



Mary and Joseph register for the census before Governor Quirinius. Byzantine mosaic at the Chora Church, Constantinople 1315–1320.

Critics and skeptics of the Bible claim that [Luke 2:2](#) contradicts history by saying that Quirinius was “governor of Syria” at the time of Jesus’ birth, because reliable historical records indicate that Quirinius held the position from 6 to 9 CE.

“In those days a decree went out from Emperor Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration and was taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria. all went to their own towns to be registered. Joseph also went from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to the city of David called Bethlehem . . . He went to registered with Mary, to whom he was engaged and who was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for her to deliver her child”—[Luke 2:1-6 NRSV](#)

The gospel of Matthew reports that **“Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king” ([Matthew 2:1 ESV](#))**. History indicates that Herod the Great died about 4 BCE, so Jesus could not have been born during the time “when Quirinius was governor of Syria” from 6 to 9 CE. Based on this, critics and skeptics claim that [Luke 2:2](#) is historically wrong, and therefore the Bible cannot be trusted.

However, upon further investigation, we find that gospel writer Luke wasn’t mixed up after all. Luke also reports another census in his second volume:

“Judas the Galilean rose up at the time of the census and got people to follow him; he also perished”—Acts 5:37 NRSV. *“Judas the Galilean appears in Josephus as a rebel who opposed giving tribute to Caesar about AD 6 or 7, following the census of Quirinius (see Josephus, Antiquities 20.52)”—NLT Study Bible*

The second census while Quirinius was governor of Syria, when “Judas the Galilean rose up” in rebellion, is the one referred to at [Acts 5:37](#).

In its note on [Luke 2:2](#), referring to **“the first registration . . . taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria”**, the NLT Study Bible says: *“Quirinius held this post AD 6-9. In 6-4 BC Quirinius also had authority over Judea, possibly through some kind of joint rule. He may have begun the census”*.

“Quirinius. This official appears to have been in office for two terms, first in 6-4 BC, and then AD 6-9. A census is associated with each term”—NIV Study Bible

“It is thought that Quirinius served two terms as Roman governor of Syria; from 6-4 B.C., and then A.D. 6-9.”—HCSB Study Bible

“Some scholars believe that a fragmentary inscription called Lapis Tiburtinus implies that Quirinius was twice governor of Syria, so that the A. D. 6 census was in fact his second census. This interpretation of the Lapis Tiburtinus is open to question, however; we do not know with certainty that this inscription actually dealt with Quirinius at all.”—NIV Archaeological Study Bible