

there Jesus was born.

Several questions have been raised in the context of this taxation [1. See Bruce, *Christian Origins*, p. 192, for example]. Even if such a taxation actually did occur, would every person have to return to his home? Was Quirinius really the governor of Syria at this time (as in v.2)? Archeology has had a bearing on the answers to these questions.

It has been established that the taking of a census was quite common at about the time of Christ. An ancient Latin inscription called the *Titulus Veneris* indicates that a census took place in Syria and Judea about AD 5-6 and that this was typical of those held throughout the Roman Empire from the time of Augustus (23 BC-AD 14) until at least the third century AD. Indications are that this census took place every fourteen years. Other such evidence indicates that these procedures were widespread [2. *Ibid.*, pp. 193-194]. Concerning persons returning to their home city for the taxation-census, an Egyptian papyrus dating from AD 104 reports just such a practice. This rule was enforced, as well [3. *Ibid.* p. 194].

The question concerning Quirinius also involves the date of the census described in Luke 2. It is known that Quirinius was made governor of Syria by Augustus in AD 6. Archaeologist Sir William Ramsay discovered several inscriptions that indicated that Quirinius was governor of Syria on two occasions, **the first time several years prior to this date** [4. Robert Boyd, *Tells, Tombs, and Treasure* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1969), p. 175]. Within the cycle of taxation-censuses mentioned above, an earlier taxation would be dated from 10-4 BC [5. Cf. Bruce, *Christian Origins*, pp. 193-194 with Boyd, *Tells*, p. 175. Bruce prefers the date 10-9 BC for the empire-wide census, with that which took place in Judea occurring a few years later. Boyd places the date of the earlier census 6-5 BC, which coincides closely with the accepted dates for Jesus' birth]. Another possibility is Bruce's suggestion that the Greek in Luke 2.2 is equally translatable as "This enrollment (census) was before that made when Quirinius was governor of Syria" [6. Bruce, *Christian Origins*, p. 192]. This would mean that Luke was dating

the taxation-census before Quirinius took over the governorship of Syria. Either possibility answers the question raised above [7. While ruling out the two-date approach to the governorship of Quirinius, Sherwin-White basically vindicates Luke's account, while still finding more problems that does Bruce (pp. 162-171)].

Therefore, while some questions have been raised concerning the events recorded in Luke 2.1-5, archaeology has provided some unexpected and supportive answers. Additionally, while supplying the background behind these events, archaeology also assists us in establishing several facts. (1) A taxation-census was a fairly common procedure in the Roman Empire and it did occur in Judea, in particular. (2) Persons were required to return to their home city in order to fulfill the requirements of the process. (3) These procedures were apparently employed during the reign of Augustus (37 BC-AD 14), placing it well within the general time frame of Jesus' birth. (4) The date of the specific taxation recounted by Luke could very possibly have been **6-5 BC**, which would also be of

service in attempting to find a more exact date for Jesus' birth.

Herod the Great died in 4 B.C. and Jesus was born before then (Matt. 2.19). Luke was a very reliable historian, proven trustworthy over and over again. (And in Acts 5, Luke shows that he was well aware of the census under Quirinius in 6 AD which makes it very doubtful that he would have been confused about the census he describes in Luke 2.)

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When Was Jesus Born?

**First Census,
Quirinius and Archaeology**



The matter of Luke's Census is resolved with archeology [The Historical Jesus: Ancient Evidence for the Life of Christ (1996) by Gary Habermas, pp. 171-173]...

Luke's Census

In Luke 2.1-5 we read that Caesar Augustus decreed that the Roman Empire should be taxed and that everyone had to return to his own city to pay taxes. So Joseph and Mary returned to Bethlehem and