

# Why It Matters That the Bible Mentions Augustus Caesar

“In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that the entire inhabited earth should be taxed” (Luke 2:1).

The opening sentences of Luke 2 demonstrate the author’s great attention to historical detail. Luke introduces us to Augustus Caesar, who was ruling at the time that Jesus was born. Augustus Caesar was a very significant political leader who ruled over the Roman Empire, one of the most prominent, longstanding, far-reaching empires in the history of the world. He was the adopted son of Julius Caesar. His title “Augustus” means “the majestic or highly revered.”

Historians say that during his rise to power, Augustus Caesar was ruthless, but once he assumed power, he became more benevolent. He was a fairly gracious ruler compared to others in his day, far more so than people like King Herod, who was a maniacal man throughout his life.

Working under Augustus Caesar was a governor named Quirinius, who enforced and executed policies and decisions from the emperor. Luke locates the birth of Jesus in a specific historical time frame by telling us that it occurred during a census ordered by these rulers.

Caesar Augustus reigned over the entire Roman Empire, and Quirinius served as a sort of cabinet member to the senior leader. Caesar would demand a certain action, and a man like Quirinius would execute the order. In this case, Luke tells us, a census was to be taken, which would have been a means for Caesar to assess his vast power and command maximum tax and military participation from the populace.

On the complete opposite of the spectrum, Luke draws our attention to Joseph and Mary. They are everything that Caesar

and Quirinius are not: poor, powerless, rural, worshipping God rather than being worshipped like gods. Nevertheless, the two loved one another, they trusted in God, and they accepted God's call on their lives. Now, near the very end of Mary's pregnancy, the census requires the couple to travel to Bethlehem.

Joseph was of the family line of David, and David grew up around Bethlehem. For the census, everyone returned to the original hometown of their particular family. In order to obey the law, Joseph has to take pregnant Mary on a roughly hundred-mile journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. It's a terrifying prospect, when you think about it, with the very real possibility she could give birth to God on the side of the road far away from any doctor, medical care or help whatsoever. But God in His providential sovereignty orchestrated history to get this couple from Nazareth to Bethlehem in order to fulfill the prophecy of Micah 5:2 about the Savior's birthplace.

Despite a long journey and no place to stay but an animal stable, Joseph and Mary arrive in Bethlehem safely, just in time for Jesus to be born. The Creator and King of the universe's first throne on earth is a feeding trough for animals. In this humble gesture, however, we see God's sovereign power over governments and history. God arranged the details implemented by everyone from the powerful (Caesar Augustus and Quirinius) to the powerless (Joseph and Mary), not to mention the infinite number of lives and events leading up to that point, in order to fulfill his Word and demonstrate his lordship over all.

*Looking back, how has God worked through unexpected encounters and events to orchestrate his plan for your life? {eo}*

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