

## CENSUS - WAS THE LUKE GOSPEL WRONG ABOUT IT?

Only two of the four gospels tell us anything about the infancy of Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Matthew and the Gospel of Luke claim to speak about the birth of Jesus. They have given rise to the Christmas story.

The idea is that Joseph took his wife Mary from their home to Bethlehem to register in a census. Apparently they had to leave their home and go there for it was the rule that you had to register in your ancestor's town! That absurdity means the one we are going to worry about - the census year! - is nothing in comparison. Only Luke tells us that! That only increases the likelihood of it being made up.

Other details coming from Matthew say, there was no room for them in the inn and they had to settle in a stable and there Mary gave birth to her firstborn son and laid him in a manger while shepherds and angels attended. Kings from the east came with gold, frankincense and myrrh to honour the Christ child. King Herod in a failed attempt to kill the baby Jesus had all the male babies in Bethlehem slain.

There are a lot of problems with the tales. Also, Christianity has manipulatively made people delight in the stories about God becoming a helpless vulnerable baby all for us. That idea is the spiritual attraction. And the faith knows fine well that if Jesus is God then he was only acting helpless and wasn't really helpless at all! He was running the universe.

What if the story makes blunders and is absurd? It matters because Christianity claims the Bible was ultimately authored by God. If there are historical errors in it then that is not true.

## THE QUIRINIUS CENSUS, 4BC OR 6AD?

Herod died in 4 BC and Matthew claims that Jesus was born before that. Luke however says that Jesus was born at the time of a census held by Quirinius when Quirinius was governor of Syria. We know from Josephus that this took place in 6AD leaving a contradiction of about a decade.

(Josephus spoke of the census in his Jewish Antiquities as occurring in 6AD. By the way, the fact that the primitive Christians did not alter this though they did tamper with his writings proves that they had no gospels.)

It is agreed that Quirinius was governor no earlier than 6AD and that there is a lot of evidence to support that (The Problem of Competing Claims, Richard Carrier). Evidence that Demands a Verdict, Vol 1, says that Quirinius was governor of Syria in 7BC according to an inscription from Antioch (page 71). The truth is the inscription doesn't say that at all (Biblical Errancy, January 1987). It only says he was elected a duumvir in Galatia. The falsehoods of the Christians have to be discovered to be believed.

Christians cannot logically admit a contradiction and have tried to reconcile the conflict.

\* One solution is to say that the text of Luke is mistranslated. It is possible that what Luke wrote ought to be translated, "The census was held before that of Quirinius". It is possible but not likely. This is based on fixing the Greek text so it must be rejected (The Unauthorized Version, page 30; Jesus and the Four Gospels, page 26). The objection casts doubt on the gospel for if it were the word of God he would look after every word in it – besides Luke was trying to put a year on Jesus' birth otherwise what would he have written about this alleged governor for? The literal interpretation is that the first census took place when Quirinius was governor (New Testament Contradictions www).

\* Another solution is to say that the census began in a small way in 4BC or so and got thorough and was completed in 6AD. So, Josephus is on about the proper census or the census when it was up and running and Luke is not but just means its feeble start.

I don't believe that Josephus would go to the trouble of dating a census to 6AD knowing that it had been rolling in a small way in the years previous to it. A census as slow as that is not much of a help, actually none at all, especially when the death rate was high. There were plenty of people to go from door to door. Luke made the reference to the census simply because he wanted to tell us when Jesus was born and said he meant the first enrolment. Both these tell us the census he meant was squeezed inside one year.

Joseph would not have trailed a pregnant Mary to Bethlehem for an embryonic census. They would wait.

Books will often tell you that Luke plots the birth of the Baptist (who was born a few months before Christ) in the days of Herod and that since Jesus was born soon after, Luke places the time of the census in Herod's time.

But Luke says that the vision about John's future birth happened in Herod's day and after an indeterminate time John was conceived (Luke 1:24). The vision could have happened in 4BC and the baby born in 6AD meaning that Jesus was born in 6AD. Notice that Luke does not say that Mary was pregnant at the time John's mother, Elizabeth was pregnant with him. Elizabeth had previously called her the mother of the Lord and praised the fruit of her womb but she was filled with the Holy Spirit and sometimes prophecies are given in the present tense. She is not saying that Mary was pregnant. Mary was not a mother yet either – even if she was with child. And even if Elizabeth was saying it Luke does not say she was right. Luke says John grew and became strong and that in those days the census happened. John must have been a big boy when Mary was ready to deliver. So all this suggests a possible date of 6 or 7 AD. Luke might have believed the census was started and finished in 6AD. Luke knew that the messianic adulation baby Jesus got in the Temple would not have been bestowed had this been in Herod's time so he must side with Josephus against Matthew.

\* Another solution is that Josephus is wrong for Luke would agree with Matthew that Jesus was born in 4BC and would date the census to then so we are wrong to assume it must have been 6AD when the census took place. But Josephus consulted the Roman records and Luke did not for he never mentioned any sources apart from alleged eyewitnesses. And you can't expect us to assume that Luke did. So even if he did we should prefer Josephus. So Josephus, being the real historian, comes first. The Luke gospel might be younger than Josephus. The oldest account comes first. Luke probably is younger. We don't even know if Luke agreed with Matthew. When you compare the two gospels we see that they would not have been friends for long.

The census that was Luke's reason for Mary and Joseph going to Bethlehem where Jesus was born came out of Josephus (page 288, The Passover Plot). Luke even goes as far as to mention Quirinius who belonged to another country altogether although he had authority over Judaea (page 28, The Unauthorized Version) just to show he had read Josephus. Why use Quirinius as a way of dating? Why not say ten years after the death of Herod or x years after the coronation of the high priest or the emperor instead? He knew people would remember their reigns better and historians always prefer to date things by rulers in or of their own land and by the highest and best-known ruler. Luke agreed with Josephus when he used him. Ignore people who say that Luke can fit with Matthew saying that Jesus came into this world in 4BC and that Josephus is wrong for putting Luke's census in 6AD.

\* Some are so embarrassed at the thought that Luke made Jesus ten years younger than Matthew did that they attempt to soften the contradiction to be able to say that Luke did think Jesus was born when Matthew says but erred for the governor of Syria was not Quirinius but Saturninus. There is no evidence that Saturninus took a census or that Luke made a mistake. He could have looked up the history books so it is improbable and he fancies himself as a competent historian so he would have been cautious.

\* Some say that Luke meant that the census was still happening when Quirinius was governor though it had started before in 4BC. "Communication was not great in those times and the Jews resisted the census so perhaps Quirinius' census had started long before 6AD in BC." But Luke mentions Quirinius in an attempt to show when Jesus was born. He uses the same method to tell us when Jesus began his ministry and he likes to be precise about Jesus. He even said that the angel Gabriel came to Mary in the sixth month.

Joseph and Mary would have registered before that if the enrolment was that slow and would not have waited until she was ready to give birth.

There were not that many people in those days so a census would have been easy and fast then. Luke wrote first that the first census happened when Quirinius was governor. Then he says that everybody went to register. The order should be taken to be chronological because it is most likely that it is even if it cannot be proved. The gospel claims to be the work of a historian and that means it is chronological except where it is hinted or stated otherwise even if the author was an amateur. When Christians see a problem in the Bible they like to tell you that it is not chronological to "solve" it. So Luke did say that nothing happened until after Quirinius took office in 6AD.

Luke has a Jesus who ministered in his twenties though he forgets himself and has Jesus starting to minister around thirty. This would mean a Jesus who was born in 6 AD and who started ministering in 36AD just when there would have been no Pilate to crucify him! And Matthew has one in his thirties who is at least ten years older than Lukes. John has the Jews tell Jesus he could not have seen Abraham for he is not yet fifty. They probably would not have said that unless Jesus was in his forties.

ABSURDITIES SURROUNDING THE CENSUS

There is no evidence that Luke was right to say that Augustus Caesar demanded the census and that it should be of the whole world, which he said was the reason Mary ended up giving birth in a stable at Bethlehem. The records would have been made for Augustus and we would expect evidence for their existence in Rome. The evidence does not exist so Luke was a liar.

An inscription found in Venice in 1674 says that 117,000 citizens were found in Apamea by order of Quirinius 1. The inscriptions called the Lapis Venetus. Those who believe in it must believe that Jesus was born after 6AD for this man ruled starting in this year. Christian believers say the census was probably started by Augustus or by Saturninus and finished by Quirinius. This claim prevents the census conflicting with Matthew's information that Jesus was born in from 4 to 7 BC. But the claim contradicts the inscription. And the idea of a Syrian ordering Venice to do a head count is laughable. Is the inscription real?

The problem of Luke saying the census happened under Quirinius who reigned from 6AD and making it fit with Matthew who says Jesus was born before Herod died in 4BC is reportedly solved by saying that a coin shows that Quirinius reigned from 11 BC and then reigned again the time Luke says. Or that there were two Quirinuses. wor

First, where are the coins that date from his reign in 6 AD? He did not have coins. A coin supposedly showing there was another Quirinius who was governor in 12 BC has been shown to be dubiously interpreted. It is people seeing patterns in a worn coin that are not there. And the coin has micrographic writing and is hard to make out (page 136).

It would seem that Quirinius did not have himself on coins. Moreover, if there had been two of them Josephus would have made that clear and so would Luke. Both were writing for people who were not from that region. Quirinius did not become governor until after Herod died so Luke does plot Jesus' birth in 6AD at least ten years after Matthew said he was born.

### 39 AD CRUCIFIXION?

Luke said that John the Baptist came out to preach in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberias Caesar. He says Jesus was about thirty when John baptised him. But though it is assumed Jesus was thirty in that year there is no reason to. John could have preached in that year and not baptised Jesus for some years later.

If Jesus was 33 when he died, then a birth in 6 AD means he was 30 in 36AD and 33 in 39 AD.

If so then Luke plots Jesus' crucifixion in 39 AD.

On the basis that Matthew was right to date the birth about 4BC or before what then? Some say that Luke is dating Tiberias's reign from before it officially began. This assumes he ruled for his sick father, Is Luke really likely to date from when Tiberias started taking care of affairs for his father Augustus? Augustus was still ruler!

If these things are the case, then as Dave Hunt says, Jesus must have started his ministry when he was about thirty in 24 – 25 AD. This is nonsense for Tiberias' reign could not be counted from then but from when he was crowned emperor. Nobody counts time like that. How could Luke expect his readers to know what year he meant if he counted an unusual way? So Luke meant that Jesus came after John who came in the fifteenth year which was 27 to 29 AD which completely contradicts the date of the birth of Jesus, 4BC at the latest, given by Matthew. It also supports the thesis that Luke dated Jesus' birth about 6 AD. When there is no evidence that Luke and Matthew were complementary it is wrong to assume that they are.

The fact of the matter is, the infancy stories of Matthew and Luke are contradictory. One or both of them is false. One of these gospels is lying about being an account of the life of Jesus because if they could not get his age right there is a serious problem. A biographer who wrote things about Diana Princess of Wales and thought she was 30 when she died would obviously be a fake.

### Conclusion

The New Testament errs gravely about when Jesus was allegedly born. The implications are huge.

### APPENDIX

Biblical Errancy by Dennis McKinsey

<http://members.aol.com/ckbloomfld/bepart31.html>

This is one of McKinsey's online magazines. The magazine is excellent for it gives the fundies the chance to respond and

carefully exposes their twisted reasoning.

This particular issue says that Herod was not a king though the New Testament says he was for the Roman tetrarchs were the rulers. It says Matthew's story that Herod massacred the boys of Bethlehem to get rid of the baby Jesus is false for Josephus liked to bring up the terrible things that Herod did and never mentioned this one. It also says that the story of Jesus being nailed between two thieves is fiction because theft was not a capital crime. It argues that when Luke said about Augustus decreeing that the whole world must engage in a census it was a lie for Augustus never had the results which he would have done. Genesis 11:26 says that when Terah was 70 he sired Abram and Nahor and Haran. The trouble is it says Abram was 75 when his father died and yet his father died at 205. The Christians argue that Genesis 11:26 does not say Abram's dad was 70 when he was born though the passage cannot mean anything else. They fudge the problem by saying that just because Abram was mentioned first that does not mean he was born first. It does in the way the verse is written for why say Terah became a father at 70 and list the sons if you don't mean one of them was born that year and it would naturally have to be the first one mentioned Abram. Pity he didn't point out that when the fundies cannot agree among themselves how to reconcile Bible contradictions that it shows that their solutions are just contrived and fraudulent.

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