events related by Josephus comfortably fit into the ninety-two days between the eclipse and the following Passover. Moreover, Herod would have been about 70 years old in early 1 BCE.

Bernegger has objected that Herod's death could not be in 1 BCE, since Varus was governor of Syria. Varus served as governor from at least 7/6 BCE to 5/4 BCE as coins minted in his name attest.⁵³ He then surmises that Varus probably did not serve as governor after 4 BCE, stating, "Though it cannot be proved that Varus was not legate of Syria for several years after 4 BCE, a tenure of that important position lasting much over three years ought not to be introduced into this period without some corroborative evidence—even for a man who had married (or was soon to marry) a granddaughter of the emperor's sister."⁵⁴ The problem here is that no one knows whether or not Varus was governor of Syria after 4 BCE. To put the burden of proof on those who surmise that he may have been when Bernegger has no proof that he was not is unfair, especially since Bernegger makes no attempt to prove that he was not. In fact, Bernegger concedes that Varus was in a strong political position as an in-law of the imperial family. Considering that he was prominent in Roman politics, being a personal friend of Augustus, elected as consul with Tiberius in 13 BCE, and (disastrously) appointed governor of Germania in 7 CE despite the fact that

⁵¹ The maximum portion of the moon that obscured by the earth's umbra was 36.7% during the partial eclipse of 4 BCE. (Data for eclipses can be obtained on NASA's website. See <http://sunearth.gsfc.nasa.gov/eclipse/LEcat/LE-0099-0000.html>.)

⁵² Martin, *The Birth of Christ Recalculated* 34-41.

⁵³ Bernegger, "Herod's Death," 206-207.

⁵⁴ Bernegger, "Herod's Death," 207.

he was ill-qualified for that position, it would not be at all surprising that he might have been legate of Syria for more than three years. Bernegger's argument is one of supposition and silence in the sources, and we simply cannot prove whether or not Varus as governor of Syria as late as 1 BCE.

The New Testament

Luke 3:1, 23 also has a bearing upon the date of the death of Herod. Luke begins the third chapter with a notice that John the Baptist began his ministry in the fifteenth year of Tiberius. On September 17, 14 CE Tiberius was named head of the Roman state by the Senate. (This followed the death of Augustus on August 19, 14 CE.) Tiberius' fifteenth year would have been August 19, 28-August 19, 29 CE, or if official Roman regnal years were intended, January 1-December 31, 29 CE.⁵⁵

Sometime after John began to preach in the wilderness (probably in the summer of the same year), Jesus came to be baptized. Luke says he was "about thirty years old" (ὥσεί ἐτῶν τριάκοντα, Luke 3:23). If Jesus had been born before the death of Herod, then according to the Schürer consensus that Herod died in 4 BCE, he would have been between at least thirty-three years old in the fifteenth year of Tiberius, but not more than thirty-five years old (Matt 2:6).⁵⁶ If, however, Herod died in 1 BCE, Jesus would have been between thirty-one and thirty-three years old. Thus, the

⁵⁵ Some would argue that Tiberius' reign should be reckoned as the beginning of his joint rule of the provinces with Augustus sometime between 11 and 13 CE. However, as far as is known, ancient sources always counted Tiberius' reign as commencing after the death of Augustus. (See the discussion in Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* 337-341, §578-583. Martin, "The Nativity and Herod's Death," 89 notes that surviving coins and inscriptions also reckon Tiberius' reign from either January 1 or August 19, 14 CE.) The reckoning of Tiberius' fifteenth year as 29 CE is confirmed by John 2:13, 20, 23. Jesus' first Passover following his baptism, should have occurred in 30 CE if Jesus was baptized in the summer of 29 CE. In John 2:20, Jesus' opposition notes "this temple has been built for forty-six years." Josephus reports that Herod began the Temple in the year that Caesar came to Syria and that this was ten years after the Battle of Actium (*Ant.* 15.354; *War* 1.398-399. Actium was fought on September 2, 31 BCE). Therefore, the temple construction began sometime after the spring of 20 BCE. The temple building itself was completed in one year and six months—in late 19 or, more likely, in 18 BCE (*Ant.* 15.421; the rest of the temple precincts were completed after eight years of work [12 BCE], *Ant.* 15:420.) Thus, the forty-sixth anniversary of the completion of Herod's temple would have occurred in late 28 CE or in 29 CE. If it was in 29 the following Passover would have been in spring, 30 CE.

⁵⁶ Jesus would have been no more than about two years old when Herod died (Matt 2:16).

question arises, “What does Luke mean by ‘about’ thirty years of age?” Does he mean “closer to thirty than to thirty-one or twenty-nine?” Or is Luke using “about” to mean something less specific such as “closer to thirty than to twenty or forty?”

Luke reports ages of people in four instances: Luke 2:42; 3:26; 8:42; Acts 4:22.⁵⁷ One of these gives Jesus’ exact age when he attended the Passover in Jerusalem with his parents (Luke 2:42). The other simply tells us that the man whom Peter healed in the temple was “more than forty years old” (ἐτῶν γὰρ ἦν πλείονων τεσσαράκοντα ὁ ἄνθρωπος, Acts 4:22). However, Luke 8:42 is very similar to Luke 3:26. It states that a synagogue ruler had a daughter who was “about twelve years old” (ὥς ἐτῶν δώδεκα). Now, it would appear in choosing to report her as “about twelve,” Luke is attempting to be as accurate as possible. He means something like “closer to twelve than to eleven or thirteen,” since he could have chosen a more general description if he only meant to indicate that she was in early adolescence. But, in choosing to give us an age, he is implying that she was close to twelve, but not exactly twelve, or he is implying that he had a good—but not exact—idea of what her age was (within a year or so). If this case is taken as indicative of Luke’s practice, this would indicate that in Luke 3:26 he is telling us that Jesus was within a year of being thirty years of age during Tiberius’ fifteenth year. Therefore, a more probable date of birth for Jesus is in late 2 BCE, making him about 30 1/2 years old at his baptism, and implying that Herod died in the first quarter of 1 BCE.⁵⁸ Admittedly, this is not a strong argument, since the Greek ὥς or ὥσεῖ are only indicating approximations. However, the probability appears to weigh in favor of Jesus being between thirty and thirty-two years of age at his baptism, not between thirty-three and thirty-five.⁵⁹

⁵⁷) I am counting only the times Luke the narrator reports someone’s age and omitting times when he is quoting the speech of others (e.g., Acts 7:23, Stephen’s speech).

⁵⁸) According to this reconstruction, Jesus could not have been born in early 1 BCE, since Herod was absent from Jerusalem after about January 10, 1 BCE (see Matt 2:1-9).

⁵⁹) One could, perhaps understand thirty-three or thirty-four as “about thirty” if a very loose use of ὥσεῖ is assumed. However, it is hard to see how thirty-five could be “about thirty” in preference to “about forty.” Given the biblical significance of the number forty, one wonders why Luke would not have chosen that number if Jesus was close to thirty-five years of age at his baptism.

The Reigns of Herod's Successors

But what of the reigns of Herod's successors? Archelaus reigned over Judea, Samaria and Idumea until 6 CE, Antipas over Galilee and Perea until the second year of Gaius (38/39 CE), and Philip over Gaulanitis until his death in the twentieth year of Tiberius (33/34 CE).

Herod Archelaus and Herod Antipas

What of the reigns of Archelaus and Antipas? Archelaus was deposed as king of Judea, Samaria and Idumea in the tenth year of his reign and exiled to Vienna in Gaul by Augustus in 6 CE.⁶⁰ This means that Archelaus reckoned his reign from 4 BCE. Likewise, Antipas lost the tetrarchy of Galilee and Perea in the second year of Gaius (38/39 CE) and the latest coins minted under his authority are dated to his forty-third year. This means that he claimed to have begun his reign in 5/4 BCE. Why would Archelaus and Antipas claim to have reigned from 4 BCE if Herod did not die in that year? Is this not proof that Herod must have died in 4 BCE and not 1 BCE?

Let us examine the events involving Herod's sons in the years preceding his death.⁶¹ Some years before his death Herod had named his son Antipater as his heir. However a little over two years before Herod's death Antipater murdered his uncle, Herod's youngest brother Pheroras, tetrarch of Galilee. Antipater's plot was discovered, and Archelaus was named as Herod's successor in place of Antipater. It would be seven months before Antipater, who was in Rome, would be informed that he had been charged with murder. Late in the next year he would be placed on trial before Varus, governor of Syria. Herod was reluctant to condemn Antipater, but eventually Herod intercepted some of Antipater's correspondence indicating further treasonous conspiracies. Herod then sent ambassadors to Rome. They returned a few days before Herod's death with permission from Augustus to execute Antipater. At some time during his last year Herod wrote a will disinheriting Archelaus and granting the kingdom to Antipas.⁶² However, in his last will he once again left the kingdom to Archelaus.⁶³

⁶⁰ Josephus, *Ant.* 17.342 (*War* 2.111 reads "ninth year"); Dio 55.22.6.

⁶¹ This treatment is similar to, but draws slightly different conclusions than that of Filmer, "Reign of Herod," 296-297.

⁶² Josephus, *Ant.* 17.146.

⁶³ Josephus, *Ant.* 17.188-189.

Several interesting passages in Josephus illuminate this period. First, Josephus reports that Herod testified before Varus that:

I confess to you, Varus, the great folly of which I was guilty. For I provoked those sons of mine to act against me, and cut off their just expectations for the sake of Antipater. Indeed, what kindness did I do them, that could equal what I have done to *Antipater, to whom I have, in a manner, yielded up my royal authority, while I am alive, and whom I have openly named for the successor to my dominions in my will...*⁶⁴

Herod testified that Antipater was not only his successor, but his co-regent! In his reply and defense to his father Antipater made the same claim.

Indeed, what was there that could possibly provoke me against you? Could the hope of being king do it? *I was already a king.* Could I suspect hatred from you? No. Was not I beloved by you? And what other fear could I have? No, by preserving you safe, I was a terror to others. Did I lack money? No, for who was able to expend so much as myself? Indeed, father, had I been the most execrable of all mankind, and had I had the soul of the most cruel wild beast, must I not have been overcome with the benefits you had bestowed upon me? Whom, as you yourself say, you brought; whom you preferred before so many of your sons; *whom you made a king in your own lifetime*, and, by the vast magnitude of the other advantages you bestowed on me, you made me an object of envy.⁶⁵

These statements are made during speeches reported by Josephus, and therefore not to be taken as verbatim quotes. More likely these quotations are what Josephus or his sources thought was likely to have been said. Therefore, we must examine how likely it is that both Herod and Antipater actually thought that Antipater had been given a measure of royal authority. In fact, in book 16 of *Antiquities* Josephus treats the succession of Herod's sons several times. For instance, he notes that Augustus forbade Herod from naming his sons as his successors.⁶⁶ As a result of this order Herod reminded his subjects that they should acknowledge him alone as king, but that he was delivering the honors of royalty to his sons.⁶⁷ Thus, Josephus implies that Antipater was not *de jure* coregent, but *de facto* exercised power akin to a coregent. His frustration about not being legally named coregent that Josephus discusses at the beginning of *Antiquities* 17

⁶⁴) Josephus, *War* 1.625.

⁶⁵) Josephus, *War* 1.631-632.

⁶⁶) *Ant.* 16.129; *War* 1.461.

⁶⁷) *Ant.* 16.133-134.

appears to confirm this. Therefore, Josephus' consistent concern in *Antiquities* 16-17 about the position of Herod's sons in succession to their father lends credence to the statements about Antipater's position as "already king" in *Jewish War* 1. Josephus or his sources may have invented the speeches of Herod and Antipater, but they based them on the facts as they knew them—that Herod had indeed yielded some of his authority to Antipater.

Given that Archelaus was named Herod's successor a little more than two years before he died, it is quite probable that Archelaus was also made *de facto* (but not *de jure*) coregent with Herod at that time. Indeed, there is evidence of this. When Archelaus went to Rome to have his authority confirmed by Augustus he was opposed by his enemies. Josephus reports that they brought what appeared to be contradictory charges. One charge was that Herod did not appoint Archelaus king until he was demented and dying.⁶⁸ The other charge was the Archelaus had exercised royal authority for some time.⁶⁹ These two charges are not as contradictory as they seem. Archelaus was named Herod's successor about two years before his death, and may have exercised royal authority until a brief period before Herod's death when he had been disinherited. Then, while he was dying Herod, when many thought he was no longer of sound mind, once again rewrote his will to leave the kingdom to Archelaus.

Therefore, once Archelaus was confirmed as king to succeed his father, he may well have begun to reckon his reign from the time that he was named successor—somewhat more than two years before his father's death. If Herod died in early 1 BCE, then Archelaus counted his reign from sometime in mid-to-late 4 BCE. Therefore, the commencing of Archelaus' reign in 4 BCE is not an indication that Herod died in that year. Ultimately, it is not important whether Archelaus ever actually reigned as *de facto* coregent with Herod. What is important is the implications in Josephus that Archelaus may well have had substantial motives to antedate his reign to about two years before Herod's death in an attempt to bolster himself as Herod's legitimate heir.

Antipas may well have antedated his reign, also. Since Antipas' uncle Pheroras' reign as tetrarch of Galilee ended with his murder in 4 BCE, Antipas may have sought legitimacy by reckoning his reign from that time. Alternatively, Herod may have moved quickly following Pheroras' death

⁶⁸) Josephus, *War* 2.31; *Ant.* 17.238.

⁶⁹) Josephus, *War* 2.26.

and in 4 BCE may have actually named Antipas to inherit Galilee in place of Pheroras, and this is the date that Antipas used as the beginning of his reign. This might explain why Herod briefly turned to Antipas as his heir in his penultimate will, since he had already shown him favor by granting him territory to rule.

Herod Philip

According to the currently published Greek texts of Josephus, Philip died in the twentieth year of Tiberius (33/34 CE) after a reign of thirty-seven years. This would have placed him on the throne in 4 BCE. However, as early as 1966 Filmer argued that a number had dropped out and that they text should probably read “twenty-second” year.⁷⁰ In the late nineteenth century Riess reported that the Franciscan monk Molkenbuhr claimed to have seen the reading “twenty-second year of Tiberius” in a 1517 Parisian copy and an 1841 Venetian copy of Josephus.⁷¹ While Barnes rightly dismissed this in 1968 as “ill-attested,”⁷² further evidence has come to light to confirm Filmer’s suspicions. Then,

in 1995 David W. Beyer reported to the Society of Biblical Literature his personal examination in the British Museum of forty-six editions of Josephus’ *Antiquities* published before 1700 among which twenty-seven texts, all but three published before 1544 read “twenty-second year of Tiberius,” while not a single edition published prior to 1544 read “twentieth year of Tiberius.” Likewise in the Library of Congress five more editions read the “twenty-second year,” while none prior to 1544 records the “twentieth year.” It was also found that the oldest versions of the text give variant lengths of the reign for Philip of 32 and 36 years. But if we allow for a full thirty-seven-year reign, then “the twenty-second year of Tiberius” (35/36 CE) points to 1 BCE (1 year BCE + 36 years CE = 37 years) as the year of the death of Herod.⁷³

Moreover, the Niese edition of Josephus lists “twenty-second year” as the reading in the Latin version of Josephus (produced in the fourth to sixth centuries), and notes that as early as the sixteenth century Joseph Scaliger

⁷⁰) Filmer, “Reign of Herod,” 298.

⁷¹) Florian Riess, *Das Geburtsjahr Christi* (Freiburg: Herder, 1880), according to Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, 301, §518 and n. 65.

⁷²) Barnes, “The Date of Herod’s Death,” 205.

⁷³) Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, 301, §518. Beyer’s report is David W. Beyer, “Josephus Reexamined: Unraveling the Twenty-Second Year of Tiberius” (Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, November 19, 1995).

had proposed this as the correct reading.⁷⁴ Thus, it appears as if the figure *twenty* could be a textual error among later printed editions of Josephus, since it is much more likely that the number *two* would have dropped out during transmission than it having been added somewhere along the way. Therefore, it now appears as if Filmer's conjecture was not as ill-founded as Barnes thought, though it is still conjectural, since it is not based on any reading in any Greek manuscript of Josephus. In Filmer's scheme Philip reigned from 1 BCE until his death in 36 CE. Since Philip received the tetrarchy upon the death of his father, under this scheme it would appear that Herod died no earlier than 1 BCE.⁷⁵

It would be even more ideal to confirm this reading with an examination of the surviving manuscripts of Josephus, a longer investigation and discussion beyond the scope of this paper. However, given present evidence based on Josephus' report of Philip's death alone, it should be noted that at the very least there is no sound reason for favoring the reading *twenty* upon which the Schürer consensus is based over the reading *twenty-two*. Moreover, given the propensity for numbers to be omitted from the text during transmission rather than being added to the text, preference could well be given to the reading *twenty-two*.

However, there is evidence other than the date of Philip's death to consider. Barnes noted that

... Philip refounded the cities of Julias and Caesarea Philippi (Paneas). Josephus states that the former was named after Augustus' daughter: if that is not an error, then it surely received its name before her disgrace in 2 BCE. The refoundation of Paneas was probably in 3 BCE: in later centuries the city used for dating an era the first year of which seems to have been 3/2 BCE.⁷⁶

Given this evidence, we may surmise that Philip, like his brothers, postdated his reign from 4 BCE, about the time that Herod had deposed Antipater as his heir, and that Philip had exercised a measure of royal authority over Gaulanitis from that time. Thus, we can agree with Schürer against Filmer: Philip died in the twentieth year of Tiberius (33/34 CE) after a

⁷⁴ Benedictus Niese, *Flavii Iosephi Opera Edidit et Apparatu Critico Instruxit*. Berolini: Apud Weidmannos, 1885-1895. Reprint, 1955; 4.160. Niese's edition is the only widely available critical text of Josephus. Unfortunately, it is based on only a few manuscripts (five in this part of *Antiquities*). The Latin version is usually characterized as following the Greek original very closely.

⁷⁵ Josephus, *Ant.* 17.189.

⁷⁶ Barnes, "The Date of Herod's Death," 206, Josephus, *Ant.* 18.28.

reign of thirty-seven years. The first three of these years were post-dated to the time that he first exercised authority over this region.

An Additional Passage in Josephus that Confirms Herod’s Reign Began in 38 BCE

There is one other passage that has been largely neglected in the discussion of the beginning of Herod’s reign. In *Antiquities* 20.250 Josephus reports:

Accordingly, the number of the high priests, from the times 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.

Those who have followed the Schürer consensus have generally held that the “times of Herod” (τῶν Ἡρώδου χρόνων) began with his conquest of Jerusalem, dated to 10 Tishri, 37 BCE.⁷⁷ Since the temple and city fell to Titus in 9 Ab, 70 CE, this means there were only about 106 years between the two conquests of Jerusalem.⁷⁸ Consistent with this reading of *Antiquities* 20.250, the Schürer consensus also holds that Josephus dated all of his regnal years for Herod in *Antiquities* from Herod’s conquest of Jerusalem. In addition to *Antiquities* 20.250 are four such references to Herod’s regnal years in *Antiquities* and one in *War*:

Table 3. Josephus’ References to Herod’s Regnal Years

Reference	Herod’s Regnal Year	Event
<i>Antiquities</i> 15.121	Seventh	Battle of Actium (Sept. 2, 31 BCE)
<i>Antiquities</i> 15.354	Eighteenth (“after Herod had reigned seventeen years”)	Caesar in Syria (Spring 20 BCE)
<i>Antiquities</i> 15.380	Eighteenth	Work on temple begun
<i>War</i> 1.401	Fifteenth	
<i>Antiquities</i> 16.136	Twenty-eighth	Work on Caesarea Sebaste completed

⁷⁷⁾ Bernegger, “Herod’s Death,” 529-530. Note that by Bernegger’s calculation, the 107 years results in a beginning date of 38 BCE, in line with what I propose in the ensuing discussion.

⁷⁸⁾ Schürer, *History* 326-327. Vermes and Millar argue that in the case of Herod Josephus “reckoned portions of [beginning] years as full years” even though there is no evidence that

Since the seventh year of Herod must correlate to the year of the Battle of Actium in 31 BCE, and Herod's eighteenth year must correlate to Caesar's presence in Syria in 20 BCE, the Schürer consensus must maintain that in *Antiquities* Josephus is counting Herod's regnal years from the conquest of Jerusalem and not from his appointment by the Romans. This means that the reference in *War* 1.401 must be a mistake made by Josephus.

However, a closer examination of *Antiquities* 20.250 demonstrates that Josephus was reckoning Herod's years from his appointment by the Romans.⁷⁹ This is shown by Josephus' noting that there were twenty-eight high priests from "the times of Herod" until the destruction of the temple in 70 CE. When Herod conquered Jerusalem he appointed Ananel to be high priest.⁸⁰ Counting high priests beginning with Ananel and ending with Pannias, the last high priest before Titus conquered Jerusalem, there were twenty-seven high priests.⁸¹ *This means that Josephus was including Antigonus in his reckoning of twenty-eight high priests during the reign of Herod.* To confirm this, note that above it was demonstrated that Antigonus reigned in Jerusalem as high priest from Tishri 39 to Tishri 36. Therefore, Josephus began the "times of Herod" with Herod's appointment by Rome three years earlier than his conquest of Jerusalem, and the beginning his reign according to official regnal years overlapped the high priesthood of Antigonus by about two years (1 Tishri 38 BCE-10 Tishri 36 BCE). However, if one were to date the "times of Herod" to the his appointment by the Romans according to the Schürer consensus (40 BCE or perhaps 39 BCE in official regnal years) this would mean that there were 110 or 109, not 107 years from "the times of Herod" to Titus' conquest of Jerusalem.

But Herod was actually appointed late in 39 BCE (since he came to Rome in the winter, *Ant.* 14.376). Since Herod was appointed by a Gentile power, he probably began to count his official regnal years as beginning on

Josephus did this elsewhere. Thus, they argue that the twenty-seven years from Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem to Herod's conquest was actually only twenty-six years (*Ant.* 14.488); that the spring of 31 BCE was actually Herod's sixth year, though Josephus counts it as his seventh (*Ant.* 15.121); and that there were only 106 years between Herod's conquest of Jerusalem and Titus' conquest, though Josephus counts it as 107 (*Ant.* 20.250).

⁷⁹ This was first noted by Filmer, "Reign of Herod," 296.

⁸⁰ Josephus, *Ant.* 15.22. Note that in his treatment of this passage, Bernegger does not notice the import of Josephus' statement about the number of high priests during these 107 years. (Bernegger, "Herod's Death," 529-530.)

⁸¹ James C. VanderKam, *From Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests after the Exile* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004) 394-490, 492.

the following Tishri (September/October) of 38 BCE (since the Jewish civil year began on Tishri). He may have counted his years as beginning in Nisan (March/April) of 38, but this is less likely, since this was the beginning of the religious year, and it would have been unwise to count a Gentile appointment from a sacred Jewish date. This appears to be confirmed by evidence from the coins Herod issued. Herod's first coins, issued to replace Hasmonean currency, are also the first dated Jewish coins. They are dated to "year three."⁸² Clearly, Herod counted the year he first reigned in Jerusalem as the third year of his reign. This means that he counted his first regnal year as beginning no later than Tishri 38 BCE and issued his first coinage shortly after conquering Jerusalem in 36 BCE.

Therefore, Herod's first regnal year would have ended on the last day of Elul in 37 BCE, making his one hundred seventh regnal year end in Elul 70 CE. Since the temple fell in Ab 70 CE, eleven months into Herod's one hundred seventh regnal year, Josephus' report in *Antiquities* 20.250 is absolutely correct.

This also implies, however, that in *Antiquities* Josephus numbered Herod's regnal years from his appointment by the Romans. Late 39 BCE until the beginning of Tishri 38 BCE was Herod's accession year. Tishri 38 BCE through Elul 37 BCE was Herod's first official regnal year. The conclusion then follows that the other regnal dates for Herod found in Josephus also count his regnal years from his appointment by the Romans:

Table 4. Josephus' References to Herod's Regnal Years Coordinated to Julian Dates

<i>Antiquities</i> 15.121	Seventh (32/31 BCE)	Battle of Actium (Sept. 2, 31 BCE) ⁸³
<i>Antiquities</i> 15.354	Eighteenth (21/20 BCE)	Caesar in Syria (Spring 20 BCE)
<i>Antiquities</i> 15.380	Eighteenth (21/20 BCE)	Work on temple begun
<i>War</i> 1.401	Fifteenth (21/20 BCE)	
<i>Antiquities</i> 16.136	Twenty-eighth (11/10 BCE)	Work on Caesarea Sebaste completed

⁸²) Ya'akov Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage: Volume II: Herod the Great through Bar Cochba* (New York: Amphora, 182) 66-67. The discussion of Herod's coins was initiated by Filmer, "Reign of Herod," 295.

⁸³) The Battle of Actium would have taken place at the very end of Herod's seventh year, since Tishri can begin no earlier than September 20 and no later than October 19. In 31 BCE the Babylonians counted September 21 as the first day of Tishri (Richard A. Parker and Waldo H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology 626 BCE-AD 75* [Brown University Studies 19, Providence: Brown University, 1956] 43). This confirms that Herod started his regnal years in Tishri, not Nisan.

With this understanding there is no need to claim that the reference in *War* 1.401 is a mistake. Instead, it is now clear that in *War* Josephus numbered Herod's regnal years from the beginning of his reign in Jerusalem, and they would total three less years. Thus, Josephus reports that Herod reigned "...since he had procured Antigonus to be slain, thirty-four years; but since he had been declared king by the Romans, thirty-seven."⁸⁴

Josephus' total of twenty-eight high priests from the times of Herod until the destruction of the temple means that in *Antiquities* Josephus *cannot* have been reckoning the years of Herod's reign from the beginning of his rule in Jerusalem. Therefore, the Schürer consensus is once again called into doubt, since it relies on just such a reckoning to make sense of the chronological data reported by Josephus in *Antiquities*. When combined with the other problems that face the Schürer consensus, there is a lesser probability that it is to be preferred over a more traditional dating of Herod's reign ending in 1 BCE.

Conclusion

The consensus about the reign of Herod that is built around Schürer's interpretation of Josephus is fraught with difficulties. It fails to fit any of the verifiable chronological data external to Josephus and must resort to unlikely readings of Josephus' chronological data and dismissal of other data as mistaken.⁸⁵ A reexamination of the data demonstrates that Herod actually reigned from 39 BCE to his death in early 1 BCE. The only readjustment required by this revised chronology is that Josephus made mistakes in *Antiquities* 14.389, 487 when reporting the consular and Olympian dating of the beginning of Herod's reign. (In the case of *Antiquities* 14.384,

⁸⁴) Josephus, *Ant.* 17.191.

⁸⁵) I.e., asserting Herod's reign of thirty-seven years was actually thirty-six or that the 107 years from the "times of Herod" to the conquest of Jerusalem in 70 CE were actually 106. To substantiate this, it has been claimed by Schürer and those that followed him that Josephus used "inclusive reckoning" of years, counting both the first and the last years in the tally (e.g., Maier, "The Date of the Nativity and the Chronology of Jesus' Life," 116). It is interesting to note that the Vermes and Millar edition of Schürer (1973 edition, 1.326-327) rejects the concept of inclusive reckoning as proposed in the original edition, (1896 edition, 1.200-201). An example of the Schürer consensus simply dismissing data that does not agree with it is that of *War* 1.401—"fifteen" being simply a mistake, without proposing a mechanism by which the mistake was made.

even the defenders of the Schürer consensus concede that there is a mistake in at least the Olympian date given by Josephus.) Apparently, Josephus calculated these dates one year too early and then assigned them to the wrong consular years. Since these two events were clearly three years apart, the mistake in the first passage (*Ant.* 14.389) lead to the parallel mistake in the second (*Ant.* 13.487).

Once the correct dates for Herod's reign are understood, all of the data external to Josephus as well as all the other data given by Josephus are in perfect harmony, and one can construct the chronology of his reign as follows:

Table 5. A Chronology of Herod's Reign

Date	Event
Late 39 BCE	Herod appointed king by the Romans
Tishri 38 BCE	Beginning of Herod's first regnal year
10 Tishri 36 BCE	Herod conquers Jerusalem
December 36 BCE or March 35 BCE	Antigonus executed
Tishri 35 BCE	Beginning of Herod's first regnal year in Jerusalem
20 BCE	Herod begins work on the temple in Jerusalem
Late 19 or early 20 BCE	Work on Temple building completed
12 BCE	Work on Temple precincts completed
11 or 10 BCE	Work on Caesarea Sebaste completed
4 BCE	Murder of Herod's brother Pheroras; Antipater deposed as Herod's heir; Archelaus named Herod's heir
2 BCE	Jesus born
First quarter of 1 BCE	Antipater executed; Herod dies

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