

the biochemical complexity of the nectar and enzyme-producing glands, actually arose in order to all work together. The pitcher structure, with its wettable rim, the nectar glands, the waxy walls, the elastic fluid, the enzyme-producing glands and the timing cycle all contribute to the overall success of the trapping mechanism. Is there not here clear evidence of conscious planning and design by the Creator? It is quite possible that naturally occurring variations have led to the variety of sizes and colours within the *Nepenthes* genus, but the consistent design features testify to the wisdom and forethought of God Himself. "Then God said, 'Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb that yields seed, and the fruit tree that yields fruit according to its kind . . .'; and it was so" (Gen. 1:11, NKJV).



Lid: Nectar glands attract prey

Pitcher: Develops at tip of leaf and hangs from long leaf stalk

Rim: Nectar glands on inner edge lure prey in

Waxy zone: denies insects a foothold to escape

Digestive fluid: entraps struggling insects; enzymes break down soft tissues

Intermittent action: gives element of surprise

The census of Luke 2

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The accuracy of Luke's reference to the census which brought about the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem has been called into question, but careful investigation shows it to be consistent with secular history and the situation of those times.

THE OPENING chapters of Luke's Gospel provide us with a lot of information about the birth of our Lord and what authority Luke had. In his skilfully constructed record he provides unique details.

Neither Mark nor John mentions where Jesus was born. Mark 1:9 says: "Jesus came from Nazareth of Galilee, and was baptized of John in Jordan". In John 1:45 Philip speaks of him as "Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph", and in Acts 10:38 Peter refers to "Jesus of Nazareth". These expressions obviously do not imply that Mark, John, or the author of Acts, considered Nazareth

to be the place of Jesus' birth. They merely show that Nazareth was universally considered to be the abode of his parents, the place which had been his home, coming from which he had appeared before the world. Similarly, the expression "son of Joseph" used

by Philip in John 1:45 cannot be taken as indicating John's own opinion, but merely as showing the current belief.

Now Matthew and Luke agree that Jesus was born in Bethlehem. Matthew 2:6 points out that his birth in this place was the fulfilment of the prophecy that the ruler of Israel was to be born there. Yet they are also fully aware that Jesus was considered by the world to be a native of Nazareth, and that he had been brought up from infancy in that city; in fact, Matthew 2:23 presents the upbringing at Nazareth as the fulfilment of another prophecy.

Matthew begins with the birth of Jesus. He tells us nothing about any previous connection of his parents with Nazareth, but says that they retired to Nazareth while the child was still an infant, being in fear of the reigning king of Judea. If Luke's record had not been preserved, we would probably have concluded on the authority of Matthew that the parents of Jesus did not live in Nazareth until after the birth of our Lord.

Luke and the census

Luke goes further back, and mentions that both Joseph and Mary originally resided at Nazareth. He says that they visited Jerusalem, and that Mary had relatives there or in the neighbourhood. This second chapter starts off in a very matter-of-fact way. We have read these words many times, no doubt, and are familiar with them:

"And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed [registered, NKJV]. (And this taxing [census, NKJV] was first made when Cyrenius [Quirinius] was governor of Syria.) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judæa, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) to be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child".

The idea of a census is familiar to us all. In Britain one takes place every ten years. The exception was 1941 due to the war. The first one in Britain seems to have been in the year 1801, when the government was concerned over food supplies for an increasing population. 6 June 1841 was a very important date in Britain because, for the first time, names and addresses were included. Each time more questions are asked, and a formidable bank of statistical information has become available to the government.

As with so many aspects of modern bureaucracy, we can trace this development back to Octavian, the ruler of the Roman Empire who took the name Augustus, which means Revered. He had secretaries for the various activities of state, as we do today. He also ordered a census to find where everyone was in his vast realm, and this went so far as to include personal details, such as name, etc. A key part of the Roman census was the valuation of property. This was to get a fair system of taxation. Small wonder, then, that the Jews generally resented the census, because they

did not want to pay tax or tribute to the occupying power! It reminded the Jews that they were a subject people, and this gave rise to disorder from time to time.

It is not certain whether the Jews were required on this occasion to take an oath of allegiance to Caesar. It would seem that such an oath had previously been required of them, and about 6,000 had refused to take it. Josephus records that those who actually refused to take the oath were counted, and he says that they were regarded as dangerous and likely to rouse war and disturbance.¹ So they were fined, but the wife of Herod's younger brother Pheroras paid this fine. This census was ordered in what we think of as 8 B.C., and was probably one of many. Augustus laid down the principle of systematic enrolment, although the frequency of these is not clear.

Herod's involvement

One of the key figures in this incident we are considering was Herod. Whilst he is not mentioned in Luke 2, it was his embassies to Caesar which led to the events we read about here.

Herod was a complex man, best known for his cruelty, even to his own wife and children. He was also afraid of upsetting the Jews. His position as king was due in no small part to his friendship with Augustus and because he tried to keep the peace in Judea. Peace was important to Augustus, who considered his rule to be the time of Pax Romana, 'the [Roman peace](#)', the long period (27 B.C. to A.D. 180) of relative peace experienced by the [Roman Empire](#). The term stems from the fact that Roman rule and [its legal system](#) pacified regions, sometimes forcefully, which had suffered from quarrels between rival leaders. It was Augustus Caesar who led Rome into the Pax Romana.

Herod's peacekeeping involved doing all he could to give the impression that he was on the side of the Jews. He allowed them to worship unhindered, and even pretended to conform to Jewish law. His great building work in Jerusalem included the magnificent temple in which the priests were the only ones allowed, both during construction and afterwards. Whilst the Jews resented the Roman occupation, they seem to have tolerated Herod. More to the point, he was sensitive to the feelings lurking just beneath the surface. These could erupt in violent disorder at any time, bringing the wrath of Rome down

1. *Antiquities of the Jews*, Book 17, chapter 2.4.

upon them heavily, which is what happened in A.D. 70.

The census would have been seen as the heavy hand of Rome and would almost certainly have led to disorder. Herod therefore sent two embassies to Augustus. The first, probably in late 8 B.C. or early 7 B.C., was to request exemption from the enrolment, which only served to delay the inevitable because Herod had dropped out of favour with Augustus as a result of some false reports which had been sent to him. Herod had been sorting out some serious problems with the Arabians, who managed to get their complaint to Augustus before Herod could give his side of the story.

The second embassy (probably late 7 B.C.) was to announce his submission to the decree and to promise to conduct a full census. Of course, this embassy was much more favourably received and returned from Rome successful, but Herod was evidently by no means completely pardoned or restored fully to favour. When once Augustus's anger had been roused at the Jewish monarch's assumption of too great freedom, it was far from easy to appease it entirely, and impossible to eradicate the effect produced on his mind. Because Herod had intervened, the numbering in Palestine could not have occurred as early as the Roman year in which the decree went out, 8 B.C. (this ended 17 April, 7 B.C.) or even in 7 B.C.

Soothing the Jews

Herod was naturally eager to avoid giving to the enrolment an entirely foreign and non-national character. Such a character both accentuated his own humiliation and was more liable to rouse the ever-wakeful pride and jealousy of his Jewish subjects. Obviously, the best way to soothe the Jewish sentiment was to give the enrolment a tribal character and to number the tribes of Israel, as had been done by purely national governments.

The Roman officials would not be likely to object to this form of enrolment. Provided Herod obeyed the orders of Augustus that an enrolment must be made, it would be entirely in accordance with the spirit in which these subject kingdoms were treated that the manner of making the enrolment should be left to the discretion of the responsible authority, that is, the king. Moreover, the marvellous success of Roman provincial administration was due to the skill and tact with which the officials accommodated themselves to the prejudices of the subject population, and this

was clearly a case in which Jewish susceptibilities might be taken into account as regards the manner of numbering. The people were well known to be stubborn and unyielding in their religious ideas; and, with rare exceptions, Rome humoured their religious prejudices.

Herod's method in governing his kingdom was, as we have mentioned, to humour the Jews, and to accept the distinction they proudly drew between themselves and the heathen. Owing to the care with which the Jews preserved their family records and pedigrees, all true Jews would know what were their family and their proper city according to the ancient tribal system, even though they might have been forced by circumstances to change their abode.

This seems to have suggested the mode of enrolment that Luke describes, and it would have identified those who were the true Jews from the mongrel population of Palestine. All who claimed to be Jews were to go to the proper city of their tribe and family. The rest of the population, who were probably much more numerous, would be counted according to their ordinary place of residence. This had the added advantage of identifying the non-Jewish population, which was generally peaceable. The enrolment would obviously be much more useful if it thus distinguished accurately the rebellious from the peaceful element in the population.

Augustus would specially desire an enrolment of Judea and Galilee in order to have some clear idea what was the military strength of the country. It was a troublesome district to rule. Disturbances were always possible. There was obvious advantage in knowing what the exact strength of the possible rebels was. The tribal enrolment furnished the means of gaining this information. It might safely be concluded that all those who were content to be counted as non-tribal would be loyal subjects of Rome.

In this national character that Herod gave to his enrolment probably lies the reason why Mary as well as Joseph went up to Bethlehem, a detail that would not fit if the enrolment had been a normal Roman census. To go personally to the enrolment was regarded as substantiating a claim to true Hebrew origin and family. As Luke says, "all [that is, all true Hebrews] went to be taxed, every one into his own city".

If Herod had not been afraid of trouble and had not intervened, then Joseph and Mary would have been counted in Nazareth. The purpose of God is served by people going about their lives

in ways that seem totally in character. Galatians 4:4 states, "but when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son, made of a woman, made under the law".

When was the census?

The decree went out in 8 B.C., and Herod's stalling meant that it probably missed 7 B.C. It is probable that it took place in 6 B.C. or 5 B.C. It could not have been later because Herod died 1 April 4 B.C.

The mass movement of people had to be at a time when it was safe to travel and caused the least disruption to the principal occupation, that of farming. The day had to be fixed a long time in advance, so all the possibilities had to be considered. People had to be told which day it would be. Winter would be ruled out because the weather could vary and travel was often difficult. Harvesting began about the middle of April and extended to July. This narrows the time down to about August to October, and anyone's guess is as good as any other.

Early Christians who remembered the birth of Jesus each year used a wide variety of dates. It was in A.D. 274 that the Emperor Aurelian declared 25 December a civic holiday in celebration of Mithras, the sun god. By A.D. 336 the Christians in Rome decided to celebrate the birth of Jesus on this date, although it was not generally followed until about a century later. In A.D. 537 Dionysius Exiguus was asked to set out the dates for Easter for the years 527-626, and while doing this he calculated the date of the birth of Jesus. Sadly, his sums were wrong, and 2007 is not the number of years from the birth of Jesus.

Luke 3:1 states, "Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judæa, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of Ituræa and of the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene . . .". Tiberius was granted equal power with Augustus over all the provinces in A.D. 11, which makes his fifteenth year A.D. 26, and this corresponds with 6 B.C. as the year of Jesus' birth, since he was thirty then (v. 23).

This is corroborated by the Jews' comment recorded in John 2:20: "Then said the Jews, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?". The temple was started in the eighteenth year of Herod, which was about 20 B.C. (Exact dates are difficult to establish due to different ways of identifying years and regnal years, and require a separate study.)

Who was Quirinius (Cyrenius)?

Publius Sulpicius Quirinius is referred to as Cyrenius in the AV of Luke 2:2, and the scarcity of information about him has led to charges of error in this record. As soon as critics start levelling such charges at the inspired Word, information comes to light that answers them. The word "first" helps us considerably. A marble inscription found in 1764 says that a man twice governed Syria as the legate of Caesar Augustus. Even though the name is indecipherable, from the other information on the marble it has been deduced that it refers to Quirinius. Luke calls him "governor", a term which has more meanings than one. It is used in 3:1 of Pontius Pilate, but it can mean an imperial legate, that is, one who has care of something in place of the emperor.

Quirinius was of equal standing with the actual governor Sentius Saturninus, due to the special task for which he had been sent to Syria. A hostile tribe of barbarians had been wreaking havoc on areas in southern Asia Minor and northern Syria. The Romans' attempt to subdue them involved a lot of road construction through difficult terrain. It is thought that oversight of these forces and the road builders was the main reason for an additional man who was equal in standing to the governor. Maybe also this very capable man was sent to oversee the census in a very troubled part of the empire.

The second occasion when Quirinius held the office of governor of Syria is the better-known one, and occurred in A.D. 6-9. In between he held other important jobs, such as tutor to Caesar's son Gaius.

Conclusion

All that we have seen shows the simplicity with which the Spirit guided Luke to set in order the facts surrounding one of the greatest events in the history of the world. The more closely we examine this record the greater is our confidence in the unassailable accuracy of the Word given to us by the inspiration of God.

F. F. Bruce praised those who took a stand against critics, especially when their arguments were the carefully considered results of scholarship. One such writer was Professor William M. Ramsay, whose work is of great interest and benefit to all those interested in the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. It is well known, but bears repetition, that Ramsay started out to show that Luke could not have written Acts in the first century. He was an honest scholar who

concluded that he did in fact write Acts in the first century, and gave reasons for his findings. (This turn about is very like that of Frank Morison, who defended the truth of the death and resurrection of Jesus in *Who Moved the Stone?* after setting out to prove the contrary.)

One of Ramsay's books is called *Was Christ Born in Bethlehem?* and this book is the main source of the information for this study. Other sources are Josephus, the Jewish historian, who wrote *The Antiquities of the Jews*; and *Hastings Bible Dictionary*.