

LECTURE 1  
THE WORLD OF FIRST-CENTURY CHRISTIANS

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Objectives:

- 1) How Rome emerged as a world power.
  - 2) Key characteristics of the early emperors.
  - 3) The Government of the empire.
  - 4) Aspects of Greco-Roman society.
  - 5) Religion and philosophy in the first century
  - 6) The status of Jews and Christians.
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*The Emergence of Roman Power*

1. At the time of the New Testament, the whole Mediterranean world was controlled from \_\_\_\_\_.
2. According to tradition the city of Rome was founded in 753 B.C., the period of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in Israel.
3. The Romans called it their ' \_\_\_\_\_ ' (Latin *res publica*, or 'commonwealth'). Executive power lay in the hands of two consuls, elected annually by Roman citizens from a \_\_\_\_\_ of 300 relatively wealthy men belonging to traditional Roman families.
4. At first, Rome was just one of numerous small city-states in central Italy which alternately vied for power with each other and joined together for mutual \_\_\_\_\_ when faced by external threat.
5. By the early third century B.C., Rome controlled all \_\_\_\_\_.
6. By 200 B.C., as a result of wars with the \_\_\_\_\_ (based in what we call Tunisia), they had annexed Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, Africa and Spain. By 100 B.C., Greece had been added as the province of Macedonia-Achaia, and the Romans had begun to talk of the Mediterranean as 'our sea.'
7. Wars on the edges of the empire, in north Africa and against tribes of \_\_\_\_\_ (in France) and Germans (121-101 B.C.) brought to prominence the general Gaius Marius.
8. The following decades were marked by increasing chaos in Italy, inflamed by rival generals using their armies against each other and even against Rome itself. In 60 B.C., three ambitious politicians who were also successful generals formed a secret pact known as the First Triumvirate. With their prestige and popularity with the army they were more powerful than the Senate. They were:
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_, who had recently cleared the eastern Mediterranean of pirates and had brought Syria, and Palestine under Roman control
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ Caesar who was soon to conquer Gaul,
  - c. and \_\_\_\_\_, the richest man in Rome.

9. After Crassus' death in 53 B.C., Pompey was persuaded by the \_\_\_\_\_ to turn against the increasingly powerful Caesar. But Caesar defeated him at Pharsalus in north-eastern Greece in 48 B.C. and made his own position apparently unchallengeable. When in 44 B.C. he was made \_\_\_\_\_ ('absolute ruler') for life, it was the last straw even for some of his friends. In a meeting of the Senate on the Ides (15<sup>th</sup>) of March his supporters abandoned him and he was stabbed to death.
10. In 43 B.C., Caesar's 19-year-old grandnephew and adopted son \_\_\_\_\_ joined with Marc Antony and Lepidus to form the 'Second Triumvirate,' dedicated to pursuing Caesar's murderers. The decisive battle was fought at Philippi in Macedonia in 42 B.C., where Brutus and Cassius, the leaders of the assassins, committed suicide.
11. The victors divided the empire: Octavian was to rule the \_\_\_\_\_, Antony the \_\_\_\_\_. But intense rivalry between the two now surfaced. There was to be one final showdown. In 31 B.C., outside the bay of Actium in north-western Greece, Octavian's admiral Agrippa outmaneuvered Antony's fleet. Antony himself fled with his lover \_\_\_\_\_ to Egypt, of which she was queen, where both committed suicide after Egypt fell to Octavian the following year. Octavian made Egypt a Roman province, to be governed by his own appointee because of its strategic role as a major supplier of grain to Rome.
12. All rivals had been eliminated, and the Roman world was hungry for peace. Octavian delivered it to them in 27 B.C. He was granted the title \_\_\_\_\_ ('revered').
13. He was careful to observe Rome's constitutional traditions, and declared 'the transfer of the state to the free disposal of the \_\_\_\_\_ and people.'
14. Augustus' tough but far-sighted regime, together with the fact that he ruled more than forty years, ensured that the transition from Republic to Empire would be permanent. The \_\_\_\_\_ ('Peace of Rome'), which he established from Spain to the Black Sea, from Egypt to the English Channel, created conditions under which life could be lived with some security, trade could develop – and the Christian message could be spread far and wide.

#### *Augustus' Successors*

1. After a distinguished military career, Augustus' step-son \_\_\_\_\_ became emperor at the age of fifty-five.
2. The young Gaius \_\_\_\_\_ was a popular successor to his great-uncle. But, having initially promised constitutional reform, he quickly became a cruel and arbitrary dictator with an extravagant lifestyle. Claiming to be divine he victimized Jews and threatened to set up a statue of himself in the Jerusalem temple. His own guards assassinated him and the order to set up the statue was revoked.

3. Caligula's uncle, \_\_\_\_\_, a scholar who was also physically disabled, proved a more able emperor than anyone expected. He added five provinces to the empire, including Britain. He developed the imperial civil service, thus further reducing the power of the Senate. He adopted a tough policy toward Jews. In 49 A.D., after disturbances in Rome, Claudius decreed that Jews should leave the city. (Refer to Acts 18.2). It was during the reign of Claudius that \_\_\_\_\_ completed most of his missionary journeys.
4. Claudius' second wife Agrippina fed him poisoned mushrooms so that \_\_\_\_\_, her son by a previous marriage, could replace him as emperor. In 64 A.D., to divert rumors that he had started a great fire in Rome in order to make room for his grandiose building schemes, he put the blame on Christians and had many of them executed. Nero committed suicide in 68 A.D.

*To scotch the rumour, Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of people, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd stiled Christians. Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilate, and the pernicious superstition was checked for a moment, only to break out once more, nor merely in Judea, the home of the disease, but in the capital itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find vogue... Accordingly, an arrest was first made of all who pleaded guilty; then, upon their information, an immense multitude was convicted, not so much of the crime of firing the city, as of hatred against mankind. Mockery of every sort was added to their deaths. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired. Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle.” [Tacitus, Annals, 15.44]*

5. For a year there was chaos as rival would-be-emperors- Galba, Otho and Vitellius – ruled briefly in turn. Then in the summer of 69 A.D., \_\_\_\_\_ became emperor. He restored stability to the empire while his son Titus completed his victory over the Jews who had rebelled against Rome. The \_\_\_\_\_ was at first desecrated and then totally destroyed.
6. After Vespasian died, Titus passed the empire to his younger brother \_\_\_\_\_. Domitian was a cruel emperor who boosted himself as god and lord. The Book of \_\_\_\_\_ was written during his reign.

### *Government of the Empire*

#### The Provinces

1. Augustus divided the provinces into \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ provinces. Senatorial provinces were generally the older more stable ones such as Asia and Macedonia. These were governed by *proconsuls*. The proconsulship generally lasted for one year only. No legions were stationed in these provinces. Imperial provinces were mostly those annexed more recently, where legions were

- stationed because they bordered on as yet unconquered territory or were thought to be places where rebellion might be organized.
2. Governors of these imperial provinces were appointed by the \_\_\_\_\_ himself, and served as long as he wanted them there. In the more important provinces, such as Syria, they were of senatorial rank.
  3. The governor's job was to maintain \_\_\_\_\_ and to raise \_\_\_\_\_. Taxes were of various kinds:
    - a. \_\_\_\_\_ taxes: namely a tax on land or other property, and a poll tax on every adult, woman and slaves (Matthew 22.17)
    - b. \_\_\_\_\_ taxes: customs duties collected at harbors and frontier posts and a sales tax.

### Client Kingdoms

1. It suited the emperors to maintain good relations with certain kingdoms on the edge of the empire by making special alliances with their rulers. Their rulers were given the title, '\_\_\_\_\_', and they were expected to lead their countries according to policies favored by Rome. \_\_\_\_\_ the Great ruled such a kingdom. Judea, after Herod's death came under the kingship of Herod Agrippa I.

### *The Army*

#### The Legions

1. At the time of Augustus' death there were \_\_\_\_\_ legions of about 5,000 men each, including a few hundred cavalry. They were stationed in the imperial provinces, for example four legions in Syria and two in Egypt.
2. The commander of a legion was assisted by six \_\_\_\_\_. The key tactical officers in a legion were its 60 \_\_\_\_\_, each in charge of about 100 men. (Acts 10.1; 21.31-32; 27.1)
3. The 50,000 miles of Roman \_\_\_\_\_ made possible the efficient movement of legions to other regions if occasion demanded.

#### The Praetorian Guard

1. An elite force served as the emperor's personal \_\_\_\_\_. Under Augustus about 1500 soldiers were stationed in Rome for this purpose, with about 3000 in nearby towns. They enjoyed significantly higher pay and benefits than regular soldiers. (Philippians 1.13) alludes to the infiltration of Paul's \_\_\_\_\_ into the praetorian guard.