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The Restoration of Priesthood Keys on Easter 1836, Part 1: Dating the First Easter

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On Easter Sunday, 3 April 1836, the Savior, Moses, Elias, and Elijah appeared in succession in the Kirtland Temple and restored priesthood keys required for the dispensation of the fulness of times. (See [D&C 110](#).) Elijah's coming had been prophesied more than twenty-two centuries earlier by Malachi. (See [Mal. 4:5](#); [D&C 110:14](#).)

This is the first of two articles that discuss the importance of this restoration and suggest that it occurred on an Easter day chosen in part because of its symbolic significance.

This first article reviews how the disciplines of scriptural study, history, and astronomy can be used to propose from the New Testament a precise date for the Savior's resurrection: Sunday, 3 April A.D. 33, on our calendar. After noting some of the reasons why other dates have been proposed, this article suggests that modern revelation supports that date.

Part 2 will consider the relationship of the Passover ceremony to the Lamb of God and then will discuss the return of the Savior, Moses, Elias, and Elijah; the priesthood keys and authority they restored; and the significance of this restoration occurring on 3 April 1836.

The reader should keep in mind that the topics addressed in these two articles are complex, and that some of the evidence employed is by its nature inexact; nevertheless, the reader may well find the proposed conclusions to be of serious interest. (See note [1](#) for further discussion on the nature of the evidence dealt with in these articles.)

Introduction

The morning of the Savior's resurrection could be considered the most important moment in earthly history. The announcement "He is risen" signaled that death had been conquered and the Atonement accomplished. Certainly it is an event worthy of the celebration and great rejoicing which we accord it each year at Easter.

But when did this marvelous event happen? On what date did Jesus rise from the tomb?

Although the date of the Savior's resurrection has been the subject of careful study for centuries, there has not been agreement among scholars on the day of the month or even the year it occurred. The Bible provides a number of clues, but the information it offers has not been sufficient to provide an indisputable correlation with our calendar. [2](#)

This article will suggest that modern revelation supports an A.D. 33 date for the Resurrection. While noting other viewpoints, it will also attempt to show that this date was already the most likely candidate if one considered only biblical evidence concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus. It will then note how conflicting evidence concerning the *birth* of Jesus has led to another date (A.D. 30) also being widely accepted.

Biblical References

This section will review the evidence from the four biblical Gospels that helps identify the day of the week, the day of the month, and the year of the Savior's resurrection.

“The First Day of the Week”

One chronological detail on which all four Gospel writers agree is that the morning the stone was found rolled away from the tomb occurred on “the first day of the week,” the day we call Sunday. [3](#) (See [Matt. 28:1](#); [Mark 16:2](#); [Luke 24:1](#); [John 20:1](#).) Most scholars conclude from these verses that the Savior rose from the dead on Sunday.

On the other hand, it has been suggested that perhaps the Resurrection occurred on Saturday, and that only the empty tomb was discovered on Sunday. [4](#) However, a literal translation of [Mark 16:9](#) clearly opposes this view: “And rising early on the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary the Magdalene.” [5](#) A Saturday Resurrection seems even more unlikely because the early Christians celebrated the Resurrection on Sunday. [6](#) (See [Acts 20:7](#).) Thus, *Sunday is proposed as the most likely day of the Savior's resurrection.*

The New Testament references to the time of the Crucifixion will now be discussed because they contribute additional chronological information.

“The Day of the Preparation”

All four Gospels agree that the Savior was crucified on a day of “preparation” for a Sabbath—that is, the day before a Sabbath. (See [Matt. 27:62](#); [Mark 15:42](#); [Luke 23:54](#); [John 19:42](#).) But a problem arises because the word “Sabbath” could refer either to a weekly Jewish Sabbath (Saturday) or to a feast day. Feast days were sacred days of rest, but they often fell on a day of the week other than Saturday. (See [Lev. 23:39](#).) Therefore, the “day of preparation” on which Jesus was crucified could refer to either (1) a Friday, the day before a weekly Sabbath, or (2) the day before a feast day (possibly any day of the week). Proponents of both interpretations find biblical support for their positions because there is evidence that the Sabbath following the Crucifixion was both a Saturday *and* a feast day. [7](#)

In support of a feast day Sabbath, John explicitly states that the day of preparation on which Jesus was crucified was “the preparation of the passover.” ([John 19:14](#).)

At the same time, the continuity of events described in the three synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) indicates that the Sabbath that began shortly after the Savior's death was also a Saturday, the weekly Jewish Sabbath, because it was the day preceding the day of the Resurrection. It is specifically stated that after the Savior was hurriedly laid in the tomb on the preparation day, the women who attended the burial went to prepare spices and ointments, rested on the Sabbath day, and then returned to the sepulcher to anoint his body very early in the morning on the first day of the week. ([Luke 23:54–56](#); [Luke 24:1](#); [Mark 16:1](#).) Hence, the Sabbath referred to was the day that preceded Sunday, and the day of preparation before it, the day on which the Savior was crucified, was a Friday.

However, there are some who believe the Crucifixion was on a Thursday. [8](#) Proponents of a Thursday Crucifixion do not feel this reasoning is conclusive. They suggest that if Friday was a feast day, then the Sabbath on which the women rested could have lasted two days. Although they sometimes concede that “Friday” is the usual meaning of “the preparation,” [9](#) they reject Friday as the day of the Crucifixion for reasons that will now be discussed.

“The Third Day”

On many occasions the Savior prophesied that he would rise on “the third day” from his death (see [Matt. 16:21](#); [Matt. 17:23](#); [Matt. 20:19](#); [Mark 9:31](#); [Mark 10:34](#); [Luke 9:22](#); [Luke 13:32](#); [Luke 18:33](#)), while at other times the phrase “after three days” or “in three days” was used (see [Mark 8:31](#); [Matt. 27:63](#); [John 2:19](#)). It is clear that these phrases were equivalent in meaning because they were used interchangeably. (Compare [Mark 8:31](#) with [Mark 9:31](#) and [Mark 10:34](#); also [Matt. 27:63–64](#).) On one occasion the Savior stated that he would be “three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” ([Matt. 12:40](#).)

Interestingly, these same verses are used to support three different views: a Wednesday, a Thursday, and a Friday Crucifixion.

The Wednesday View. Those who advocate a Wednesday Crucifixion base their opinion on Matthew 12:40 [[Matt. 12:40](#)]. They note that Jesus died about 3:00 P.M. ([Matt. 27:46](#); [Mark 15:34](#); [Luke 23:44](#)), and they believe he was dead for exactly three days and three nights, and so conclude that the Resurrection occurred in the afternoon. Because the Savior had risen by Sunday morning, they place the Resurrection on Saturday and the Crucifixion on Wednesday.

This view seems untenable because the disciples were *witnesses* that Jesus actually did “rise from the dead the third day” after his crucifixion ([Luke 24:46–48](#)), and the day they saw him is identified as Sunday, the *third* (not fourth) day since the crucifixion (see [Luke 24:1, 13, 20–21](#)). Moreover, the fact that the women came to the tomb on *Sunday* morning to anoint the body after having had to rest on the Sabbath seems to nullify this view, because under no circumstances could there have been a three-day Sabbath to prevent them from coming sooner.

The Thursday View. Proponents of a Thursday Crucifixion also feel that a Friday death does not allow enough time to fulfill Matthew 12:40 [[Matt. 12:40](#)]. That is, even though there may be parts of three days between Friday afternoon and Sunday morning, there are only two nights. They solve this problem by placing the Crucifixion on Thursday afternoon and the Resurrection on Sunday morning; and thus they are forced to propose a two-day Sabbath, as discussed above.

The Friday View. Scholars who advocate a Friday Crucifixion point out that the arguments for Wednesday and Thursday are based almost entirely on one interpretation of an isolated verse ([Matt. 12:40](#)), rather than on the many statements that Jesus would rise the third day. Although we might count Sunday as the third day after Thursday, they note that it is clear from many other passages in the Old Testament and rabbinic literature that the Jews counted inclusively 10—that is, in counting three days after a Friday death, they would have counted Friday as the first day, Saturday as the second, and Sunday as the third. (See [Luke 13:32–33](#); [Luke 24:7, 21, 45–48](#).) Moreover, according to Jewish custom, any part of a day was reckoned as an entire day (including the night); 11 hence, part of Friday, all of Saturday, and part of Sunday would have been counted as three days and three nights.

Therefore, the Jewish manner of reckoning both nullifies the objection to Friday and also implies that Sunday would have been counted as the fourth day after a Thursday Crucifixion.

Accordingly, Wednesday seems to be entirely excluded and Thursday is unlikely because its support lies almost wholly in one verse which strains the interpretation of many others. Thus, while Thursday is possible, it is proposed that *the day of the Crucifixion was probably a Friday*.

Crucifixion at Passover

All four Gospels agree that the day of the Crucifixion was at the time of the Passover celebration. This is an important chronological clue, because the Passover was always prepared on 14 Nisan, the fourteenth day of the Jewish lunar month Nisan, according to the Lord’s commandment. (See [Ex. 12:2–6](#); also “Calendar” and “Feasts” in the Bible Dictionary, LDS edition of the Bible.)

However, there is an apparent disagreement as to whether 14 Nisan was the actual day of the Crucifixion or the day before the Crucifixion.

As discussed above, John’s account specifically states that the Crucifixion occurred on the preparation of the Passover, 14 Nisan ([John 19:14](#); [John 18:28](#)), and he is completely self-consistent on this point. On the other hand, the synoptic Gospels are not so clear. They agree with John that Jesus might have been released because of the Passover feast ([Matt. 27:15](#); [Mark 15:6](#); [Luke 23:17](#); [John 18:39](#)), apparently supporting John’s 14 Nisan Crucifixion date. But they also describe the Last Supper as a Passover meal ([Matt. 14:17–19](#); [Mark 14:12–16](#); [Luke 22:7–13](#)), which would imply a 15 Nisan Crucifixion.

Because all four Gospels are describing the same events, and because John’s calendrical references

are so precise and self-consistent, whereas the synoptic accounts are unclear, [12](#) most scholars accept John's account that the day of the Crucifixion was 14 Nisan and then offer explanations for why the Savior and his disciples ate the Last (Passover) Supper a day before the Judeans. (For example, it has been suggested that the Last Supper was eaten a day early because the Savior knew of his imminent arrest, or that perhaps the disciples used the calendar of Qumran or a Galilean calendar to reckon when to celebrate Passover. [13](#)) Part 2 of this article will give a doctrinal argument supporting 14 Nisan. Accordingly, although a 15 Nisan Crucifixion date is not impossible, it is proposed that *the most likely Judean date for the Crucifixion is 14 Nisan*.

Caiaphas and Pilate

Unfortunately, the year of the Crucifixion is not mentioned in the scriptural text. But the fact that the high priest Caiaphas ([Matt. 26:57](#); [John 18:24](#)) and the Roman procurator Pilate ([Matt. 27:2](#); [Mark 15:1](#); [Luke 23:1](#); [John 18:29](#)) presided at Jesus' trials limits the year of the Crucifixion to the period of their common jurisdiction, A.D. 26 to 36—and there are advocates for nearly every one of those years. [14](#) However, other biblical information about the beginning and length of the Savior's ministry limits the possible Crucifixion years even further.

The Year of Tiberius Caesar

The only year explicitly stated in the Gospels is in Luke's account of John the Baptist beginning his ministry "in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar" ([Luke 3:1](#)), shortly before Jesus came to be baptized ([Luke 3:23](#)). If one knew (1) how Luke reckoned the reign of Tiberius, and (2) the length of the Savior's ministry, then the year of the Resurrection could be deduced. Each of these questions will now be considered.

Beginning of Ministry. The evidence is strong that throughout the Roman Empire the years of Tiberius were counted from the beginning of his reign at the death of Augustus Caesar in August, A.D. 14. Consequently, the fifteenth year of Tiberius, when John the Baptist began his ministry, was probably August/September A.D. 28 through August/September A.D. 29. [15](#)

It has been suggested that Luke may have reckoned the year of Tiberius not from the death of Augustus, but from the coregency of Tiberius with Augustus Caesar, which began about A.D. 12. If so, Jesus' baptism would have occurred in A.D. 26–27. Proponents of this view cite Tertullian, an early Christian writer, who appears to have used both methods of reckoning. [16](#) Critics charge, however, that there is no evidence from documents or coins that such reckoning was ever actually used. [17](#)

Thus, it is proposed that A.D. 28–29 is the most likely time for Jesus' baptism, and A.D. 26–27 is a possible second choice.

Length of Ministry. The book of John specifically mentions three annual Passovers during the ministry of the Savior, counting the one at his death ([John 2:13](#); [John 6:4](#); [John 11:55](#)), but implies an extra year between the first two because a spring harvest is mentioned ([John 4:35](#)) followed by another Jewish feast ([John 5:1](#)). Thus, it follows that Jesus' ministry was not less than about three and a half years, and included at least four Passovers. [18](#)

Counting four Passovers from A.D. 28–29 brings us to A.D. 32–33 as the most likely Resurrection years (with a lower limit of A.D. 29, when one counts from A.D. 26).

Other Historical Evidence

More clues to the year of the Resurrection come from other historical evidence. For example, most scholars date the conversion of Paul, which occurred some time after the Resurrection, to A.D. 34–35. For that reason, a Crucifixion date later than A.D. 33 is unlikely, and some feel that even A.D. 33 may be too late. [19](#)

Another historical clue is that Pilate yielded to the Jews' demands after they accused him of not being a friend to Caesar. ([John 19:12](#).) Such submissive behavior was typical of Pilate some time after the death

of Sejanus in October, A.D. 31; but before that he had firmly ignored Jewish protests. [20](#) Thus, Pilate's actions also favor the A.D. 32–33 date derived above.

In conclusion, *the historical evidence points to the Resurrection year as probably being A.D. 32 or 33, with a lower limit of A.D. 29 and an upper limit of A.D. 34.*

Calendrical Calculations

In summary, the historical and biblical evidence seems to indicate that the Lord was crucified at the time of a Passover feast, probably (1) on a Friday, (2) on the fourteenth day of the lunar month Nisan, and (3) during the period A.D. 29 to A.D. 34. Principles of astronomy can now be used to determine when 14 Nisan could have fallen on a Friday during that period, and to correlate the possible dates for the Crucifixion to our Gregorian calendar. [21](#)

First, it may be helpful to briefly consider the workings of the Judean lunisolar calendar.

The Jewish lunisolar calendar (*luni* = moon; *solar* = sun) used the *moon to reckon months* and the *sun to measure years*. At the time of the Savior, the first day of each month was determined by actual observation of the moon. [22](#) A day on the Judean calendar was from evening to evening. Months began after sunset at the beginning of each lunar cycle—that is, on the night when the thin crescent of the new moon was first visible. (See Figure 1 for details.) It was important to begin the month on the correct day because special sacrificial offerings were to be made then. (See [Num. 10:10](#); also “New Moon” in the Bible Dictionary, LDS edition.)

The lunar calendar was tied to the solar year by choosing Nisan, the first month of the Judean year, to begin immediately after the new moon nearest the spring equinox, when the sun rises most nearly due east. In this way, the feast day 15 Nisan (the first day of unleavened bread) was not allowed to precede the spring equinox. Because twelve lunar months are about eleven days less than a solar year, a thirteenth “leap” month was added about every third year to keep Nisan properly aligned with the equinox. [23](#)

Sir Isaac Newton was the first to use his law of gravity to calculate the position of the moon in antiquity to determine the date of the Crucifixion. [24](#) From historical considerations, Newton concluded that the most likely Crucifixion years were A.D. 33 and 34. He then used lunar calculations to determine in which years 14 Nisan could have been a Friday. His results are listed in Table 1. [25](#) For the years Newton considered historically plausible, he found that only A.D. 33 and 34 were astronomically possible, because only in those years could 14 Nisan have fallen on a Friday. Of these two possibilities, he favored A.D. 34. [26](#)

Earlier in this century, J. K. Fotheringham, unaware of Newton's work, performed the same calculations using his own criteria for crescent visibility; [27](#) and further refinements were recently made by Colin J. Humphreys and W. G. Waddington. [28](#) Their results are also shown in Table 1.

Note from Table 1 that, of the years deduced as most likely for the Crucifixion (A.D. 32–33), A.D. 33 is a perfect fit: 14 Nisan almost certainly was a Friday that year. On the other hand, 14 Nisan could not have been a Friday (or even a Thursday) in A.D. 32 or A.D. 31, so those years are excluded; A.D. 30 is astronomically acceptable, but is less likely for reasons discussed earlier. As the table indicates, A.D. 34 would be another possibility if a leap month was added that year; however, that would be improbable because it was a sabbatical year, [29](#) making A.D. 34 an unlikely third choice.

Thus, the evidence considered so far indicates that the three possible years for the Crucifixion, in order of likelihood, are A.D. 33, A.D. 30, and A.D. 34.

Crucifixion Lunar Eclipse

According to the Bible, the sun was darkened for three hours at the time of the Crucifixion ([Matt. 27:45](#); [Mark 15:33](#); [Luke 23:44–45](#)), which might suggest a solar eclipse if it were not that (1) solar eclipses are not total for more than about three minutes, and (2) the moon was full on 14 Nisan, not new, as would be

required for a solar eclipse. However, a lunar eclipse may occur at a full moon, causing the moon to turn a dark reddish color.

Table 1. Gregorian Calendar Dates for 14 Nisan

Year A.D.	<i>Newton (1733)</i>	<i>Fotheringham (1934)</i>	<i>Humphreys/Waddington (1983)</i>
26			Sun, 19 Apr
27		Thu, 8 Apr†	Thu, 8 Apr†
28		Tue, 28 Mar	Tue, 28 Mar
29		Mon, 16 Apr	Mon, 16 Apr‡
30		Fri, 5 Apr	Fri, 5 Apr‡
31	Tue, 25 Mar* 25	Tue, 25 Mar	Tue, 25 Mar
32	Sun, 11 Apr* 25	Sun, 11 Apr†	Sun, 11 Apr†
33	Fri, 1 Apr	Fri, 1 Apr	Fri, 1 Apr
34	(Wed, 22 Mar) ‡‡ or Thu, 20 Apr* 25	Tue, 21 Mar† or (Thu, 20 Apr)‡‡	Wed, 22 Mar or (Thu, 20 Apr**)‡‡
35	Tue, 10 Apr* 25		Tue, 10 Apr
36	Sat, 29 Mar		Sat, 29 Mar

† Perhaps one day later if atmospheric transparency was poor.

‡ It is possible, but highly improbable, that it was one day earlier.

* Newton added one day to this calculation for non-astronomical reasons; thus, he concluded that the *following* day was 14 Nisan.

‡‡ () indicates the choice considered less likely.

** Only in case of exceptionally severe weather.

Fotheringham pointed out that there was a partial lunar eclipse on Friday, 14 Nisan, 1 April A.D. 33, but he did not consider it a decisive factor. He calculated that this lunar eclipse would have been visible in Jerusalem at moonrise for nineteen minutes and suggested that perhaps it gave rise to the reports of the sun darkening at the Crucifixion (on the assumption that it was confused with a solar eclipse). [30](#)

However, this eclipse has recently taken on new significance with the observation by Humphreys and Waddington [28](#) that Peter's reference to the sun darkening and moon turning to blood ([Acts 2:20](#)) probably refers to the events of the Crucifixion. They cite contemporary reports of lunar eclipses

described in such terms as “the moon turned to blood,” and as supporting evidence they note that the uncanonized “Report of Pilate” claims that at the Crucifixion “the moon appeared like blood.” [31](#) These researchers then refined the calculations for the lunar eclipse of 1 April A.D. 33 and determined that it should have been visible in Jerusalem for thirty minutes. They note that it might well have been widely observed, because Jews on 14 Nisan would have been looking for the rising of the full moon of Passover. Figure 2 is based on their illustration of the eclipse.

Thus, if it is accepted that a lunar eclipse was observed on the day of the Crucifixion, then Friday, 1 April A.D. 33, is the only candidate among the potential dates listed in Table 1. [32](#) If so, this eclipse could put an end to arguments for other days (Thursday) or years (A.D. 30 or 34).

Because the Resurrection occurred on the Sunday following the Crucifixion, it is proposed that *Sunday, 3 April* A.D. 33, is the day that best matches the Gospel writers’ description of the Savior’s resurrection day.

Conflict with Data on the Savior’s Birth

Except for the lunar eclipse, most of the evidence presented thus far is well known. Why, then, are scholars not in agreement on the most likely day of the Crucifixion? The problem is that this proposed date for the Resurrection (3 April A.D. 33) does not appear to some to be consistent with other biblical and historical evidence concerning the date of the Savior’s *birth* and the *length of his life*.

The biblical record is much less precise about the time of the Savior’s birth than about his death; years have been proposed from at least 9 B.C. to A.D. 2. Most of the events mentioned in the Bible in connection with his birth have not been clearly identified in secular sources: the star of Bethlehem ([Matt. 2:2](#)), a taxation decree that would require the journey to Bethlehem ([Luke 2:1](#)), nor the governorship of Cyrenius before A.D. 6 ([Luke 2:2](#)). [33](#)

The most decisive factor relative to the date of Jesus’ *birth* has been considered to be the date of the death of Herod the Great. The historian Josephus is understood to date Herod’s death in 5–4 B.C. Because the Magi visited him after the Savior was born ([Matt. 2](#)), it is reasoned that Jesus’ birth must have occurred by at least 4 B.C., and probably about 6 B.C.

The *length* of the Savior’s life is traditionally believed to be about thirty-three years because he was baptized when he “began to be about thirty years of age” ([Luke 3:23](#)), and his ministry lasted somewhat more than three years, as described earlier. That Jesus was within one year of age thirty at his baptism is consistent with John the Baptist beginning his ministry at age thirty, as was customary for those of priestly descent ([Num. 4:3](#)), and with John being about six months older than Jesus ([Luke 1:24–27](#)).

Thus, three conflicting conclusions have been based on the historical and biblical evidence: (1) that the Savior was born in 6–4 B.C., (2) that the Savior lived 33–34 years, and (3) that the Savior died in A.D. 33.

Clearly, at least one of these conclusions must be discarded as being incompatible with the other two, because there are 36 years between 4 B.C. and A.D. 33. Thus, it becomes a matter of choosing the most convincing evidence, and there are advocates for rejecting each of the three positions:

Option A: 6–4 B.C. Birth and A.D. 30 Death. Many scholars have chosen to retain the 6–4 B.C. birthdate and a 33- to 35-year life, thus rejecting the A.D. 33 death date. These scholars note that A.D. 30 is an astronomically possible year for the Crucifixion (see Table 1) and suggest that Luke probably reckoned the years of Tiberius’ reign from his coregency with Augustus.

Option B: 6–4 B.C. Birth and A.D. 33 Death. Other scholars reject the 33-year life span as the length of Christ’s life because they feel that the evidence from both sacred and secular history for the Savior’s death in A.D. 33 is so convincing that it must be chosen, even with a 6–4 B.C. birthdate. [34](#) These proponents suggest that Luke’s phrase “about thirty” (at Jesus’ baptism) is vague enough to include age 33–35 as a beginning point, meaning that Jesus would have died at about age 36–38.

Option C: 2–1 B.C. Birth and A.D. 33 Death. Other scholars have recently argued from historical

evidence that Herod could not have died by 4 B.C., but probably died about 1 B.C. [35](#) These scholars agree more closely with most early Christian writers, who generally placed the Savior's birth at about 2 B.C. [36](#)

Which, if any, of the above three scenarios is correct? Each has its advocates. Fortunately, *modern revelation adds light to these issues and helps us choose among the options.*

Modern Revelation

It will now be suggested that modern revelation adds more details to the biblical testimony and favors the choice of the 1 B.C. birth date and A.D. 33 Resurrection date (Option C).

The Savior's Birth Date

Since the organization of the Church on 6 April 1830, many members have believed that Jesus was born on 6 April 1 B.C. This belief is based on a revelation stating that the Church was organized "one thousand eight hundred and thirty years since the coming of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ in the flesh, it being regularly organized and established agreeable to the laws of our country, by the will and commandments of God, in the fourth month, and on the sixth day of the month which is called April." ([D&C 20:1](#).)

The wording used does not make it clear whether this verse was intended to mean that the day 6 April 1830 was precisely 1,830 years since the birth of Jesus, or whether it was simply a formal way of stating that the year was called 1830. Some Church leaders have argued for the literal interpretation that Jesus was born on 6 April 1 B.C. [37](#) They often note that the Lord pointed out "the precise day ... to organize His Church." ([D&C 20](#), section heading.) Other Church leaders have not felt bound to accept Doctrine and Covenants 20:1 as accurate to the very day because "the Church has made no official declaration on the matter." [38](#) ([D&C 20:1](#))

Recently, two Presidents of the Church affirmed their belief that this verse does imply that April 6 (on our calendar) is the anniversary of the Lord's birth. On 6 April 1973, President Harold B. Lee noted that that day was "the anniversary of the birth of the Savior" and then quoted Doctrine and Covenants 20:1 as a reference. (*Ensign*, July 1973, p. 2.) Then on 6 April 1980, President Spencer W. Kimball stated that Jesus was born on "this day 1,980 years ago." (*Ensign*, May 1980, p. 54.)

While these statements may not have been intended as declarations of doctrine, they do add to the impression that the literal interpretation of Doctrine and Covenants 20:1 is generally accepted in the Church, favoring the acceptance of 6 April 1 B.C. as the Savior's birthdate, consistent with Option C above.

Length of Life

The Book of Mormon is another witness to the length of the Savior's life. First, it describes the appearance of a sign at night that heralded the Savior's birth on the following day ([3 Ne. 1:19](#)) and states that the Nephites began to count time from the appearance of the sign ([3 Ne. 2:7–8](#); see also [Moro. 10:1](#)).

The Book of Mormon also describes a great storm and earthquake that occurred for three hours ([3 Ne. 8:19](#)) at the time of the Savior's death, as prophesied by Samuel the Lamanite ([Hel. 14:21](#)). Matthew also describes an earthquake in Jerusalem at the Savior's death "about the ninth hour," or 3:00 P.M. ([Matt. 27:46–51](#)), [39](#) which would be about 7:00 A.M. in Central America (compare [3 Ne. 10:9](#)) due to the difference in longitude. [40](#)

The Book of Mormon specifically states that the destruction happened on the fourth day of the thirty-fourth year. ([3 Ne. 8:5](#).) Thus, if the Savior was born on the first day of the first Nephite year and died on the fourth day of their thirty-fourth year, then the length of his life was thirty-three Nephite years plus three days.

It follows, then, that if the length of the Nephite year were known, one could calculate an exact number of days for the length of the Savior's life.

At first glance, the obvious candidate for a Nephite calendar would probably be the Jewish lunisolar calendar, because the Nephites came from Jerusalem and kept the law of Moses. However, that choice does not seem to fit the Nephite reckoning because they record that Jesus died on the fourth day of the Nephite month ([3 Ne. 8:5](#)), not on the fourteenth day ([John 19:14](#)). Thus, the Jewish lunisolar calendar is apparently excluded.

Orson Pratt was the first to suggest that the Nephite year would probably have been the 365-day year of the Mesoamerican calendar. [41](#) If this was the case, the length of the Savior's life would have been $33 \times 365 + 3 = 12,048$ days. The Mesoamerican calendar yields this figure so easily because in that calendar the period of 33 years is not complicated by the addition of leap days. [42](#) On our Gregorian calendar, however, one leap day is added every 4 years—that is, 8 leap days in the 33-year period of Jesus' life. Hence, 33 years plus 3 days on a Mesoamerican calendar would represent the same elapsed time as 33 years minus 5 days on our Gregorian calendar. [43](#)

The conclusion from the Book of Mormon is twofold. First, the record states that Jesus was born in the first Nephite year and died early in the thirty-fourth. Thus, it is *another witness to the biblical data which suggests that Jesus lived 33 years*. The scripture is so clear that it seems to eliminate Option B discussed above, which would require the Savior to have lived 36–38 years.

Secondly, if one assumes (1) that Jesus was born on the first day of the Nephite first year, and (2) that the Nephites used a 365-day calendar, then Jesus lived 5 days less than 33 of our years, or 12,048 days.

Now it will be suggested that, given these assumptions, modern revelation supports the A.D. 33 Resurrection date derived above from the biblical evidence.

Resurrection Date

No date for the resurrection of Christ is explicitly given in modern revelation (though an 1833 statement attributed to the Prophet Joseph Smith notes that it was "just 1800 years since the Savior laid down his life," [44](#) suggesting that he accepted the commonly held understanding that Jesus died in A.D. 33). Nevertheless, an implied witness can now be established from three of the conclusions discussed thus far:

1. Several latter-day statements support 1 B.C. as the year of Jesus' birth. In addition, a precise day is indicated: 6 April 1 B.C.
2. The Book of Mormon implies that Jesus lived thirty-three years, confirming the biblical testimony. Moreover, an exact length for the Savior's life can be suggested: 12,048 days.
3. The New Testament indicates a precise day that is most likely for the Savior's resurrection: Sunday, 3 April A.D. 33.

An obvious question arises: Are all of these conclusions self-consistent? This question can be answered precisely. Counting 12,048 days (5 days less than 33 years) from Thursday, 6 April 1 B.C., brings one to Friday, 14 Nisan, 1 April A.D. 33—the exact Crucifixion date deduced from the Bible!

In other words, adding the *length of Jesus' life* calculated from the Book of Mormon, to his *birthdate* as understood from the Doctrine and Covenants, results in a biblical *death date*, to the very day. This precise internal consistency between different books of scripture was noticed only recently. [45](#)

That this Crucifixion date even falls within the same biblical year, A.D. 33, is impressive; that it falls also on a day that year that was a Friday and also 14 Nisan according to the Judean calendar seems beyond chance. [46](#) *Such interscriptural self-consistency in chronological details provides a second witness to the proposed Resurrection date of Sunday, 3 April A.D. 33.*

Part 2 of this article will discuss how the timing of the Lord's death and resurrection had been foreshadowed in the Passover ceremony, which becomes a doctrinal argument in the discussion. Then the article will note how the return of the Savior, Moses, Elias, and Elijah in the Kirtland Temple on Easter Sunday, 16 Nisan, 3 April 1836, occurred on a remarkable anniversary of the date proposed for the Savior's resurrection.

[illustration] "The Lord Jesus Christ," by Del Parson

[illustration] "This Do in Remembrance of Me," by Harry Anderson © Pacific Press Publishing Association, used by permission.

[illustration] FIGURE 1. The Judean month began with the evening on which the thin crescent of the new moon was first visible after sunset. Because the period between new moons is 29.53 days, a lunar month always has either 29 or 30 days. Skilled observers waited on the hills around Jerusalem on the twenty-ninth day of each month because if the thin crescent could be seen before the moon set just after sundown, then the day just beginning would be declared the first day of the new month. But if no trace of the moon's thin crescent could be observed, then that day was a thirtieth day added to the present month. In case of cloudy weather, calculations were used to begin the month. (Illustrated by E. Kay Watson.)

[illustration] FIGURE 2. An illustration of the moon appearing to "turn to blood" at the lunar eclipse on Friday, 1 April A.D. 33, viewed from Jerusalem after sunset, at the rising of the full moon of Passover. Atmospheric refraction gives rise to the distorted shape of the moon. (Illustrated by E. Kay Watson.)

[illustration] "He Appeared to the Eleven as They Sat at Meat," by Tissot

Notes

1. It should be noted that the conclusions in this article are based on scriptures, historical sources, and astronomy, in all of which there are elements of uncertainty. The interpretation of scripture as it relates to history is often very difficult, history itself is by nature inexact, and astronomical calculations can only be accurate to within certain tolerances. Moreover, judging the relative importance of data is a subjective enterprise, especially when conflicting evidence comes from different fields. However, the consistency discovered in the *scriptures* is thought to be of interest to Latter-day Saints.
2. Two excellent summaries of this subject are: Harold Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1977); and Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1964).
3. The weekly cycle has not been changed nor interrupted since Jesus lived, so our Sunday still corresponds to the first day of the week at that time.
4. See W. Graham Scroggie, *A Guide to the Gospels* (London, 1948), pp. 569–77; or Herbert W. Armstrong, *Easter Was Not on Sunday* (Pasadena: Worldwide Church of God, 1972).
5. Alfred Marshall, *The R.S.V. Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1958), p. 215.
6. This tradition is especially clear in some uncanonized works, such as the Book of Barnabas. After noting that the former Sabbath was symbolic of the seventh 1,000-year "day" since the Creation, during which all would rest, Barnabas 8:9–10 explains that the next day would be "the eighth day, that is, the beginning of the other world. For which cause we observe the eighth day with gladness, in which Jesus rose from the dead." (See Rutherford H. Platt, Jr., *The Lost Books of the Bible and the Forgotten Books of Eden*, New York: World Publishing, 1963, p. 161.)
7. [John 19:31](#) seems to state specifically that the Sabbath was both a Saturday and a feast day.

Paraphrased with the usual meanings of “the preparation” and “Sabbath,” this verse would read: “Because it was Friday, the Jews did not want the bodies to remain upon the cross on Saturday (for that Saturday was a high day)—that is, it was “a Sabbath rendered doubly sacred because of its being also a feast day.” (James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1979, p. 618; see also Finegan, p. 288.) However, those who believe that the Crucifixion took place on a Thursday (or Wednesday) would paraphrase it differently to read: “Because it was the preparation for Passover, the Jews did not want the bodies to remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day (for that Sabbath was a feast day).” So rather than resolve the question, this verse simply illustrates the problem.

8. For example, Brooke F. Westcott, *An Introduction to the Study of the Gospels*, 6th ed. (Cambridge and London, 1881), pp. 343–49; or Roger Rusk, “The Day He Died,” *Christianity Today*, March 29, 1974, pp. 4–6.

9. See Hoehner, p. 70. Most scholars agree that the normal use of the phrase “preparation day” referred at the time to Friday. For example, Josephus quotes a decree of Augustus Caesar excusing Jews from certain legal obligations not only on the Sabbath but “on the day preparation to it, after the ninth hour.” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 16.6.2.)

10. For instance, in [Lev. 23:15–16](#) the interval of seven weeks, “from the morrow after the sabbath” to “the morrow after the seventh sabbath,” is counted as fifty days. We would count forty-nine days. See also Hoehner, p. 73.

11. See Hoehner, p. 66.

12. The situation is complicated by the fact that all three synoptic accounts specifically refer to the daylight period before the disciples’ Passover meal as the “first day of unleavened bread,” whereas on the Judean calendar that phrase referred to the daylight *following* the meal. In order to understand these accounts, it has been suggested that the disciples used a Galilean calendar on which days began at sunrise rather than sunset, in which case all of their statements could be correct. (See note 13.) In that case, John’s 14 Nisan Crucifixion date would stand.

13. Finegan, pp. 288–90; Hoehner, pp. 81–90. Both prefer the explanation that the Galilean calendar differed from the Judean calendar, but the question is not settled. See also Talmage, pp. 617–19.

14. See Hoehner, pp. 95–98.

15. This was most likely the Roman dating method, which Luke probably used because he addressed his work to the Roman official Theophilus. If Luke used Jewish reckoning, then the ministry of John the Baptist could have begun as early as the spring of A.D. 28. (See Finegan, pp. 88–90, 266–73, Hoehner, pp. 29–37.)

16. Finegan, p. 263.

17. Hoehner, pp. 31, 102.

18. Some arguments for a longer ministry have been proposed, but they depend heavily on arguments from silence. See Finegan, pp. 280–85; Hoehner, pp. 55–60.

19. Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, transl. N. Perrin (London: SCM, 1966), p. 39.

20. Hoehner, pp. 105–11.

21. Dates before 14 October 1582 are usually understood to refer to the Julian calendar, which derives from Roman times (45 B.C.). Thus, most of the literature on this subject generally uses the Julian calendar. However, this article refers only to the Gregorian calendar for all dates because the question being answered is not what the Resurrection day was called in Roman times but what it would be on *our* calendar, projecting back to Roman times. For dates during the life of the Savior, these calendars would differ by only two days; that is, Sunday, 3 April A.D. 33, on our Gregorian calendar would have been Sunday, 5 April A.D. 33, on the Julian calendar. For a good summary, see Gordon Moyer, *Scientific*

American 246, no. 5 (May 1982), p. 144.

22. This calendar is called the “Judean calendar” to avoid confusion with the modern Hebrew calendar, which uses the *average*, not the *observed* lunar position. Details of the Judean calendar are found in *The Code of Maimonides: Sanctification of the New Moon*, trans. Solomon Gandz (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1956).

23. The Sanhedrin would add an extra month just before Nisan (1) if the vernal equinox was calculated to occur on or after 16 Nisan; (2) if the barley crop did not appear ripe enough to offer on 16 Nisan (Lev. 23:10–12); or (3) for various reasons of convenience, such as roads needing repair for Passover travelers.

The Babylonian calendar at that time, like the modern Hebrew calendar, had a fixed intercalation of seven months every nineteen years. (See Richard A. Parker and Waldo H. Dubberstein, *Babylonian Chronology 626 B.C.–A.D. 75*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942.)

24. Sir Isaac Newton, *Observations upon the Prophecies of Daniel and the Apocalypse of St. John* (London: J. Darby and T. Browne, 1733), Part 1, chap. 11.

25. Newton believed that, as in the modern Hebrew calendar, 14 Nisan was not allowed to fall on a Sunday, Tuesday, or Thursday anciently and that the beginning of the month would be postponed one day to prevent such an occurrence. (He noted that 15 Nisan and 21 Nisan were always sabbatical days or days of rest, and it was inconvenient to have two sabbaths together, which would have prohibited burying the dead and making ready fresh meat [Ibid., pp. 162–63].) For that reason, the asterisks in Table 1 indicate cases in which the *following* day was Newton’s actual choice for 14 Nisan.

Today it is generally believed that this feature of the modern Hebrew calendar was not incorporated in the earlier Judean calendar, so that 14 Nisan could have fallen on any day of the week at the time of Christ. (See S. Zeitlin, “The Judean Calendar during the Second Commonwealth and the Scrolls,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 57, 1966, p. 28. However, some have disagreed. See G. R. Driver, in *The Judean Scrolls: The Problem and a Solution*, New York: Schocken, 1966, p. 324.)

26. Newton’s analysis of the Gospels led him to think there were five (not four) Passovers after an A.D. 29 baptism. Thus, he chose A.D. 34 as the more likely Crucifixion year.

27. J. K. Fotheringham, *Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society* 70 (1910), pp. 527–31; with updated results in *Journal of Theological Studies* 35 (1934), pp. 142–62.

28. Colin J. Humphreys and W. G. Waddington, “Dating the Crucifixion,” *Nature* 306 (December 22/29, 1983), pp. 743–46. It is interesting that these latest results are identical to Newton’s, although they were unaware of his work and used a new and refined crescent visibility criterion. Newton claimed (p. 160) that the Judeans deemed the new moon visible “about 18 hours after the true conjunction.”

29. Solomon Zeitlin, “The Duration of Jesus’ Ministry,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 55 (1965), p. 198. Humphreys and Waddington also conclude that the April date for 14 Nisan (see Table 1) would be unlikely unless severe weather delayed the crops. Zeitlin, who favors A.D. 34, agrees that no extra month would have been added because it was a sabbatical year.

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30. Fotheringham, p. 161.

28. Colin J. Humphreys and W. G. Waddington, "Dating the Crucifixion," *Nature* 306 (December 22/29, 1983), pp. 743–46. It is interesting that these latest results are identical to Newton's, although they were unaware of his work and used a new and refined crescent visibility criterion. Newton claimed (p. 160) that the Judeans deemed the new moon visible "about 18 hours after the true conjunction."

31. They cite Montague R. James, *The Apocryphal New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 154. Even if the document is apocryphal, they argue, it would probably reflect a widely held belief. Another version of the Report of Pilate describes even more clearly a partial eclipse: "The moon lost its brightness, as though tinged with blood." (See Platt, p. 274.)

32. The only other possible contender is a partial lunar eclipse visible in Jerusalem about 11:00 P.M. on Wednesday, 23 April A.D. 31. (See eclipse no. 1,910 in T. Oppolzer, *Canon of Eclipses*, New York: Dover, 1962, p. 344.) The chance of that date being 14 Nisan was considered so remote that it was excluded from consideration by all three investigations. Moreover, as discussed earlier, a Wednesday

Crucifixion is highly unlikely.

33. An excellent summary of the data on the Savior's birth is David Hughes, *The Star of Bethlehem: An Astronomer's Confirmation* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979). See also note 2. A source that includes Book of Mormon considerations is Jay Huber, "Lehi's 600-Year Prophecy and the Birth of Christ," Provo, Utah: FARMS preliminary report.

34. This is Hoehner's view. He concludes (p. 111): "Thus, the A.D. 33 date for the death of Christ best explains the evidence of both sacred and secular history."

35. This proposal has kindled a heated debate which is beyond the scope of this article. (See W. E. Filmer, *Journal of Theological Studies* 17, 1966, pp. 283–98; also Ernest Martin, *The Birth of Christ Recalculated*, Pasadena, Calif. : FBR Publications, 1978, reviewed by John Mosley, *Griffith Observer*, December 1980, p. 2; and John Mosley and Ernest Martin, *The Planetarian* 9, no. 2, Summer 1980, p. 6. Filmer's paper was attacked by T. D. Barnes, *Journal of Theological Studies* 19, 1968, pp. 204–9; and the Mosley/Martin paper is opposed by Douglas Johnson, *The Planetarian* 10, no. 1, 1981, p. 14. LDS sources relative to this debate include: S. Kent Brown, C. Wilfred Griggs, and H. Kimball Hansen, review of *April Sixth*, by John C. Lefgren, *Brigham Young University Studies* 22, no. 3., Summer 1982, p. 375; a rebuttal to that review by John P. Pratt, and a response to the rebuttal by the authors, in *Brigham Young University Studies* 23, no. 2, Spring 1983, p. 252. See also Paul N. Hyde, "A Date for the Birth of Christ," *The Fourth Annual Church Educational System Religious Educators' Symposium on the New Testament*, Salt Lake City: Church Educational System, 1980, p. 100.)

36. See Finegan, pp. 222–29.

37. For example, Elder James E. Talmage wrote: "We believe that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem of Judea, April 6, B.C. 1." (*Jesus the Christ*, p. 104.)

38. J. Reuben Clark, Jr., *Our Lord of the Gospels* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1954), pp. vi–vii.

39. It is believed that earthquakes can be triggered by lunisolar tidal forces, which are greatest at a new or full moon. (See T. H. Heaton, "Tidal Triggering of Earthquakes," *Geophysical Journal of the Royal Astronomical Society* 43, 1975, p. 307.) The full moon of 1 April A.D. 33 was so well aligned with the sun that there was a lunar eclipse as discussed above. This alignment, combined with the effect of the moon being in an orbital position near the earth, would have increased the tidal forces.

40. This record of great catastrophes in the Western Hemisphere at the time of the Crucifixion may also explain two Mesoamerican Indian traditions, but only if the destruction occurred in A.D. 33. First, it was believed that the resurrection of the god Quetzalcoatl occurred when the planet Venus also rose from the underworld as the bright morning star (compare Rev. 22:16), which it does about every 584 days. It has been suggested that Quetzalcoatl was the resurrected Savior (see Milton R. Hunter, *Christ in Ancient America*, Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1959), who is not to be confused with the tenth-century Toltec leader Topiltzin, who is also "identified to the confusion of modern scholars with the Feathered Serpent, Quetzalcoatl" (Michael Coe, *Mexico*, New York: Frederick Praeger, 1967, p. 135). Second, such an appearance of Venus was also thought to be an omen of "death, pestilence, and destruction." (See A. Aveni, *Skywatchers of Ancient Mexico*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 1980, pp. 186–87 for a discussion of both traditions.)

In A.D. 33, Venus first appeared as the morning star about two weeks before April 3, the proposed Resurrection date (see B. Tuckerman, *Planetary, Lunar, and Solar Positions, A.D. 2 to A.D. 1649 at Five-day and Ten-day Intervals*, Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1964, pp. 31–36), which explains both traditions in the sense that (1) Venus would have been rising at the time of the Resurrection, and (2) the first rising would have occurred just prior to the great destructions. The nearest other years in which the morning star was rising at Easter were A.D. 25 and A.D. 41, which are outside the range of plausible years, as discussed earlier.

41. *Masterful Discourses of Orson Pratt*, p. 56 (from the *Millennial Star*, December 22, 1866, p. 808) and *Journal of Discourses*, 15:259–60. In ancient America, the Mesoamerican calendar was apparently the

only calendar that had widespread use, making Elder Pratt's suggestion a reasonable one.

42. Although the Mesoamerican calendar may have inserted 13 leap days at the end of 52 years, most modern scholars believe none were added at all. (See J. E. S. Thompson, *Mayan Hieroglyphic Writing*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1971, p. 21.) In either case, no leap days would have been added during the 33-year period of the Savior's life. The ancient Egyptian calendar also had exactly 365 days.

43. On the Jewish lunisolar calendar, however, the same elapsed time equals precisely thirty-three years; that is, the Savior was probably born as 15 Nisan began and died as 14 Nisan ended.

44. *History of the Church*, 1:337, the day before Easter 1833.

45. John Lefgren, *April Sixth* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1980). He presents the idea in the opposite manner: one can deduce the Savior's birthdate by subtracting the length of his life given in the Book of Mormon from the biblical Crucifixion date.

He assumes that Christ was born on day zero, not day one; if so, the Savior's life lasted 12,049 days, and his birth could have been early in the morning on April 6 rather than in the evening. My primary reason for assuming the birth was on day one is that the zero point on the Nephite calendar seems to be the time of the sign on the night before the Savior's birth.

46. For example, 1 B.C. is the only year between 84 B.C. and A.D. 219 in which one can begin on 6 April, count 12,048 days, and end on a Friday, 14 Nisan on the Judean calendar.

† Perhaps one day later if atmospheric transparency was poor.

‡ It is possible, but highly improbable, that it was one day earlier.

* Newton added one day to this calculation for non-astronomical reasons; thus, he concluded that the *following* day was 14 Nisan.

†† () indicates the choice considered less likely.

Notes

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