Daily Devotion #196

***God Is At Work***

**Luke 2:1 (NASB)** *“Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth.*This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria.”

In the US there is a census taken every ten years. For those of us who live here, it is no big deal. Go online; fill out a form; answer some questions; and the government knows how many people live in the country. Pretty simple. So when we read about a census being taken in the days of the Roman Empire, we think that too was no big deal.

Well, God was using that situation to fulfill His plan to have His Son, the Lord Jesus, to be born in Bethlehem of Judea, which was as the prophet foretold. **Micah 5:2 (NASB)** *"But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Too little to be among the clans of Judah, From you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, From the days of eternity."* And little did Caesar Augustus know that God was up to something so marvelous, when he was looking to line his pockets with riches from the people.

Augustus’s real name was Caius Octavious. He was the adopted son and heir of Julius Caesar. Octavious rose to power when he defeated his rival, Antony, in battle, which basically eliminated the Roman republican government and caused the Roman senate to name Octavious the first emperor. And two years later he was named “Augustus” or “exaulted one”, which would give him religious respect or status as well. At that point, Octavious had complete power both militarily and spiritually. So, during his reign, the Roman Empire dominated the known world of that day which created a time of prosperity and peace, as long as the surrounding nations agreed with Rome.

But with his great power, Octavious, like most ruthless dictators, wanted more. So he called for a census. A census that would be different from other censuses by Rome. The normal census was to enroll men into military service. But Palestine, the region of Jerusalem and Bethlehem, was not normally included, but this time they were. In fact, all the region of the Roman Empire was included. This began a census that would be taken every fourteen years. The purpose was to number all the families and tribes of the people living in the Roman occupied territories for the purpose of a poll tax. This tax was a fixed sum of money to be paid based on the number of people living in the region. This was a way for Rome to add even more taxation to the people beyond what was required in property and income taxes. And the Jews hated it. They hated Rome even more than what they had always hated them for. And as a result, many insurections or revolts took place by the Jews.

What makes this interesting is that from this historical event, we can determine with accuracy to within about two years, the time of Jesus’s birth. Because it was from this order that Joseph had to return from Nazareth to his hometown to be registered for this new poll tax. I can only imagine that to Jospeh and Mary, this new tax would be just another burden on them by the hated government. One that would place greater frustration and pressure on their already emotional and stressful situation. But God was working His plan, even though the earthly parents of our Lord had no idea what was happening from Caesar’s new edict.

There are times, like now, during COVID and the upheaval in our government, when God often does the most. It is highly likely that God is using the upside down circumstances of our day to fulfill His purposes for His people and our nation. I don’t know with certainty that is the case, but it is not unlike God to do so or to use the evil desires of man to fulfill His greater purposes.

We can apply this same truth to our lives on a daily basis. Whatever you and I face that seems to add more pressure or just don’t make sense, remember that God is always at work. He is always doing what is best for us and for what fulfills His plan. So take heart, beloved, you are in good care. Just do the next thing and keep your focus on God. He will get us through.