

CHRISTMAS INTERLUDE

God's Encouragements Amid Life's Oppressions, Luke 2:1-20

I. God's Edification Amid Government Oppression

(Luke 2:1-4, 9-11a)

Introduction: (To show the need . . .)

Many people struggle with depression at Christmas, for if they try to focus on what makes them happy, they only note their lack of joy due to oppression. One realm of trial is that of an oppressive government. We illustrate:

(1) Intrigue in the government oppresses people. Syndicated columnist Megan McArdle in her November 22 column, "How can Republicans defend Trump? Because of the Clintons" ("Quotable" editorial, Republican-American, November 23, 2019, p. 8A) expressed her concern over this issue, claiming, ". . . (C)omplicating the efforts to nail (President) Trump is the Democratic Party's own history of winking at corruption and abuses of power, as long as they were committed by the right people. Most particularly, people named Clinton . . . Hillary Clinton's astonishing luck in the cattle-futures market; Bill Clinton's profligate sexual misbehavior; the renting of the Lincoln Bedroom to donors; the crony pardons; the foundation that appeared to be selling access to Hillary Clinton . . ."

(2) Conflicts between officials oppresses people. Victor Davis Hanson in the November 21 National Review Online/The Corner article, "Sheep During Reset, Lions Now?" (Ibid., "Quotable" editorial, November 22, 2019, p. 10A) expressed his concern over this issue, lamenting, "(I)t is baffling that a parade of civil servants now express their disenchantment with the White House policies of delaying lethal military aid that was fully delivered. Yet, many of these critics were in government service between 2009-17 . . . Where was their outrage at resetting with the Russians and leaving the Ukrainians to fend for themselves when it came to stopping Russian armor?"

(3) Oppressive taxation plagues people. The November 21, 2019 Republican-American editorial ("Tolls prove a hard sell," p. 10A) reported, "Early on, we predicted Gov. Lamont would have a hard time selling a general tolling plan" since "Connecticut residents likely would view such a plan as a call for the people to clean up after incompetent and/or spineless politicians," but "(d)on't be surprised if Capitol politicians eventually try to revive general tolling."

(4) Identity politics in government oppresses people. Richard Cohen's piece, "Marooned in Democratic Party" (Ibid., November 23, 2019, p. 8A) claimed that since he felt he could not vote to re-elect President Trump, he was "stuck with the Democratic Party . . . that . . . insists you are ineffably and permanently little more than your identity at birth -- black, white, Hispanic, Asian or whatever . . ."

Need: *So we ask, "What edification does God offer for the government oppression we face this Christmas?!"*

I. Joseph and Mary's trip to Bethlehem was plagued by government oppression similar to what we face:

A. Joseph and Mary's journey was plagued by government intrigue:

1. Luke 2:1 states that their trip was necessitated by a decree from the Roman Emperor Caesar Augustus for the whole Roman world (*oikoumene*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 563-564) to be registered (*apographo*, Ibid., p. 89), what involved a census with taxation. (Harold W. Hoehner, Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ, 1979, p. 15)
2. "Since the Jews' property was the property of the fathers' estates, the Romans would comply to the custom of laying claim to one's family estate in order to assess it for taxation. Every person needed to appear to be questioned so as to make a proper assessment of his property," what would require both Joseph and Mary to make the 70-mile trip from Nazareth to Bethlehem, the town of their ancestral origins, Ibid., Luke 2:3-4.
3. Normally, King Herod who served under Caesar would collect his own taxes and then pay tribute out of them to Rome, so it seems unusual to some for Caesar himself to collect taxes from Judaea. (Ibid., p. 17)
4. However, Herod had shortly before this census fallen out of favor with Caesar, so Herod's autonomy would have been removed, and Herod was getting old and his sons were struggling for the throne, Ibid.
5. Thus, Caesar was not willing to risk having to deal with a military conflict in Judaea, so he felt it prudent to take his own census to assess Herod's domain in the event of trouble there after Herod had died, Ibid.

B. Joseph and Mary's journey was plagued by division among influential officials in the government:

1. As Herod was nearing the end of his life, an intense struggle occurred among his sons for his throne following their father's death, what led him to execute two of his sons and to change his will several times before his death that occurred in the spring of 4 B. C., Ibid., p. 22.
2. Each time Herod changed his will or decided to execute one of his sons, he had to obtain Caesar's approval (Ibid., p. 22-23), so Caesar was acutely aware that future trouble might well be brewing in Herod's realm!

3. Thus, Caesar's census to assess Judaea's people in case of a crisis was caused in part by official infighting.
- C. Joseph and Mary's journey was also plagued by oppressive taxation:
1. In their era, Joseph and Mary faced taxes "on almost everything" -- real estate taxes, poll taxes, export and import taxes, crop taxes, income taxes, road use taxes, animal taxes, vehicle taxes, salt taxes, sales taxes, property transfer taxes and even taxes on emergencies, *Zon. Pict. Ency. Bible*, vol. Five, p. 605.
 2. As the Roman census involved another tax (*Ibid.*), the census with all the other taxes was also oppressive!
- D. Joseph and Mary's journey was plagued by identity politics:
1. Herod was part "Idumean," a part descendant of Jacob's brother Esau, an Edomite and Arab, so the theologically conservative Jewish Pharisees opposed his rule due to his lineage, *Ibid.*, vol. Three, p. 132.
 2. Such opposition caused Herod to be defensive and competitive toward all who opposed him, which attitude would have spread to his sons, leading them to compete against one another, creating unrest in Herod's administration that led to Caesar's direct census rule and Joseph and Mary's trip to Bethlehem!
- II. **Yet, God sovereignly used all of this government oppression to fulfill Bible prophecy on Messiah's birth:**
- A. Micah 5:2 predicted that Messiah would be born in Bethlehem of Judaea. (Matthew 2:4-6)
 - B. However, Joseph and Mary resided in Nazareth 70 miles by road-travel north of Bethlehem, and Mary was chosen by God to be the woman to give birth to the Messiah, Jesus, Luke 1:26-33.
 - C. God accordingly **used** Caesar Augustus' edict to force Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem that Messiah Jesus might be born in that city of David as prophesied by Scripture, cf. Luke 2:9-11a.
 - D. Thus, all the intrigue, division among influential officials, oppressive taxation and identity politics in the government, as evil as they all were, *came under a sovereign, good God's USE of them to fulfill His Word.*

Lesson: *Though Joseph and Mary were forced by the evils of intrigue, division among influential government parties, oppressive taxation and identity politics in the government to travel the 70-mile trip by foot from Nazareth to Bethlehem, our sovereign, good God UTILIZED these evils to fulfill Scripture regarding Messiah Jesus' birth.*

Application: *(1) May we trust in Christ for salvation, John 3:16. (2) Though facing evils in the government like intrigue, division among influential officials, oppressive taxation and identity politics, may we look for our sovereign, good God's USE of even these evils to accomplish His good purpose in our lives with blessing.*

Conclusion: (To illustrate the message . . .)

Our sovereign, good God offers **edifying Biblical contrasts in the local church** to the oppressive intrigue, division among officials, taxation and identity politics we face **in the government** (as follows):

(1) In **edifying Biblical contrast** to evil intrigue in the **government**, Ephesians 4:11-15 reveals God has given leaders to the **local church** for the edifying of the rest of the body that it might spiritually mature. We then cease being tossed about by deceptive intrigue wrought by evil teachers, but speaking the truth in love, we can grow up into Christ, our Spiritual Head. We should thus take our discouragement over intrigue we witness in government and turn it into a commitment to minister and be ministered unto in the local church for the edification of everyone involved.

(2) In **edifying Biblical contrast** to destructive division among **government officials**, Ephesians 4:1-3 calls believers in the **local church** to walk worthy of their vocation in Christ with all humility, longsuffering and forbearance, endeavoring to preserve the unity the Holy Spirit has produced in the body in the bond of peace.

(3) In **edifying Biblical contrast** to oppressive taxation we face from the **government**, 2 Corinthians 9:6-10 directs that each believer in the **local church** donate to God's ministry in line with his personal will, not out of any oppressive pressure. As he does this, God will reward him with the remuneration that fits his individual donations.

Thus, may every believer in our church always feel free to give according to the dictates of his heart free of any oppressive pressure from church leaders. May we church leaders trust the sovereign headship of Christ over this church and wait upon Him to move His people to provide for this ministry. (cf. Exodus 25:1-2; 36:3-7)

(4) In **edifying Biblical contrast** to identity politics in the **government**, Galatians 3:26-29 teaches that (a) all who trust in Christ in the **local church** are spiritual sons of God, Galatians 3:26-27. (b) Thus, all believers are one in Christ so that spiritual divisions based on race, ethnicity, station in life, class and gender are forbidden, not augmented as in identity politics, Galatians 3:28. (c) In the end, all believers are spiritually identified as the "seed" of Abraham (Galatians 3:29). Christ is the "seed" of Abraham (Galatians 3:16), so since every believer is spiritually situated "in Christ," he is of the spiritual "seed" of Abraham, complete with the blessings of God that accompany it.

May we trust in Christ for salvation. May we counter intrigue, division among officials, oppressive taxation and identity politics in government by looking to God's contrasting, edifying will for encouragement.