

# miracle in a MANGER

## WEEK 2 - CHRIST IN AN OCCUPIED NATION OVERVIEW

When the New Testament was written, the might and rule of the Roman Empire was at its peak. In fact, the shadow of Rome falling over everything was such a common phenomenon that the biblical authors rarely draw our attention to it. For example, Luke does not mention that the census of Augustus in 2:1, which leads Mary and Joseph to travel to Bethlehem, also sparked off a violent rebellion in Galilee. The shadow of Rome and the unrest it fomented in Israel was just a part of life. However, as we look back at the first century with two thousand years of history between us and Rome, we can gain a lot of new insight by grasping the implications of Jesus being born under foreign military occupation. What do we learn about our savior as we consider his deep identification with a people oppressed by empire?

*At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire.*

**Luke 2:1**

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Read [Luke 2:1-3](#). What are some of the “world behind the text” considerations that might be easy for us to miss about the time of Jesus’ birth?
2. Why do you think Jesus Christ was born in a nation occupied by Rome?
3. Read [1 Corinthians 15:24-26](#) and [John 1:5](#). How would Christ defeat the powers of this world?
4. Give some examples of how Jesus’ ministry and teaching (the upside-down kingdom) undermined the values of human empire.
5. Read [Matthew 13:33](#). How did the Roman empire help to spread the Kingdom of Heaven?
6. Why do you think Jesus let Rome destroy him on a cross instead of going to war against Rome?
7. Read [John 16:33](#) and [1 Corinthians 1:26-28](#).
  - a. Barry said that we can “*resist and remember*” while we await the ultimate victory of the kingdom of God. What would that look like?
  - b. What does it mean to resist the powers of this world when we happen to live in one of the mightiest empires the world has ever seen?
8. How does learning more about the human empire and rulers at the time of Jesus’ birth change the way you think about the Christmas story?