

Life of Brian Topics

1. Funding the film
2. Effort to ban distribution of the film in 1979
3. Comments on development by Pythons
4. The Times of Brian
5. Merging Christianity and the Roman Empire

Funding the Film

- EMI approved it. Pythons were two days from filming it in Tunisia
 - Then EMI pulled out after Lord Delfont read the actual script
 - Delfont's brother had produced Franco Zeffereilli's "Jesus of Nazareth" the year before
 - Delfont was afraid of negative reaction or comparisons
 - Zeffereilli's sets in Tunisia were later used in the Python film
- George Harrison of the Beatles then mortgaged his house to fund the film because he wanted to see it made

Effect of Campaign To Ban *Life of Brian*

- **Banned in Ireland**
- **Banned in Norway**
- **Banned in 39 counties in the U.K.**
- **Reduced distribution in the U.S. South**
- **Advertised in Sweden as:**
 - “The Film So Funny It Was Banned In Norway!”
- **Currently #1** on most lists of “Best British Comedy Films of all time.”

Campaign To Prevent Distribution Of Life of Brian

- **Life of Brian was released in 1979**
- **What was going on in 1979?**

What was going on in 1979 (UK)?

Margaret Thatcher was running for Prime Minister

- Promised to restore Neo-Victorian era to Britannia
- Aligned with **Mary Whitehouse**
 - Nationwide Festival of Light leader
 - Had been battling BBC over sex and violence since 1964



What was going on in 1979 (US)?

Jerry Falwell's "Moral Majority" formed

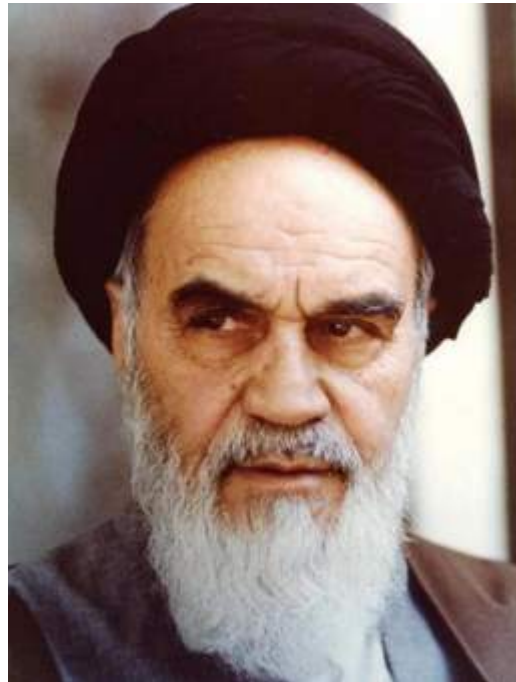
- Far-right Baptist evangelical ministry
- Aligns itself with far-right elements of other churches
- Supports Reagan-Bush election effort
- Expressly eliminated concept of separate church and state



What was going on in 1979 (Iran)?

Islamist extremists take over Iran

- Led by Ayatollah Khomeini
- Take 52 hostages at U.S. Embassy in Tehran



Topic 3: Evolution of the “Life of Brian” Script

- **What do the Pythons themselves say about the development of the “Life of Brian” script and film?**

Python comments on development of “Life of Brian” script

- **Terry Gilliam:**
 - We were on a pub crawl in Amsterdam one night (in 1975) after promoting “Holy Grail”
 - Eric came up with the concept of **“Jesus Christ—Lust For Glory”** and we fell off our chairs
 - The title was a take-off on the British title for the Oscar-winning film about General George Patton
 - **“Patton--Lust For Glory”**
 - Very quickly we came to feel that Jesus was OK and we didn’t want to take the piss out of him
 - That’s when Brian was created

Python comments on development of “Life of Brian” script

- **Michael Palin**

- We’d done our reading, and we had all come out as Jesus fans.

Python comments on development of “Life of Brian” script

- **John Cleese:**

- “Life of Brian” was going to be about the 13th disciple and how he always turned up late.
- The funny thing is that if you turn up five minutes late for a miracle you might as well turn up two and a half thousand years late.
- That got dropped quite early on.

Python comments on development of “Life of Brian” script

- **Michael Palin:**

- There was the idea that there was **Messiah fever** at the time.
- That was really the key to it and gave us the theme. That led to this character who wasn't Jesus, but who led an almost parallel life.
- He was the next door neighbor.

Python comments on development of “Life of Brian” script

- **Terry Jones:**

- The humor lay in somebody preaching and talking about peace and love, and then in people who spend the next 2,000 years killing and torturing each other because they can't decide how he said it.

Python comments on development of “Life of Brian” script

- **John Cleese:**

- Quite genuinely I don’t know how you could try to be funny about Jesus’ life. There would be no point in it.
- What is absurd is not the teachings of the founders of religion, it’s what followers subsequently make of it.
- I was always astonished at the people who didn’t get that.

Python comments on development of “Life of Brian” script

- **Terry Jones:**

- The Life of Brian isn't blasphemous, it's heretical.
- **It *isn't* blasphemous**, because it takes the Bible story as gospel.
- **It *is* heretical**, because it's making fun of the way that the church interprets it.
- Heresy is basically taking a position against the church's interpretation, not against the basic belief.

Python comments on development of “Life of Brian” script

- **Terry Gilliam:**

- In a strange way we were being very cautious about not being blasphemous.
- We got around it by being totally blasphemous about another guy.
- My mother, an avid church-goer, saw it, and she didn't have a problem with it because it wasn't about Jesus.

Topic 4: The Times of Brian



What Do These Numbers
Have in Common?

4716

5778

2018

They are all *this* Year
on these respective calendars

4716 = Chinese calendar

5778 = Jewish calendar

2018 = Christian (a.d.) or Common Era (c.e.)

Question:

In What Year Was Brian Born?

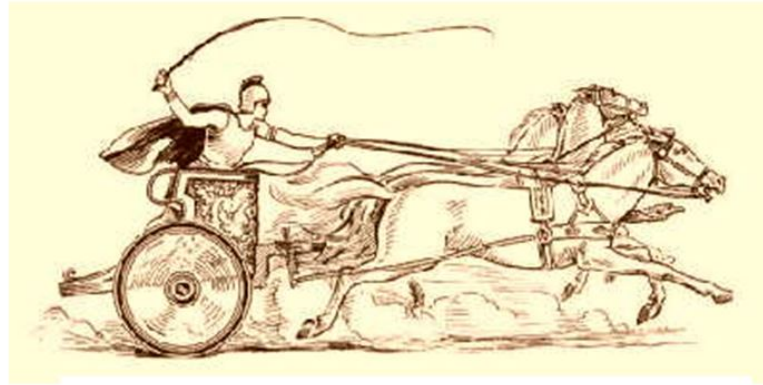
- **Answer:**
 - Same time and place as Jesus
 - Only just down the block in Bethlehem
- **Is this a trick question?**
 - Yes, because now you have to define the year in which Jesus was born

In What Year Was Jesus Born?

- **Why, 0 a.d., of course!**

- Except that the Romans, Greeks and Jews didn't have zero as a number yet. They started counting from one.
 - **Egyptians** had a symbol for null in 1770 b.c.e.
 - **Babylonians** by 300 b.c.e. had an empty placeholder marked by two slanted wedges, but it was not used alone
 - **Ptolemy** used a small circle with a long overbar for zero in 130 a.d.
 - **Muhammad ibn Mūsā al-Khwārizmī**, a Persian mathematician In 825 a.d., published an explanation of the concept of zero as derived from Hindu and Sanskrit scrolls. The word “algorithm” comes from the Latinization of his name.
 - The word “**zero**” came to English from the French, who got it from the Italian “**Zefiro**”, and the earlier Greek “**zephyrus**”.
 - The little circle was originally called “**sifr**”, which led to “zero” and has the same root as the word “zephyr”.

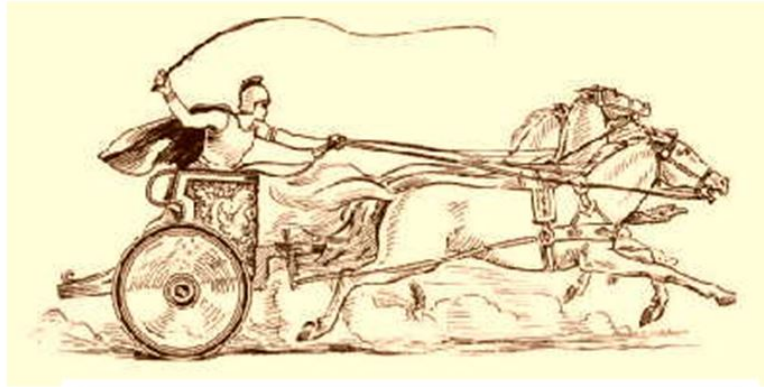
Question: What Year Was It On the Roman calendar?



0 A.D. JANUARY						
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

Answer: 754 A.U.C. (Ab urbe condita)

“Since the founding of Rome”



754 A.U.C.		JANUARY				
SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

Was Jesus really born in 0 a.d.?

- Two methods of calculation:
 - **Matthew** said that Jesus was “about 30” when he started preaching, so they worked backwards from there
 - **Both Luke and Matthew** associate Jesus’ birth with the reign of “Herod”. Herod The Great died in 4 b.c.e.
 - He was followed by Herod Archelaus, and Luke and Matthew only referred to a “Herod”, so there is confusion.
 - **The census of Quintus** didn’t happen until 6 a.d.
 - And no Roman census required people to migrate to their towns of origin
 - Thus the Roman census cannot be used to date the birth of Jesus
- Scholars today:
 - Put Jesus’ birth at 6-4 b.c.e.

How Long Had The Romans Been In Control of Judea?

- **GREEKS 332 BCE:**
 - **Alexander the Great** conquers the area establishing the Hellenistic Seleucid Empire
- **MACCABEES 166-140 BCE:**
 - **Maccabees** throw out the Selucids and establish the Hasmonean dynasty. Re-establish Jewish practices in Jerusalem.
- **ROMANS 63 BCE:**
 - **Roman general Pompeus** intervenes in Hasmonean civil war between the Pharisees and Sadducees, making Judea a tributary client kingdom of Rome
- **ROMANS 39 BCE:**
 - Roman Senate declares Judea to be a full Roman province
 - **Herod The Great** named as King of the Jews
- **HEROD THE GREAT Dies 4 BCE to 1 BCE:**
 - Herod the Great dies, dividing up the kingdom to his three sons and his daughter Salome
 - **Herod Archelaus** gets the main part of Judea that contains Jerusalem

The Roman Empire

At the time of Jesus and Brian



Need for a Messiah in Judea

- Encyclopedia of Biblical Prophecy (J. Barton Paine)
 - **127 Messianic predictions**
 - **574 Biblical references** to a personal messiah in the Hebrew Bible (AKA Old Testament)
- **Judea had been roiling with civil war and resentment of Roman domination**
 - The 70 a.d. Bar Kokhba revolt lay ahead
 - **Herod the Great placed a golden Roman Eagle at the top of the Temple**
 - **Daily sacrifices to Caesar were made at the Temple in Jerusalem**
- **Many thought they were in the ending times during that generation (Apocalypticism)**
- Brian just happened to stumble into all of this
- All that Brian really wanted was Judith

Topic 5: 300 Years Later

- The merging of Christianity and the Roman Empire

Trick Question:

How Many Catholics Lived
in the times of Jesus?

Trick Answer = Zero

- There were those who held beliefs that would later be declared Catholic doctrine
- Catholicism was formalized in 325 c.e. at the First Council of Nicaea and the establishment of the Nicene Creed
- Earlier adherents were called “proto-orthodox” Christians
 - Multiple branches of early Christianity
 - Proto-Orthodox branch achieved ascendancy in the third century
 - Arian and Gnostic branches lost out at Nicaea, scrolls burnt

The Road to Nicaea

- **33 c.e. Jesus is crucified**
 - Christianity in the first through third centuries became a religion of many martyrs
 - Christianity required renouncing all other religions, and thus the Romans felt that the Christians angered the Pagan gods
- **312 c.e. Constantine defeats the rest of the Roman tetrarchy**
 - Envisions a cross; Has crosses painted on the shields of his troops
 - Modern physicists suggest it may have been a “sun dog” illusion caused by viewing sunlight in a particular way.
 - Wins major battle in Rome with 100,000 soldiers on each side to become Emperor
- **313 c.e. Edict of Milan**
 - Initiates benevolent treatment of Christians by Roman Empire. Constantine declares himself a Christian
- **324 c.e. Constantine becomes sole ruler of Roman Empire**
- **325 c.e. First Council of Nicaea**
 - Establishes Nicene Creed (Apostles Creed)
- **380 c.e. Edict of Thessalonica**
 - Made Nicene Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire
 - Roman = Backed by the Roman legions
 - Catholic = Universal, there is no other
 - Church = Church

Crucifixion

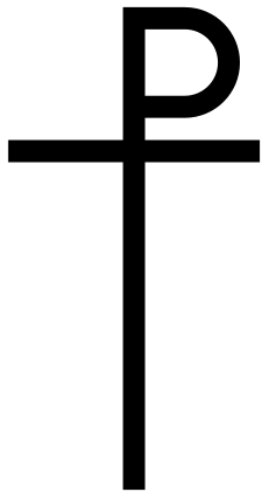
- Part of Roman Empire standard operating procedure
 - **Object:** Control of population through public demonstration of extreme cruelty
 - Optimized for both
 - Extended excruciating pain
 - Humiliation
 - Most were crucified naked to increase humiliation
 - **Used on:**
 - Slaves, Pirates, Rebels against the state

Crucifixion Vocabulary

- **Crux simplex:** 1 vertical stake
- **Crux comissa:** T-shaped cross
- **Crux immensa:** traditional Christian depiction with crossbeam and headpiece
- **Patibulum:** Cross beam
- **Sedile:** Small seat
- **Suppedaneum:** Foot support
- **Titulus:** Label telling name and crime
- **Gibbet:**
 - Whole category of death/torture harnesses
 - Includes crosses, stakes, death cages, gallows

Staurograms

Tau-Rho



Chi-Rho

