Undesigned coincidences—Josephus and the Gospels—Jesus at 12 years of age

J.J. Blunt

Luke 2:42.—“And when *he was twelve years old*, they went up to Jerusalem after the custom of the feast.”

I am aware that commentators upon this text quote the Rabbins, to show that children of twelve years old amongst the Jews were considered to be entering the estate of manhood (see Wetstein), and that on this account it was that Jesus was taken at that age to the Passover. Such may be the true interpretation of the passage. I cannot, however, forbear offering a conjecture which occurred to me in reading the history of Archelaus.

The birth of Christ probably preceded the death of Herod by a year and a half, or thereabout. (See Lardher, Vol. i. p. 352.8vo. edit.) Archelaus succeeded Herod, and governed the country, it should seem, about ten years. “In the *tenth year* of Archelaus’ reign, the chief governors among the Jews and Samaritans, unable any longer to endure his cruelty and tyranny, accused him before Cæsar.” Cæsar upon this sent for him to Rome, and “as soon as he came to Rome, when the Emperor had heard his accusers, and his defence, he banished him to Vienne, in France, and confiscated his goods.”—Antiq. xvii. c. 15. The removal, therefore, of this obnoxious governor, appears to have been effected in our Lord’s twelfth year. Might not this circumstance account for the parents of the child Jesus venturing to take Him to Jerusalem at the Passover when He was *twelve years old*, and not before? It was only because “Archelaus reigned in Judæa in the room of his father Herod,” that Joseph was afraid to go thither on his return from Egypt; influenced not merely by motives of personal safety, but by the consideration that the same jealousy which had urged Herod to take away the young child’s life, might also prevail with his successor; for we do not find that any fears about himself or Mary withheld him from subsequently going to the Passover, even during the reign of Archelaus, since it is recorded that “they went every year.” I submit it, therefore, to my readers’ decision, whether the same apprehensions for the life of the infant Jesus, which prevented Joseph from taking Him into Judæa, on hearing that Archelaus was king, did not, very probably, prevent him from taking Him up to Jerusalem till he heard that Archelaus was deposed?