

## CHRISTMAS INTERLUDE

### God's Stability In An Unsettled World At Christmas

#### Part I: God's Stability Amid Institutional Instability At Christmas

(Luke 2:1-20)

Introduction: (To show the need . . . )

This Christmas Season, we face instability in various institutions in an unsettled world:

(1) We face it on the national level: when a federal judge ruled against President Trump in a case involving "the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program," the editor of the Republican-American ("Get Measure of 'caravans,'" November 23:2018, p. 6A) reported that syndicated columnist Rich Lowry wrote: "Here is an unelected branch of government overstepping its constitutional bounds to frustrate a core priority of a president who ran and won on the issue of immigration." The editor added, "Of such rulings . . . is anarchy made." (Ibid.)

(2) We face it in evangelicalism: (a) my alma mater, Dallas Theological Seminary, just released a statement on "Unity, Diversity, and Community" (<https://www.dts.edu/about/policies/university-diversity-and-community>). Incredibly, these nouns are "masking" terms used by promoters of ecumenism ("unity"), LGBTQ orientations ("diversity") and Marxism ("community")! (B. Howse, Religious Trojan Horse, 2012, p. 476-485) The seminary's statement opposes these evils, but seeks to use their "masking" terms to teach Biblical truth, to "engage" the world in dialogue. However, as R. Albert Mohler, Jr. reported, such a practice has only led other evangelicals into error. ("Evangelical" What's In A Name?", in John H. Armstrong, gen. ed., The Coming Evangelical Crisis, 1996, p. 33)

(a) A member recently showed me pages 41-42 of the book, Gospel Reset by Ken Ham of Answers in Genesis where Mr. Ham wrote: "Many Christians are guilty of only preaching part of the gospel, specifically the power and hope of the gospel. But when you preach the power and the hope of the gospel, you're assuming the foundation has already been laid. This is a faulty assumption, especially in our post-Christian, godless culture. In this current moral climate, we can never assume that people possess a foundational knowledge concerning creation, sin, and death."

I was stunned at this: the "power" of the gospel that Ken Ham implies is insufficient to evangelize is the power of **God Himself**, Romans 1:16. Also, though the gospel does **not** claim God created the universe (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1-11), it does not need to do so: Romans 1:18-20 claims God has revealed His eternal power and Godhead **in creation** so that even **pagan** man is without excuse in acknowledging his Creator. In addition, John 16:7-11 claims the Holy Spirit convicts the **world** of **sin** relative to its need to trust in Christ! Ken Ham's Gospel Reset greatly errs!

Need: *So, we ask, "In view of the unsettledness we face, what insight does God have toward our stability?!"*

- I. When Caesar decreed that a census occur in Luke 2:1-3, there was much unrest in Israel's government:**
  - A. Herod who ruled Israel as a vassal king under Rome's Caesar Augustus normally collected his own taxes and paid tribute to Rome out of them. (Harold Hoehner, Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ, 1979, p. 17)
  - B. Yet, in 8/7 B. C., Herod had invaded Arabia to suppress some Arabs who troubled him, what angered Caesar into demoting Herod from being his "friend" into being his "subject," Ibid.; Josephus, Antiquities, xvi. 9. 3.
  - C. With Caesar removing Herod's autonomy, Rome's emperor exercised more direct control of Israel's affairs, what in part explains why Caesar Augustus himself ordered the Roman census for taxation in Luke 2:1-7.
  - D. Also, Herod was aging, he was in poor health, and he had much trouble with his sons who struggled to gain Israel's throne after their father's death, what Augustus himself knew since Herod changed his will six times before he died, and each time required the approval of Caesar. (Zon. Pict. Ency. Bible, v. Three, p. 138)
  - E. Caesar Augustus, an able, shrewd ruler, knew he had to keep a close watch over Israel once Herod died, so he wanted to take a census before Herod's passing better to prepare to preserve order there, Ibid., Hoehner.
- II. However, a Roman census would strain ties between the Hebrews and Augustus, fueling social unrest:**
  - A. Unlike taxation under Israel's own king Herod, Roman law required that Caesar's census for taxation make "the property owner . . . register . . . in the district in which his land was situated," Ibid., Hoehner, p. 15.
  - B. The Jews' property was the property of their fathers' estates, so the Romans complied with the custom of laying claim to one's family estate to assess it for taxation, thus requiring the Hebrews to travel back to their fathers' family estates to have those estates assessed for their taxation, Ibid.
  - C. Thus, taxation by Caesar's direct involvement required a mass movement of Hebrews from their homes to their fathers' estates, aggravating the Jews into desiring all the more to be free of Gentile rule, Ibid., p. 15, 18.
- III. Living in a land of Hebrews forced by a Gentile ruler to relocate for a census and assessment for taxing left Joseph and Mary facing many people who were very aggravated! They lived in an unsettled society!**

- IV. Such a mass mobilization of people would lead to housing crises, what Joseph and Mary faced, Lk. 2:4-7:**
- A. The relocation of many in the land to their fathers' estates would produce housing congestion in many towns.
  - B. Mary and Joseph faced this problem at Bethlehem: the city was so packed with aggravated people who had moved to be near their ancestors' estates for the census, there was no room for them in the inn, Luke 2:4-5.
  - C. Thus, with no room elsewhere, Mary gave birth to Jesus in a stable and laid Him in a manger, Luke 2:6-7.
- V. Even so, God's hand was involved to give Joseph and Mary stability in an unstable world, Luke 2:8-20:**
- A. Scripture predicted that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem of Ephrathah, Micah 5:2. "Ephrathah" was the ancient name of Bethlehem and "also apparently the name of the district (cf. Gen. 35:19; Ruth 4:11)" in Judah (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, ftn. to Micah 5:2), so it was necessary for Mary and Joseph to travel 70 miles from Nazareth to Bethlehem in Judaea for God's Word to be fulfilled. (Ibid., Map 12: The Ministry of Jesus)
  - B. However, to get Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem at the proper time, **God sovereignly** used (1) the unrest of Herod's overreaction in Caesar's view to troublesome Arabs, (2) the unrest of Herod's sons, (3) Herod's aging and (4) poor health to motivate Herod (5) to change his will so often (6) that Caesar got involved in a census before he died, (7) leading to the unrest of the forced relocation of many citizens in Israel! Above all the clamor at man's level of experience, God's hand was at work to get His Son to be born in Bethlehem.
  - C. In addition, God gave personal peace and joy to Mary and Joseph amid the stresses they faced, Luke 2:8-20:
    1. To cheer Mary amid her having to give birth to Jesus in a stable amid aggravated people after relocating from faraway Nazareth near the end of her pregnancy, God sent heaven's angels to shepherds in the fields with news of great joy about Jesus' birth, and they in turn visited the infant Jesus, Luke 2:8-16.
    2. The shepherds then spread abroad the news of Mary's infant, making all who heard it marvel, and giving treasured memories to Mary that offset the unsettledness stress that she and Joseph had faced, Lk. 2:17-20.

***Lesson:*** *Though Joseph and Mary faced great unsettledness in living amid an aggravated people and traveling many miles only for her to give birth in a stable, God was sovereignly orchestrating His will above all the unrest about them, and He personally encouraged Joseph and Mary with the visitations of the angels and the shepherds.*

***Application:*** *(1) May we trust in Christ for salvation, John 3:16. (2) In facing institutional unsettledness in today's world that leads to much stress on the human level, may we (a) trust Almighty God is sovereignly ruling in it all and (b) obey Scripture, (c) waiting upon the Lord to provide what encouragements we need in what we face in life.*

**Conclusion:** (To illustrate the message . . . )

Each of the issues of concern mentioned in our sermon introduction can be addressed with stability as follows:

(1) As for the unsettledness in the world exemplified in the immigration issue faced at the national level, we have often noted that Christ predicted such trouble in Revelation 3:21 (in light of Daniel 2:43 that claims the seed of men will not mix in our era), and promised to give us balm as we relied on Him by faith and applied His Word in life! God is simply allowing such unrest occur in our day like He did that first Christmas for Joseph and Mary to create a thirst for stability in men that they might search for it and find it in Christ via the ministry of Bible teaching churches!

(2) As for Dallas Theological Seminary's use in its recent statement of the words "unity, diversity and community," masking terms utilized by promoters of ecumenism, LGBTQ orientations and Marxism, (a) Jesus said His disciples were hated by the world, for they were not of it like He was not of it. Thus, the "unity" Christians are to have is a **select** "unity" with those of like faith, not an unholy "unity" with the world, John 17:14, 20-21. (b) The "community" to which such believers are to belong is the "community" of those of like faith who have been called **out** of the world, a **select** "community" **opposite** global ecumenism, LGBTQ orientation or Marxism! True, that "community" includes people diverse as to race, **birth** gender and nationality (Romans 1:16; Galatians 3:28-29), but only those people of such groups who also believe in Christ and are of like faith and holiness in life. (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15) There is no need to form a statement to "engage" apostates on "unity, diversity and community" -- the **kind** of "unity, diversity and community" that **God** wants us to have **already exists** in the **Biblical local church!**

(3) As for the gospel, it does not need to be "reset" as Ken Ham claims. Instead, the Church must rely on the Holy Spirit for outreach (John 16:7-11). In his 1919 book True Evangelism written to counter "false forces" of evangelism in his day, Lewis Sperry Chafer, founder of Dallas Theological Seminary, wrote (p. 134-135): "(I)t is the Spirit who convinces of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment in answer to prayer which He inspires; and it is the Spirit Who meets the willing soul with the power of God in salvation." We have **always** needed to rely on God!

**May we trust in Christ for salvation. Then, may we face institutional unsettledness by trusting in God sovereignly to rule, and focus on heeding His Word and waiting on Him to provide for what we need in life.**