

~QUIRINIUS (168) (Qui-rin'i-us)

- Roman governor of Syria at the time of the registration ordered by Caesar Augustus that resulted in Jesus birth taking place in Bethlehem.
- Now in those days a decree went forth from Caesar Augustus for all the inhabited earth to be registered. (Luke 2:1)
- This first registration took place when Quirinius was governor of Syria. (Luke 2:2)
- His full name was Publius Sulpicius Quirinius.
- In the Chronographus Anni CCCLIII, a list of Roman consuls, the name of Quirinius appears in 12 B.C.E. along with that of Messala. [Chronica Minora, edited by T. Mommsen, Munich, 1981, Vol. I, p. 56]
- Roman historian Tacitus briefly recounts Quirinius history, saying, He sprang from the municipality of Lanuvium had no connection, but as an intrepid soldier and an active servant he won a consulate under the deified Augustus, and, a little later, by capturing the Homonadensian strongholds beyond the Cilician frontier, earned the insignia of triumph, adviser to Gaius Caesar during his command in Armenia. [The Annals, III, XLVIII]
- His death took place in 21 C.E.
- Not mentioned by Tacitus is Quirinius relationship to Syria. Jewish historian Josephus relates Quirinius assignment to Syria as governor in connection with the simultaneous assignment of Coponius as the Roman ruler of Judea.
- He states: 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. Josephus goes on to relate that

Quirinius came into Judea, to which his authority was extended, and ordered a taxation there.

- This brought much resentment and an unsuccessful attempt at revolt, led by **Judas, a Gaulanite**. [*Jewish Antiquities*, XVIII,1,2,3,4 [i, 1]]
- This is evidently the revolt referred to by Luke at;
- After him **Judas the Galilean** rose in the days of the registration, and he drew off people after him. And yet that man perished, and all those who were obeying him were scattered abroad. (*Acts of Apostles* 5:37)
- According to Josephus account it took place in **the thirty-seventh year after Caesars defeat of Antony at Actium**. [*Jewish Antiquities*, XVIII, 26 [ii, 1]]
- That would indicate that **Quirinius** was governor of Syria in **6 C.E.**
- For a long time this was the only governorship of Syria by **Quirinius** for which secular history supplied confirmation. However, in the year 1764 C.E. an inscription known as the **Lapis Tiburtinus** was found in Rome, which, though not giving the name, contains information that most scholars acknowledge could apply only to **Quirinius**. [*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, edited by H. Dessau, Berlin, 1887, Vol. 14, p. 397, No. 3613]
- It contains the statement that on going to Syria he became governor or, legate, for the second time. On the basis of inscriptions found in Antioch containing **Quirinius** name, many historians acknowledge that **Quirinius** was also governor of Syria in the B.C.E. period.
- There is uncertainty on their part, however, as to where **Quirinius** fits among the secularly recorded governor's of Syria. Josephus lists Quintilius Varus as governor of Syria at the time of, and subsequent to, the death of Herod the Great. [*Jewish Antiquities*, XVII, 89 [v, 2], XVII, 221 [ix, 3]]
- Tacitus also refers to Varus as being governor at the time of Herod's death. [*The Histories*, V, IX] Josephus states that Varus predecessor was Saturninus [*C. Sentius Saturninus*]
- Many scholars, in view of the evidence of an earlier governorship by Quirinius, suggest the years 3-2 B.C.E. for his governorship. While

these dates would harmonize satisfactorily with the Biblical record, the basis on which these scholars select them is in error.

- That is, they list **Quirinius** as governor during those years because they place his rule after that of Varus and hence after the death of Herod the Great, for which they use the popular but erroneous date of **4 B.C.E.**
- For the same reason, that is, their use of the unproved date **4 B.C.E.** for Herod's death, they give Varus governorship as from **6 to 4 B.C.E.**, the length of his rule, however, is conjectural, for Josephus does not specify the date of its beginning or of its end.
- The best evidence points to **2 B.C.E.** for the birth of Jesus. Hence **Quirinius** governorship must have included this year or part thereof.

See Also **CHRONOLOGY**

See Also **HEROD No. 1 (Date of His Death)**

- Some scholars call attention to the fact that the term used by Luke, and usually translated, governor, is *he-ge-mon'*. This **Greek** term is used to describe Roman legates, procurators, and proconsuls, and it means, basically, a leader or high executive officer.
- Some, therefore, suggest that, at the time of what Luke refers to as the **first** registration, Quirinius served in Syria in the capacity of a special legate of the emperor exercising extraordinary powers.
- A factor that may also aid in understanding the matter is Josephus clear reference to a dual rulership of Syria, since in his account he speaks of two persons, Saturninus and Volumnius, serving simultaneously as **governor's of Syria**. [*Jewish Antiquities*, XVI, 277,280, ix, 1, XVI, 344,x, 8]
- Thus, if Josephus is correct in his listing of Saturninus and Varus as successive presidents of Syria, it is possible that **Quirinius** served simultaneously either with Saturninus, as Volumnius had done, or with Varus prior to Herod's death which likely occurred in **1 B.C.E.**
- The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge presents this view: **Quirinius** stood in exactly the same relation to Varus, the governor of Syria, as at a later time Vespasian did to Mucianus. Vespasian conducted the war in Palestine while Mucianus was

governor of Syria, and Vespasian was *legatus Augusti*, holding precisely the same title and technical rank as Mucianus. [1957, Vol. IX, pp. 375,376]

- An inscription found in Venice, *Lapis Venetus*, refers to a census conducted by **Quirinius** in Syria. However, it provides no means for determining whether this was in his earlier or his later governorship. [Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum, edited by T. Mommsen, O. Hirschfeld, and A. Domaszewski, 1902, Vol. 3, p. 1222, No. 6687]
- Luke's proved accuracy in historical matters gives sound reason for accepting as factual his reference to **Quirinius** as governor of Syria around the time of Jesus birth.
- It may be remembered that Josephus, virtually the only other source of information, was not born until **37 C.E.**, hence nearly four decades after Jesus birth. Luke, on the other hand, was already a physician traveling with the apostle Paul by about **49 C.E.** when Josephus was but a boy of 12.
- Of the two, Luke, even on ordinary grounds, is the more likely source for reliable information on the matter of the Syrian governorship just prior to Jesus birth.
- Justin Martyr, a Palestinian of the **Second Century C.E.**, cited the Roman records as proof of Luke's accuracy as regards **Quirinius** governorship at the time of Jesus birth. [A Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture, edited by B. Orchard, 1953, p. 943]
- There is no evidence that Luke's account was ever challenged by early historians, even by early critics such as Celsus.