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THE DATES OF THE NATIVITY AND THE CRUCIFIXION OF OUR LORD

A NEW DISCOVERY

I. THE NATIVITY

THERE are probably few dates about which there has been more controversy and a greater difference of opinion than that of the crucifixion of our Lord. A.D. 29, A.D. 30, and each of the other years up to and including A.D. 34 have all, at different times, had their supporters, although perhaps the most generally accepted date has been A.D. 30. This is due largely to the fact that A.D. 30 harmonises to a greater extent than most of the others with the still more generally accepted date of 4 B.C. for the Nativity.

It is scarcely to be wondered at that there should have been such difference of opinion, because there are so many different incidents that go to make up the completed picture, for which a place has to be found, that if a mistake is made with the initial or closing scenes it follows that the whole picture will be thrown out of perspective. This is exactly what has happened. The generally accepted date of our Lord's birth, equally with the date of His crucifixion, are, as now appears, both wrong. It is because of this that there has been such difficulty in finding the proper setting for each of the different pieces of which the picture, as a whole, is made up.

Quite recently the discovery has been made that not only is the correct date of the Nativity of our Lord 8 B.C., as one writer has claimed, but that the date of the crucifixion was not any of the years that have been mentioned, but several years earlier, i.e. A.D. 24. With 8 B.C. as the date of the Nativity and A.D. 24 as the year of the crucifixion, the various incidents that go to make up the completed picture, as recorded not only in the Gospels but in the Acts, in the Epistle to the Galatians in connection with the life of Paul, and in the prophecy of Daniel ix. 25, 26, all fit in perfectly, the one with the other, each falling without difficulty into its own particular niche like a piece of delicate clockwork.

That the key to the discovery came, in the first instance, not from Jerusalem or Palestine, where we might have expected to obtain any additional information that might become available, but from China, adds to the interest of the whole enquiry.

The genesis of the whole matter is as follows: A few years ago the writer had occasion to study the question of the remarkable missionary activity of the early Christian Church with special reference to its development in the continent of Asia.¹ While doing so he came across a quotation from an old Chinese classic which referred to the Gospel as having been first brought to China during the time of a certain emperor who reigned in the years A.D. 25-28. In this quotation reference was made not only to the life but to the crucifixion, resurrection and ascension of our Lord. It was evident that if the traditional year of His birth as 4 B.C. and of His death as A.D. 29 or 30 were correct, the statement quoted from the Chinese classic must necessarily be wrong as to date, however much the other references might be true as to fact. It was therefore assumed that while the reference indicated that the Gospel story had reached China some time in the first century of the present era there was nothing more that could be said about it so far as that particular quotation was concerned.

A little later the matter came up again in a reference to the inscription on an old temple to Augustus in Angora, from which it appeared that the birth of Christ took place not in 4 B.C., as had for so long been supposed, nor even in 6 B.C., as a few others had claimed, but in 8 B.C. This, if correct, at once suggested the possibility that the date claimed in the Chinese classic might after all be right and that the crucifixion might possibly have taken place not later than A.D. 27 instead of A.D. 29 or 30.

There was one way in which the matter might be put to the test with a view to arriving at the actual date. This was the fact that according to Scripture (as will be shown later) the crucifixion must have taken place on a Wednesday, and not on the Friday as usually supposed. The first of Nisan, the month in which the Passover was observed, was, as is well known, determined by the appearance of the new moon, the Passover taking place fourteen days later on the fourteenth of the month, the full moon falling on the fifteenth.

¹ Vide *Nestorian Missionary Enterprise*. T. & T. Clark (1928).

If it were found, therefore, that the fifteenth of Nisan in either of the years A.D. 25-27 fell on a Thursday that would definitely settle the question. The lecturer on Chronology in the University of Oxford was accordingly appealed to and asked to be good enough to state on which of the years mentioned the fifteenth of Nisan fell on a Thursday if any, or alternatively, the nearest year to the dates given on which it did fall on a Thursday. He replied saying that in the years A.D. 25, 26 and 27, Nisan 15th fell on Tuesday, Monday, and Friday respectively, and that the nearest year on which it fell on a Thursday was A.D. 24. This result was not at all expected but, on going into the matter more fully, it was found that with 8 B.C. as the date of the birth and A.D. 24 as the date of the crucifixion, everything else seemed just to dovetail into its proper place and that as a matter of fact there was neither necessity nor occasion for any discussion as to alternative dates—there was no alternative.

The writer of this is quite free to confess that he has no liking for mere abstract discussion as to dates and that he quite recognises that it is more important to know that our Lord really became man, died, and rose again, than to be able to state definitely the exact year in which these events took place. At the same time, the bearing that the one thing has on the other is very obvious, especially as confirming not only the fact of the event having taken place at all but also the reliability and trustworthiness of the Scripture record as a statement of fact. With that in view, we shall now consider the evidence, following as far as possible the chronological order of events.

The first thing, therefore, that requires to be done is definitely to ascertain the year in which Christ was born. Only two of the Gospels, Matthew and Luke, refer to the matter and of these only Luke gives any indication as to the exact date. The account in Luke is not only given in more detail but applies to an earlier period than that given in Matthew. Both refer to the birth as having taken place in Bethlehem but only in Luke do we find the reason why Joseph and Mary should have left Nazareth and gone to Bethlehem at that particular time, viz. that they had gone for the purpose of being enrolled in connection with the census that was being taken, and it was immediately on their arrival there that Jesus was born.

The reason why an enrolment was being taken just then is stated in Luke ii. 1, 3: "It came to pass in those days, there

went out a decree from Cæsar Augustus, that all the world should be enrolled. . . . And all went to enrol themselves, every one to his own city." "And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, . . . to enrol himself with Mary, who was betrothed to him, being great with child." In other words, Augustus had ordered a census to be taken and it was when Joseph and Mary reached Bethlehem for this purpose that Jesus was born. It is evident, therefore, that if we can ascertain the exact year of that particular census we shall at the same time arrive at the year of Christ's birth.

Augustus is known to have ordered a census to be taken on three different occasions, viz. in the years 28 B.C., 8 B.C. and A.D. 14. These are referred to in a document containing a record of the chief events in his reign which he spent the last months of his life in compiling. After his death a copy of this document, inscribed on marble in double columns, was by order of the Roman Senate made and set up in the porch of a temple to Augustus and Rome at Ancyra (now Angora, the capital of Turkey), where it still remains. A translation of the part of it which refers to the different censuses is to be found at page 394 of *Augustus: The Life and Times of the Founder of the Roman Empire*, by E. S. Shuckburgh, and reads as follows:

"I three times made up the roll of the Senate and in my sixth consulship (28 B.C.) I took a census of the people with M. Agrippa as my colleague. I performed the lustrum after an interval of forty-one years in which the number of Roman citizens entered in the census was 4,063,000. A second time with consular imperium I took the census by myself in the consulships of Gaius Censorinus and Gaius Asinus (8 B.C.) in which the number of Roman citizens on the roll was 4,233,000. I took a third census with consular imperium, my son Tiberius Cæsar acting as my colleague, in the consulship of Sextus Pompeius and Sextus Appuleius (A.D. 14) in which the number of Roman citizens entered on the roll was 4,937,000."

There does not seem to be any definite evidence that either the first or the third of the three censuses referred to were enforced in either Syria as a whole or in the part of it which was within Herod's jurisdiction. As regards the first of the three, that in 28 B.C., there were two reasons why the census may not have been insisted on. First, because of the short time

that had elapsed since the province became subject to Augustus. He may have thought that his authority was not yet sufficiently established to warrant such an innovation. Enrolments as a rule took place only in countries which were thoroughly Romanised and not in newly conquered territories. Secondly, his personal regard for Herod may have prevented him from insisting on a step which was scarcely likely to be popular among Herod's subjects.

As regards the third of Augustus's censuses, it may not have been considered necessary in view of the fact that the second of the fourteen yearly cycle of censuses, which will be referred to immediately, had taken place in A.D. 7, seven years earlier. If the census of A.D. 14 was made applicable to Syria it must have been a sort of extra, independent of, and additional to, the census of A.D. 7.

As regards the 8 B.C. census, however, not only did none of the reasons mentioned operate to hinder its being carried out but, as a matter of fact, Herod was somewhat out of favour with Augustus just then, because of his having waged war on some neighbouring tribes in Arabia without first obtaining the consent of the emperor. Augustus was so incensed by this independent action on the part of Herod that he informed him he would no longer treat him as a friend but as a subject, and it would seem probable that Augustus insisted on immediate compliance with the order, to mark his displeasure and to assert his authority and that Herod, wishing to retain the emperor's favour, endeavoured to meet his wishes in the matter without any delay (*cf.* Josephus, *Ant. Bk.*, 16, Chap. 9, 3; and Mackinlay, *The Magi*, page 170).

In any case, neither the first nor the third of the censuses ordered by Augustus can, for obvious reasons, have been the one to which Luke refers. Neither of them comes within the scope of the present enquiry, which is thus limited to the census taken in 8 B.C., which must, therefore, have been the one of which Luke speaks.

That that year was the year of Augustus's second census is confirmed by the fact mentioned in the inscription at Ancyra that while in 28 B.C. and also in A.D. 14 Augustus had colleagues associated with him in the taking of the census, viz. Agrippa in 28 B.C. and Tiberius in A.D. 14, he was alone in 8 B.C. Agrippa died in 12 B.C. and in 7 B.C. Augustus purposed associating Tiberius with himself in Tribunitian power, but Tiberius was

unwilling to accept the honour or the responsibility just then and begged permission to retire to Rhodes, which he was permitted to do.

Further particulars as to the time when this second census took place are given in Luke ii. 2. Of this verse there are three possible translations. The Authorised Version reads: "This taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria." The American Revision is: "This was the first enrolment made when Quirinius was governor of Syria." The third rendering reads: "The taxing itself was made for the first time when Quirinius was governor of Syria." These various versions can be interpreted in two different ways, both of which are correct.

If the emphasis is laid on Quirinius it means that Quirinius was twice governor of Syria, that a census was taken by him on both occasions and that this was the first of the two, viz. the one taken during his first governorship. If the emphasis is laid on the enrolment it means that this particular census ordered by Augustus for the whole empire became in Syria the starting point, or the first, of a census cycle which recurred every fourteen years and which continued to be observed until the year A.D. 329. It is important to note this, as it supplies independent testimony as to the date of the particular census under consideration apart altogether from the question as to whether Quirinius was or was not twice governor of Syria.

It is known that he was governor in A.D. 6-9 and that a census of Syria, the second of the fourteen yearly cycle, was taken during that time, but as to the earlier period, there has until comparatively recently not only been no independent evidence in support of his governorship apart from the statement in Luke, but on the other hand there is a definite statement by Tertullian in *Adv. Marc.* IV, 19 to the effect that, although both the census and the Nativity took place in 8 B.C., the governor at that time was Sentius Saturninus, whose term of office was from 9 B.C. to 6 B.C.

We have thus the apparently unsupported testimony of Luke, in the one case, in favour of Quirinius and the equally unsupported testimony of Tertullian, in the other, in favour of Sentius Saturninus, both agreeing, however, as to the fact that the Nativity took place in the year of the census. Luke claims to have "traced the course of all things accurately from the first" (Luke i. 3), and his statements regarding other dates

which can be verified have so often stood the test of the most searching examination that we might well have accepted what he says in the present instance also, until, at least, such time as he had been definitely proved to be wrong but, as it happens, his statement has been confirmed by an old monumental inscription found in A.D. 1765 from which it appears that Quirinius really did hold the governorship twice, as Luke's statement implies, but that Sentius Saturninus was governor also during the time when he (Quirinius) first held office. Luke and Tertullian were therefore both right.

When the first governorship of Quirinius, which was for a short period only, took place, he was engaged, as a direct envoy of the emperor, in waging war for imperial purposes against a certain Syrian tribe called the Homonadenses. In virtue of this position he would, for the time being, rank above the ordinary civil ruler, Sentius Saturninus, who would continue to carry on the ordinary civil governmental duties of the province concurrently with but subordinate to him, he (Quirinius) being the military governor.¹

Sir William Ramsay gives instances of similar arrangements in other periods of Roman history, and it is assumed that this "was the accepted procedure of a frontier war."

"From the Imperial point of view, which Luke always took in his writings, Quirinius would be described as governor; but from the provincial point of view the ordinary governor would be mentioned as ruling. Dating by the period of governing of the general in command of the frontier expedition would be more accurate than dating by the reign of the ordinary ruler, as the former only exercised his functions for the short time that the war lasted." "The Greek word used in Luke ii. 2 is well fitted to describe the special authority wielded by Quirinius at that time" (cf. Mackinlay, *The Magi*, page 167; and Ramsay, *Was Christ Born in Bethlehem?* pages 185, 237 and 241).

Coming back now to the question of the confirmation of 8 B.C. as the year of the census and of the Nativity, supplied by the periodicity of the censuses, and ignoring meantime the name of the particular governor as of secondary importance, there is, as stated, evidence that the census referred to in Luke ii. 1 was the first of a fourteen yearly cycle of which the second took place in A.D. 7, the third in A.D. 21, and the fourth in A.D. 35.

¹ Justin Martyr in three different places in his writings speaks of our Lord as having been born under Quirinius (*Apol.* I, XXXIV, p. 37; XLVI, p. 46; *Dial.* LXXVIII, p. 195. Quoted in *Companion Bible*, Vol. V, p. 197).

As regards the first of the series, the proof of its having taken place is contained, first, in the document drawn up by Augustus himself, a copy of which is still to be found in Angora, and secondly in the independent testimony by Tertullian just referred to. The date of the second finds confirmation in an old inscription discovered in a house in Venice, referred to by Ramsay in *St. Paul the Traveller*, page 386, note. A copy of the enrolment paper for the third was found by Messrs. Grenfell and Hunt on an Egyptian rubbish heap. And Tacitus bears testimony to the fourth as having been held in A.D. 35. Counting backward from A.D. 35 fourteen years brings us to A.D. 21, fourteen more to A.D. 7 and a third fourteen to 8 B.C. as the date of Quirinius's first governorship and Augustus's second census, corresponding to the first of the fourteen yearly series, all of which goes to confirm beyond dispute 8 B.C. as the year of the first of the series and of the Nativity.

Having arrived at an understanding as to the year in which the census was taken and in which Christ was therefore born, the next question to be determined is the time of the year when this took place. This we are able to do approximately from the statement in Luke ii. 11, that when the angel of the Lord came to the shepherds saying, "There is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord," they were in the field keeping watch over their flocks by night. We are told that in Palestine during the hot months of the year, viz. April to October, sheep will not graze during the day owing to the great heat. They simply crowd together wherever there seems to be a little shade and remain quiet. The only time when they graze freely during these months, therefore, is in the cool of the evening and during the night. This necessitates the shepherds being with them to choose suitable pasture and guard them from wild animals. The first four months of the period mentioned are also the time of harvesting and of garnering the crops, a time that would not be at all suitable for census purposes. The most likely time for a census to be taken would in that case be some time between August and October. The probability, then, is that the birth of Christ took place about that time.

From Luke we turn to Matthew, which deals with a somewhat later period in the life of our Lord. It is in Matthew that we find the reference not only to the visit of the wise men from the

East but to the appearance of a star in connection with the birth of Christ. It is to be noted that there is no reference to the appearance of any star in the account of the visit by the shepherds to Bethlehem on the night when Jesus was born, but in Matthew ii. 1 we read, "When Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the king, behold wise men from the East came to Jerusalem saying, Where is He that is born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and are come to worship Him." Just how long this was after the birth of Christ we are not told, but the probability is that it was not less than a year.

Lieutenant-Colonel Mackinlay, in his book *The Magi*, takes the view that the star was the planet Venus which in 8 B.C. appeared for several months prior to and including December, as the Morning Star. He is of opinion that our Lord was probably born on September 20th, 8 B.C., that being the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles. He believes that the wise men arrived in Jerusalem in December of that year and that the flight into Egypt took place immediately afterwards, the holy family remaining there until the beginning of 3 B.C. In that case, the events of Matt. i. 18-ii. 23 would be spread over fully four years.

In arriving at the conclusion that the date of the census coincided with the first day of the Feast of Tabernacles, Lieutenant-Colonel Mackinlay has overlooked the fact that while, at the Feast of Tabernacles, all male members of Jewish families were required to leave their homes and repair to Jerusalem for the observance of the festival, when the census was being taken exactly the opposite procedure took place. They were then required, wherever they might be, to return "everyone into his own city" or village, and present themselves for enrolment at their tribal headquarters, or in the registration area to which, genealogically, they belonged. It was because Joseph was of the house and lineage of David that he had to repair to Bethlehem for enrolment, and not because it happened to be near Jerusalem. Jews who, genealogically, belonged, say, to Nazareth or Capernaum would naturally enrol there, and it is extremely unlikely that Herod would make the mistake of arranging a census, in the various centres, at a time when ceremonial requirements made it necessary that the persons concerned should be absent in Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles. Whatever, then,

the exact date on which our Lord was born, it could not have been the date suggested by Lieutenant-Colonel Mackinlay.

The inference in any case from Luke is that the appearance of the star did not coincide with the visit of the angels to the shepherds nor with the visit of the latter to the inn where Jesus was.

The only information we have as to how long it was from the time when the wise men first saw the star until they came to Jerusalem is what may be gathered from their interview with Herod and the action taken by him in consequence of what he then learned. Herod, we are told, was greatly troubled at the news of their arrival and of the purpose for which they had come. He called them and enquired earnestly what time the star appeared. He then sent them to Bethlehem with instructions that they were to search diligently for the young child (not a babe in swaddling clothes any longer), and when they had found him they were to bring him word again so that he also might go and worship him. When they failed to return, having been warned of God to go back another way, Herod "was exceeding wroth and sent forth and slew all the male children that were in Bethlehem and in all the borders thereof from two years old and under according to the time which he had exactly learned of the wise men." Joseph, however, having been warned of God in a dream that Herod would attempt to destroy the young child, had taken Jesus and His mother by night and had departed into Egypt and thus escaped the wrath of the king, and there they remained until the death of Herod.

That the star is quite as likely to have been the result of a conjunction of two or more planets rather than the appearance of Venus as the Morning Star as surmised by Lieutenant-Colonel Mackinlay, that 7 B.C. is the most probable date of its first appearance (viz. six or eight months after the birth of Christ) and 6 B.C. the most likely date for the wise men to have arrived in Jerusalem, is confirmed by a statement made by Kepler, quoted by Sir William Ramsay in *Was Christ Born in Bethlehem?* The statement is to the effect that in May, October and December of the year 7 B.C. there was a conjunction of the two planets Jupiter and Saturn. In March of the following year—6 B.C.—there occurred a further conjunction of not only Jupiter and Saturn but of Mars as well. This would present a most brilliant appearance in the sky and would naturally

attract the attention of all observers interested in the phenomena of the heavens as the wise men were. Such a conjunction, according to Jewish belief, was a sign of the coming of the Messiah.

If Christ were born in the autumn of 8 B.C., and if the star represented by the conjunction of the two planets appeared in May, October and December of the following year, the wise men would scarcely be likely to arrive in Jerusalem earlier than December, as it is extremely unlikely that they would begin their journey until the hot weather was over, nor need they in any case have set out immediately the star appeared. Judging from Herod's action after he had ascertained exactly what time the star appeared, they were more likely to have arrived about March than in any other month. If, therefore, we allow a period of about eighteen months from the date of the census until the arrival of the wise men, there would remain two years or a little more as the time the holy family must have remained in Egypt prior to the death of Herod in 4 B.C., a date which is definitely known. If the wise men arrived in Jerusalem earlier than March of 6 B.C., they must have done so in either the previous October or December, as we are definitely told that the star appeared to them again as they drew near to Bethlehem. In that case the time spent in Egypt would be correspondingly increased. This all fits in perfectly with what we already know as to our Lord's birth having taken place at the time of the census of 8 B.C.

In Luke ii. 39 we read: "When they (Joseph and Mary) had accomplished all things that were according to the law of the Lord they returned into Galilee to their own city Nazareth." This comes immediately after the account of the presentation in the temple and the adoration by Simeon and Anna, but as Luke does not even refer either to the visit of the Magi or the flight into Egypt, there is no reason why this statement and the somewhat similar one in Matthew ii. 22, 23 should not refer to one and the same period, so that between Luke ii. 38 and Luke ii. 39 the whole of the events recorded in Matthew ii. 1-21 may have taken place. The question has been asked, Why, if the birth of Christ took place a year and a half prior to the arrival of the wise men, should the holy family have remained in Bethlehem all that time? The Scriptures give no information on that point. They may have remained there, as seems likely, or,

for anything we know to the contrary, they may have gone back to Nazareth for a time and returned again to Bethlehem. From Luke ii. 41 we gather that they went every year to Jerusalem at the Feast of Passover. It is at least conceivable that they may have done so in 6 B.C., and that it was while they were in Bethlehem for that purpose that the triple conjunction of the planets and the visit of the wise men took place. That, however, is mere conjecture. What we do know is that the birth of Christ took place in 8 B.C., probably in the autumn, that the death of Herod occurred just before the Passover of 4 B.C., and that somewhere in between these two dates the visit of the Magi and the flight into and stay in Egypt took place.

When Herod was dead an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, saying, "Arise and take the young child and his mother and go into the land of Israel, for they are dead that sought the young child's life," but hearing on the way "that Archelaus was reigning over Judæa in the room of his father Herod he was afraid to go thither, and being warned of God in a dream he withdrew into the parts of Galilee and came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth" and there Jesus grew up and "advanced in stature and in favour with God and man."

II. THE CRUCIFIXION

Having arrived at the year in which the birth of Christ took place, the question arises whether we can with equal precision determine the year of the crucifixion. It so happens that we can.

The first step in this direction is to ascertain, approximately at least, the year when Jesus began His public ministry. This we are able to do from the very definite statement in Luke iii. 1-3 that "in the fifteenth year of Tiberius Cæsar . . . the word of God came unto John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. And he came into all the country about Jordan preaching the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins." The question, then, is: What was the fifteenth year of Tiberius Cæsar? As already stated, Augustus wished to associate Tiberius with him in the government of the empire in the year 7 B.C. but Tiberius begged to be excused and retired to the island of Rhodes. In A.D. 4 he returned from Rhodes and Augustus immediately carried out his former intention and

raised him to the position formerly filled by M. Agrippa by "associating him with himself in tribunitian power, which they were to exercise in common for five years. He also adopted him into the Julian house and required that he should in turn adopt Germanicus, the son of his brother Drusus." The emperor indicated clearly his expectation that Tiberius would be his principal successor by conferring on him the two essential ingredients of imperial authority—the "*proconsulare imperium*" on the one hand and, as just stated, the "*tribunitia potestas*" on the other. Augustus had himself accepted the imperium for a fourth decennial period in the previous year (3 of our era).

A.D. 4 was, therefore, not only the year when Tiberius was associated with Augustus in the government of the state and in which he received the insignia of office, but the year when he was adopted by him into the Julian house and became his legal heir. The fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar can, therefore, have been no other than A.D. 19, which was therefore the year when John the Baptist came "into all the region round about the Jordan preaching the baptism of repentance unto remission of sins."

If we assume, as we are justified in doing, that John was preaching for a year, or perhaps a little more, before Christ began His public ministry, we arrive at the year A.D. 20 or 21 as the year when the baptism of our Lord took place, He being then about twenty-seven years of age. It is true that in Luke iii. 23 we read: "Jesus himself when he began was about thirty years of age." That, however, is so indefinite that we can quite believe that Luke had in mind the whole period of Christ's public ministry, and especially the concluding event in His life as centering round His thirtieth year. And this is all the more likely in view of the fact that Luke wrote his gospel some years after the crucifixion. If, then, we are right in placing the beginning of our Lord's ministry at A.D. 20 or 21, and assuming, as is usually done, that it extended over a period of three or three and a half years, we arrive at A.D. 24 as the year of the crucifixion, His age at that time being about thirty years and six or eight months.

Objection may perhaps be taken to the age claimed for our Lord at the time of His baptism on the ground that it was unusual for anyone to enter upon the priestly office until he had attained the age of thirty years. One answer to that is, that

although our Lord is spoken of frequently, especially in the Epistle to the Hebrews, as our high priest, our great high priest, etc., strictly speaking He only entered upon the duties of that office when, once for all, He was "manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself" (Heb. ix. 26) and when "by one offering He perfected forever them that are sanctified" (Heb. x. 14). This completed, sufficient, and once for all, sacrifice for sin was offered when He was "about thirty years of age."

Something more than mere assertion or supposition is, however, required if we are to be quite certain in the matter, and the question at once arises, Is there any confirmation from any other quarter that the crucifixion took place in the year mentioned? There are three lines of proof from Scripture which definitely support the accuracy of the claim now made. These are, *first*, the day of the week on which the Scriptures show the crucifixion to have taken place as determined by a coincidence which can only recur about once in six or seven years. *Secondly*, the probable date of the conversion of St. Paul which supplies very strong confirmation of what has just been stated. The *third* is found in connection with the fulfilment of the prophecy contained in Daniel ix. 25, 26 to the effect that at the end of a certain number of years from a given date the Messiah would be cut off. A striking confirmation from secular history, already mentioned, will also be referred to.

An exhaustive treatment of the day of the week on which our Lord was crucified would require a whole article to itself. It is perhaps sufficient for our present purpose if we recall the fact that the first day of the feast of unleavened bread, which immediately followed the day on which the Passover was observed was always kept as a Sabbath and that therefore in that particular week there were always two Sabbaths unless when the special Sabbath coincided with the weekly Sabbath, a coincidence that could not in any case occur oftener than once in six or seven years. One of the two Sabbaths was the first day of the feast, called a "high" day or great Sabbath (John xix. 31) and was preceded by the day, spoken of as the day of preparation, on which the Passover was held; which was also the day on which the crucifixion took place. The Passover itself was always observed on 14th Nisan. About the particular day of the month on which the crucifixion took place there is, therefore, no dispute. The second of the two Sabbaths was the ordinary

weekly Sabbath, which began at 6 p.m. on our Friday and ended at 6 p.m. on our Saturday, when the first day of the week began.

The question, then, to be determined is on what day of the week did this great or high Sabbath fall in the particular year in which our Lord was crucified? There are several definite statements which enable us to arrive at a decision in the matter. It is not disputed that the crucifixion took place on the day called the "preparation" which immediately preceded the day of which it is said "that Sabbath day was an high day" (John xix. 31). It was with reference to it that the Jews besought Pilate that the legs of those crucified might be broken and that they might be taken away so that they might not remain on the cross on the Sabbath day. But when the soldiers came to Jesus they found that He was dead already and they brake not His legs.

Then when the even was come came Joseph of Arimathea and "went to Pilate, and asked for the body of Jesus. And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb that was hewn in stone, where never man had yet lain. And it was the day of the Preparation and the Sabbath drew on. And the women, who had come with Him out of Galilee, followed after, and beheld the tomb, and how the body was laid."

How soon the chief priests and rulers learned what had taken place we are not told, but it all happened close on 6 p.m., the hour at which the Sabbath began on the evening that formed part of that very Sabbath. Nothing more could be done then, nor could anything be done on the great Sabbath itself, but as soon thereafter as possible, viz. on the day immediately following the great Sabbath, the women, as we are told in one place (Mark xvi. 1), *bought* spices, and, as we are told in another place (Luke xxiii. 56), *prepared* them and then rested the Sabbath day according to commandment. So that there was evidently one day and only one between the two Sabbaths. In like manner, as the Jews could not have known where He was buried until after the Sabbath had begun, they also could do nothing more until the Sabbath was past, but as soon as ever they could in keeping with their own law, they went to Pilate and said, "We remember that that deceiver said while He was yet alive, after three days I will rise again . . . command therefore that the sepulchre be made sure until the third day lest His disciples come by night and steal Him away and say unto the people He

is risen from the dead. . . . So they made the sepulchre sure, sealing the stone and setting a watch," and then they, too, perforce rested the Sabbath day (viz. the weekly Sabbath) according to commandment. Both parties required one free day, that was not a Sabbath, to attend to these various matters and where and how could such a day be got if not between the two Sabbaths, viz. on our Friday? That being so, the great Sabbath in that year must have fallen on a Thursday and the weekly Sabbath of course on the usual day—our Saturday. The crucifixion must, therefore, have taken place on the Wednesday. Jesus died at 3 p.m. on that day, hung on the cross till almost 6 p.m., was then taken down from the cross by Joseph and laid in the grave where He remained until 6 p.m. on Saturday, when He rose from the dead.

This is confirmed by what we read in Matthew xxviii. 1. "In the end of the Sabbath as it began to dawn (or draw) toward the first day of the week (the very same word that we find used in Luke xxiii. 54) came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary unto the sepulchre. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone from the door and sat upon it . . . and the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye; for I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified. He is not here for He is risen even as He said," etc. That these same women went away and apparently became convinced, or accepted the assurance of others, that the whole thing was a hallucination, and came back with the other women the next morning bearing the spices which they had prepared, does not alter the fact that their first coming to the sepulchre was just at the end of the Sabbath and that Jesus must accordingly have risen at 6 p.m. on our Saturday, or exactly three days and three nights after He was placed in the tomb, as He Himself had definitely foretold. Mark viii. 31 records the definite statement by our Lord, to His disciples, that the "Son of man must be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and be killed and *after* three days rise again," and Matthew xxvii. 63, where again the words "*after* three days" are used, shows quite clearly how His enemies understood the prediction.

To claim that the expression "three days" means only part of one day, then the whole of the second day and part of the third, and that it might, as a matter of fact, mean only twenty-six

hours altogether, viz. one hour on the fourteenth, the whole of the fifteenth, and one hour on the sixteenth of Nisan, opened the way to serious error in the past and may do so again. The error that crept in was that our Lord did not actually die but that He only fainted, or fell into a trance out of which He awoke in twenty-six hours and was spirited away by His disciples.¹ The Jews had a belief that the spirit did not really leave the body finally until after three days, hence three days and three nights were necessary to bring definite conviction to all, whether friend or foe.

Objection may be taken to the claim that our Lord died at 3 p.m. on Wednesday, was buried at 6 p.m. that same day, and rose again at 6 p.m. on the Saturday, on the ground that there is repeated reference to the fact that He would be raised again "the third day" (Matt. xvi. 21) and that He rose again "the third day" according to the Scriptures (1 Cor. xv. 4) and other similar statements. In view, however, of the fact, already referred to, that the "spirit was not supposed to have finally departed" from the body until after three days; in view also of the fact stated by Herodotus that embalmment did not take place until after three days (Herod. ii. 86-89) and that, therefore, even if it had been otherwise possible, the women would scarcely have been likely to bring the spices and ointments until the expiry of the usual period, the only feasible interpretation is that the "third day" meant the third legal day, the two Sabbaths being ignored as both *dies non*. From that point of view the first day would be the Wednesday, the second the Friday, and the third the first day of the week (our Sabbath), on which day the resurrection took place.

That our Lord should remain in the grave or, as Matt. xii. 40 puts it, "in the heart of the earth" three full days and three full nights seems to have been expressly determined, that there might be no room for Jewish incredulity, "to preclude all doubt that death had actually taken place, and to shut out all suggestion that it might have been a trance or a mere case of resuscitation." Had He been buried at 6 p.m. on Friday and had He risen again on the morning of the first day of the week "while it was yet dark" He would only have been in the tomb thirty-six hours at the most, or one day and part of a second.

¹ *Transactions of Victoria Institute*, Vol. 62, p. 198.

It may be true that "three days" is a recognised Hebrew idiom for any part of three days and three nights, but when the number of nights is stated as well as the number of days, as in Matt. xii. 40 already referred to, "the expression ceases to be an idiom and becomes a literal statement of fact."

If there were one day, and only one, between the two Sabbaths of the week in which our Lord was crucified it proves conclusively that the first day of the feast of Unleavened Bread, which was the day of the full moon, fell in that year on a Thursday, the new moon, a fortnight earlier, having also fallen on a Thursday. Reference has already been made to the fact that in A.D. 24 the 15th Nisan did fall on that particular day of the week. That did not happen again until A.D. 33, but whatever the year or years on which it did happen, A.D. 24 being in any case one of them, on one or other of those years the crucifixion must have taken place. There are, however, considerations which rule out all other years with the exception of A.D. 24, that being the only year that fits in with known facts and therefore the only year in which the crucifixion could possibly have taken place.

There is, for example, the fact that with 8 B.C. as the date of our Lord's birth, A.D. 33 would conflict with the statement by Luke that His public ministry centred round His thirtieth year. He would in that case have been about thirty-seven years of age when He began His ministry and forty at its close. It would conflict also with the second confirmatory evidence which we shall now proceed to consider. This, as we shall see, confirms A.D. 24 as being the only year that coincides with other events which have to be taken into consideration if we are to view the completed picture in its proper perspective.

The first of these events has to do with the life of St. Paul as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles and as referred to in the Epistle to the Galatians. Acts xii tells of the martyrdom of James and the arrest of Peter and his subsequent miraculous deliverance from the fate that befell James. It then records the death of Herod Agrippa which we know from secular history took place in the year A.D. 44. From the previous chapter we learn that it was in the same year that Paul and Barnabas were sent by the Christians of Antioch to carry help to the Christians in Jerusalem who were very soon to be suffering from famine. And in the twelfth chapter of Acts, immediately after the account of the death of Herod, we read that Paul and Barnabas, having

fulfilled their ministry, returned from Jerusalem, taking with them John whose surname was Mark.

This visit by Paul to Jerusalem is quite evidently the one referred to in Galatians ii. 1. In chapter i. 18 of that same epistle he tells us that not until three years after his conversion did he go up to Jerusalem and that he then saw only Peter, with whom he stayed fifteen days. Then in Galatians ii. 1 he says that not until fourteen years later did he visit Jerusalem again and that on that occasion he was accompanied by Barnabas (*cf.* Acts xi. 30) and took Titus also with him. This visit was therefore seventeen years after his conversion, assuming that he went into Arabia immediately after his baptism, as is quite likely. There is no indication that Paul had ever seen the Lord until he met Him on his way to Damascus, and it is generally agreed that the visit to Damascus which resulted in his conversion must have taken place not less than about three years after the crucifixion of Christ, during which time the events recorded in Acts, chapters ii to vii inclusive, took place. If this is accepted as reasonably possible, we have three, plus three, plus fourteen years, or twenty years in all, from the crucifixion to the death of Herod in A.D. 44, which again fixes A.D. 24 as the date of the former event.

Even if the famine on account of which the Antiochian Christians sent help took place in A.D. 45 or 46, as Sir William Ramsay seems to think, that would not conflict with Luke's statement that Barnabas and Paul arrived prior to the events recorded in Acts xii., i.e. in A.D. 44. There is nothing improbable in the supposition that they may have remained in Jerusalem for a year or more and assisted in the distribution of the alms which they had brought. At the same time there is equally nothing in the record that necessitates their doing so. They may quite justifiably have assumed that they had fulfilled their ministry when they handed over the money they had brought to the care of the officers of the Church in Jerusalem, who would then be responsible for its distribution. The conclusion arrived at remains, therefore, as before, i.e. that they arrived in Jerusalem in the year A.D. 44.

From the New Testament we turn to the Old, where again we find a striking confirmation of the fact that A.D. 24, and A.D. 24 alone, must have been the year of the crucifixion. The confirmation in this case is found in one of the prophecies in the

Book of Daniel on the one hand, and in the record of its primary fulfilment as given in the Book of Ezra on the other.

The prophecy referred to dates from one of the last years of the seventy years' captivity, i.e. about 537 or 536 B.C., and is, therefore, long prior to the event which it foretells. It is found in Daniel ix. 25, 26 and reads as follows: "Know therefore and discern that from the going forth of the commandment to restore and to build Jerusalem unto the anointed one, the prince, shall be seven weeks and threescore and two weeks; . . . and after the threescore and two weeks shall the anointed one be cut off . . ." The weeks referred to are admittedly weeks of years and total altogether 483 years. What the prophecy therefore means is that 483 years after an event still future, the Messiah, who will by that time have come, will be cut off or put to death.

The first step towards the fulfilment of the prophecy referred to took place under Ezra as described in chapter vii of the book of that name. It is not explicitly stated in so many words that the command to restore and build Jerusalem did actually "go forth" but the commission given to Ezra by Artaxerxes as stated in the letter there quoted—which practically gives Ezra *carte blanche*, appointing him governor of all the people beyond the river and instructing him to appoint magistrates and judges—clearly implies that that had already been done. One wonders how much the influence of Esther (the queen-mother or step-mother) on Artaxerxes had to do with the very liberal conditions embodied in the wording of the commission.

That the proclamation authorising the restoration and building of the city of Jerusalem must have been issued some time during the sixth year of Artaxerxes is evident from chapter vii. 9, where we read that Ezra and those who accompanied him began their journey from Babylon on the first day of the first month of the seventh year of king Artaxerxes and arrived in Jerusalem on the first day of the fifth month, after a journey of four months.

Apart altogether from the delay that may have been caused by the intervention of the hot weather, the marshalling and other arrangements for such a large company and for such a long journey and the gathering together of the equipment, provisions for the journey and other material necessary, must have occupied several months. The command was, therefore, probably issued

in the early part of the previous year, which was the sixth year of the king's reign. It is important to note this, as it determines the year when the 483 years that were to elapse prior to the cutting off of the Anointed One, the Prince, began.

There is no difficulty in arriving at the year which, according to our reckoning, corresponds to the sixth of Artaxerxes. It is generally agreed that he succeeded to the throne of Persia in the year 465 B.C., although some writers prefer 464. Accepting 465 B.C. as the correct date, the sixth year of his reign would then be 460 B.C., which was, therefore, the year when the 483 years began. If the command or permission to return were given, say, on Passover day of that year, as is quite conceivable, the 483 years' period would end on Passover day in the year A.D. 24. Reversing the order and counting back from A.D. 24 instead of towards it, 483 years obviously brings us to exactly the same point and thus definitely confirms 460 B.C. as the year in which the fulfilment of the prediction made by Daniel began and A.D. 24 as the year in which the fulfilment was completed. We thus arrive once more, although by an entirely different route, at A.D. 24 as the year in which the crucifixion took place.

What, it may be asked, is the meaning of the two periods of 49 years and 434 years into which the whole period of 483 years is divided? It is scarcely possible in the space at our disposal to discuss this question at any length. Briefly, however, the 49 years or seven weeks represents the period from the going forth of the command to build in 460 B.C., to the date when the wall was dedicated in 411 B.C., and the 434 years or three score and two weeks represents the period from the dedication of the wall till the Anointed One, the Prince, was cut off.

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem in 446 B.C., thirteen years after Ezra, he found the walls broken down and the gates burned with fire. He set to work with such energy that in fifty-two days the building of the wall was completed. Daniel ix. 25, however, speaks not only of the wall but of the street, as forming part of the whole. "The street shall be built again and the wall even in troublous times," we read. And the question arises, What is meant by the "street" and why should it be conjoined with the wall in this way? The word "build" is used both in the sense of erecting new buildings and in that of repairing or building up breaches. The fifty-two days probably refers to the latter usage.

That the word "street" here has a special significance and is used to designate a particular thoroughfare, is indicated by the fact that there must have been more than one street in the city. We find a similar usage in Esther vi. 9, 11; Job xxix. 7; Isa. lix. 14 and other places and in 2 Chron. xxxii. 5, 6 we read that Hezekiah "built up all the wall that was broken," in his day, "and raised it up to the towers and another wall without," and that he gathered the captains of war together to him in the street of the gate of the city. The "street" there, as well as here, was evidently, in a very special sense, a place of public resort—a sort of promenade. Archæologists tell us that "the original earth ramparts, with glacis facing, of the Hittites gave place in Palestine to two stone wall facings with earth filling between" (Duncan, *Accuracy of the Old Testament*, page 110). This was evidently the plan followed by Nehemiah and would not only give much greater security than a single wall could, but, being raised above the level of the surrounding country, would provide a very convenient place of concourse where the inhabitants might gather together for any purpose and from which proclamations, etc., could easily be made. One may very well, therefore, hazard the opinion that the street referred to in the prophecy was the roadway on the top of the rampart formed by the double stone wall with earth filling between. It was on the top of this wall that the dedication ceremony, described in Nehemiah xii. 27-43, took place.

The erection of such a rampart would take much longer to complete than a single wall would and, without the driving force of Nehemiah's presence, and with the spirit referred to in Malachi i. 10 prevailing, its construction may very well have been spread over the long period of forty-nine years as already stated.

That the dedication took place not earlier than 413 B.C. is proved by the fact that Eliashib, who was high priest when Nehemiah first came to Jerusalem, died in that year, being the eleventh of Darius Nothus (424-405 B.C.). He was succeeded by his son Joiada under whom, as high priest, the dedication of the wall took place.

This is confirmed by the fact that when Nehemiah, who had probably come to Jerusalem the second time for the dedication, cast forth all the household stuff of Tobiah out of the chamber which Eliashib had wrongfully placed at his disposal, there is no

reference to any rebuke as having been addressed to Eliashib himself, as there certainly would have been if he had been still alive. The date of Eliashib's death is definitely known but there is nothing said as to the length of time that elapsed between his death and the dedication ceremony. We cannot be very far wrong, however, if we allow a maximum period of two years, viz. till 411 B.C., for that purpose. This completes exactly the period of forty-nine years from the time when the commission to Ezra was first issued.

About the remaining period of 434 years there is no difficulty nor is there any doubt about the combined period as beginning in 460 B.C. and terminating in A.D. 24.

It is a far cry from Jerusalem to China but, as already stated, it is from China, strangely enough, that the final confirmatory evidence in favour of A.D. 24, or a year very close to it, as the year in which our Lord suffered, comes. We have already seen that a year quite close to A.D. 24 would not meet the needs of the case unless it could be shown that the first and fifteenth of Nisan of that year fell on a Thursday. This as we know was not the case, and we are therefore shut up to A.D. 24 as the year to which the evidence referred to applies.

In Volume IX, pages 26-28 of a well-known Taoist work called *Shen Hsien Kang Chien*, popular among both Buddhists and Taoists written about the year A.D. 1701, there appears a very sympathetic résumé of the life of Christ which, it is claimed, was brought to China by certain tribes from countries to the West who invaded China, during the reign of the Emperor Kuang-Wu-Ti, who reigned in the years A.D. 25-28, but were driven back by one of Kuang-Wu-Ti's generals. These tribes, it is said, gave quite a good account of the life of our Lord from His birth to His death and after, including the account of His crucifixion, His rising again on the third day, and His ascension after forty days.¹

It is difficult to imagine any reason why anyone should take the trouble to fake such an account, and if they had, it is practically certain that the fake would have differed so materially from the genuine article as to be quite easily detected. That, however, does not seem to be the case here, as the narrative as given in the book quoted is quite consistent with what we know to have taken place.

¹ Stewart, *Nestorian Missionary Enterprise*, p. 168.

The translator of the passage is a well-known missionary of many years' standing, and if the story reached China in even the last year of the reign of the emperor mentioned it must have been carried across Asia in less than four years and could only refer to the events of A.D. 24, thus confirming in a remarkable way that year as the year when our Lord died and rose again. It is, at the same time, an illustration of the feverish activity in spreading abroad the good news that characterised those early Christians, and confirms the statement of Paul in Romans x. 18, that at the time he wrote, the messengers of the Gospel had already gone into all the earth and their words to the ends of the world.

The comparatively recent discovery by Sven Hedin, that, two thousand years ago, there was a great highway from China to Syria used by merchants to bring silks, spices and other merchandise to the Western world, indicates that the carrying of the Gospel message from Syria to China within a period of one or two years was not such an impossible task as at first glance it might have seemed to be. This highway lay alongside a chain of fresh-water lakes, connected by rivers, of which the central point was the town of Lob-nor on the lake of the same name situated at 39 : 30 N. and 90 E. and 2,200 feet above sea level. Owing to the deflection, for some unknown cause, of a river, the lakes disappeared, the river bed was dry, and the road impracticable for some 1,500 years. But within the last ten years the river (the Konchedarya) has returned to its former channel, the old lakes have reappeared, vegetation is springing up and the ancient highway has become useable once more.

If the conclusion arrived at had depended on one particular line of proof, it might have been difficult to speak dogmatically on the subject ; but when all the different lines of enquiry that have been followed converge at one and the same point we may rest assured that the conclusion arrived at is the only one that fits in with all the facts of the case.

Using the analogy of a lock and key, we find that when the key is inserted in the lock it fits every ward and lever in it and the door opens " of its own accord."

To sum up : Our enquiry has shown that the date of the Nativity coincides with the census referred to by Luke.

That that particular census was the second of the three censuses ordered by Augustus and that it took place in 8 B.C. is

confirmed, as has also been shown, (1) by the inscription on the temple to Augustus in Angora ; (2) by the fact that the census took place during the period of Quirinius's first governorship of Syria ; (3) by the fact that 8 B.C. was the first of a fourteen yearly Syrian census cycle which continued to be observed till A.D. 329.

Further, the star which brought the wise men to Jerusalem and Bethlehem finds a possible explanation in the triple conjunction of the planets Jupiter, Saturn and Mars, which took place in March of 6 B.C., although the death of Herod did not take place until 4 B.C.

Then as regards the crucifixion : There are no less than six converging lines, all of which go to confirm A.D. 24 as the date of that event. These are :—

(1) The fact that A.D. 19, as has been shown, was the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar when John the Baptist came preaching in the wilderness : thus indicating A.D. 20 or 21 as the date of our Lord's baptism and A.D. 24 as the year of the crucifixion.

(2) The fact that the crucifixion took place on Wednesday, the fourteenth of Nisan in a year in which the fifteenth of Nisan fell on a Thursday : a coincidence which occurred in A.D. 24 but did not recur until A.D. 33.

(3) Luke's statement that when our Lord began (His mediatorial or high priestly work) He was about thirty years of age.

(4) The dates of Paul's conversion and of his first and second visits to Jerusalem in A.D. 27, A.D. 30 and A.D. 44 respectively.

(5) The period of 483 years which, according to Daniel, was to elapse between the command to rebuild the city, given in 460 B.C., and the cutting off of the Anointed One, the Prince : a period that was exactly fulfilled in A.D. 24.

(6) The report from China that the story of the crucifixion and the resurrection had reached there some time between A.D. 25 and 28, a maximum period of less than four years.

The only possible alternative to A.D. 24 is, as already indicated, A.D. 33, in which, equally with A.D. 24, the fifteenth of Nisan fell on a Thursday. This, as has been shown, was the case in the year of the crucifixion.

A.D. 33 can be made to meet the requirement implied in the "fifteenth year of Tiberius" also by counting, not from the

time when Tiberius became associated with Augustus in the government of the empire, but from the date of the latter's death in A.D. 14. The fifteenth year of the former's reign would in that case be A.D. 29 instead of A.D. 19. In every other respect, however, A.D. 33 fails to meet the needs of the case while A.D. 24 does.

A three-fold cord, we are told, is not quickly broken. Much more is this the case when the number of strands is not three only but twice three, and when there is nothing whatever that can be adduced to the contrary the conclusion arrived at is placed beyond dispute.

The lock in this case has six levers. Only when the key fits all the wards does the door swing open.

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