Luke 2:1-3 and the Census under Quirinius

Josephus, Antiquities 17.342-344, 355

In the tenth year of Archelaus’ rule the leading men among the Jews and Samaritans, finding his cruelty and tyranny intolerable, brought charges against him before Caesar the moment they learned that Archelaus had disobeyed his instructions to show moderation in dealing with them. Accordingly, when Caesar heard the charges, he became angry, and summoning the man who looked after Archelaus’ affairs at Rome. . ., he said to him, “Go, sail at once and bring him here to us without delay.” . . . And when Archelaus arrived, Caesar gave a hearing to some of his accusers, and also let him speak, and then sent him into exile. . .

Now the territory subject to Archelaus was added to (the province of) Syria, and Quirinius, a man of consular rank, was sent by Caesar to take a census of property in Syria and to sell the estate of Archelaus.

Josephus, Antiquities 18.1-4

Quirinius, a Roman senator who had proceeded through all the magistracies to the consulship and a man who was extremely distinguished in other respects, arrived in Syria, dispatched by Caesar to be governor of the nation and to make an assessment of their property. Coponius, a man of equestrian rank, was sent along with him to rule over the Jews with full authority. Quirinius also visited Judaea, which had been annexed to Syria, in order to make an assessment of the property of the Jews and to liquidate the estate of Archelaus. Although the Jews were at first shocked to hear of the registration of property, they gradually condescended, yielding to the arguments of the high priest Joazar, the son of Boethus, to go no further in opposition. So those who were convinced by him declared, without shilly-shallying, the value of their property.

But a certain Judas, a Gaulanite from a city named Gamala, who had enlisted the aid of Saddok, a Pharisee, threw himself into the cause of rebellion. They said that the assessment carried with it a status amounting to downright slavery, no less, and appealed to the nation to make a bid for independence. . . .

Josephus, War 2.117-118

The territory of Archelaus was now reduced to a province, and Coponius, a Roman of the equestrian order, was sent out as procurator, entrusted by Augustus with full powers, including the infliction of capital punishment. Under his administration, a Galilean named Judas incited his countrymen to revolt, upbraiding them as cowards for consenting to pay tribute to the Romans and tolerating mortal masters, after having God for their lord. This man was a sophist who founded a sect of his own, having nothing in common with the others.

Acts 5:37

After him Judas the Galilean rose up at the time of the census and got people to follow him; he also perished, and all who followed him were scattered.
Luke 2:1-3: Lost in Translation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KJV</th>
<th>NRSV</th>
<th>NASV</th>
<th>NLT</th>
<th>TNIV</th>
<th>Stephen Carlson (2004)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>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.</td>
<td>1 In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered.</td>
<td>1 Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.</td>
<td>1 At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire.</td>
<td>1 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world.</td>
<td>1 Now it came to pass that in those days a decision issued from Caesar Augustus for the whole civilized world to be registered.</td>
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<td>2 (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.)</td>
<td>2 This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.</td>
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<td>2 (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.)</td>
<td>2 (This became a very important registration when Quirinius was governing Syria),</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3 And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.</td>
<td>3 All went to their own towns to be registered.</td>
<td>3 And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city.</td>
<td>3 All returned to their own towns to register for this census.</td>
<td>3 And everybody would go to be registered, each to their own community.</td>
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</tbody>
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Zealot origins

Josephus links census to Judas and to origins of Zealots. Luke (Ac 5:37) refers to Judas but doesn’t mention Zealots.

Scope of census

Josephus describes census in Syria and Judea. Luke seems to describe an empire-wide census (including Galilee). = a local census in line with empire-wide tax policy?

Client Kingdoms

Josephus indicates direct Roman rule of Judea did not begin until 6 CE. Luke seems to have a Roman tax census under Herod the Great.

Relocation

Josephus makes no mention of dislocations during censuses. Luke has Rome requiring families to return to their ancestral homes. = a regional concession to Jewish concerns about land?

Quirinius

Both Josephus and Luke describe a census under Quirinius, governor of Syria. Both associate the census with a historical turning point.

Josephus: Quirinius’ rule begins in ± 6 CE (Ant.18.1) [Josephus doesn’t mention any of his earlier assignments.] Luke (2:2) seems to imply Quirinius’ rule, in some form, overlapped with Herod’s (d. 4 BCE; Lk 1:5). Luke 3:1, 23 implies Jesus was born c. 4 BC. [Jesus c. 30 yrs old in 15th year of Tiberius (27-28 CE)]

What is Luke saying?
- this census was the first of two < prōtos > during reign of Quirinius?
- this census happened before Quirinius was governor?
- the broad census became politically significant locally under Quirinius?