

# THE CENSUS OF CYRENIUS POINTS TO THE BIRTH OF CHRIST

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Many see the census of Cyrenius as an irreconcilable Biblical contradiction between Matthew and Luke. Why? Matthew says that Jesus was born during the reign of Herod the Great whom Josephus tells us died in the spring of 4 BC.

\* Mat 2:1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

Luke says he was born during a census when Cyrenius was Governor of Syria. Josephus tells us that Cyrenius became Governor of Syria in 6 AD.

\* Luk 2:1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.

Luk 2:2 ([And] this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

Luk 2:4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)

Luk 2:5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

How do we reconcile this contradiction?

We must understand that Luke Chapter 2 is understood in the light of Luke Chapter 1. And Luke Chapter 1 makes clear that he and Matthew do not contradict at all. They agree. Chapter 1 tells the story of the conception of John the Baptist and of Jesus. The context of both conceptions began in the reign of Herod the Great and specifically a period of time called the 'Course of Abia' during which Zacharias was serving in the temple..

\* Luk 1:5 There was in the days of Herod, the King of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife [was] of the daughters of Aaron, and her name [was] Elisabeth.

As Zacharias was serving in the Course of Abijah, the angel appeared and promised that he would have a son. The Course of Abijah was the eighth week from the beginning of Nisan. It occurred the third week of May (*See The Course of Abijah Points to the Birth of Christ*). The year would be 6 BC in order to have both pregnancies remain within the reign of Herod and not extend past his death in the spring of 4 BC. Zacharias served two weeks in his course that included the third week of May and the following week beginning with Pentecost. He went home about the end of May. Then, according to the promise of the angel, Elizabeth became pregnant with John the Baptist sometime in June, 6 BC.

\* Luk 1:8 And it came to pass, that while he executed the priest's office before God in the order of his course,

Luk 1:9 According to the custom of the priest's office, his lot was to burn incense when he went into the temple of the Lord.

Luk 1:23 And it came to pass, that, as soon as the days of his ministration were accomplished, he departed to his own house.

Luk 1:24 And after those days his wife Elisabeth conceived, and hid herself five months,

The scriptures go on to say that Mary conceived in the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. If Elizabeth conceived in June, 6 BC, then Mary conceived in December, 6 BC.

\* Luk 1:31 And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS.

Luk 1:36 And, behold, thy cousin Elisabeth, she hath also conceived a son in her old age: and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren.

When we project nine months from the beginning of Elizabeth's pregnancy in June 6 BC, John the Baptist was born during the spring Holy Day season in March, 5 BC. Notice that Luke Chapter 1 ends with the birth of John the Baptist and his growth.

\* Luk 1:80 And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel.

So at the end of Luke Chapter 1 we are left with Mary being three months pregnant at the birth of John the Baptist. Luke chapter 2 goes on to the logical conclusion of the birth of Jesus six months later. Six months from March 5 BC would be September 5 BC.

## LUKE 2 VERSE 1

Chapter two of Luke opens with the scripture about the census decree.

\* Luk 2:1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.

Since Luke 1 ends with the birth of John the Baptist in March of 5 BC, it makes the most sense that 'in those days' refers to some time after his birth. So at the time of the decree Mary was between three and eight months pregnant.

Of course, there is no proof available that any decree from Augustus went out between March and September 5 BC..

We do have evidence that Augustus gave several decrees for a census. For example:

<http://classics.mit.edu/Augustus/deeds.html>

The Deeds of the Divine Augustus, By Augustus himself Written 14 A.C.E. Translated by Thomas Bushnell, BSG

8. When I was consul the fifth time (29 B.C.E.), I increased the number of patricians by order of the people and senate. I read the roll of the senate three times, and in my sixth consulate (28 B.C.E.) I made a census of the people with Marcus Agrippa as my colleague. I conducted a lustrum, after a forty-one year gap, in which lustrum were counted 4,063,000 heads of Roman citizens. Then again, with consular imperium I conducted a lustrum alone when Gaius Censorinus and Gaius Asinius were consuls (8 B.C.E.), in which lustrum were counted 4,233,000 heads of Roman citizens. And the third time, with consular imperium, I conducted a lustrum with my son Tiberius Caesar as colleague, when Sextus Pompeius and Sextus Appuleius were consuls (14 A.C.E.), in which lustrum were counted 4,937,000 of the heads of Roman citizens. By new laws passed with my sponsorship, I restored many traditions of the ancestors,

which were falling into disuse in our age, and myself I handed on precedents of many things to be imitated in later generations.

As he writes here, Augustus decreed a census in 28 BC and again in 8 BC. 8 BC is the closest census to the one Luke mentioned. But the census of 8 BC involved only Roman citizens whereas the decree Luke mentions says that Augustus ordered ‘all the world’ to be taxed or enrolled.

So my theory is that Augustus expanded the census that he first decreed in 8 BC for Roman citizens to include ‘all the world’. This would include the Roman client kingdom of Judea as well. This decree must have gone out between March and September 5 BC in order for Joseph to feel obligated to respond to it when he did. Joseph would perhaps not have taken Mary on a 65-mile trip from Nazareth to Jerusalem to keep the Feast of Tabernacles in the fall of 5 BC because of her condition. But obedience to the decree of the census forced him to go. And so he traveled to Bethlehem, his ancestral town, to be enrolled. Bethlehem was only 6 miles from Jerusalem. The whole area was very crowded because of the fall feast days as well as because of the census.

5 BC September Yr 3756							Birth Month of Jesus
S	M	T	W	T	F	S	
					1	2	* Day of Trumpets (1 <sup>st</sup> day of civil year): Saturday, September 2
							* Day of Atonement: Monday, September 11
3	4	5	6	7	8	9	* Feast of Tabernacles Saturday, September 16
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	* Last Great Day: Saturday, September 23
17	18	19	20	21	22	23	* Herod still in Jerusalem at this time. Total Lunar Eclipse Friday, Sept 15, 10:30 PM Jos Ant 17:6:4
24	25	26	27	28	29	30	
Elul/Tishri							

Thus, Jesus was born six months after John the Baptist in the fall Holy Day season, September, 5 BC. At this time, as we learned from the article, “*The Reign of Herod the Great Points to the Birth of Christ*”, Herod was still in Jerusalem to receive the wise men. (Jos Ant 17:6:4) He had not yet left for the mineral baths beyond Jordan for his health, and from there to his winter palace in Jericho where he died in the spring of 4 BC.(Jos Ant 17:6:5, Ant 17:18:1)

## LUKE 2 VERSE 2

Now we come to verse 2.

\* Luk 2:2 ([And] this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)

From Luke chapter 1 until now, the context for the births of John the Baptist and Jesus has been the year 6 BC for the two conceptions and 5 BC for the births in the reign of Herod the Great. But Luk 2:2 takes place ten years later in 6 AD when Herod was dead, Archelaus his son was deposed, Cyrenius became governor of Syria and Judea was added to the province of Syria.

Does it make sense to say that Jesus was born at this time in 6 AD? Mary was three months pregnant in March of 5 BC. What pregnancy ever lasted ten year?.

These are the quotes from Josephus placing Luk 2:2 at the time of 6 AD.

\* Ant 17:13:5 So Archelaus's country was laid to the province of Syria; and Cyrenius, one that had been consul, was sent by Caesar to take account of people's effects in Syria, and to sell the house of Archelaus.

\* Ant 18:1:1 Now Cyrenius, a Roman senator, and one who had gone through other magistracies, and had passed through them till he had been consul, and one who, on other accounts, was of great dignity, came at this time into Syria, with a few others, being sent by Caesar to be a judge of that nation, and to take an account of their substance. Coponius also, a man of the equestrian order, was sent together with him, to have the supreme power over the Jews. Moreover, Cyrenius came himself into Judea, which was now added to the province of Syria, to take an account of their substance, and to dispose of Archelaus's money; but the Jews, although at the beginning they took the report of a taxation heinously, yet did they leave off any further opposition to it, by the persuasion of Joazar, who was the son of Beethus, and high priest; so they, being over-persuaded by Joazar's words, gave an account of their estates, without any dispute about it.

\* Ant 18:2:1 1. When Cyrenius had now disposed of Archelaus's money, and when the taxings were come to a conclusion, which were made in the thirty-seventh year of Caesar's victory over Antony at Actium, (Battle of Actium 31 BC + 37 years = 6 AD) he deprived Joazar of the high priesthood, which dignity had been conferred on him by the multitude, and he appointed Ananus, the son of Seth, to be high priest;

When you read these verses out of context of Luke Chapter 1, they do appear to say that Jesus was born in 6 AD.

\* Luk 2:1 And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed.

Luk 2:2 ([And] this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was Governor of Syria.)

Luk 2:3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

Luk 2:4 And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:)

Luk 2:5 To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

Luk 2:6 And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

Luk 2:7 And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.

Many try to solve the problem by saying that Luke simply made a mistake.

If they looked back at Chapter 1, they would see it says that he had perfect understanding of all things. (Luk 1:3) Thus it would be ridiculous for Luke to fix the births to the reign of Herod (5 BC) in Chapter 1 and then to Cyrenius (6 AD) in Chapter 2, contradicting himself so profoundly in the space of just one chapter.

Some try to solve the problem by finding a previous governorship for Cyrenius during the reign of Herod the Great. But no real proof can be found for this. Quintilius Varus, not Cyrenius, was Governor of Syria from 6 BC to 3 BC during the reign of Herod. (Velleius 2.117.2; Tacitus,

Historiae 5.9.2; Josephus, War 1.617-39 & 2.66-80, Antiquities 17.89-133, 17.221-23, 17.250-98)

In fact many, many solutions are put forth. See, for example: <http://www.harrington-sites.com/Carrier.htm>

The one solution that explains clearly what Luke was trying to convey is that Luke Chapter 2 is actually the end of Chapter 1 and can only be understood in context of the information given in Chapter 1.

Therefore Luk 2:2 is not conveying that Jesus was born in 6 AD. Rather, it explains and defines the parameters of this particular census. It brings to a conclusion the taxations that began with the decree for the enrollment in 5 BC. It was the initial decree that Joseph responded to in 5 BC when he traveled to Bethlehem to be enrolled.

Matthew tells us that Joseph and Mary fled to Egypt with the already born baby Jesus to escape Herod's slaughter of the infants. When Herod was dead, they returned to Israel. At that time Archelaus, Herod's son was reigning. This was well before 6 AD. Archelaus was not yet deposed.

\* Mat 2:22 But when he (Joseph) heard that Archelaus did reign in Judaea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither: notwithstanding, being warned of God in a dream, he turned aside into the parts of Galilee:

Mat 2:23 And he came and dwelt in a city called Nazareth:

## CONCLUSION

If you take Luke Chapter 2 by itself, there is no doubt that it appears to place the birth of Christ in 6 AD when the census was completed by Cyrenius. But Luke Chapter 1 already established the time of his birth by the Course of Abijah during the reign of Herod. Chapter 1 ends with the birth of John in March 5 BC. And since Mary conceived in the sixth month of Elizabeth, we can project six months from March to the birth of Jesus in September 5 BC.

Luke Chapter 2 explains the birth of Jesus in the context of the role that the census played in his birth. But his birth took place shortly after the time of the initial decree, not at the time of the completion of the taxations under Cyrenius.

Luke Chapter 3 completes the framework for Jesus' life by giving the 15<sup>th</sup> year of Tiberius Caesar (26 AD) as the time he was baptized at 30 years of age. You can see by the following chart that Jesus' life fits perfectly between the reign of Herod the Great and the 15<sup>th</sup> year of Tiberius. If you place Jesus' birth in 6 AD, this would place it well out of the reign of Herod the Great and Jesus would only be 20 years old in the 15<sup>th</sup> year of Tiberius. Therefore it must be understood that the first chapter of Luke establishes the birth month of Jesus, not Luke 2:2..

BC AD	REIGN OF AUGUSTUS	REIGN OF HEROD	LIFE OF JESUS	REIGN OF TIBERIUS	REIGN OF ARCHELAUS
6	22	35 32			
5	23	36 33	0 Jesus born		
4	24	37 34	1 fall of 5 BC		1
3	25	Herod died	2		2
2	26	Spring of 4 BC	3		3
1	27	Jos Ant 17:18:1	4		4
1AD	28		5		5
2	29		6		6
3	30		7		7
4	31		8		8
5	32		9		9
6	33		10		10 deposed
7	34		11		Cyrenius Census
8	35		12		
9	36		13	Tiberius coregent	
10	37		14	with Augustus	
11	38		15	from 12 AD	
12	39		16	1	
13	40		17	2	
14	41 died		18	3	
15			19	4	
16			20	5	
17			21	6	
18			22	7	
19			23	8	
20			24	9	
21			25	10	
22			26	11	
23			27	12	
24			28	13	
25			29	14	
26	Jesus baptized 15 <sup>th</sup> yr of Tiberius		<b>30</b>	<b>15</b>	
27	fall of 26 AD age 30 - Luk 3:1,21		31	16	
28			32	17	
29			33	18	
30	Death of Jesus		33 1/2	19	
31	The Hebrew year 29 AD began in the fall			20	
32	(Tishri) of 29 AD and ended in the fall			21	
33	(Elul) of 30 AD. The Passover of Jesus'			22	
34	death, Wednesday, April 5, 30 AD, was			23	
35	in the middle of this year			24	
36				25	
37				26 died	