

## § 010

### THE BIRTH OF JESUS

<sup>1</sup> In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. <sup>2</sup> This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. <sup>3</sup> And all went to be registered, each to his own town. <sup>4</sup> And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, <sup>5</sup> to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. <sup>6</sup> And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. <sup>7</sup> And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn. <sup>1</sup>

Luke 2:1-7

#### Introduction

1. Luke begins this Christmas story with the mention of Caesar Augustus, nephew of Julius Caesar and one of the most powerful of the Caesars.
  - It was said of him that he came to a Rome made of brick and left it a city of marble.
  - He transformed not just Rome but the entire known world with his roads and his armies.
2. At his funeral, his mourners comforted themselves with the belief that he was a god and therefore immortal.
  - The man believed to be a god intercepted in time and space the God who became a man.
  - And this mightiest man of his time decreed that a census was to be taken, which forced Joseph and Mary to travel to Bethlehem.<sup>2</sup>

#### Commentary

1. *Caesar Augustus*. Born Gaius Octavius, the Roman senate bestowed upon him the title Augustus in 27 BC.
  - He ruled until AD 14 and was succeeded by Tiberius (3:1).

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: English standard version*. 2001 (Lk 2:1-7). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

<sup>2</sup> Larson, B., & Ogilvie, L.J. (1983). *Vol. 26: The Preacher's Commentary Series, Volume 26: Luke*. Formerly The Communicator's Commentary. The Preacher's Commentary series (47). Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Inc.

- Like Nebuchadnezzar and Cyrus, Caesar Augustus is seen as a divine agent bringing about God's purpose and plan.
2. In mentioning this Roman emperor, Luke revealed his historical interests and indicated that salvation history is both particular (Jewish) and universal in its implications (the Roman world).
    - "Augustus," which is both a title and a name, is the transliteration of the Latin term into Greek and functions primarily as a name here.
    - The Greek translation of the term would have been *Sebastos*, which we find in Acts 25:21, 25, where it is used as a title.<sup>3</sup>
  3. *In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.* Here Luke indicates the historical circumstances that brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem.
    - Caesar Augustus had decreed that *all the world*, i.e. the whole of the Roman Empire, should be taxed.
    - This Caesar reigned from 30 BC to August 19, AD 14.
    - After he had, by political astuteness and military strength, put an end to the terrible civil wars which had raged for many years throughout the Roman world and to all resistance that was offered to him, he reigned for forty-four years as absolute monarch over the Roman Empire.
    - Through a peaceful and mild rule he gave to the world a period of unprecedented outward \_\_\_\_\_<sup>4</sup> and to his huge empire a permanent organization which afterwards facilitated the spread of Christianity.
    - In this, and also in the fact that through his command (verse 1) the prophecy of Micah 5:1 was fulfilled, he was an instrument in the all-guiding hand of God.
    - Ere long, however, the successors to this Roman emperor (e.g. Nero) were to act most violently, as instruments in the power of the Evil One, against the Christian church, but even then still under the permissive will of God.<sup>5</sup>
  4. There are difficulties posed by the facts that our knowledge of the times is imperfect and that what Luke says is not easy to fit in to what we do know.

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<sup>3</sup> Stein, R.H. (2001, ©1992). *Vol. 24: Luke* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (105). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>4</sup> [calm](#)

<sup>5</sup> Geldenhuys, N. (1977). *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (99). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

- Thus there is no record of any law of Augustus that a universal census be held.<sup>6</sup>
  - But he did reorganize Roman administration, and there are records of censuses held in a number of places.
  - In Egypt, where the custom is unlikely to have differed significantly from neighboring Syria (of which province Judea was a part), a census was held every fourteen years.
  - Actual documents survive for every census from AD 20 to 270.<sup>7</sup>
  - When Augustus died he left in his own handwriting a summary of information, such as statistics on direct and indirect taxation, which would most naturally have been derived from censuses.<sup>8</sup>
  - The evidence seems best satisfied if we understand the *decree* of which Luke writes, not as a formal law, but as an administrative direction which set the whole process in motion and had its effect in distant Judea.
5. It was not, of course, necessary for Luke to mention the point (none of the other Evangelists does).
- But it seems to be part of his plan to set his story in the secular context (cf. 3:1).
  - He sees God as Lord of history, and the actions of the emperor in faraway Rome do but set forward the divine plan and purpose.<sup>9</sup>
6. *This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria.* Luke describes this taxing as “the first” and states that it took place when Quirinius was governor of Syria.

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<sup>6</sup> In such a census as had been commanded by Augustus the name, occupation, property and kindred had to be entered in the public registers. In this instance the census probably took place with a view to the levying of taxes. The Jews were exempted from military service, but were at that time tributary to the Romans, although they nominally had their own king, Herod the Great. [Geldenhuys, N. (1977). *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (99). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.]

<sup>7</sup> Barclay, William. *The Gospel of Luke*, The Daily Study Bible (Saint Andrew Press, 1967).

<sup>8</sup> Tacitus, *Annals* i.11; Suetonius, *Octavian* 101.

<sup>9</sup> Morris, L. (1988). *Vol. 3: Luke: An introduction and commentary*. Originally published: Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1988, in series: The Tyndale New Testament commentaries. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (98). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>10</sup> There is a further difficulty about the part *Quirinius* played. As governor of Syria he carried out a census in AD 6 (Josephus, *Antiquities* xviii.26; this is mentioned in Acts 5:37). This aroused violent opposition and Judas of Gamala led a rebellion (*Antiquities* xviii.3ff.). That census is too late for the present passage but certain inscriptions show that between 10 and 7 BC Quirinius performed military functions in the Roman province of Syria. If the interval between censuses was fourteen years, this brings him into the area in an official capacity at the right time. There is no record outside Luke for a census at

- He calls it “the first enrollment” to distinguish it from the well-known enrollment in AD 6 of which he makes mention in Acts 5:37.
  - The word *prōtē* can be construed to mean not “first,” as usually translated, but “former” or “prior.”
  - The meaning of verse 2 is then “This census was before that made when Quirinius was governor.”<sup>11</sup>
- Of this “first enrollment” we have no other direct mention outside the New Testament.
- There is, however, no cogent reason why doubt should be cast on Luke here.
- There is inscriptional evidence. Quirinius was governor of Syria for some time in the first decade BC as well as from AD 6 to 9.<sup>12</sup>

7. *And all went to be registered, each to his own town.* A command that everyone return to his own home seems to us a \_\_\_\_\_<sup>13</sup> way of taking a census.

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this time, but there is nothing improbable about it. Josephus tells us that at about this time ‘the whole Jewish people’ swore an oath of loyalty to Caesar (*Antiquities* xvii.42), which possibly reflects a census. It is also worth noting that Tertullian says that the census was carried out under Saturninus, who was governor of Syria 9–6 BC (*Adversus Marcionem* iv.19). This is not in the Bible, so, if the statement can be relied on (which many scholars doubt [C. F. Evans, in an article, ‘Tertullian’s References to Sentius Saturninus and the Lukan Census’, argues that Tertullian’s statement does not refer to the census in Luke (*JTS*, n.s. 24, 1973, pp. 24–39), Tertullian must be relying on other evidence. Justin, in the middle of the second century, assures the Romans that they can see the registers of Quirinius’s census (*I Apology* 34). Some hold that the census of AD 6 must have been the first, for people rebel at the unfamiliar, whereas once a census had been held a second would be accepted. But it is fairly contended that at the time of which Luke writes Herod would have arranged the details and ‘it would be quite like Herod’s skill in governing Jews to disguise the foreign nature of the command by an appeal to tribal patriotism’ (Easton, cited in William Manson, [*The Gospel of Luke*, Moffatt New Testament Commentary (Hodder and Stoughton, 1937)]. This is supported by the fact that in Luke’s census people returned to their family homes, whereas a Roman registration would have been at the place of residence. N. Turner argues on grammatical grounds that we should understand Luke to mean ‘This census was *before the census* which Quirinius, governor of Syria, made.’ (*Grammatical Insights into the New Testament* (T. and T. Clark, 1965), p. 23. Fitzmyer rejects this view.) [Morris, L. (1988). *Vol. 3: Luke: An introduction and commentary*. Originally published: Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1988, in series: *The Tyndale New Testament commentaries*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (98). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.]

<sup>11</sup> Turner, N. *Grammatical Insights into the New Testament* [Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1966], 4; idem, *Syntax*, 32.

<sup>12</sup> Geldenhuys, N. (1977). *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (99). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

<sup>13</sup> curious

- But at least one such direction is preserved from antiquity, namely an edict of the governor of Egypt in AD 104 ordering everyone to return home for enrollment.<sup>14 15</sup>
8. Thus, it was customary to return to one's \_\_\_\_\_<sup>16</sup> home for such a census.
- Also, powerful as he was, Herod was only a client king under Rome and, like others, was subject to orders for a census.
  - Furthermore, it is scarcely conceivable that Luke, careful researcher that he was (1:14), would have stressed the census unless he had reasonable historical grounds for doing so.<sup>17 18</sup>
9. The genuineness of the statement that everyone had to go into his own city to be enrolled has also been strikingly confirmed.
- It was a characteristic feature of Augustus's action towards a subject people that he gave every consideration to their national customs.
  - Especially since he had the enrollment made through Herod, who ruled as king of the Jews, it goes without saying that the Jewish custom was followed to let the inhabitants go to their original native city for the taxings.<sup>19</sup>
10. *And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David.* Since Joseph was of the family of David he had to report at Bethlehem.
- Here David had been born about a thousand years previously,<sup>20</sup> though David is not recorded as having contact with it after he left it.
  - Similarly Jesus is never said to have visited it after his birth there.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>14</sup> See A. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1927), 271. Deissmann says that Luke uses official 'departmental language' in reporting the order (ibid., 270, n. 5).

<sup>15</sup> Morris, L. (1988). *Vol. 3: Luke: An introduction and commentary*. Originally published: Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1988, in series: The Tyndale New Testament commentaries. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (100). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>16</sup> original

<sup>17</sup> See further F.F. Bruce, *Jesus and Christian Origins Outside the New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 4], 192–94; Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, 98–104.

<sup>18</sup> Leifeld, W.L. (1984). Luke. In F.E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (F.E. Gaebelin, Ed.) (843). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

<sup>19</sup> Geldenhuys, N. (1977). *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (99). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

<sup>20</sup> Geldenhuys, N. (1977). *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (100). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

<sup>21</sup> Morris, L. (1988). *Vol. 3: Luke: An introduction and commentary*. Originally published: Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1988, in series: The Tyndale New

- Originally the town had been called Ephrath (Gen. 35:19).

11. That Joseph, a carpenter, knew his Davidic lineage and could prove it is something quite natural. The Jews from earliest times kept their genealogical tables in order with amazing \_\_\_\_\_<sup>22, 23</sup>

12. *To be registered with Mary.* Mary's attendance was probably not necessary.<sup>24</sup>

- Little is known of the regulations governing such a contingency, but the probability is that, even if she had property, Joseph's attendance would suffice.
- Perhaps Joseph did not care to leave her at Nazareth.
- She had been with Elizabeth for three months after her pregnancy began (1:56) and we have no way of knowing how much later the wedding took place.
- To have remained behind may have exposed her to calumny.
- Luke refers to Mary as *his betrothed*, perhaps because, though they were married (Matt. 1:24), the marriage was not yet \_\_\_\_\_<sup>25</sup> (Matt. 1:25).<sup>26</sup>

13. *Mary, his betrothed* (or *Who was pledged to be married to him*). This is an unusual way of expressing a journey made by a husband and wife.

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Testament commentaries. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (100). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>22</sup> **fidelity**

<sup>23</sup> Geldenhuys, N. (1977). *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (100). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

<sup>24</sup> At a Roman census a woman also had to pay taxes, but it was not necessary for her to go and do so in person. There were, however, several considerations that made it necessary for Joseph to take Mary with him to Bethlehem. Because the time was already close at hand when she was to be delivered of her firstborn, Joseph did not want to leave her behind in Nazareth, since she would probably, when the child came to be born, be treated with insult and distrust, as the people knew that she had been married to Joseph for considerably less than nine months (cf. 1:56). It is also possible that Joseph and Mary knew that according to Micah 5:1 the Messiah would be born in Bethlehem and that both accordingly decided to go there. At that time it was generally accepted among the religious Jews that the promised Redeemer was to be born in Bethlehem. In Micah 5:1 this is expressly foretold. The fact that, according to Matthew 2:22, Joseph intended to return from Egypt to Judaea, and only after the warning by the angel decided to go to Nazareth, also indicates that Joseph and Mary knew that the Messiah was to come from Bethlehem.

[Geldenhuys, N. (1977). *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (100). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.]

<sup>25</sup> **consummated**

<sup>26</sup> Morris, L. (1988). *Vol. 3: Luke: An introduction and commentary*. Originally published: Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1988, in series: The Tyndale New Testament commentaries. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (100). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

- Luke may have been suggesting here what Matthew 1:25 states explicitly, that the marriage had not yet been consummated, although Mary was living as a wife with Joseph (as her going to Bethlehem with him suggests).<sup>27</sup>
- 14.** *And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth.* Luke does not say how long in advance of Jesus' birth Joseph left for Bethlehem (verse 4).<sup>28</sup>
- The text neither affirms nor denies the popular image of the couple arriving in Bethlehem just as the baby was about to be born.
  - Luke simply states that the birth took place *while they were there*.<sup>29 30</sup>
- 15.** *And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger. Swaddling cloths* are long strips which could wrap the child round and round.
- That Mary wrapped the child herself points to a \_\_\_\_\_<sup>31</sup> birth.
  - That he was laid in a manger has traditionally been taken to mean that Jesus was born in a stable.
  - He may have been. But it is also possible that the birth took place in a very poor home where the animals shared the same roof as the family.
- 16.** A tradition going back to Justin says it occurred in a cave<sup>32</sup> and this could be right.
- Some have thought that the birth took place in the open air (possibly the courtyard of the inn), that being where a manger would likely be.

<sup>27</sup> Stein, R.H. (2001, ©1992). *Vol. 24: Luke* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (107). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

<sup>28</sup> Nor why he took Mary with him. It is possible that he used the emperor's order as a means of removing Mary from possible gossip and emotional stress in her own village. He had already accepted her as his wife (Matt 1:24), but apparently they continued in betrothal (verse 5: "pledged to be married") till after the birth.

<sup>29</sup> Since she had stayed three months with Elizabeth, Mary was at least three months pregnant. It is possible that they went down during her last trimester of pregnancy, when the social relationships in Nazareth would have grown more difficult. They may have stayed in a crowded room in the home of some poor relative till the birth of the baby necessitated their vacating it for privacy and more space. Any such reconstruction is, however, merely speculative.

<sup>30</sup> Leifeld, W.L. (1984). Luke. In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (F.E. Gaebelin, Ed.) (843). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

<sup>31</sup> **lonely**

<sup>32</sup> *Dialogue with Trypho* 78. The early church father, Justin Martyr (c. AD 150), states that this "stable" was a cave. About AD 330 Constantine the Great caused a church to be built over this cave, which according to some experts was most probably the real place of the nativity. Justinian, some time later, rebuilt this as a more beautiful building, and the church which to-day still stands over the cave is mainly the same as the one erected there at that time, about one thousand six hundred years ago. [Geldenhuys, N. (1977). *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (101). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.]

- We do not know.
- We know only that everything points to poverty, obscurity and even rejection.<sup>33</sup>

17. We should perhaps reflect that it was the combination of a decree by the emperor in distant Rome and the gossiping tongues of Nazareth that brought Mary to Bethlehem at just the time to fulfill the prophecy about the birthplace of the Christ (Micah 5:2). God works through all kinds of people to \_\_\_\_\_<sup>34</sup> his purposes.<sup>35</sup>

18. *Because there was no place for them in the inn.* The word *katalyma*, usually translated “inn” (v. 7), may mean a room (e.g., the “guest room” used for the Last Supper [22:11], referred to as an “upper room” in 22:12), a billet for soldiers, or any place for lodging, which would include inns.

- It is not, however, the usual Greek word for an inn—*pandocheion*, to which the Good Samaritan took the robbery victim (10:34).
- As the etymology of the word—*pan* (“all”) and *dechomai* (“receive”) suggests, inns accepted all kinds of people, often the worst.
- Stories were told of discomfort and even of robberies at inns.

19. Luke could have painted a sordid picture, had he so desired.

- Instead he uses the general word for a lodging place and states the simple fact that when Mary’s time came, the only available place for the little family was one usually occupied by animals.
- It may have been a cave, as tradition suggests, or some part of a house or inn.
- Even today in many places around the world farm animals and their fodder are often kept in the same building as the family quarters.
- The eating trough, or “manger,” was ideal for use as a crib.
- Luke does not seem to be portraying a dismal situation with an unfeeling innkeeper as villain.

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<sup>33</sup> Morris, L. (1988). *Vol. 3: Luke: An introduction and commentary*. Originally published: Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1988, in series: The Tyndale New Testament commentaries. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (100). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>34</sup> effect

<sup>35</sup> Morris, L. (1988). *Vol. 3: Luke: An introduction and commentary*. Originally published: Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press; Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1988, in series: The Tyndale New Testament commentaries. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (100). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.



- Rather, he is establishing a \_\_\_\_\_<sup>36</sup> between the proper rights of the Messiah in his own “town of David” and the very ordinary and humble circumstances of his birth.
- Whatever the reason, even in his birth Jesus was excluded from the normal shelter others enjoyed (cf. 9:58).
- This is consistent with Luke’s realistic presentation of Jesus’ humanity and servanthood.<sup>37</sup>

20. These two verses (6, 7), then, proclaim that at last there had taken place the greatest and most glorious event in the whole history of mankind—the Redeemer was born, the Son of God became Man, so as to be able to become the Saviour of the world.
- He had left the glory of the Father and humbled Himself to be born as a human child in the most lowly circumstances.
  - And ... He was laid in a manger.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

### THIS WAS THE FIRST REGISTRATION WHEN QUIRINIUS WAS GOVERNOR OF SYRIA.

This statement is a *crux interpretum* due to the historical problems incurred in this text. These problems include the lack of an extrabiblical reference to a universal census of the whole Roman Empire and the unusual nature of Joseph’s returning to his birthplace for the census and Mary’s normally unnecessary presence at the census. The date of the census causes the most difficulty. The dating of the governors of Syria appears to have been as follows: 10 BC, M. Titius; 9–6 BC, C. Sentius Saturnius; 6–4 BC, P. Quintilius Varus. The birth cannot be later than this because Herod the Great died in 4 BC, and he was alive when Jesus was born (cf. Matt 2:1–18). We also know that P. Sulpicius Quirinius (Cyrenius, KJV) was governor of Syria from AD 6 to 7.

Numerous attempts have been made to explain these difficulties. Although no record exists of a single census involving all the Roman Empire, under Augustus a tax assessment of all the Roman Empire did take place, even if this was not the result of a single census. In addition at times it was important for persons to return to their hometowns for a census. (Such a census took place in Egypt under G. Vibius Maximus in AD 104.) We also know of a poll tax in Syria in which women of twelve years or older

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<sup>36</sup> contrast

<sup>37</sup> Leifeld, W.L. (1984). Luke. In F.E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 8: Matthew, Mark, Luke* (F.E. Gaebelin, Ed.) (843). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

<sup>38</sup> Geldenhuys, N. (1977). *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*. The New International Commentary on the Old and New Testament (101). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

were required to appear personally for the tax. And, of course, Mary could simply have wished to be with Joseph during the time of her delivery, and this required her to go with him to Bethlehem for his required enrollment.

The heart of the problem, as has already been stated, is the dating of the census within the rule of Quirinius. It is the date, not the existence of the census, that is problematic. Several attempts have been made to reconcile this biblical statement with the historical materials. Some of these involve the discrediting of Josephus, who stated that the census under Quirinius took place in AD 6–7. Another attempt is to argue that the appearance of the name “Quirinius” in 2:2 is a textual error and that the name C. Sentius Saturnius should be read instead. There is, however, no textual evidence that the name “Quirinius” is a scribal error. Another attempt is to divide the census into two parts. The first part, or ordering of a census, took place during the time of Caesar Augustus; and the second part, the census itself, was completed under Quirinius in AD 6–7 (cf. Acts 5:37). But why then would Joseph and Mary go to Bethlehem during the ordering of the census in the time of Herod when the actual census did not take place until later? Another attempt is to understand Quirinius, who was placed in charge of putting down the Homodensian revolt in northwestern Syria, i.e., southeastern Turkey today (see Strabo, *Geography* 12.6.5), as being a kind of second governor at the time. He was the governor of external affairs, whereas Saturnius was governor of internal affairs. Still another explanation is that the term “first,” or “first census,” should be understood not as “first” but should be translated, “This was the census ‘before’ Quirinius was governor.” The genitive absolute “while Quirinius was governor of Syria,” however, makes this unlikely. It must be confessed that there is no easy explanation at the present time for this historical problem of the census date, but some new evidence might in the future vindicate the historical accuracy of Luke on this point.<sup>39 40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> For further discussion see G. Ogg, “The Quirinius Question Today,” *ExpTim* 79 (1968): 231–36; H. W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 11–27; Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, 99–102.

<sup>40</sup> Stein, R.H. (2001, ©1992). *Vol. 24: Luke* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (105). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.