

Reckoning Tiberius's Reign and Jesus's Baptism

First- and Second-Century Evidence Concerning

Tiberius's Fifteenth Year (Luke 3:1)

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Abstract

One much-discussed Bible verse relating to the chronology of Jesus's ministry is Luke 3:1, where Jesus's baptism is placed during Tiberius's fifteenth year. Normally, Tiberius's reign is said to have begun after Augustus's death, making AD 29 his fifteenth year as emperor. However, some have wished to date the fifteenth year of Tiberius earlier by claiming that Luke would have understood Tiberius's reign as commencing sometime between AD 11 and 13, when Tiberius was granted joint authority with Augustus over the provinces. A survey of the extant literary-historical sources from the first and second centuries combined with surveys of the surviving numismatic and inscriptional evidence reveals that there is no support for an earlier dating of Tiberius's reign. Thus, it is highly unlikely that Luke or his readers would have understood the fifteenth year of Tiberius as occurring before AD 29.

1. Introduction

Luke 3:1, which places Jesus's baptism in Tiberius's fifteenth year (see Luke 3:21), is key to establishing the chronology of Jesus's ministry.¹ The Gospel of John mentions several feasts, including three Passovers (John 2:13,23; 6:4; 11:55 (twice); 12:1; 13:1; 18:39; 19:14), Tabernacles (John 7:2), Dedication (John 10:22), and an

1. While John 3:1 dates John's baptismal ministry, it is generally understood that Jesus's baptism took place that same year in light of all four Gospels moving quickly from John's preaching and baptising to Jesus's baptism in the Jordan River. All of the literature cited in this study, whether dating Tiberius's fifteenth year to AD 26, AD 27 or AD 29, places Jesus's baptism in that same year. The same assumption was made in antiquity by Tertullian who explicitly places the beginning of Jesus's ministry in Tiberius's fifteenth year. (See the discussion of Tertullian on pp. 104-105).

unnamed feast, either Tabernacles or Pentecost (John 5:1). This indicates that Jesus's ministry from his baptism to his crucifixion may have lasted more than two years in duration at a minimum.² In addition, the Synoptic Gospels report the disciples plucking grain roughly halfway between the beginning of Jesus's Galilean ministry and the feeding of the five thousand, which places another spring with a Passover between John's first and second ones (Matt 12:1; Mark 2:23; Luke 6:1).³ Jesus's ministry began some months before with his baptism, possibly

2. The most recent advocates of a ministry of just over two years include Wright, who places Jesus's baptism in AD 28 and his crucifixion in AD 30. N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 147 and N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 479. Meier makes a more concerted effort to defend a ministry of two years and one or two months. See John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus*, vol. 1, ABRL (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 405–406. While Meier is cognisant of the Synoptic Gospels depicting a spring where the disciples plucked grain (see note 3 below), he does not attempt to integrate that event into John's chronology of Jesus's ministry. See Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 403.

3. It is difficult to incorporate the grain-plucking incident from the Synoptic Gospels into John's chronology without adding a spring between John's first Passover and the feeding of the five thousand, which took place in the early spring before the second Passover when the grain would not have been ripe enough to eat (Matt 14:13–21; Mark 6:30–44 (see Mark 6:39); Luke 9:10–17; John 6:1–15 (see John 6:4)). As Hoehner notes, 'The Passover of John 2:13 is too early for the incident of the disciples plucking grain, because the Passover of John 2:13 occurred shortly after Jesus had been baptised and had started his ministry. Furthermore, after the Passover of John 2:13 his ministry was carried out in Judaea; but the plucking of the grain occurred when he was in Galilee. Therefore, the plucking of the grain would fit well around the time of the Passover between the Passovers mentioned in John 2:13 and 6:4.' Harold W. Hoehner, 'The Chronology of Jesus' in *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, ed. Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 2337–2338, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004210219_076. Two notices in John indicate that there was more than a year between John 2:13 and 6:4. John 4:35, which is set during Jesus's time in Samaria after his baptism, quotes Jesus as saying 'there are still four more months, and then comes the harvest'. Thus, Jesus was in Samaria before his Galilean ministry in January or February after the Passover of John 2:13. This means the grain plucking in Galilee had to take place in the spring of the following year. John 4:34 mentions an unnamed feast, which perhaps refers to Tabernacles (Andreas Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 177; Hoehner, 'The Chronology of Jesus', 2338–2339; Jack Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology: Principles of Time Reckoning in the Ancient World and Problems of Chronology in the Bible*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 351–352). Since John 7:2 is another Feast of Tabernacles, this would indicate that there is a year between John 5:1 and John 7:2, once again requiring two years between the Passovers of John 2:13 and John 6:4. Therefore, Hoehner ('The Chronology of Jesus', 2339) places about three and one-half years from Jesus's baptism to his crucifixion.

in summer or early autumn.⁴ Thus, the four canonical Gospels collectively imply a ministry of about three-and-a-half years between Jesus's baptism in the summer or autumn of the fifteenth year of Tiberius and his Passover crucifixion.⁵

Therefore, accurately determining the date of Jesus's baptism is vital to establishing the date of the crucifixion. A survey of literature referencing the possible dating of Tiberius's reign reveals a variety of issues that might affect how Luke's readers understood the fifteenth year of Tiberius:

1. What did Tiberius's contemporaries or near contemporaries consider to have been the starting point of his reign? Was it following the death of Augustus in AD 14? Or was it from about AD 12, when Tiberius was granted joint rule of the provinces with Augustus?⁶
2. What method did the ancients use to count the years of Tiberius's reign?
3. Which of the calendars current in the first-century Roman world was used to reckon the years of Tiberius's reign?

Unfortunately, my survey of peer-reviewed journal articles and books on biblical chronology found few recent studies that address this issue in a new light. The majority of the most recent treatments are from the last quarter of the twentieth century.⁷ These works reveal that while the great majority choose the option of

4. Evidence from the Gospels suggests that the elapsed time from Jesus's baptism to the Passover at John 2:13 (John 1:29–2:12) is four to nine months (Hoehner, 'The Chronology of Jesus', 2334–2335). John 1:32–34 indicates that Jesus's baptism took place before the Baptist's words recorded in John 1:29–34. Since Jesus's temptation took place for forty days immediately following the baptism (Matt 4:1–11; Mark 1:12–13; Luke 4:1–13), a minimum of five weeks precedes John 1:19. Then John carefully records a series of days and a stay in Capernaum (John 1:19–2:11). The absolute minimum time between Jesus's baptism and the first Passover in John is fifty to sixty days. This would require an extremely compressed timeframe between Jesus's baptism and John 1:19, assuming that the Gospels document nearly every day from Jesus's baptism to John's first Passover. A more reasonable estimate would place Jesus's baptism earlier.

5. Andrew E. Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul: A Biblical Chronology* (St Louis: Concordia, 2011), 257–261. Meier notes that the Synoptic Gospels hint that Jesus's ministry was longer than one year. See Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 403–405. Riesner allows for either a ministry of just over two years or just over three years. Rainer Riesner, *Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology*, trans. Doug Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 47–48.

6. On 23 October AD 12 Tiberius celebrated an *Imperator* for his military victories in Germany and Pannonia. Suetonius, *Tib.* 21, indicates that the consuls shortly thereafter granted him joint governance of the provinces with Augustus.

7. Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, 330–370, especially §§570, 578; Harold W. Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 31–37; August Strobel, 'Plädoyer für Lukas: Zur Stimmigkeit des Chronistischen Rahmens von Lk 3:1', *NTS* 41 (1995): 466–469, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688500021603>; Brian Messner, "In the Fifteenth Year" Reconsidered: A Study of Luke 3:1', *Stone-Campbell Journal* 1 (1998):

Tiberius's reign having commenced after the death of Augustus in AD 14, they often feel compelled to mention the earlier dating, AD 12, while Augustus was still alive.⁸ In some cases they also mention the issues of methods of counting years of a reign and competing calendars.

2. Contemporary Proposals for Identification of the Fifteenth Year of Tiberius

The range of treatments of Luke's mention of Tiberius's fifteenth year in a selection of commentaries and other works published since the 1970s is as follows:

1. Some assume that Tiberius's reign began in AD 14 after the death of Augustus, placing Jesus's baptism in AD 29.⁹
2. Some conclude that the best date for Jesus's baptism is AD 29, while mentioning and rejecting the alternate proposal of dating Tiberius's reign from AD 12.¹⁰
3. One argues that Tiberius's reign began in AD 14 and Luke was reckoning the years of Tiberius's reign inclusively, making the date for Jesus's baptism AD 28.¹¹
4. A few maintain that Tiberius's reign began about AD 12, placing Jesus's

202–205; Hoehner, 'The Chronology of Jesus', 2329–2339; Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 383–406; Rainer Riesner, *Paul's Early Period: Chronology, Mission Strategy, Theology*, trans. Doug Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 39–48; Steinmann, *From Abraham to Paul*, 219–220; Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 156–157.

8. Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, 330, §570 notes that some have argued for either AD 11 or AD 13.

9. Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, 7th ed., THKNT (Berlin: Evangelisch Verlagsanstalt, 1974), 100. Fred B. Craddock, *Luke*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 46; Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, SP 3 (Collegeville, MN: Michael Glazier, 1991), 63; Trent C. Butler, *Luke*, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2000), 46; Mikeal C. Parsons, *Luke*, Paideia (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2015), 64 (caption to figure 6).

10. E. Earle Ellis, *The Gospel of Luke*, NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 88; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke (I-IX): Introduction, Translation, and Notes*, AB 28 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981), 455; Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 384–385; John Nolland, *Luke 1-9:20*, WBC 35A (Dallas: Word, 1989), 139; Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, NAC 24 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 127; Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, vol. 1: 1:1–9:50, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 282; Arthur A. Just, Jr, *Luke 1:1-9:50*, ConcC (St Louis: Concordia, 1996), 145; François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1-9:50*, trans. Christine M. Thomas, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 120.

11. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 384–386. This also appears to be the position of Wright. See Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 147.

baptism in AD 26 or 27. However, the alternative reckoning is acknowledged, placing the baptism in AD 29.¹²

5. One assumes that Tiberius's reign began in AD 12, dating Jesus's baptism to AD 26 or 27.¹³

The arguments put forward in these works for reckoning the beginning of Tiberius's reign in AD 14 are three: that this was the common way in antiquity that Tiberius's reign was regarded, that this was Tiberius's official reign as recognised by the Senate, and that there is no ancient evidence for reckoning Tiberius's reign from his joint rule of the provinces in AD 12. This paper will concentrate on these arguments.

The arguments in defence of AD 12 as the beginning of Tiberius's reign are six. The first is that Jesus was born in about 4 BC, so in Tiberius's fifteenth year (AD 27), he would have been about thirty years old (see Luke 3:1,23). This argument assumes that the date for the birth of Jesus defended by Emil Schürer in the late nineteenth century and accepted by most since that time is correct.¹⁴ However, Schürer's dating of Jesus's birth has not gone unchallenged, with others arguing for a 2 BC birth.¹⁵ Thus, it is questionable whether one can calculate the date of Jesus's baptism by counting forward from Jesus's birth.

The second argument is that AD 27 would have been a Jubilee Year and would cohere well with Jesus's reading of Isaiah in the Nazareth synagogue (Luke 4:16-19). However, there is little to suggest that Jubilee Years were celebrated in first-

12. Craig A. Evans, *Luke*, NICNT 3 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1990), 50; John MacArthur, *Luke 1-5*, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody, 2009), 201; David E. Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 151.

13. Eugene LaVerdiere, *Luke*, NTM (Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1980), 86.

14. Emil Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, trans. John Macpherson, 5 vols (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2009). The original English version was published in 1890.

15. The classic challenge is that of W. E. Filmer, 'The Chronology of the Reign of Herod the Great', *JTS* 17 (1966): 283-298, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/XVII.2.283>. Cf. Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, 301, §518. Steinmann and Young have marshalled arguments to demonstrate that Schürer's chronology for Herod the Great, and, therefore, the birth of Jesus, does not cohere with the ancient evidence. See Andrew E. Steinmann, 'When Did Herod the Great Reign?' *NovT* 52 (2009): 1-29; Rodger C. Young and Andrew E. Steinmann, 'Caligula's Statue for the Jerusalem Temple and Its Relation to the Chronology of Herod the Great', *JETS* 62 (2019): 759-773; Andrew E. Steinmann and Rodger C. Young, 'Elapsed Times for Herod the Great in Josephus', *BSac* 117 (2020): 308-328; Andrew E. Steinmann and Rodger C. Young, 'Consular and Sabbatical Years in Herod's Life', *BSac* 177 (2020): 442-461.

century Palestine or, if they were, when they occurred.¹⁶ DeWitt Knauth observes, ‘There is no evidence that the Jubilee as legislated here was ever practised, aside from fallow provisions (which were also part of the Sabbatical Year laws) during the Second Temple period (1 Macc 6:48-54).’¹⁷ Several conjectural reconstructions of Jubilee cycles have been proposed. Based on Ezra’s arrival in Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:8), Strobel proposed that autumn AD 26 to autumn AD 27 was a Jubilee year.¹⁸ Zuckermann suggested that autumn AD 33 to autumn AD 34 was a Jubilee year.¹⁹ Based on the timing of the Bar Kokhba rebellion in AD 132, Wacholder proposed autumn AD 34 to autumn AD 35.²⁰ Coupled with a lack of evidence for the celebration of Jubilees during the Second Temple era, these hypothetical proposals demonstrate that any claim to using Jubilee years as an indication of what Luke meant by Tiberius’s fifteenth year is speculative.

However, Riesner makes a more concerted argument that Jesus’s baptism took place in AD 27, during a Jubilee year.²¹ He notes that both Strobel and Wacholder demonstrated that Tishri AD 26 to Elul AD 27 was a Sabbatical Year. However, he

16. There is no mention in ancient sources of Jubilees being celebrated in Palestine in the Persian, Hellenistic, or Roman periods. Josephus knew of the Pentateuch’s Jubilee legislation (*Ant.* 3.282-283; *Ant.* 4.273). However, he never mentions Jubilee years being observed in his day, although he knew of the practice of observing Sabbatical years in Palestine (*Ant.* 14.202, 14.206, 14.475, 15.7; see also 1 Macc 6:49). Philo knew of the Jubilee legislation, but does not indicate that it was practised in his day (*QG* 2.5; 3.39; *Spec. Laws* 2.109; 2.117).

17. Robin J. DeWitt Knauth, ‘Jubilee, Year of’, in *Eerdmans’s Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 743. Also Christopher J. H. Wright, ‘Jubilee, Year of’, in *ABD*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1027–1028, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780300261899-0882>.

18. Strobel, ‘Plädoyer’; also August Strobel, ‘Das apokalyptische Terminproblem in der sogen. Antrittspredigt Jesu (Lk 4.16-30)’, *TLZ* 92 (1967): 251–254.

19. Benedict Zuckermann, *A Treatise on the Sabbatical Cycle and the Jubilee: A Contribution to the Archaeology and Chronology of the Time Anterior and Subsequent to the Captivity*, trans. A. Löwy, (London: Chronological Institute, 1866), 40–49. For the Jubilee years derived from Zuckermann, see Table 57 in Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, 120. Zuckermann’s calculation of Sabbatical years is early by one year. See Steinmann and Young, ‘Consular and Sabbatical Years’.

20. Ben Zion Wacholder, *Essays on Jewish Chronology and Chronography* (New York: KTAV, 1976), 246–248, 256–257 (Table 3). Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, 129, note 348 observes that there is a typographical error in Wacholder’s Table 3, which ought to have listed the year as AD 34 to AD 35, as given above. Wacholder’s dating of Sabbatical years is impressive because he marshals both ancient historical references to Sabbatical years (e.g. Josephus, 1 Maccabees) as well as inscriptional evidence for Sabbatical years as late as the third century AD. All indicate the same seven-year cycle practised over several centuries.

21. Riesner, *Paul’s Early Period*, 43–45.

believes – without offering any documentation – that this should be increased by one year to Tishri AD 27 to Elul AD 28. He employs Wacholder's argument that John the Baptist's ministry began in a Sabbatical Year to argue that this was the year of Jesus's baptism.²² However, Wacholder himself stated: 'It should be noted that this passage [Luke 3:1] makes no mention of a sabbatical date.'²³ Wacholder's argument is based on reasoning and speculation about messianic chronological connections to Sabbatical Years, not on ancient sources connecting John's ministry to a Sabbatical Year. Moreover, Wacholder does not make the claim that the year in which John began his ministry was a Jubilee Year.

Third, the claim is made that John 2:20 requires the spring following Jesus's baptism to have been AD 28, placing the baptism in AD 27. This is based on understanding Jesus's opponents as stating, 'This temple has taken forty-six years to build'. However, this interpretation is far from certain. Some have argued that John 2:20 has often been mistranslated and misinterpreted, proposing instead that Jesus's opponents were stating, 'This temple was built forty-six years ago'. According to this alternate view, John 2:20 took place in the spring of AD 30, favouring AD 29 as the year of Jesus's baptism.²⁴

Riesner attempts an extended defence of his understanding of John 2:20 as it applies to the chronology of Jesus's ministry. He states 'The *tertium comparationis* for the response of Jesus' Jewish dialogue partners, however, is his prediction that he will need a construction time of only three days for the new temple. The sense of Jn. 2:20 can thus hardly be any other than "this temple was built in forty-six years".²⁵ Is Riesner correct about the point of comparison? Jesus said that he would raise the temple ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις, which could be understood as 'three days from now' (point in time) not 'over the period of three days' (extent of time). Moreover, John notes that Jesus was referring to his resurrection. While the Scriptures uniformly count three days from Jesus's crucifixion to his resurrection, they never depict resurrection as a process that occupies three days, but as an instantaneous event (compare Rom 6:5 with 1 Cor 15:51–52). Thus, it is

22. Ben Zion Wacholder, 'Chronomessianism: The Timing of Messianic Movements and the Calendar of Sabbatical Cycles', *HUCA* 46 (1975): 213–215.

23. Wacholder, 'Chronomessianism', 213.

24. Finegan, *Handbook of Biblical Chronology*, 348–349 (§595); Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, 38–43; Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 560–561; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 109–110; J. Paul Tanner, *Daniel*, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2020), 559, note 220.

25. Riesner, *Paul's Early Period*, 46.

more probable that the phrase in John 2:20, ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις, means ‘three days later’.²⁶ If this is the case, then Riesner’s point of comparison argument is moot.²⁷

Fourth, it is claimed that since Luke mentions the coregency of the priests Annas and Caiaphas (Luke 3:2), it is likely that he also has in mind a coregency for Tiberius. There are at least two problems with this logic. One is that Luke specifically omits the supposed other Roman coregent (Augustus), making this an argument from silence. Second, this logic would also imply that the other magistrates mentioned in Luke 3:1 – Pilate, Herod Antipas, Philip, and Lysanias – were also likely to have had co-magistrates, a proposition that is false.

Fifth, it is argued that Luke was writing from the standpoint of the provinces, and that he used the word denoting the actual exercise of authority, ἡγεμονία, for ‘reign’ instead of the word for titular rule, βασιλεία.²⁸ By this choice of vocabulary Luke indicated Tiberius’s joint rule over the provinces before Augustus’s death. There are several problems with this assertion. The term ἡγεμονία is a general term for ruling, although here it is being treated as if it were a specific term for non-titular rule. Yet ἡγεμονία encompasses all kinds of ruling, including βασιλεία. More importantly, Josephus used this term in reference to Tiberius: μεταβάσης δὲ εἰς Τιβέριον τὸν Ἰουλίας υἱὸν τῆς Ῥωμαίων ἡγεμονίας μετὰ τὴν Αὐγούστου τελευτήν, ‘when the reign of the Romans transferred to Tiberius, son of Julia, after the death of Augustus’.²⁹ Josephus was from the provinces, having lived in Palestine for over forty years. However, he uses the term ἡγεμονία to refer to the reign of Tiberius commencing after the death of Augustus, not from the time of Tiberius’s joint rule over the provinces.

This theory offers a specific reason Luke chose a particular term without examining Luke’s own work to determine why he may have avoided using the term βασιλεία. But is the reason proffered the only reasonable explanation for Luke’s choice of vocabulary? A survey of the uses of βασιλεία followed by a genitive of person (either a proper noun or a pronoun) would have revealed that Luke always

26. John 2:21 states that Jesus’s opponents misunderstood him in that ‘in three days’ was referring to his resurrection. It does not state that they misunderstood what ‘in three days’ meant in chronological terms.

27. For a more thorough analysis of this passage which defends the contention that John 2:20 implies a date of AD 29 for Jesus’s baptism see Andrew E. Steinmann, ‘Did It Take Forty-Six Years or More to Build the Temple in Jerusalem? Reconsidering John 2:20’, *JETS* 65 (2022): 319-331.

28. Riesner, *Paul’s Early Period*, 39-40; also August Strobel, *Ursprung und Geschichte des frühchristlichen Osterkalenders*, TUGAL 121 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1977), 84-92.

29. J. W. 2.168. All translations of ancient texts throughout this paper are my own unless noted otherwise.

uses this construction to refer to God's kingdom or Jesus's reign.³⁰ The lone exception occurs at Luke 11:18, which refers to Satan's kingdom, a kingdom that is diametrically opposed to God's kingdom. Therefore, at Luke 1:3 the evangelist may have chosen to use ἡγεμονίας followed by a genitive of person (τῆς ἡγεμονίας Τιβερίου Καίσαρος) to avoid any hint that he was implying to his readers that the Roman Empire was in diabolic opposition to God's kingdom. Overall, though, it is not at all certain why Luke chose the term ἡγεμονία to refer to Tiberius's reign.

Sixthly, it is stated by Riesner that 'Numismatic evidence also attests the rise of Tiberius as coregent after A.D. 13.'³¹ He makes this statement without describing the coins or their features. Moreover, he stops short of claiming that the coins demonstrate that Tiberius's reign was reckoned from his appointment as joint ruler of the empire's provinces. Therefore, his lack of specificity does not allow a direct rebuttal. Nevertheless, Riesner's numismatic claim will be examined further below.

Obviously, one cannot choose a starting date for Tiberius's reign simply based on one's preference for when the fifteenth year of Tiberius's reign occurred. The issue is what Luke and his readers would have understood to be Tiberius's fifteenth year. In contrast to Riesner's statement about numismatic evidence, Martin claimed that the numismatic and inscriptional evidence from the first century uniformly placed the beginning of Tiberius's reign in AD 14.³² Meier agreed, stating that calculating Tiberius's reign from his joint rule over the provinces 'has no basis in either ancient historical documents or coins'.³³ Yet, neither author states what the numismatic and inscriptional evidence is. Thus, it is important to establish from first-century sources how Luke's contemporaries reckoned Tiberius's reign. To do this, I propose to survey the evidence from three types of documentation from antiquity: literary-historical works from the first and second centuries, numismatic evidence from the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius, and inscriptions from the time of Augustus and Tiberius.

30. Luke mentions the kingdom of God (ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ) thirty-seven times in Luke-Acts. βασιλεία is followed by a genitive pronoun for a person six times.

31. Riesner, *Paul's Early Period*, 40. As far as I can determine, Riesner is the only scholar to make this assertion.

32. Ernest L. Martin. 'The Nativity and Herod's Death', in *Chronos, Kairos, Christos: Nativity and Chronological Studies Presented to Jack Finegan*, ed. Jerry Vardaman and Edwin M. Yamauchi (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989), 89; also Morris, *Gospel According to St. Luke*, 93.

33. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 384.

3. Ways that Tiberius's Reign May Have Been Reckoned in Antiquity

Several ways of reckoning years of reign are known to have been practised in antiquity. The factual method counted from the start date to the end date, tallying years, months, and days. Tiberius reigned twenty-two years, five months, and twenty-seven days from his investiture by the Senate until his death (Julian calendar, beginning on 17 September AD 14 and ending on 16 March AD 37). If one reckons his reign from the day after Augustus's death on 19 August AD 14, he reigned twenty-two years, six months, and twenty-five days.

Other methods simply counted whole years. The non-inclusive or accession-year method began counting on the first day of the new year following the ruler's accession to the throne. Any partial year from accession to the end of the year of accession was not counted. However, the final year was counted, even if it was partial. If we assume that Tiberius's reign was reckoned from August or September AD 14 to his death, it would total twenty-three years.³⁴

The inclusive or non-accession-year method counted the partial year between a ruler's accession and the new year as an entire year of reign. Thus, the inclusive method always was one year greater than the non-inclusive method. Tiberius would have reigned for twenty-four years under this method.

For the non-inclusive year method, Tiberius's fifteenth year would have been AD 29 on the Roman calendar. On other calendars in use in the empire, most of which began the year sometime in autumn, the fifteenth year would have been autumn AD 28 to summer AD 29. For the inclusive method, the fifteenth year would have been one year earlier, AD 28 or autumn AD 27 to summer AD 28.

When looking at the various surviving records from Tiberius's day or shortly thereafter, it is important to determine which method was used. Luke 3:1 does not employ the factual reign method, since he gives the year, but not any number of months or days. The question is which of the other two methods Luke was likely to have assumed.

4. Literary–Historical Works from the First and Second Centuries

There are seven extant literary–historical works from the first and second centuries that treat the length of Tiberius's reign. Two Latin works are from Roman historians: the senator Publius Cornelius Tacitus (c. AD 56–c. AD 120) and Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus (c. AD 69–after AD 122). One was composed in Greek

34. Counting from Tiberius's joint rule of the provinces (about October AD 12), the total would be twenty-five years.

by a Roman historian, the senator Lucius Cassius Dio (c. AD 155–c. AD 235). Two are from Jewish sources written in Greek: Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BC–c. AD 50) and Flavius Josephus (AD 37 or 38–c. AD 100). Two Christian writers also refer to the length of Tiberius's reign: Clement of Alexandria (c. AD 150–c. AD 215) writing in Greek and Tertullian (AD 155–AD 220) writing in Latin.

Tacitus wrote that Tiberius died in his seventy-eighth year (i.e. he was seventy-seven years old when he died), and he had reigned 'about (*ferme*) twenty-three years'.³⁵ He reckoned Tiberius's reign from August or September AD 14. He was probably noting factual years in round numbers, since he wrote 'about twenty-three years' and not simply 'twenty-three years', which would have implied non-inclusive reckoning.

Like Tacitus, Suetonius noted that Tiberius died in his seventy-eighth year, on 16 March during the twenty-third year of his reign.³⁶ Also like Tacitus, Suetonius appears to have used factual years in a round number from September (or August) AD 14, since he used an ordinal number and specified that Tiberius died during that year. Had he used a cardinal number (i.e. twenty-three years), it would have implied non-inclusive reckoning.

Cassius Dio wrote that Tiberius was seventy-seven years, four months, and nine days old at death and that he had reigned twenty-two years, seven months, and seven days.³⁷ Dio's numbers are inaccurate. He misdated Tiberius's death to 27 March AD 37 instead of 16 March AD 37 and then miscalculated his age at death.³⁸ However, he reckoned Tiberius's reign from the day after Augustus's death, since counting backwards would yield 20 September AD 14 as the first day of Tiberius's reign. Dio was reckoning Tiberius's reign in factual years.

Philo of Alexandria twice states that Tiberius reigned twenty-three years.³⁹ Philo clearly reckoned Tiberius's reign by the non-inclusive method. However, we cannot be certain which calendar he was employing. Since he lived in Egypt, the most probable calendar was the official Roman calendar for Egypt, the Alexandrian calendar. This calendar was a reformed Egyptian calendar imposed by Julius Caesar and designed to synchronise with the Julian calendar. However, unlike the Julian calendar, the first day of every year was not 1 January but 1 Thoth, which

35. Tacitus, *Ann.* 6.51.

36. Suetonius, *Tib.* 78.1

37. Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 58.26.5.

38. Tiberius was seventy-seven years, four months old at the time of his death. Dio should have calculated Tiberius's age at his supposed death on 27 March AD as seventy-seven years, four months, and eleven days.

39. Philo, *Embassy* 1.141, 1.298.

corresponded to 29 September.⁴⁰ Thus, Philo counted Tiberius's reign from either 20 August or 17 September AD 14. If he was using the Alexandrian calendar, he counted the period of Tiberius's reign before 29 September AD 14 as his accession period, and then counted 29 September AD 14 to 28 September AD 15 as Tiberius's first year.

Josephus wrote that Tiberius reigned twenty-two years, three months, and five days.⁴¹ Josephus was stating Tiberius's reign in factual years and reckoning from sometime in AD 14. However, Josephus made a calculation error. If he was using the Julian calendar, he placed the start of Tiberius's reign on 13 October AD 14. If he was reckoning by the lunisolar Syro-Macedonian calendar, his information would imply a beginning date of 20 October AD 14.⁴² Either way, Josephus appears to be in error by about two months if dating from the death of Augustus in August AD 14 or one month if dating from Tiberius's investiture by the Senate in September. Josephus was probably attempting to date Tiberius's reign either from Augustus's death or from his investiture by the Senate.

Writing in the latter part of the second century, Clement of Alexandria listed the early Roman emperors, giving the length of their reigns. His list begins:

Αὐγουστος ἔτη τεσσαράκοντα τρία, Τιβέριος ἔτη κβ', Γάιος ἔτη δ', Κλαύδιος ἔτη ιδ'

Augustus, forty-three years; Tiberius, twenty-two years; Gaius, four years; Claudius, fourteen years ...⁴³

The length of reigns is confusing. Augustus reigned a little less than forty-one years (16 January 27 BC–19 August AD 14). However, if his reign was counted from the Battle of Actium (2 September 31 BC), using the non-inclusive method and the Alexandrian calendar it would be forty-three years. Tiberius's reign of twenty-two years, as given by Clement, is one year short of his reign as reckoned by the non-inclusive method. However, the reigns of Gaius (Caligula) and Claudius are each reckoned by the non-inclusive method using the Alexandrian calendar. It is probably best to conclude that Clement made a mistake for Tiberius's reign, but

40. In a year preceding a Julian leap year, 1 Thoth would occur on 30 September, and the two calendars would once again be in alignment after 29 February of the next Julian year.

41. Josephus, *Ant.* 18.224.

42. Tiberius's death was 9 Xanthikos AD 37 in the Syro-Macedonian calendar, placing the beginning of his reign on 6 Dios AD 14. This corresponds to the Hebrew calendar as 6 Tishri AD 14 to 9 Adar AD 37.

43. *Miscellanies* 1.21.144.2. The Greek text is from Marcel Caster, *Les Stromates: Stromate 1*, SC 30 (Paris: Cerf, 2013), 149.

most likely was reckoning it by the non-inclusive method, as he did for Augustus, Gaius, and Claudius.

Immediately after giving his list of the reigns of the early emperors, Clement wrote that others had different reckonings, this time starting with Julius Caesar:

Γάιος Ἰούλιος Καῖσαρ ἔτη γ' μῆνας δ' ἡμέρας ζ', μεθ' ὃν Αὐγουστος ἐβασίλευσεν ἔτη μζ' μῆνας δ' ἡμέραν μίαν, ἔπειτα Τιβέριος ἔτη κζ' μῆνας ζ' ἡμέρας ιθ', ὃν διαδέχεται Γάιος Καῖσαρ ἔτη τρία μῆνας ι' ἡμέρας ὀκτώ· τοῦτον Κλαύδιος ἔτη ιγ' μῆνας η' ἡμέρας κη'

Gaius Julius Caesar, three years, four months, six days; after him Augustus reigned forty-six years, four months, one day; thereafter Tiberius, twenty-six years, six months, nineteen days. He was succeeded by Gaius Caesar, who reigned three years, ten months, eight days; this one [succeeded by] Claudius for thirteen years, eight months, twenty-eight days ...⁴⁴

This list is fairly accurate for Julius Caesar, if one assumes that his reign is counted from his receiving the *tribunicia potestas* – tribunician power – sometime in late 48 BC. Clement's report of others' reckoning is exact for Gaius's reign and only nine days more than Claudius's actual reign. The reign of Tiberius is too long if one is reckoning from Augustus's death. It would be tempting to take this as evidence of a reckoning of Tiberius's reign from his receiving joint rule with Augustus. However, there are good reasons to believe that this is simply a mistake. First, Clement places Tiberius's reign after Augustus, employing the temporal adverb ἔπειτα, 'thereafter'. This does not permit reading Clement's text as accommodating an overlap with Augustus's reign. Second, the time span given would place Tiberius's accession on 25 August AD 10, too early for his joint rule of the provinces. One would be obliged to argue that the figures given for Tiberius in this alternate list are a mistake for the reckoning of Tiberius's reign from sometime in AD 12. But if they are a mistake, they could just as easily be a mistake for his reign as reckoned from after Augustus's death in AD 14, as implied by Clement's ἔπειτα. Finally, the mistake in Tiberius's reign is mirrored by a mistake in Augustus's reign. It is impossibly long, dating its start to 18 April 33 BC, more than two years before the Battle of Actium. This argues that Clement's sources were confused about the reigns of both Augustus and Tiberius.

Clement offers little to support the notion that Tiberius's reign may have begun from his joint rule over the provinces with Augustus. His chronological notices appear inaccurate at times, but his twenty-two years for Tiberius and his

44. *Miscellanies* 1.21.144.4. For the Greek text see Caster, *Les Stromates*, 149.

use of ἔπειτα lend support to the notion that Tiberius's reign was reckoned as commencing after the death of Augustus.

Like Clement, Tertullian wrote in the late second century. In *Against the Jews*, Tertullian wrote that Tiberius succeeded Augustus and reigned twenty-two years, seven months, and twenty-eight days.⁴⁵ He places the reign of Tiberius after Augustus, not during the end of Augustus's reign. In this same context Tertullian demonstrates that he is very unreliable in matters of chronology.⁴⁶ He lists the first-century emperors from Augustus to Vitellius. He credits Gaius with three years, eight months, thirteen days, almost two months less than Gaius's actual reign (16 March AD 37–24 January AD 41). He omits Claudius. He credits Galba with a reign of seven months, six days, which is nearly accurate (seven months, seven days; 8 June AD 68–15 January AD 69). He credits Otho with three months, which is near his actual reign of three months, one day (15 January–16 April AD 69).⁴⁷ He credits Vitellius with eight months, twenty-seven days, some twenty-six days less than Vitellius actually reigned (19 April–20 December AD 69). Nevertheless, Tertullian clearly places Tiberius after Augustus and does not indicate that Tiberius's reign in any way overlapped with that of Augustus.

Moreover, when writing about Tiberius's reign, Tertullian states that Christ died during Tiberius's fifteenth year and was about thirty years old. He places this on 25 March when Rubellius Geminus and Fufius Geminus were consuls – AD 29. Apparently, he misapplied the chronological data given for Jesus's baptism at Luke 3:1,23, crediting it instead to the time of the crucifixion.⁴⁸ In addition, his equating the fifteenth year of Tiberius with AD 29 confirms that he was employing non-inclusive reckoning for the reign of the emperor from after the death of Augustus in AD 14.

45. *Against the Jews* 8.15-16. One manuscript reads 'twenty years'. This reading is found in some English editions. Geoffrey D. Dunn, 'Probabimus venisse eum iam: The Fulfilment of Daniel's Prophetic Time-Frame in Tertullian's *Adversus Iudaeos*', *ZAC* 7 (2003): 144, <https://doi.org/10.1515/zach.2003.002>.

46. Dunn attributes Tertullian's inaccuracy to his desire to fit chronology to his interpretation of Dan 9:24-27. Dunn, 'The Fulfilment of Daniel's Prophetic Time-Frame', 144, 151; Geoffrey D. Dunn, *Tertullian's Adversus Iudaeos: A Rhetorical Analysis* (Washington: Catholic University of America, 2008), 120-121.

47. One manuscript reads 'three days'. This reading is found in some English editions of *Against the Jews*. See Dunn, 'The Fulfilment of Daniel's Prophetic Time-Frame', 144.

48. *Against the Jews* 8.18. Another alternative would be that Tertullian was assuming Jesus's ministry lasted about nine months. See Dunn, 'The Fulfilment of Daniel's Prophetic Time-Frame', 152.

In *Against Marcion*, Tertullian refers to the first year of Jesus's ministry three times.⁴⁹ In contrast to *Against the Jews*, where Tertullian placed Jesus's crucifixion in Tiberius's fifteenth year, in *Against Marcion* he consistently agrees with Luke 3:1 that Jesus's ministry began in Tiberius's fifteenth year.

Despite the apparent errors in the information provided by Suetonius, Josephus, Clement, and Tertullian, there are at least three conclusions that can be drawn from the first- and second-century literary-historical writers. First, some considered Tiberius's reign to have begun on the day after Augustus's death in August AD 14 (Cassius Dio and possibly Tacitus, Suetonius, Philo, Josephus, Clement, and Tertullian). Alternatively, it is possible that the starting date for Tiberius's reign was his investiture by the Senate in September AD 14 (Tacitus, Suetonius, Philo, Josephus, Clement, and Tertullian). Most writers used factual years in reckoning Tiberius's reign, though Philo (and probably Tertullian) used non-inclusive reckoning. Either way, Tiberius's fifteenth year would have been late summer AD 28 to late summer AD 29.⁵⁰

In addition, note the variety of sources: Roman sources (Tacitus, Suetonius, Dio), Jewish sources both from a Palestinian Jew (Josephus) and a diaspora Jew (Philo), and Christian sources from the east (Clement) and the west (Tertullian). These are all unanimous in reckoning Tiberius's reign after Augustus's death.

5. Numismatic Evidence

Coins issued in the Roman Empire during the first century fall into two broad categories: imperial coins and provincial coins. While imperial coins usually bear an indication of when they were minted, most provincial coins, except for those minted in Alexandria, Egypt, do not. Unlike the secondary nature of literary sources, numismatic evidence provides primary source evidence from Tiberius's reign.

49. *Against Marcion* 1.15, 1.19, 4.7. Some earlier editions have 'twelfth year' at 1.15. Modern critical editions agree that the correct reading is 'fifteen years' (*anno quinto decimo Tiberii Caesaris*). René Braun, *Tertullian: Contre Marcion Tome I (Livre I): Introduction, Text Critique, Traduction et Notes*, SC 365 (Paris: Cerf, 1990), 168; Ernest Evans, *Tertullian: Adversus Marcionem*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972), 68–69.

50. 20 August AD 28 to 19 August AD 29 (from Augustus's death), 17 September AD 28 to 16 September AD 29 (from Tiberius's investiture), or 29 September AD 28 to 28 September AD 29 (using the Alexandrian calendar).

5.1 Imperial Coins Depicting Tiberius

Roman imperial coins can often be dated by their notation of honours and offices accorded a person depicted on the coin.⁵¹ *Tribunicia potestas* (tribunician power) was an office granted by the Senate annually. During Augustus's reign it was granted every 1 July. For his successors it was granted on the anniversary of the emperor's accession.⁵² Augustus was granted this office for life in 23 BC, but during his reign others could also be granted this office. Tiberius first received *tribunicia potestas* in 6 BC and was renewed in this office every year until Augustus's death. Thus, a coin minted under Augustus and attesting to Tiberius's tribunician power does not indicate that his reign began when he gained joint authority over the provinces with Augustus. When Tiberius became emperor, he reserved the *tribunicia potestas* for himself, a practice followed by subsequent emperors.⁵³

Imperator, originally a title for Roman military commanders, became an honorary title given to celebrate victories. Often emperors were accorded the title when they assumed the throne. Tiberius's first acclamation as *imperator* was granted in 12 BC. Other imperial acclamations during Augustus's reign were granted him in 8 BC, AD 5, AD 8, AD 11, and AD 12. Thus, a coin noting Tiberius's imperial acclamation but issued under Augustus is not an indication that he was joint ruler with Augustus.

A third indication of date is the notation that a person was serving as consul. Two consuls were appointed every year. Originally this office was the highest military and executive office in the Roman Republic and still held great political power through the reign of Augustus. After Augustus it became an honorary office. Tiberius first served as consul in 13 BC. He was also consul under Augustus in 7 BC. Therefore, a coin minted under Augustus that notes Tiberius's consulship is not an indication that he was joint ruler with Augustus.

Coins minted under Augustus often bore his portrait. However, it was not unusual for Augustan-era coins to bear the image of others, especially those in

51. The standard complete catalogue of Roman imperial coinage for the early emperors is C. H. V. Sutherland and R. A. G. Carson, *Roman Imperial Coinage*, vol. 1: 31 BC–AD 69 (London: Spink & Son, 1999) (*RIC*). *RIC* can be accessed through the American Numismatics Society's 'Online Coins of the Roman Empire', <http://numismatics.org/ocre/>. Another important reference for imperial coins is David Van Meter, *The Handbook of Roman Imperial Coins: A Complete Guide to the History, Types and Values of Roman Imperial Coinage* (Utica, NY: Laurion, 1991).

52. This held true through the reign of Trajan. See Finegan, *Handbook*, 85 (§179).

53. In AD 22 Tiberius attempted to have *tribunicia potestas* conferred on Drusus Julius Caesar. Drusus died the next year, and Tiberius never again attempted to have tribunician power conferred on anyone else.

the imperial family, including Gaius (Caligula), Livia (Augustus's wife), Agrippa, and Tiberius.⁵⁴ However, on coins until his death in AD 14, only Augustus was accorded honours and titles reserved for the emperor, such as *pontifex maximus* (chief priest) or *pater patriae* (father of his country). Thus, there is no indication from Roman imperial coinage that Tiberius was considered joint ruler with Augustus before the latter's death in August AD 14.

A set of remarkably similar coins issued in the period of the transition from Augustus to Tiberius illustrate the difference between Tiberius before he was ruler and Tiberius as ruler. The first is a gold aureus issued during Augustus's last year.⁵⁵ The obverse depicts the laureate head of Augustus with the inscription CAESAR AVGVSTVS DIVI F[ili] PATER PATRIAE, 'Caesar Augustus, son of the divine, father of his country'. The reverse pictures Tiberius in a quadriga holding a laurel branch and four horses looking forward. The inscription reads: TI[berius] CAESAR AVG[ustus] F[ili] TR[ibunicia] POT[estas] XV, 'Tiberius Caesar son of Augustus, *tribunicia potestas* 15'.⁵⁶ This coin notes Tiberius's fifteenth *tribunicia potestas*, 1 July AD 13 to 30 June AD 14. Note that while Tiberius is honoured on the coin's reverse, its obverse clearly identifies only Augustus as emperor, noting his status as son of the divine Julius Caesar and his title *pater patriae*.

The second coin is also a gold aureus but was issued during Tiberius's first year as emperor.⁵⁷ It displays all the characteristics of a reissue of the previous aureus, but with key design changes made following the death of Augustus. The obverse depicts the laureate head of Tiberius with the revised inscription TI[berius] CAESAR DIVI AVG[ustus] F[ili] AVGVSTVS, meaning 'Tiberius Caesar

54. Tiberius appears on imperial coins as early as AD 8.

55. *RIC* Augustus 221. Three other coins have similar designs: two denarii and another aureus (*RIC* Augustus 222, 223, and 224).

56. Note that – as here – Tiberius is often called Tiberius Caesar on coins and inscriptions. In these cases 'Caesar' is a family name, not a title. Tiberius's name was originally Tiberius Claudius Nero. In AD 4 he was adopted by Augustus and his name was changed to Tiberius Julius Caesar.

In fact, all members of the Julio-Claudian dynasty included the family name Caesar in their name or in the name by which they ruled. (Thus, after Gaius Julius Caesar, Gaius Octavius ruled as Caesar Augustus; Caligula's name was Gaius Julius Caesar Augustus Germanicus; Claudius's name was Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus; Nero's name was Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus). It was not until after the end of the Julio-Claudian dynasty that 'Caesar' became strictly an imperial title, though the trend towards using it in this way was already developing prior to Nero's death.

57. *RIC* Tiberius 1. Three similar coins are documented: a denarius (*RIC* Tiberius 2), another aureus, and another denarius with the inscription TR[ibunicia] POT[estas] XV (= 1 July AD 14 to 30 June AD 15; *RIC* Tiberius 3 and *RIC* Tiberius 4).

Augustus, son of the divine Augustus'. Augustus was deified after his death. Thus, during his reign, Tiberius is often characterised as son of the divine Augustus on coins and inscriptions, but never during Augustus's reign. The reverse depicts the identical scene to the aureus issued under Augustus. The amended inscription reads: TR[ibunicia] POT[estas] XVI IMP[erator] VII. Tiberius's sixteenth *tribunicia potestas* was 1 July AD 14 to 30 June AD 15, while his seventh imperial acclamation ran from AD 14 to AD 21. Therefore, this coin was issued in AD 14–15 after the death of Augustus, who for the first time on a coin is called 'divine Augustus'.⁵⁸

One other coin issued late in Augustus's reign reinforces the observation that during the end of Augustus's reign Tiberius is never depicted as joint ruler with Augustus and never accorded titles reserved for an emperor.⁵⁹ This coin's obverse depicts a laureate head of Augustus facing right with the inscription CAESAR AVGVSTVS DIVI F[ili] PATER PATRIAE, 'Caesar Augustus, son of the divine, father of his country'. The reverse shows a bare head of Tiberius facing right with the description TI[berius] CAESAR AVG[ustus] F[ili] TR[ibunicia] POT[estas] XV, 'Tiberius Caesar son of Augustus, *tribunicia potestas* 15' (i.e. AD 13–14). Only Augustus's head is laureate and only Augustus is given the emperor's title *pater patriae*. While this coin depicts both Augustus and Tiberius, they are clearly honoured differently. Tiberius is not depicted as joint ruler with Augustus. At best this coin could be characterised as depicting Tiberius as heir apparent.

The coins issued in the last years of Augustus's reign and the first years of Tiberius's reign are important because they demonstrate that Tiberius was not depicted as coregent with Augustus. It is ironic that these are the coins that Riesner cites in his attempt to provide numismatic evidence that Tiberius's reign could have been reckoned from his joint rule of the provinces with Augustus.⁶⁰ They demonstrate the opposite: Tiberius is not depicted as ruler with Augustus. Instead, only after Augustus's death is he depicted holding the emperor's office. Riesner neither describes these coins nor offers his reasoning as to how they

58. Before his death, Augustus was typically titled DIVI F[ili], 'son of the divine' (i.e. son of the deified Julius Caesar). See, for example, the As struck at Rome in AD 11–12 (*RIC* Augustus 471). The inscription reads IMP CAESAR DIVI F AVGVSTVS IMP XX, 'Emperor Caesar Augustus, son of the divine, emperor 20' (AD 11–12).

59. *RIC* Augustus 225. A similar denarius was also issued (*RIC* Augustus 226).

60. Riesner cites these coins from Harold Mattingly, *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum*, vol. 1, Augustus to Vitellius (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1923), plate 13 (numbers 1–5), plate 22 (numbers 1–3); see also the description of these coins on pages 87–88, 120–121. These coins are *RIC* Augustus 221, 222, 223, 224, 225 and Tiberius 1, 3, 4.

bolster his argument that Tiberius's reign could have been reckoned from his joint authority over the provinces. Therefore, we can only speculate as to why he thought they offered support for his position. However, coins issued before Augustus's death never depict Tiberius as coruler with him in any sense. It is also ironic that Riesner chose imperial coins as supposed numismatic evidence, since he argues that Luke was using a provincial – not imperial – reckoning of Tiberius's co-regency over the provinces.

Another imperial coin from early in Tiberius's reign accords him a title reserved for the emperor.⁶¹ The obverse shows the head of Tiberius and the inscription TI[berius] CAESAR DIVI AVG[ustus] F[ili] AVGVST[us] IMP[erator] VII. The reverse depicts a seated, veiled, and draped female figure facing right and holding a patera in her right hand and a long sceptre in her left hand. Her feet rest on a stool. A large letter S is to her left and a large letter C to her right. These letters are the abbreviation for *senatus consulto*, 'by Senatorial decree'. Along the outer edge is the inscription PONTIF[ex] MAXIM[us] TRIBVN[icia] POTEST[as] XVII (i.e. AD 15 to AD 16). Therefore, this coin denotes that the Roman Senate had conferred the title *pontifex maximus* on the emperor.

Overall, there are sixty-one known imperial coin types portraying Tiberius or bearing his name that were issued bearing marks for specific years of his reign.⁶² Every year except two is represented (AD 17–18, 19–20).⁶³ Mints that produced these coins were located at Lugdunum in Gaul (modern Lyon, France), Rome, Caesarea in Cappadocia (modern Kayseri, Turkey), and Commagene (western Asia Minor).

The evidence presented by Roman imperial coinage depicting Tiberius is clear: his reign was reckoned from after the death of Augustus, perhaps from his investiture on 14 September, as the *senatus consulto* inscription found on several coin types implies. Imperial coins minted in both the west and the east bear witness to the fact that Tiberius's reign was not counted from his joint authority over the provinces with his adoptive father.

61. *RIC* Tiberius 33.

62. Ninety-five known imperial coin types were issued under Tiberius. Thus, almost two-thirds of the coin types bear dates indicating a specific year.

63. *RIC* 1 catalogue numbers for Tiberius coins bearing a particular year mark are: 1, 2 (AD 14–15); 3, 4, 5, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37 (AD 15–16); 6 (AD 18–19); 7, 41 (AD 20–21); 8, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 46, 48, 49, 50, 51 (AD 22–23); 9 (AD 23–24); 10 (AD 24–25), 11 (AD 25–26); 12 (AD 26–27), 13 (AD 27–28), 14 (AD 28–29); 15 (AD 29–30); 16 (AD 30–31); 17 (31–32); 18, 84, 85 (AD 32–33); 19, 86, 87, 88 (AD 34–35); 20, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57 (AD 34–35); 21, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63 (AD 35–36); 22, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69 (AD 36–37).

5.2 Provincial Coins Depicting Tiberius

Provincial coins issued during Augustus's reign seldom depicted Tiberius.⁶⁴ When he was portrayed, it was never as emperor, and he is not accorded titles reserved for the emperor nor called son of the divine Augustus.⁶⁵

Less than one-third of the provincial currency issued under Tiberius bears date marks, although coins minted at Alexandria commonly displayed their mint date.⁶⁶ Dated provincial coins depicting Tiberius bear date marks ranging over his entire reign from AD 14–15 to AD 36–37.⁶⁷ Moreover, these coins were minted throughout the empire, including Spain, Italy, North Africa, Crete, Greece, Asia Minor, Cyprus, Syria, Phoenicia, Palestine, and Egypt. A typical example is a coin issued at Amisus in the province of Bithynia and Pontus in north-western Asia Minor.⁶⁸ On the obverse is the head of Tiberius and the inscription ΣΕΒΑΣΤΟΣ, 'Augustus'. The reverse depicts a seated Dikaiosyne with scales. The inscription reads ΑΜΙΣΟΥ ΕΤΟΥΣ Ξ, 'year sixty [of the era] of Amisus', that is, AD 28–29.⁶⁹

64. The standard complete catalogue for Roman provincial coinage during the reigns of the early emperors is Andrew Burnett et al., *Roman Provincial Coinage*, vol. 1 (London; Paris: British Museum; Bibliothèque Nationale de France, 1992) (RPC). 'Roman Provincial Coinage Online', <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/> reflects the content of RPC 1. A useful print resource is David R. Sear, *Greek Imperial Coins and Their Values: The Local Coinage of the Roman Empire* (London: Seaby, 1982), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvm201p9>.

65. Known provincial coins issued under Augustus depicting Tiberius are RPC 1 catalogue numbers 90, 166, 747, 748, 749, 789, 790, 790A, 791, 983, 1011, 1140, 1316, 1317, 1429, 2123, 2288, 2467, 2535B, 2989.

66. Of the 496 known coin types issued under Tiberius and displaying his portrait or name, only 139 bear date marks denoting a specific year.

67. Every year is represented by at least one coin type. RPC 1 catalogue numbers: 4270, 4271, 4374, 4375, 4270, 4271, 4374, 4375 (AD 14–15); 4958, 4959, 4959A (AD 15); 4527, 4880, 4880, 4943 (AD 15–16); 4330, 4330, 4960, 4961, 4961A (AD 16); 4962, 4963, 4964 (AD 17); 4505C, 5075, 5076, 5077, 5078 (AD 17–18); 4965 (AD 18); 5082, 5083, 5084, 5085 (AD 18–19); 3868, 3869, 3870, 5087 (AD 19–20); 711, 712A, 712B, 713, 5089 (AD 20–21); 762, 763 (AD 21); 233, 832, 834, 3920, 4461, 4461 (AD 22–23); 768, 769 (AD 23); 4598, 4799, 4598, 4799, 4881 (AD 23–24); 4966 (AD 24); 4484, 4484 (AD 25–26); 4881A, 4944, 4945 (AD 26–27); 734, 735, 735A, 4485, 4485, 5090, 5091 (AD 27–28); 344, 736, 737, 738, 2150, 4812, 4813, 4814, 4812, 4813, 4814 (AD 28–29); 4967, 4967A, 4967B (AD 29); 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 4946, 4947 (AD 29–30); 4928 (AD 30); 4948 (AD 30–31); 398, 399, 4969 (AD 31); 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 4066, 4067, 4272, 4273, 4066, 4067, 4272, 4273, 4881B, 5092, 5093, 5094, 5095 (AD 31–32); 3621 (AD 32–33); 3622A, 3622B, 3622C, 3622D, 4274, 4275, 4274, 4275, 4861, 4802, 4861, 4802, 4952, 5096, 5097 (AD 33–34); 5098, 5099, 5100, 5101 (AD 34–35); 5102, 5103 (AD 35–36); 5104, 5105 (AD 36–37).

68. RPC 1, 2150.

69. In 31 BC Octavian (i.e. Augustus) proclaimed Amisus a free city and a Roman ally. The era of Amisus began in mid-to-late 31 BC.

Two coins, however, are extremely helpful in determining how the reckoning of the years of Tiberius's reign was understood during his tenure. The first is a coin issued at Syrian Antioch.⁷⁰ The obverse shows the head of Tiberius with the inscription ΣΕΒΑΣΤΟΣ ΣΕΒΑΣΤΟΥ ΚΑΙΣΑΡ, 'Caesar Augustus, [son] of Augustus'. The reverse has an inscription within a laurel wreath that reads Α ΕΠΙ ΣΙΛΑΝΟΥ ΑΝΤΙΟΧΕΩΝ ΕΜ, '[year] one, under the authority of Silanus of Antioch, [year] forty-five'. The dual dating of this coin enables a synchronisation of Tiberius's reign with a known year. This coin was issued in Tiberius's first year, which was also the forty-fifth Actian year, 2 September AD 14 to 1 September AD 15. It exhibits non-inclusive reckoning for Tiberius's reign, commencing his first year on 2 September AD 14 following the death of Augustus on the previous 19 August.

A similar coin was issued at Seleucia.⁷¹ It also portrays the head of Tiberius on the obverse and a laurel wreath on the reverse. The inscription on the obverse is 'Caesar Augustus, [son] of Augustus'. The reverse reads Γ ΕΠΙ ΣΙΛΑΝΟΥ ΣΕΛΕΥΚΕΩΝ ΖΜ, '[year] three, under the authority of Silanus of Seleucia, [year] forty-seven'. This coin confirms the non-inclusive reckoning of Tiberius's reign as beginning in AD 14–15. The forty-seven refers to Actian year forty-seven (2 September AD 17 to 1 September AD 18). The three refers to Tiberius's year three, indicating that his accession year began on 20 August AD 14. Thus, his third year in Actian years was the forty-seventh Actian year.

In contrast to other provincial coins, currency issued at Alexandria often bore mint dates. Extant coins are dated to years three, four, five, six, seven, eleven, fourteen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two, and twenty-three of Tiberius's reign.⁷² Since these coins were issued in Egypt, the years referenced are most probably Egyptian civil years. A typical example was minted in Tiberius's twenty-third year.⁷³ The obverse depicts the head of Tiberius with the inscription ΤΙΒΕΡΙΟΣ ΚΑΙΣΑΡ ΣΕΒΑΣΤΟΣ ΛΚΓ, 'Tiberius Caesar Augustus, year twenty-three'.⁷⁴ The reverse shows the head of Augustus with the inscription ΘΕΟΣ ΣΕΒΑΣΤΟΣ, 'divine Augustus'.

70. *RPC* 1, 4270.

71. *RPC* 1, 4330.

72. Keith Emmett, *Alexandrian Coins* (Lodi, WI: Clio's Cabinet, 2001), 8. Emmett does not offer a complete accounting of all Alexandrian coins issued under Tiberius. The complete catalogue of Alexandrian coins issued under Tiberius may be obtained at <https://rpc.ashmus.ox.ac.uk/>.

73. *RPC* 1, 5105.

74. The symbol L stands for *year*. Year twenty-three would have been 29 September AD 36 to 28 September AD 37, the year of Tiberius's death.

The Alexandrian coins suggest that Tiberius's reign was reckoned from AD 14 in a non-inclusive manner. No Alexandrian coins are dated year twenty-four, as might be expected if the inclusive system were used. In addition, there are no coins marked years twenty-four, twenty-five, or twenty-six, which one might expect if Tiberius's reign was reckoned from his joint rule of the provinces with Augustus.

The coins minted under Tiberius uniformly demonstrate that his reign was reckoned from August or September AD 14 in a non-inclusive manner. The evidence is pervasive and widespread, covering all sectors of the Roman Empire, including both imperial and provincial coinage from Italy and the eastern and western provinces.

6. Inscriptional Evidence

A second type of primary evidence for chronological information concerning Tiberius's reign is inscriptional.⁷⁵ Like the numismatic evidence, the inscriptional evidence does not support the notion that Tiberius's reign might at times have been reckoned from his joint rule of the provinces with Augustus. Surviving inscriptions from Augustus's reign name him alone as emperor and accord him titles fitting of the head of the Roman state. The inscriptions mirror the numismatic evidence in that Tiberius is called the son of the divine Augustus only after AD 14.

6.1 Latin Inscriptions

Latin inscriptions mark Tiberius's accession as occurring in AD 14. This is seen in an inscription from Spain that dates to Augustus's thirty-fifth *tribunicia potestas*, AD 12–13, when Tiberius had joint rule of the provinces with Augustus.⁷⁶ However, it makes no mention of Tiberius as joint ruler. The inscription reads:

IMP[eratori] CAES[ari] AUGUSTO / Pon[tifici] Max[imo] TR[ibunicia]
POT[estas] / XXXV IMP[eratori] XX CO[n]S[uli] XIII

75. Two helpful academic sites have collected the surviving ancient inscriptions. For Latin and some dual-language Latin/Greek inscriptions, see Heidelberg Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 'Epigraphic Database Heidelberg', <https://edh-www.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/inschrift/suche>. For Greek inscriptions, see The Packard Humanities Institute, 'Searchable Greek Inscriptions: A Scholarly Tool in Progress', <https://epigraphy.packhum.org/>.

76. <https://edh-www.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/edh/inschrift/HD012192>.

To Emperor Caesar Augustus, chief priest, *tribunicia potestas* thirty-five, *imperator* twenty, consulship thirteen

This inscription is mirrored by a Latin votive inscription found near Trieste (ancient Tergeste) that reads:

[I]MP[eratori] CAESARI / DIVI f[ilio] AUGUSTO / PONT[i]F[ici] MAXIM[o] / TRIB[unicia] POTEST[ate] XXXVII / CO[n]S[uli] XIII P[at]ri P[at]riae SACRUM

Emperor Caesar Augustus, son of the divine, chief priest, *tribunicia potestas* 37, consulship 13, Father of his Country, sacred⁷⁷

Augustus's thirty-seventh *tribunicia potestas* was AD 13–14, and there is no mention of Tiberius as joint ruler.

Contrast an inscription from shortly after Tiberius's accession to the throne in AD 14, an inscription from North Africa from the Forum of Vestus behind the Temple of Rome and Augustus:

TI[berio] CAESARI DIVI AVG[usti] F[ilio] AUGUSTO

To Tiberius Caesar Augustus, son of the divine Augustus⁷⁸

Thus, almost immediately after Augustus's death, Tiberius is called 'son of the divine Augustus', an appellation that is widely used on coins and inscriptions during his reign.

A mile marker from Tazarona, Spain (ancient Turiasone), illustrates Tiberius's imperial titles. It dates to Tiberius's thirty-fifth *tribunicia potestas*, AD 33–34.

TI CAESAR DIVI AVG F / DIVI IVLI N AVGVSTVS / PONTIFEX MAX TRIB / POT XXXV IMP VIII / COS V / TVRIASONE / M XXII

Ti[berius] Caesar Augustus, son of the divine Aug[ustus], g[randson] of the divine Juli[us]; *pontifex max[imus]*, *trib[unicia] pot[estas]* thirty-five, *imp[erator]* nine, Co[n]s[ul] five, Turiasone 1022⁷⁹

There are forty-nine known Latin inscriptions mentioning Tiberius during his reign. Thirty-nine of them are datable to a specific year. The years span his entire reign from AD 14 to AD 37. Thus, Latin inscriptions provide no support for the notion that Tiberius's reign was reckoned from his joint authority over the provinces with Augustus.

77. <https://edh-www.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/edh/inschrift/HD033050>.

78. <https://edh-www.adw.uni-heidelberg.de/edh/inschrift/HD019704>.

79. Tiberius's ninth *Imperator* began in AD 18, and his fifth term as consul was AD 31.

6.2 Greek Inscriptions

Over 200 known Greek inscriptions mention Tiberius. The few Greek inscriptions from before AD 14 that mention Tiberius do not accord him standing as emperor, which was reserved exclusively for Augustus. A typical example from Augustus's reign is an inscription from Attica which recognises Augustus as emperor, but not Tiberius:⁸⁰

Αὐτοκράτορος Καίσαρος θεοῦ υἱοῦ Σεβαστοῦ

Emperor Caesar Augustus, son of the divine

Greek inscriptions during Tiberius's reign typically call him 'son of the divine Augustus'. For example, an inscription from Egypt dating somewhere between AD 32 and the end of Tiberius's life in AD 37 reads:⁸¹

ἐπ' Αὐτοκράτορος Τ / ιβερίου [Κ]αίσαρος, ν-έου Σ / εβαστοῦ, [τ]οῦ θεοῦ
Σεβαστοῦ υ / ιοῦ, [Σ]εβαστοῦ

authorised by Emperor Tiberius Caesar Augustus, the new Augustus, son of
the divine Augustus

Over a dozen Greek inscriptions in Egypt from Tiberius's reign are dated. Inscriptions from years three, five, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, fourteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two, and twenty-three of his reign have been documented. Typical are these two excerpts from inscriptions:

... ἔτους ιδ' Τιβερίου Καίσαρος Σεβαστοῦ ...⁸²

... year fourteen of Tiberius Caesar Augustus ...

... ἔτους ἐνάτου Τιβερίου Καίσαρος Σεβαστοῦ ...⁸³

... year nine of Tiberius Caesar Augustus ...

These Egyptian inscriptions suggest that Tiberius's reign was reckoned from AD 14 in a non-inclusive manner. No Egyptian inscriptions are dated year twenty-four, as might be expected if the inclusive system were used. In addition, there are no inscriptions bearing dates for years twenty-four, twenty-five, or twenty-six,

80. <https://epigraphy.packhum.org/text/5492>.

81. <https://epigraphy.packhum.org/text/219851>.

82. <https://epigraphy.packhum.org/text/218033>.

83. <https://epigraphy.packhum.org/text/219849>.

which one might expect if Tiberius's reign was reckoned from his joint rule of the provinces with Augustus.

While this survey of the epigraphic evidence concerning Tiberius from the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius offers only a few typical examples, the corpus of inscriptions is uniform in the way the years of Tiberius's reign are mentioned. The almost three hundred inscriptions that can be dated to a particular year of either the reign of Augustus or that of Tiberius always depict him as emperor after Augustus's death in AD 14 and never before that time. In addition, many inscriptions that cannot be dated to a particular year refer to Tiberius as 'son of the divine Augustus' (DIVI AVGV[usti] F[ilio]/τοῦ θεοῦ Σεβαστοῦ υἱοῦ or similar). These inscriptions most certainly date to a time after Augustus's death, since Augustus was not deified while he was alive.

7. Summary of the Ancient Evidence for the Reckoning of Tiberius's Reign

A wide array of evidence concerning how Tiberius's contemporaries and near-contemporaries reckoned the years of his reign is available to us. Roman, Jewish, and Christian authors mention the length of Tiberius's reign. Numismatic evidence covers the Roman homeland and the provinces, both west and east. Inscriptional evidence in both Latin and Greek ranging from Spain in the west to Egypt in the east also testifies to first-century practice concerning the years of Tiberius's reign. From this widespread range of witnesses, it is possible to draw some conclusions.

Two important negative deductions can be confidently asserted. First, there is no support for the supposition that the beginning of Tiberius's reign was reckoned from his joint rule of the provinces with Augustus. Second, there is no evidence for inclusive reckoning of Tiberius's reign.

There are also positive conclusions that can be stated. Tiberius's reign was reckoned either by factual years or by the non-inclusive method. Under either reckoning, Jesus's baptism in the summer or autumn of Tiberius's fifteenth year would have taken place in AD 29. Using the various forms of evidence from the first century, Tiberius's fifteenth year would be as shown below in Table 1.

Given the pervasiveness of the early evidence for Tiberius's reign, it is extremely unlikely that either Luke or his audience would have understood Luke 3:1 to place Jesus's baptism in any other year than AD 29. An earlier acknowledged starting point for Tiberius's reign among his contemporaries or near-contemporaries in Luke's day, as far as I can determine, has no support from any numismatic or inscriptional evidence from the first century and no

Reckoning method	Evidence			Tiberius's fifteenth year
	Literary	Numismatic	Epigraphic	
Factual reign	Tacitus Suetonius Cassius Dio Josephus	Roman imperial coins	Latin inscriptions	20 August AD 28– 19 August AD 29 / 17 September AD 28– 16 September AD 29
Non-inclusive / Roman civil year	Tertullian (probably)			1 January AD 29– 31 December AD 29
Non-inclusive / Egyptian year	Philo (probably) Clement (probably)	Alexandrian coins	Greek (Egyptian) inscriptions	29 September AD 28– 28 September AD 29
Non-inclusive / Actian year		Syrian provincial coins		2 September AD 28– 1 September AD 29

Table 1: Evidence for possible reckoning methods for Tiberius's fifteenth year.

unassailable evidence from the surviving literary–historical sources from the first two centuries AD. In addition, I can find no advocate of an early dating for Tiberius's reign who correctly and accurately cites numismatic or inscriptional evidence in support of such a date. This, in turn, calls into question AD 30 or 31 (or any year before AD 30) as possible years of Jesus's crucifixion, since the Gospels' testimony (especially the Gospel of John) indicates a ministry for Jesus of over two years. In fact, the testimony of the combined evidence from the Gospels for a ministry of about three and a half years supports AD 33 as the correct year of the crucifixion.

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