

## Christ and the Census

For decades Luke's report about the birth of Jesus, the census, a Roman official named Quirinius, and the journey to Bethlehem has caused serious discussions concerning its historical reliability. While critical scholarship has denied the historicity of many if not most aspects of the story, conservative scholars have proposed various theories to rehabilitate Luke's credibility. In this workshop we will look at the problem and some of the most popular and important proposals for solving it from the perspective of a Roman historian. What reasons are there to trust Luke's testimony about Jesus and the Census? How far can historical scholarship get us? Where are its limits? And, what about the birth story in Luke 2:1-7 as a whole? Is it properly based on real historical events?

**Andreas Gerstacker** is a lecturer and researcher in ancient history at the Helmut-Schmidt-Universität Hamburg. He studied ancient history, modern history, and political science at the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg and University College Dublin. At Erlangen he received an MA degree. After that he went to Universität Leipzig, where he received a PhD in ancient history for a thesis on the perspectives of second- and third-century church fathers on military service for Christians. Since 2015 he has been working at Helmut-Schmidt-Universität Hamburg, where he teaches Greek and Roman history to undergraduates and where pursues his habilitation post-doctoral degree with a research project on Graeco-Roman diplomacy. Since 2014 he has also been working for the Institut für Glaube und Wissenschaft ([www.IGuW.de](http://www.IGuW.de)) as a project assistant for early Christian studies, working on the Quirinius census and on the canon of the New Testament. Together with his wife, Katrin, he is raising two children.

### I. How do historians work?

- A. Aims
- B. Methodology
- C. Historical research & theology

### II. The Problem(s) with Luke 2:1-7

- A. The Census
- B. Quirinius
- C. Bethlehem & The Journey
- D. Possible Interpretations/Solutions

**III. What reasons are there to expect Luke to write proper history?**

**IV. How Rome governed its provinces**

A. Types of provinces and governors

B. Types of census

**V. The census and the journey**

A. The workings of the census in Luke 2

B. Why Bethlehem?

**VI. Quirinius and the Date**

A. Did Luke misdate the Census?

B. Did Josephus misdate the Census?

C. Was Quirinius twice in Syria?

D. Do we need to interpret Luke 2 afresh?

1. A revised chronology of Luke 1-2

2. A revised translation of Luke 2:2

***Suggested Readings:***

**A) Introductions to the Life of Jesus:**

**a. Basic**

- i. BOCKMUEHL, M., *This Jesus – Martyr, Lord, Messiah*, repr., London/New York: T&T Clark International 2004 (German: *Jesus von Nazareth – Messias und Herr*, Wuppertal: Brockhaus 1999).
- ii. STEIN, R.H., *Jesus the Messiah – A Survey of the life of Christ*, Downers Grove: IVP Academic 1996.

### **b. Advanced**

- i. BLOMBERG, C.L., *Jesus and the Gospels – An Introduction and Survey*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Nashville: B&H Academic 2009 (German [of the 1<sup>st</sup> ed.]: *Jesus und die Evangelien*, Nürnberg: VTR 2004).
- ii. THEISSEN, G., MERZ, A., *The Historical Jesus – A Comprehensive Guide*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1998. (German: *Der historische Jesus – Ein Lehrbuch*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed., Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht 2011. [Critical standard])

## **B) New Testament Introductions**

### **a. Basic**

- i. BURGE, G.M., Cohick, L.H., Green, G.L., *The New Testament in Antiquity – A Survey of the New Testament within Its Cultural Context*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2009.
- ii. CARSON, D.A., MOO, D.J., NASELLI, A.D., *Introducing the New Testament: A Short Guide to Its History and Message*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2010.
- iii. THEIBEN, G., *The New Testament – History, Literature, Religion*, London: T&T Clark 2003 (German: *Das Neue Testament*, (Beck Wissen), 5<sup>th</sup> ed., München: C.H. Beck 2015). [Critical standard]
- iv. WEIBENBORN, T., *Apostel, Lehrer und Propheten – Einführung in das Neue Testament*, 3 vols., Marburg: Francke 2004-2005.

### **b. Advanced**

- i. CARSON, D.A., MOO, D.J., *An Introduction to the New Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2005 (German: *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, (TVG Lehrbücher), Wuppertal: Brockhaus 2010).
- ii. SCHNELLE, U., *The History and Theology of the New Testament Writings*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press 1998 (German: *Einleitung in das Neue Testament*, 8<sup>th</sup> ed., Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht 2013.) [Critical standard]

## **C) New Testament History**

- i. BARNETT, P., *Jesus & the Rise of Early Christianity – A History of New Testament Times*, Downers Grove: IVP Academic 2002.
- ii. BRUCE, F.F., *New Testament History*, reissue ed., New York: Doubleday 1980 (German: *Basiswissen Neues Testament – Zeitgeschichte von Kyros bis Konstantin*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Wuppertal: Brockhaus 1997).
- iii. SCHNELLE, Udo, *Die ersten 100 Jahre des Christentums 30-130 n. Chr. – Die Entstehungsgeschichte einer Weltreligion*, (UTB 4411), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Rupprecht 2016. [Critical standard]
- iv. WITHERINGTON, B., *New Testament History – A Narrative Account*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2001.

## **D) On the Historical Reliability of the New Testament**

- i. BARNETT, P.W., *Is the New Testament Reliable*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Downers Grove: IVP Academic 2003.
- ii. BAUCKHAM, Richard, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006.
- iii. BLOMBERG, C.L., *The Historical Reliability of the Gospels*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Downers Grove: IVP Academic 2014 (German [of the 1<sup>st</sup> ed.]: *Die historische Zuverlässigkeit der Evangelien*, Nürnberg: VTR 1998).
- iv. BLOMBERG, C.L., *The Historical Reliability of the New Testament – Countering the Challenges to Evangelical Christian Beliefs*, Nashville: B&H Academic 2016.
- v. STAUDINGER, H., *The Trustworthiness of the Gospels*, Edinburgh: Handsel Press 1981 (German: *Die historische Glaubwürdigkeit der Evangelien*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed., Wuppertal: Brockhaus 1995).

## **E) All things Roman**

### **a. Basic**

- i. ECK, W., *The Age of Augustus*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Malden MA/Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 2007 (German: *Augustus und seine Zeit*, (Beck Wissen), 6<sup>th</sup> ed., München: C.H. Beck 2014).
- ii. KELLY, C., *The Roman Empire – A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: OUP 2006.

## **b. Advanced**

- i. ALSTON, R., *Aspects of Roman History 31 BC-AD 117*, (Aspects of Classical Civilisation), 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London: Routledge 2013.
- ii. GOODMAN, M., *The Roman World 44 BC-AD 180*, (The Routledge History of the Ancient World), London: Routledge 1997.
- iii. BOWMAN, A., CHAMPLIN, E., LINTOTT, A. (eds.), *The Cambridge Ancient History, Vol. 10 – The Augustan Empire, 43 BC-AD 69*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised & enlarged ed., Cambridge: CUP 1996.

## **F) Luke 2:1-7 in particular:**

### **a. Review of scholarship**

- i. BENOIT, Pierre, s.v. Quirinius, in: *DBSup* 9 (1978), 693-720 (**French!**).
- ii. OGG, G., The Quirinius Question To-day, in: *ExT* 79 (1968), 231-236.
- iii. PORTER, S.E., The Reasons for the Lucan Census, in: *Paul, Luke and the Graeco-Roman World – Essays in Honour of Alexander J. M. Wedderburn*, ed. by A. Christophersen, C. Claussen, J. Frey and B. Longenecker, (JSNT Suppl. 217), Sheffield: Bloomsbury T&T Clark 2002, 165-188.
- iv. GERSTACKER, A., Der Zensus des Quirinius und die Datierung der Geburt Jesu - Quellenlage, Argumente und Interpretationsansätze, Teil 1: Einführende Überlegungen, in: *ICHTHYS* 31/2 (2015), 110-132; Teil 2: Quirinius I, in: *ICHTHYS* 32/1 (2016), 3-25; Teil 3: Quirinius II, in: *ICHTHYS* 32/2 (2016), 139-162.
- v. GERSTACKER, A., *Was geschah an Weihnachten? – Ein Historiker untersucht die Geburt Jesu nach dem Lukasevangelium*, (smd Studien), Marburg 2016 (popularized version of the articles).

### **b. Further contributions (selection)**

- i. BRAUNERT, H., Der römische Provinzialzensus und der Schätzungsbericht des Lukas-Evangeliums, in: *Historia* 6/2 (1957), 192-214.
- ii. HAYLES, D.J., The Roman Census and Jesus' Birth: Was Luke Correct?, Part 1: The Roman Census System, in: *Buried History* 9 (1973), 113-132; Part 2: Quirinius' Career and a Census in Herod's Day, in: *Buried History* 10 (1974), 16-31.
- iii. HIRSCHMÜLLER, Martin, Der Zensus des Quirinius nach der Darstellung des Josephus, in: *JETH* 8 (1994), 33-68.
- iv. LLEWELYN, St.R., The Provincial Census and the Birth of Jesus, in: *New Documents Illustrating Early Christianity Vol. 6*, Marrickville 1992, 123-132.
- v. PEARSON, B.W.R., The Lucan Census Revisited, in: *CBQ* 61 (1999), 262-282.
- vi. PUIG I TÀRRECH, A., The Birth of Jesus, in: idem (ed.), *Jesus: An Uncommon Journey – Studies on the Historical Jesus*, (WUNT II 288), Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2010, 63-104.
- vii. RIESNER, R., Bethlehem, the Birth Stories and Archaeology, in: Estrada, B., Manicardi, E., Puig i Tàrrach, A. (Hrsg.), *The Gospels: History and Christology – The Search of Joseph Ratzinger-Benedict XVI.*, Vol. 1, Vatican City 2013, 473-507.
- viii. RHOADES, John, Josephus Misdated the Census of Quirinius, in: *JETS* 54/1 (2011), 65-87.
- ix. ROSEN, K., Jesu Geburtsdatum, der Census des Quirinius und eine jüdische Steuererklärung aus dem Jahr 127 nC., in: *JAC* 38 (1995), 6-15.
- x. SCHÜRER, E., Vermes, G., Millar, F., Black, M., *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Christ*, Vol. I, Edinburgh: T&T Clark 1973, 399-427.
- xi. SMITH, M.D., Of Jesus and Quirinius, in: *CBQ* 62 (2000), 278-293.
- xii. WOLTER, M., Erstmals unter Quirinius! Zum Verständnis von Lk 2,2, in: *BN* 102 (2000) 35-41.

### **c. Commentaries on Luke (selection)**

#### **i. Basic**

1. EDWARDS, J.R., *The Gospel according to Luke*, (PNTC), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2015.
2. STEIN, R.H., *Luke*, (NAC), Nashville: B&H Publishing 1992.

#### **ii. Advanced**

1. BOCK, D.L., *Luke*, Vol.1, (BECNT), Grand Rapids: Baker 1994.
2. FITZMYER, Joseph A., *The Gospel According to Luke I-IX*, (AB), New York: Doubleday 1981. [Critical standard]
3. GARLAND D.E., *Luke*, (ZECNT), Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2012.
4. MARSHALL, I.H., *The Gospel of Luke*, (NIGTC), Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978.