

Luke 2:1-7

"The City of David"

March 3, 2024

1. Intro

- a. So I have to admit, the book of Judges is probably my least favorite book in the Bible
 - i. I don't know if its OK to say things like that from the pulpit, but those are just my honest feelings about that book
 1. The Bible starts out with the five books of Moses... Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy
 - a. These books certainly aren't a garden full of roses, but there are some great high points in them, right?
 - i. In Genesis, you have the beautiful account of God's creation of ALL things
 - ii. We also see God saving righteous Noah out of the flood, and then calling Abraham to be the father of many nations
 - iii. We also get the fantastic story of Joseph, as we watch him faithfully endure hardship after hardship, as God eventually exalts him to second in command of all of Egypt
 - iv. Tragically, the people of Israel are then taken over as slaves in Egypt, where they serve their harsh masters for almost four hundred years
 - v. But, even in those harsh conditions, we see God growing a small family of Israelites into a nation that numbered well into the millions
 - vi. And then of course, we get the wonderful account of the Exodus, as God leads His people out of their slavery through a series of absolutely mind-blowing signs and wonders
 - vii. He leads them into the wilderness, where He blesses them with His Ten Commandments and the Law
 - viii. Israel continues to struggle in their sin, as we well know, yet God continues to dwell with them in the Tabernacle... He continues to lead them with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night... He continues to feed them manna every single day... for FORTY years!
 - ix. And then, finally, in Joshua, the people of God reach their Promised Land, and they begin clearing it of all of its wicked inhabitants
 1. They don't do a great job in this effort, but they're there, right?
 2. They made it to the Land God had promised to give to their fathers
 - a. This nation that was a nation of slaves for 4 centuries
 - b. This nation that was a nation of refugees for 4 decades
 - c. This nation of wanderers, were now HOME!
 - i. And then, we get the book of Judges, and EVERYTHING falls apart
 - ii. Judges highlights the fact that, in just about every region of the Promised Land, the Israelites failed to drive out the inhabitants of the land
 1. Instead of being obedient to the commands of God, and pushing through some hard obstacles, they instead compromised...
 - a. They settled...

- b. They allowed those inhabitants to stay in the Land, and they became thorns in the Israelites sides
 - 2. And as the book of Judges goes on, the tone of the book gets darker and darker, as the people chose to do what was right “in their own eye,” rather than obeying the God who had rescued them out of their slavery and given them a Land flowing with milk and honey
 - a. We read of VERY tainted heroes like Jephthah and Samson
 - b. We read of horrific stories of idolatry and rape and murder... within the people of God
 - c. We see the Tribe of Benjamin almost getting wiped out by all the other tribes of Israel
 - i. As you come to the end of Judges, you’re almost left with a sick feeling in the pit of your stomach
 - ii. You have to wonder, how could things go so tragically wrong?!
 - 1. Judges is a painfully dark book in the Word of God
 - 2. But I believe, in the providence of God, the darkness of the book of Judges is meant to serve as a backdrop for the light that we find, in the book of Ruth
- b. The book of Ruth opens with verse 1 saying, “In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land...
 - i. That right there should give us pause, right?
 - 1. How in the world does a famine happen, in THE PROMISED LAND?!
 - a. Things were clearly NOT going well with God’s people
 - 2. But, in the days of the Judges, when there was a famine in the land, we are introduced to a man named Elimelech, and his wife Naomi
 - a. And verse 1 also tells us that Elimelech and Naomi are Ephrathites, from the town of Bethlehem
 - i. As the book goes on, we read that Elimelech and Naomi flee to Moab during the famine, where Elimelech dies
 - 1. Naomi has two sons, who both marry Moabite women, but then those two sons die as well
 - 2. Naomi, in her sadness, decides to return to Bethlehem, and one of her daughters-in-law, Ruth, faithfully chooses to go back with her
 - ii. The rest of the book of Ruth is a beautiful story of how Ruth meets a man from the tribe of Judah, named Boaz, and how Boaz takes Ruth under his protection, and they are eventually married
 - ii. And then we get this wonderful conclusion to this book in chapter 4, verses 13-17...
 - 1. *¹³So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. ¹⁴Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! ¹⁵He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.” ¹⁶Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. ¹⁷And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.*
 - a. Isn’t that wonderful?

- i. In the midst of the spiritual darkness and depravity of the time of the Judges, we find that God was still very much at work
 - ii. ESPECIALLY, in the little town of Bethlehem
 - 1. For it is in Bethlehem that the first great King of Israel is born, David, the son of Jesse, the son of Obed, the son of Boaz and Ruth
 - iii. This town of Bethlehem pops back up again on the radar in 1 Samuel 16, when the Lord rebukes Samuel for grieving over Saul's sinfulness, and God's rejection of Saul because of that sin
 - 1. In verse 1, God says to Samuel,
 - a. *¹"How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go. I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons."*
 - i. So Samuel would travel to Bethlehem, and there he would anoint the youngest of Jesse's eight sons to be God's own King
 - 2. In the history of the people of Israel, there are few events with greater significance than this visit of the prophet to this small village
 - a. For David would be the King who was a man after God's own heart
 - i. He would be the one who would finally establish the Kingdom of Israel in the Promised Land
 - 1. Through his many victories in battle, this warrior-king, who was also a great poet and hymnwriter, would bring the Tribes of Israel back together
 - a. He would bring them into a time of astounding national prosperity
 - b. And he would pave the way for the building of the great Temple of God Himself
 - b. ALL of this, from a young boy from Bethlehem, in the land of Judah
 - 3. Surprisingly, as monumental as David's life and impact was, the town of Bethlehem doesn't play much of a role for the next THREE hundred years
 - a. It gets mentioned in passing around a dozen more times in the Scriptures, but there really isn't much meaning or importance attached to those passages
 - iv. UNTIL we get to the passage that Adrienne read for us this morning
 - 1. Take a look again in your worship guides at our Scripture reading for this week, Micah 2:1-5. It is worth reading again!
 - a. *¹Now muster your troops, O daughter of troops; siege is laid against us; with a rod they strike the judge of Israel on the cheek. ²But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days. ³Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. ⁴And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. ⁵And he shall be their peace.*
 - 2. Just let the weight of what Micah is saying here sink in
 - a. Israel was in turmoil during these days
 - i. Assyria had likely already destroyed the Northern Kingdom

- ii. The Southern Kingdom of Judah was still intact, for the most part, but they were increasingly following the idolatrous ways of their Northern brothers
 - 1. Micah prophesies that the Lord will save them from the hand of Assyria
 - 2. But we know that it wouldn't be too long before Babylon would rise to power
 - a. So trouble is on their horizon as well
- b. Yet, in all of this, where does the Lord, through Micah, point their hope?
 - i. To Bethlehem Ephrathah, a town too little to be among the clans of Judah
 - ii. From this little village would come forth from God a ruler who is from of old, from ancient days
 - iii. And this ruler will shepherd his people in the strength of the Lord
 - iv. And he will be great, to the ends of the earth!
- c. Three hundred years BEFORE this prophecy, God brought forth a king of his own choosing from the town of Bethlehem, young David, the son of Jesse
- d. Seven hundred years AFTER this prophecy, God would once again bring forth THE King of his own choosing
 - i. Again, from Bethlehem Ephrathah, the City of David!
 - 1. It is in THIS light, that we now turn to our passage for this morning, Luke 2:1-7

2. Luke 2:1-7

- a. *¹In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. ⁶And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.*
- b. I absolutely love the way that Luke frames the birth of Christ
 - i. I know that, ultimately, it is the Holy Spirit who inspired him to write these words, but Luke's language here is just brilliant
 - 1. In verse 1, he says that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered
 - a. Obviously this decree wasn't meant for the WHOLE world, but rather, for all those who lived within the "world" of the Roman Empire
 - b. So, Augustus makes this decree from Rome, mainly as a way to drum up more taxes
 - c. And this decree prompts Joseph and his betrothed to have to make the journey to register in Bethlehem
 - i. It is no accident that Luke refers to Bethlehem as the City of David, is it?
 - ii. The clear implication underlying this passage is that, through the decree of a Roman Emperor, God is bringing together the prophecies of the Old Testament, and they will be fulfilled in the little town of Bethlehem Ephrathah, a village too little to even be included among the clans of Judah!
 - 1. Is it any wonder that Solomon would write in Proverbs 21:1

- a. *¹The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; He turns it wherever he will.*
- c. And while they were in Bethlehem, Luke writes, the time came for her to give birth
 - i. And she gave birth to her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling cloths, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn
 - ii. How strange it is that God would unfold His purposes in such ways
 - 1. The King of Kings would not be born in Jerusalem, in the Temple that bore his Father's name, but rather, in the little town of Bethlehem
 - 2. And even in Bethlehem, the Lord of lords, the Word made flesh, the very Son of God, would not be born in one of the town's finest establishments, but rather, in a stall reserved for the animals, where he would be laid in a feeding trough for the cows
 - iii. THIS was how God chose to bring into the world His one and only Son
 - 1. THIS was how He would bring to fulfillment the prophecy of Micah 5, where the ruler from of old, from ancient days, would come forth
 - a. He would come forth as a helpless little baby, wrapped in swaddling cloths
 - i. Born to a young girl maybe 16 or 17 years old, who had become pregnant through the Holy Spirit
 - ii. Born to a young man, who knew the journey they were about to embark on as a young family would be one of scorn and rejection
 - iii. Born in the midst of a divided and oppressed people, who couldn't conceive of the fact that they needed a Messiah to save them from their own sin, but instead longed for a military Messiah who would save them from Rome
 - iv. Born in just one of thousands of inconsequential towns and villages within the Roman Empire
 - 2. The one who would be given the throne of the house of David was HERE!
 - a. And he was born in the city of David, Bethlehem
 - i. Right where God had said he was to be born, 7 centuries earlier!!
- d. My friends, how many more examples do we need to see before we TRULY believe in the sovereignty of God over ALL things in this world?
 - i. There's no way we could even begin to calculate the actual number, but there had to have been millions of independent events that happened throughout these days, all across the world, in order for Joseph and Mary to end up PRECISELY in Bethlehem, PRECISELY when it was time for Mary to give birth!
 - 1. God was moving and shaping the events of the world in those days – from the decrees of an emperor to the lineage of a carpenter from Nazareth
 - a. And God is STILL moving and shaping the events of the world in our day today
- e. This is the wondrous mystery that we sang about earlier, isn't it?
 - i. It is a mystery because we cannot comprehend or understand all that God is doing behind the scenes to bring about His purposes in this world
 - ii. But it is a WONDROUS mystery because we know the God who is behind it ALL!
 - 1. We know that He is a HOLY God, and not even one molecule of sin resides within His being
 - 2. We know that He is a WISE God, a God who not only sees the end from the beginning, but who has set it all in motion according to His design
 - 3. And we know that He is a GOOD God
 - a. A God who was gracious enough to breath life into our bodies this morning
 - b. A God who is patient and long-suffering enough to not strike us dead right here on the spot, even though we constantly sin against Him

- c. A God who is merciful enough to continue to care for us and watch over us and meet all of our basic needs
 - d. A God who is loving enough to send His only begotten Son to die on the cross on our behalf, that we might not perish but have everlasting life!
 - 4. THAT is what makes mystery of God's sovereign plan so absolutely wonderful... we KNOW the God who is behind it ALL!
 - iii. You have to wonder what was going on in in Joseph and Mary's heart during these days
 - 1. Did either of them remember the prophesy given in Micah?
 - a. They obviously both knew that this was the Son of the Most High in Mary's Womb, but was there a point when they made the connection between Augustus' decree and the fulfillment of Micah's prophecy?
 - i. It's fun sometimes to use our sanctified imagination with these things, isn't it?
 - 1. When they were back in Nazareth, and they heard the decree from Caesar's heralds, did Mary think through the calendar and the timing of it all, and then go to Joseph in awe, asking him, "Do you realize what this means about WHERE our son will be born?"
 - 2. Or maybe it was as they were in the house in Bethlehem, after Jesus had been born, after the shepherds had left, when everything had quieted down...
 - a. Maybe it was then that Joseph looked at Mary and said, "Mary, do you realize we are in Bethlehem Ephrathah, and our child is the ruler that Micah spoke of? The ruler who has come forth from ancient days??"
 - ii. We don't know when they made the connection, and it really isn't that important
- f. The King was HERE
 - i. On that day, in the city of David, EVERYTHING changed!
 - 1. Not just for those in the little town of Bethlehem, but for the entire world
 - a. For as Paul writes in Galatians 4:4-5,
 - i. *⁴But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.*
 - 2. According to His sovereign design, God fulfilled the prophecies of Micah 5 in the fullness of time, as Christ was born in Bethlehem
- g. But there is another connection that we need to make in Micah's prophecy before we leave today
 - i. Notice what Micah says in verse 3...
 - 1. AFTER God promises to bring forth the ruler who is from ancient days, Micah then says,
 - a. *³Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. ⁴And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. ⁵And he shall be their peace...*
 - 2. At first glance, we might jump to the conclusion that "she who is in labor" is referring to Mary, and all these things will happen once she gives birth to Jesus

- a. That could certainly be one aspect of this prophecy, but then what do we do with the part about all his brothers returning to Israel, and they are all dwelling secure?
 - i. There has to be something bigger than Mary going on here, doesn't there?
 - ii. Turn with me in your Bibles to Revelation, chapter 12
 - 3. In this chapter, we get pretty stunning depiction of things that are happening in the supernatural realm
 - a. There are far too many details for us to get into this morning, but in the first few verses of chapter 12, much like in Micah 5, we find a woman who is in labor
 - i. We read later that the great red dragon, Satan, tried to devour her child, but God delivered him and brought him to the throne, a clear allusion to Jesus Christ and his death and resurrection
 - 1. Which might lead us to again think that the pregnant woman is Mary
 - ii. But as we keep reading in chapter 12, we see Satan and his demons engaged in battle against Michael and the angels
 - 1. Satan is defeated and cast down to the earth, where he now pursues the woman who gave birth
 - 2. He attempts to swallow her up with a flood, but she is protected by the earth... she is protected by God
 - 3. And John then writes in verse 17, "Then the dragon became furious with the woman and went off to make war on the rest of her offspring, on those who keep the commandments of God and hold to the testimony of Jesus."
 - iii. My friends, all of this imagery... the woman in labor, the child that now sits on the throne, Satan's furious pursuit of the woman and all the rest of her offspring – all of it points to one thing...
 - 1. THE CHURCH!
 - a. Not just the New Testament church that began after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, but the UNIVERSAL church that God has been building since the dawn of creation
 - i. This UNIVERSAL church includes the saints of Old Testament Israel, men and women like Noah and Abraham and Ruth and Esther
 - ii. This UNIVERSAL church includes the saints of that transitional time that begins our New Testament, men and women like Zechariah and Elizabeth, and Mary and Joseph
 - iii. Out of this UNIVERSAL church that God was already building, the Son of God would be born
 - 1. Through the work of wicked men used by Satan, Jesus would be nailed to the cross
 - 2. But even that was a part of God's sovereign plan
 - a. Christ was raised from the dead
 - b. He ascended to heaven, where he now sits on the throne at the right hand of God
- b. But the great dragon is still at work, isn't he?
 - i. Throughout the centuries, he has sought to devour the woman, the Bride of Christ
 - ii. And as he continues to fail, his fury against all her offspring continues to intensify
 - 1. He continues to make war against a very specific people:
 - a. Those who keep the commandments of God

- b. Those who hold to the testimony of Jesus
- iv. Brothers and sisters in Christ, we are at war
 - 1. We have a very real, and a VERY dangerous enemy who is seeking our destruction with GREAT fury
- v. Which is why we must CLING to the promises of Micah 5:1-5
 - 1. The ruler of Israel has been born in Bethlehem Ephrathah
 - a. The one whose coming forth is from old has arrived
 - i. This prophecy has been fulfilled
 - b. Which means the rest of the prophecy will be fulfilled as well
 - i. When she who is in labor has given birth...
 - 1. When the Bride of Christ has brought in all the fullness of the Gentiles
 - 2. And all the sons and daughters of God have been revealed,
 - a. The rest of Christ's brothers and sisters shall return to Israel
 - 2. We will return to the City of David...
 - a. Not the town of Bethlehem, but the NEW City of David, the New Jerusalem, Zion!
 - i. And in Zion, Christ shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord
 - ii. In Zion, Christ will rule in the majesty of the name of the Lord His God
 - iii. In Zion, we shall all dwell secure, and the name of Jesus will be great to the ends of the earth
 - 1. And Christ shall be our peace!!
 - 3. How can we know that these things will happen with such certainty, in a world of ever-increasing chaos and darkness?
 - a. Because around two thousand years ago, the Son of God was born in the City of David
 - i. He came to this earth right on time
 - ii. And he was born right where he was supposed to be born
 - 1. What a wondrous mystery to behold!!