

## Coming Home, Part 3, To Chaos and Uncertainty

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**BIG IDEA – God comes home to a dark and chaotic world.**

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**scripture focus** - Luke 2:1-7 NLT <https://bible.com/bible/116/luk.2.1-7.NLT>

“At that time **the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire.** (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David’s ancient home. **He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee.** He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child. **And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born.** She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, **because there was no lodging available for them.**”

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Let’s just say, it wasn’t an easy Christmas morning for Mary and Joseph!

As we talked about last week, God did not hide the way Jesus was conceived. We also discover, that did God did not make it easy on them, delivering a live birth in ancient times where mortality rates were 50%\*. Plus, God had to get the couple from Nazareth to Bethlehem, a mere 80 miles of hilly trails, harsh weather, and hoodlums. Adding to the tension, Mary was in her last trimester. Have you ever traveled with a nine-month pregnant woman?

Icing on the Christmas Cake... the one hotel in town was booked up, so Joseph had to find last minute accommodations fast - but nothing was available.

Matthew’s gospel wants us to know that Jesus was prophesied to be a Nazarene ([Matthew 2:23](#)), and, the Messiah had to be born in Bethlehem ([Micah 5:2](#))

How does God get the couple from their hometown to their ancestral town? And, why does everything feel so difficult, so dangerous?

In these seven verses out of Luke, we see that God chose to bring His only Son, the Savior for all of humanity’s sins, into our world.

Definitely NOT in the best of circumstances, comforts or accommodations – but in the commonness of struggles we can all relate to.

Jesus came home to the dark planet to bring light. He came home to chaos to bring peace.

The angels got it right, “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!” Luke 2:14

Let’s look at this from three lenses:

- The Decree – obedience to Roman law, test of obedience.
- The Distance – traveling can be stressful back then, test of endurance.
- The Disquietude - state of uneasiness or anxiety, test of patience to peace.

## The Decree

“At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census.” Luke 2:1-3 NLT  
<https://bible.com/bible/116/luk.2.1-3.NLT>

What about this census? God either directs the affairs of men to do his will or knowing their decisions and desires, He has already accommodated the plan.

Augustus loved taking a census or assessing how to create more wealth from his constituent's tax base. The Roman citizens loved it for the luxuries it provided them but hated it because of the emperor's opulence. The Jewish citizens just hated it! The Jewish community hated the census so much that it triggered a whole new sect of terrorism among themselves, these became the Jewish extremist called the “Zealots.” One of Jesus' own disciples came out of this terrorist group, Simon the Zealot.

One of those revolts is mentioned by Luke, in Acts, when Gamaliel makes his speech to the Sanhedrin in [Acts 5:37](#).

Just to be clear, the census was NOT a tax, it was an assessment. There was no money due upon registration! For Caesar Augustus, this registration/assessment would determine future taxes that helped keep the Roman army healthy.

There is a lot more in the notes about Augustus, the emperor and Quirinius, the Governor.

The fact that Luke wrote such detail about this census, which has its own controversy, yields two applications for us today:

1. **God uses difficult circumstances to bring about His will and fulfillment of His plans and promises!** Don't think for one moment that God will not bring a certain amount of pain and struggle to force us to stay on His path. When we signed up to follow Jesus, God helps us do the unwanted, sometimes impossible means of accomplishing His will and plan for our lives and the greater purpose of the Kingdom of God. We may not understand at the time, but it will likely make sense years later! **For God, it placed Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem where the Messiah was predicted to be born hundreds of years earlier.**
2. **Luke gives us an amazing compare and contrast model when he points out that Joseph and Mary complied to the law, rather than rebel, riot or protest.** I'm just saying. **Luke's little fact of the census and the couple's willingness to submit is clearly a godly response!** Let's not forget, this would **cost them for travel, accommodations loss of income from work and a general disruption of life.**

## The Distance

“And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David’s ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child.” Luke 2:4-5 NLT <https://bible.com/bible/116/luk.2.4-5.NLT>

Mary and Joseph traveled to Bethlehem in Judaea, where Joseph’s family live. The journey takes four or five days as Nazareth is 65-80 miles from Bethlehem.

The [L.A. TIMES ARCHIVES](#), back on December 23, 1995, writes, A Long, Cold Road to Bethlehem: Nativity: Gospel accounts of Mary and Joseph’s journey gloss over the arduous reality of life and travel in ancient Galilee, scholars say.

This wasn’t a bad bus ride or an 80-mile road trip in a car without air conditioning! This was a week-long, slow-paced walk, possibly donkey ride up and down an arduous dirt path. It made for a tough 10-miles-a-day journey to the little town of Bethlehem.

Even with the likelihood of traveling with relatives or trade caravans for protection, this was not a [cakewalk](#).

As I said earlier, being pregnant is already hard. A woman’s body has to accommodate massive changes in her own body to give the baby EVERYTHING it needs to grow in her protected womb. I do not think this one fact has changed over the eons of time since babies are continuing to be born – traveling in your last trimester, let alone the last month of pregnancy is never a good idea!

You know what I mean! It’s not exactly safe for anyone – the baby, the mother and certainly not for the father who is clueless of the experience himself!

Everyone agrees, Mary was in her final month of pregnancy and traveling with no restrooms!

These two tiny verses can’t possibly unpack the reality of what it took to take a little trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem!

If any mother agrees, let me hear an AMEN!

Both my daughters have done our family vacation in Tahoe, California while pregnant with their first child! It’s not at all like the weeklong trip to Bethlehem, but a 9-hour roadtrip at 9 months pregnant was a doozy! My granddaughter Millie was born just a week later - A WEEK LATER! Big respect for both our girls!

## The Disquietude

“And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them.” Luke 2:6-7 NLT <https://bible.com/bible/116/luk.2.7.NLT>

And when they arrived in Bethlehem, it seemed as though nothing went right.

Each one of these difficult situations, virginal conception, forced travel and nine months pregnant had to be navigated very carefully, and yet, right at the end, when the time for Jesus to be born was upon them – now there’s no proper place to have him.

Luke's point is simple, yet profound. God wasn't born in a posh, plush, royal palace as anyone would expect of a god that decides to live in this world. No, Jesus' environment was practical and theological in its purpose.

The manger was real life object lesson as to how Jesus' own life would be lived.

- Poor, but not destitute.
- Common, but not lacking the charisma of God.
- Jesus was born and buried in a borrowed trough, hewn out of stone.

God did not make it easy on the mother that would bear His son, nor the earthly father that would raise him.

Have you ever struggled to obey the laws of our government?

Have you ever traveled a circuitous journey, not knowing how it would go?

Were you born in a barn? Jesus was.

Jesus came in the most humble, crazy conditions to make his home among us. To be born as one of us, to live as one of us and to die far worse than any of us.

No matter where you came from, what you came from or out of, you and I are not out of reach for God to redeem us and make us new.

You can have a new start, be a new person, and have a new life – here and now. Don't wait for heaven to be your final destination, let God make things right and new here today!

May the gift you open this Christmas season be the gift of eternal life!

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## NOTES

### Scriptures

**Luke 2:1-7 NLT** <https://bible.com/bible/116/luk.2.1-7.NLT>

“At that time **the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire.** (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census. And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. **He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee.** He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child. **And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born.** She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, **because there was no lodging available for them.**”

### Questions

Q: Have you ever struggled to obey the laws of our government?

Q: Have you ever traveled a circuitous journey, not knowing how it would go?

Q: Were you born in a barn?

## Divining Deeper into God's Word

### Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers

#### Luke 2:1

There went out a decree.—**The passage that follows has given rise to almost endless discussion.** The main facts may be summed up as follows:—(1) The word "taxed" is used in its older English sense of simple "**registration**," and in that sense is a true equivalent for the Greek word. The corresponding verb appears in Hebrews 12:23. It does not involve, as to modern ears it seems to do, the payment of taxes. The "world" (literally, the inhabited world, οἰκουμένη, œcumenè,—the word from which we form the word "œcumenical" as applied to councils) is taken, as throughout the New Testament, for the Roman empire. **What Augustus is said to have decreed, was a general census.** (2) It may be admitted that no Roman or Jewish historian speaks distinctly of such a general census as made at this time. On the other hand, the collection of statistical returns of this nature was an ever-recurring feature of the policy of Augustus.

#### Matthew 2:23

**Being a Nazarene:** He had heard men speak with scorn of "the Nazarene," and yet the very syllables of that word had also fallen on his ears in one of the most glorious of the prophecies admitted to be Messianic—"There shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a Netzer (Branch) shall grow out of his roots" (Isaiah 11:1). So he found in the word of scorn the nomen et omen of glory. The town of Nazareth probably took its name from this meaning of the word, as pointing, like our -hurst and -holt, to the trees and shrubs for which it was conspicuous.

### Barnes notes on the Bible

#### Luke 2:1

In those days - About the time of the birth of John and of Christ. A decree - A law commanding a thing to be done. Caesar Augustus - This was the Roman emperor. His first name was Octavianus. He was the nephew of Julius Caesar, and obtained the empire after his death. He took the name "Augustus - i. e., august," or honorable - as a compliment to his own greatness; and from him the month "August," which was before called "Sextilis," received its name.

Should be taxed - Our word "tax" means to levy and raise money for the use of the government. This is not the meaning of the original word here. It means rather to "enroll," or take a "list" of the citizens, with their employments, the amount of their property, etc., equivalent to what was meant by census.

#### Luke 2:7

Swaddling clothes - When **a child among the Hebrews was born, it was washed in water, rubbed in salt, and then wrapped in swaddling clothes;** that is, not garments regularly made, as with us, but bands or blankets that confined the limbs closely, **Ezekiel 16:4 [And as for your**

**birth, on the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you, nor rubbed with salt, nor wrapped in swaddling cloths].** There was nothing special in the manner in which the infant Jesus was treated.

### Matthew Henry' Concise Commentary

**Luke 2:1-7** The fulness of time was now come, when God would send forth his Son, made of a woman, and made under the law. The circumstances of his birth were very mean.

### Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary

**Luke 2:4, 5** Not only does Joseph, who was of the royal line, go to Bethlehem (1Sa 16:1), but Mary too—not from choice surely in her condition, but, probably, for personal enrollment, as herself an heiress.

### Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges

**Luke 2:4** [Bethlehem] Thus was fulfilled the prophecy of Micah 5:2, "Thou, Bethlehem-Ephratah ... out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel." Cf. Luke 4:8, "And thou, O tower of the flock" (Migdol Eder, Genesis 35:21), "unto thee shall it come, even the first dominion."

### Benson Commentary

#### Luke 2:6, 7

Tradition informs us that the stable, in which the holy family was lodged, was, according to the custom of the country, hollowed out of a rock, and consequently the coldness of it, at least by night, must have greatly added to its other inconveniences. Because there was no room for them in the inn — The concourse of people at Bethlehem being very great on this occasion. **It seems there was but one principal inn at Bethlehem, now but a small village, and that when Joseph came thither it was full, so that he and Mary were obliged to lodge in a stable, fitted up as a receptacle for poor travelers, in which they, and the animals that brought them, were meanly accommodated under the same roof.** Now also there is seldom room for Christ in an inn. It will not be improper to observe, on this humiliating circumstance of our Lord's birth in a stable, how, **"through the whole course of his life, he despised the things most esteemed by men. For though he was the Song of Solomon of God, when he became man he chose to be born of parents in the meanest condition of life. Though he was heir of all things, he chose to be born in an inn, nay, in the stable of an inn, where, instead of a cradle, he was laid in a manger. The angels reported the good news of his birth, not to the rabbis and great men, but to shepherds, who, being plain honest people, were unquestionably good witnesses of what they heard and saw. When he grew up he wrought with his father as a carpenter. And afterward, while he executed the duties of his ministry, he was so poor that he had not a place where to lay his head, but lived on the bounty of his friends.** Thus, by going before men in the thorny path of poverty and affliction, he has taught them to be contented with their lot in this life, however humble it may be."

### Internet Links

[A list of all the things needed for a woman's labour in ancient times.](#)

For normal labour one must prepare beforehand: **olive oil, warm water, warm fomentations (for pain), soft sea sponges, pieces of wool, strips of cloth, a pillow, things to smell, a midwife's stool or chair, two beds and a proper room.**

## [What prophecy is Matthew 2:23 referring to regarding Jesus being a Nazarene?](#)

[Census of Quirinius](#) - The census that triggered a revolt of Jewish extremists.

In order to install an *ad valorem* property tax in the new province, Publius Sulpicius Quirinius, the legate (governor) of the province of Roman Syria starting in 6 CE,<sup>[1]</sup> was assigned to carry out a census in Judaea. **This would record the names of the owners of taxable property, along with its value, for which they would be taxed.**<sup>[2][3]</sup>

The census triggered a revolt of Jewish extremists (called Zealots) under the leadership of Judas of Galilee.<sup>[4]</sup> (Galilee itself was a separate territory under the rule of Herod Antipas.) Judas seems to have found the census objectionable because it ran counter to a biblical injunction (the traditional Jewish reading of Exodus 30:12) and because it would lead to taxes paid in heathen coins bearing an image of the emperor.<sup>[5]</sup>

**[The revolt is mentioned by Luke, in Acts, when Gamaliel makes his speech, "But one member, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, who was an expert in religious law and respected by all the people, stood up and ordered that the men be sent outside the council chamber for a while. Then he said to his colleagues, "Men of Israel, take care what you are planning to do to these men! Some time ago there was that fellow Theudas, who pretended to be someone great. About 400 others joined him, but he was killed, and all his followers went their various ways. The whole movement came to nothing. **After him, at the time of the census, there was Judas of Galilee. He got people to follow him, but he was killed, too, and all his followers were scattered.**" Acts of the Apostles 5:34-37 NLT**  
<https://bible.com/bible/116/act.5.34-37.NLT>

## [Quirinius](#)

**The Jews already hated their pagan conquerors, and censuses were forbidden under Jewish law.**<sup>[11]</sup> **The assessment was greatly resented by the Jews,** and open revolt was prevented only by the efforts of the high priest Joazar.<sup>[12]</sup> Despite efforts to prevent revolt, the census did trigger the revolt of Judas of Galilee and the **formation of the party of the Zealots,** according to Josephus<sup>[13]</sup> and of which Luke speaks in the Acts of the Apostles.<sup>[14]</sup>

## [Why do Roman records say Quirinius governed Syria in 6-12 AD?](#)

## [What Does the Bible Say about Simon the Zealot?](#)

## [What did the census accomplish at the time of Jesus birth?](#)

**This was an assessment of how the tax base would be decided – it was not a collection of taxes due upon registration!**

**For Caesar Augustus, this registration/assessment would determine future taxes that helped keep the Roman army healthy,** build roads, and finance army campaigns to keep conquering the world. **Plus, he was a very luxurious emperor.** He ordered widespread Roman censuses at least three times: in 28 BC, 8 BC, and AD 14.

**Joseph and Mary were Roman Law-abiding citizens** and obeyed the governor's command. The reason Joseph had to go to Bethlehem, Luke says, was that **Bethlehem was the town of David, and he was of David's lineage. In fact, Mary was of David's lineage too. It would cost Joseph for travel, accommodations loss of income from work and a general disruption of life. It would not cost him money, due upon arrival.**

**For God**, it placed Joseph and Mary in Bethlehem where the Messiah was predicted to be born hundreds of years earlier.

### [Compare and Contrast](#)

Luke may have intended to compare Joseph & Mary's decision to submit to the laws of the land to those who rose up in rebellion against Rome.

It appears Luke wanted his readers to compare and contrast the well-known actions of Judas with the actions of Mary and Joseph. Like Judas, Mary and Joseph are from Galilee. And yet unlike the revolutionary they don't rebel when commanded to register. They humbly obey.

**If anyone had a reason to rebel, they did. Mary with child, a long distance to travel and no room for them when they arrive. But suffering the insults, they conducted themselves as Rome, the oppressor state, required.**

Luke in both his gospel and Acts is insistent on the peaceful behavior of Christ and his followers. Despite Jesus being executed as an enemy of Rome, and His followers being the source of numerous riots, Luke stresses over and over again that the seditious overthrow of the government is not the way of those who follow Christ.

### **Zechariah's Prophecy about Jesus...**

"to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace."

**Luke 1:79** NLT <https://bible.com/bible/116/luk.1.79.NLT>

### [A Long, Cold Road to Bethlehem](#) – what travel was really like in ancient times.

Matthew's gospel reminds us...

**Matt. 1:22-23** The gospel of Matthew, quoting the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 7:14), says "All this happened to bring about what the LORD had said through the prophet: 'The young woman will be pregnant. She will have a son, and they will name him **Immanuel**,' which means '**God is with us**.'" (Matthew 1:22-23).

The facts are clear and with the appropriate definition of terms we can unequivocally conclude that human life begins at conception.