

Exegetical Notes - Luke 2:1-7

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Luke 2:1-7

Verses 1-2

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.)

- Caesar Augustus ruled as Emperor of Rome from 27 B.C. to 14 A.D. Quirinius was governor of Syria from 4 B.C. to 1 A.D. Roman records show that this census was taken during his first term as governor. These dates then set the event of Jesus' birth in history. The change from B.C. to A.D. was determined by them.

Verse 3

And everyone went to his own town to register.

- The purpose of the Roman census was to determine the size of the native population ruled by Rome in any particular place. From this data, proper information related to the amount of tribute due Rome from that place could be determined and the number of troop enlistees from that place could be set. As the people would be taxed according to the amount of tribute determined, the purpose of the census was taxation in everyone's mind.
- To participate in this event that would only raise their taxes, the people in each area were required to travel back to the town of their ancestral origin to register for the taxes. For some people who still lived in the town of the family's origin, this requirement presented no problems. However for others, it presented a great and expensive inconvenience. It meant that many people would have to travel many miles at their own expense just to register to be taxed.

Verse 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.

- Joseph, the espoused husband of Mary the Mother of Jesus and, therefore, the earthly protector of our Lord, was one whose life was greatly disturbed by this Roman census. He lived in the town of Nazareth in the province of Galilee. But his home of family origin was Bethlehem in the province of Judea. He was descended from the family of King David and their hometown was Bethlehem. Thus, he was required to travel to Bethlehem. Though the actual distance does not seem far to us today, the journey, then, would have taken at least three days.

Verse 5

He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child.

- Mary was also of the house and line of David. As women were required to pay taxes, too, she also had to enroll for the census. Given the fact that she was already pregnant, she traveled with Joseph and was under his protection rather than that of her father.

Verses 6-7

While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 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.'

- While they were in Bethlehem their circumstances were made worse because the baby came.
- As the angel had told her, Mary gave birth to her first child which was a boy. See Luke 1:26-38.
- The baby was wrapped in “swaddling clothes” as was the custom of the day. He was placed in a manger, a feeding trough for farm animals. This is the only implication in the Bible that Jesus was born in a barn, or a cave used as a barn. All the tradition so related has grown from the use of this word and the fact that the child was laid in a manger.

- The reason that the baby was laid in a manger is that there was no room for Joseph's family in the local hotel.

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