

JESUS IS
“God Rules” Luke 2:1-7
October 19, 2025

INTRO.: Who rules when it comes to life? Some see this cosmic war between good and evil, between God and Satan as a close battle. Eventually God wins but it's a close call. Is that what the Bible teaches? Some believe Jesus' death on the cross was a great tragedy but is that what the Bible teaches?

Peter is preaching to the crowd and he says:

Acts 2:22–24 “Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. **23** This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. **24** But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

What about when people go through very difficult experiences and God doesn't seem to intervene? From the Old Testament we can look at the life of Joseph. His brothers sell him into slavery; they tell their father a wild animal has eaten him. Joseph found favor in the eyes of Potiphar and is put in charge of Potiphar's house. Potiphar's wife tries to seduce him, but Joseph runs from her. She accuses him of rape and Potiphar has him thrown into prison. He interprets the dream of the baker and cupbearer but is forgotten in prison until Pharaoh has a dream and asks Joseph to interpret it. Joseph is put in charge of managing the food supply so there is enough for those in Egypt. His brothers come asking for food, and eventually his father comes as well. He reveals his identity to them, and after their father dies, his brothers are afraid Joseph will kill them. This is Joseph's response to their fears:

Genesis 50:19–21 But Joseph said to them, “Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? **20** You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. **21** So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

The word used to describe the truth that God is in control is sovereignty. This morning, we want to observe how God displays His sovereignty in the birth of Jesus. There are three things we can see in Luke 2:1-7: **THE DECREE, THE DESTINATION, and THE DELIVERY**. Let's begin by reading Luke 2:1-7 in unison.

Luke 2:1–7 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. **2** (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) **3** And everyone went to his own town to register. **4** So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. **5** He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. **6** While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, **7** and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

THE DECREE

v. 1-3

Luke 2:1–3 In those days **Caesar Augustus** issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. **2** (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) **3** And everyone went to his own town to register.

The first person we see being mentioned is Caesar Augustus (also referred to as Octavian). Who is he? The following information is from multiple sources.

“Caesar:” means “emperor”

“Augustus:” means “revered,” “honored,” or “esteemed” It carries connotations of respect and authority.

Augustus's ascension to the throne marked the beginning of the Roman Empire. He restored unity and orderly government after a long period of destructive civil wars, and ushered in the Pax Romana, an era of peace and prosperity throughout the Greco-Roman world that lasted for two centuries. He is arguably the most significant person in Roman history. (John MacArthur)

He ruled from 27 BC until his death in 14 AD, which was a time of peace and extensive architectural achievements. Tiberius, Augustus' stepson, ruled after his death. Following his death, the title "Augustus" was given to all Roman emperors. The one mentioned in Acts 25:21, 25, is not Octavian, but Nero. (Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Dictionary)

"issued a decree:" this is an imperial edict (Robert H. Stein)

"that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world:" Census were taken for military service or taxes. Since Mary and Joseph were Jews they wouldn't have appreciated the Roman ruler and since they were Jews they were exempt from military service. The Jews didn't like the Romans because they were Gentiles and were known for their blatant idolatry. They were upset when Peter went to Cornelius' house.

Acts 10:28 He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But God has shown me that I should not call any man impure or unclean.

Acts 11:1–3 The apostles and the brothers throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. **2** So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him **3** and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them."

"Quirinius:" He was the Roman governor at the time of Jesus' birth. There is some difficulty with the date of the decree which some say was about 8 BC and Jesus wasn't born until 4 BC most likely. Possibly it took a while for the implementation of the decree due to the fact ancient communication was slow and implementation slowly enforced (MacArthur).

"everyone went to his own town to register:" this would have been Joseph's ancestral home. It is through the most powerful leader on earth at the time to get Mary and Joseph where He wanted them to be and we will see in a few minutes why this was so important.

Many times, in Scripture the governmental leaders thought they were in charge only to discover they were pawns in the hand of Almighty God. We can see this with Pharaoh and the Israelites when God told Moses to go to Pharaoh and command him to let God's people go.

Exodus 6:1–8 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my mighty hand he will drive them out of his country." **2** God also said to Moses, "I am the LORD. **3** I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them. **4** I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as aliens. **5** Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant. **6** "Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. **7** I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. **8** And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD.' "

Exodus 7:1–6 Then the LORD said to Moses, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron will be your prophet. **2** You are to say everything I command you, and your brother Aaron is to tell Pharaoh to let the Israelites go out of his country. **3** But I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and though I multiply my miraculous signs and wonders in Egypt, **4** he will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and with mighty acts of judgment I will bring out my divisions, my people the Israelites. **5** And the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I stretch out my hand against Egypt and bring the Israelites out of it." **6** Moses and Aaron did just as the LORD commanded them.

Exodus 9:10–12 So they took soot from a furnace and stood before Pharaoh. Moses tossed it into the air, and festering boils broke out on men and animals. **11** The magicians could not stand before Moses because of the boils that were on them and on all the Egyptians. **12** But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart and he would not listen to Moses and Aaron, just as the LORD had said to Moses.

Exodus 9:33–35 Then Moses left Pharaoh and went out of the city. He spread out his hands toward the LORD; the thunder and hail stopped, and the rain no longer poured down on the land. **34** When Pharaoh saw that the rain and hail and thunder had stopped, he sinned again: He and his officials hardened their hearts. **35** So Pharaoh's heart was hard and he would not let the Israelites go, just as the LORD had said through Moses.

Exodus 10:18–20 Moses then left Pharaoh and prayed to the LORD. **19** And the LORD changed the wind to a very strong west wind, which caught up the locusts and carried them into the Red Sea. Not a locust was left anywhere in Egypt. **20** But the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he would not let the Israelites go.

Exodus 11:9–10 The LORD had said to Moses, “Pharaoh will refuse to listen to you—so that my wonders may be multiplied in Egypt.” **10** Moses and Aaron performed all these wonders before Pharaoh, but the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart, and he would not let the Israelites go out of his country.

Proverbs 21:1 The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.

What happens when you and I face the difficulties, challenges, heartaches, and unfairness in the world in which we live? Do we appeal to God, the Sovereign of the universe? God didn’t lose track of you when life got difficult. Every person wants to know the why of the trials of life, but sometimes God doesn’t give that to us.

How about what God does in the time of Habakkuk? Habakkuk brings his complaint to God that the Israelites are not living for the Lord. So, God uses the Babylonians, probably the most vicious and evil empire of the time, to discipline the Israelites. Habakkuk wants to know how God can use such evil people to discipline God’s chosen nation. God tells Habakkuk that he will take care of the Babylonians. In his closing prayer Habakkuk prays: **Habakkuk 3:16–19 16** (page 1461 in the pew Bible) I heard and my heart pounded, my lips quivered at the sound; decay crept into my bones, and my legs trembled. Yet I will wait patiently for the day of calamity to come on the nation invading us. **17** Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, **18** yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior. **19** The Sovereign LORD is my strength; he makes my feet like the feet of a deer, he enables me to go on the heights.

How is it with me? As I go through life, am I willing to trust God even when I can’t figure out why things are happening? God is the one who causes Caesar Augustus to issue the decree. Secondly, we see:

THE DESTINATION

v. 4-5

Luke 2:4-5 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. **5** He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

Where did David go to report for the census? He went from Nazareth to Bethlehem. This was a journey of approximately 90 miles.

So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem : Bethlehem is located in southern Israel, close to Jerusalem and is higher in elevation than Nazareth. Bethlehem is mentioned in the Old Testament by the prophet Micah.

Micah 5:2 “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.”

Bethlehem was a small and very insignificant town. The prophet couldn’t have been referring to David because he had died long before Micah’s time. Micah also describes this person as the “*ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times:*” from ancient times is translated “from the days of eternity (NASB)” and “from everlasting (NKJV). This person being described is eternal, a claim that couldn’t apply to one who is just human, he must be God. This is a description of the Messiah, the one who would be born, not in Jerusalem, but in this small, insignificant town of Bethlehem. This was predicted centuries before Jesus’ birth. One would be hard pressed to say it was just a coincidence. The prediction is repeated by the chief priests and teachers of the law when asked by Herod where the Messiah was to be born (Matthew 2:5-6).

Another interesting thing to note is the meaning of Bethlehem in the Hebrew, which was the original language of the Old Testament.

“*Bet*” means house; “*lehem*” means bread.

Who did Jesus claim to be in the gospel of John?

John 6:35 Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

For emphasis Jesus uses the personal pronoun which didn’t have to be used because you could just use the verb form, but he uses both for emphasis. Literally it means, “I, I am.” That is, nobody else can fulfill this claim that I am making. Jesus is saying that no one can truly live without me.

“the town of David:” the “city of David” was title given to Mount Zion in Jerusalem because that was where David ruled as king, but he was born and raised in Bethlehem.

Samuel anointed David as Saul’s successor as King of Israel.

1 Samuel 16:1 The LORD said to Samuel, “How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.”

1 Samuel 16:13 So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power. Samuel then went to Ramah.

Luke continues to tell why Joseph had to go to Bethlehem to register.

“because he belonged to the house and line of David:” this is a reminder that the Messiah was to come from the line of David.

Jeremiah 23:5–6 “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. **6** In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness. (see also Isaiah 11:1+)

“He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child:” For the baby to be born in Bethlehem, Mary had to go with Joseph. Some have argued that only the head of the family had to register, but there is evidence that in Syria women 12 years and older had to pay a poll tax (Howard I. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*).

We should perhaps reflect that it was the combination of a decree by the emperor in distant Rome and the gossiping tongues of Nazareth that brought Mary to Bethlehem at just the time to fulfil the prophecy about the birthplace of the Christ (Mi. 5:2). God works through all kinds of people to effect His purposes (Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St. Luke*).

No matter the reason people may come up with, it was God’s sovereign rule that truly led Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus as prophesied in the Old Testament. Once again, we are reminded that we can trust what is written in the Bible to be the Word of God. What is your source of truth?

The decree by Caesar Augustus led to the destination, Bethlehem, the house of bread, where the *Bread of Life* would be born. This leads us to:

THE DELIVERY

v. 6-7

Luke 2:6-7 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, **7** and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Mary delivered a son, which once again, was fulfillment of what we read in The Old Testament.

Isaiah 7:14 Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.

Then, there is the passage in Isaiah 9 which will be the chapter we will study in our Advent series beginning on the last Sunday in November.

Isaiah 9:6–7 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. **7** Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

“she wrapped him in cloths:” strips of fabric, commonly used for newborns. Jesus didn’t come with any fanfare, He didn’t come dressed in kingly attire, such as a royal robe.

“placed him in a manger:” The word, *manger*, was commonly used for feeding trough. This doesn’t necessarily mean Jesus was born in a stable, as one could find feeding troughs anywhere animals were kept (MacArthur).

This reminds us of the description given by the Apostle Paul in Philippians 2.

Philippians 2:5–8 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: **6** Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, **7** but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. **8** And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross!

Jesus came to serve and not be served. He turned everything upside down.

Matthew 20:25–28 Jesus called them together and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. **26** Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, **27** and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— **28** just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

Jesus was born to a very humble teenager, a commoner by the standards of the day. He was born in a very humble town, Bethlehem, the house of bread for the Bread of Life. He was born in a very humble place, a manger, a common feeding trough for the animals. He was dressed in a very humble way, strips of cloth, just like every other baby. As Pastor Paul will share next week, His birth was announced to a very humble group of people, the shepherds. Yet, all the way thru we see the sovereignty of God working in the fulfillment of the Word of God.

You can trust God with everything. This is the only true God, the One who loved you so much He sent His one and only Son, in the way we just described, as predicted in Scripture, to pay the penalty for your sin. I texted some folks last week with this message:

We are reminded that some day Jesus will return, but He will come as King. Some day you will pass from this life, and you will face God. All the things the world values will no longer matter. What you’ve done with Jesus will determine your eternal destiny.

SO WHAT???

*Am I running the race of life with the wrong rules?

Ephesians 2:8–9 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— **9** not by works, so that no one can boast.

*Am I relying on the truth of Scripture? The Bible, authored by God’s Spirit, working through those who wrote it, so that it is without error.

*Am I trusting God, who is Sovereign, the one who works all things together for my good and His glory, even when I don’t understand. Even when I can’t make sense of it all? Am I willing to give to God what I’m struggling with, believing He is good, that He knows what is best, and that He has eternity in mind?

John Piper on the Providence of God

In his book *A Sweet and Bitter Providence*, John Piper offers these thoughts about God's providence:

Life is not a straight line leading from one blessing to the next and then finally to heaven. Life is a winding and troubled road. Switchback after switchback. And the point of biblical stories like Joseph and Job and Esther and Ruth is to help us feel in our bones (not just know in our heads) that God is for us in all these strange turns. God is not just showing up after the trouble and cleaning it up. He is plotting the course and managing the troubles with far-reaching purposes for our good and for the glory of Jesus Christ.

Source: John Piper, *A Sweet and Bitter Providence* (Crossway Books & Bibles, 2010), pp.101-102