

LECTURE 2  
THE WORLD OF FIRST-CENTURY CHRISTIANS

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Objectives:

- 1) Discuss Roman Society
  - 2) Discuss Religion and Philosophy
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*Roman Society*

Citizenship

1. By the death of Augustus there were about \_\_\_\_\_ million citizens (including women and children) in an empire of 70 – 100 million people.
2. Under later emperors citizenship was greatly \_\_\_\_\_ so that its value became less significant.
3. Citizenship could be obtained in various ways:
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ to citizen parents (Acts 22.28)
  - b. As a \_\_\_\_\_ for special service to the empire (Acts 18.2)
  - c. Being freed from \_\_\_\_\_ to a Roman citizen
  - d. On enlistment or discharge from \_\_\_\_\_ service

Classes

1. A tiny proportion of the Roman population belonged to the wealthy \_\_\_\_\_ class from whom the leadership of the city and empire were traditionally drawn.
2. Below them in status were the \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The great majority of Roman citizens were \_\_\_\_\_, mostly poor and with little influence on affairs of state. Their sheer numbers made it politically important for rulers to satisfy their basic needs.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ made up around a quarter of Rome's population, and a similar proportion of Italy as a whole.
5. People became slaves through:
  - a. Getting into \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. \_\_\_\_\_ and sale
  - c. Being born into a \_\_\_\_\_ family
  - d. Becoming a prisoner of \_\_\_\_\_
6. Regarded as "living \_\_\_\_\_," they were sometimes treated harshly. But for most, their economic value ensured a tolerable level of treatment, and some gained real respect and even friendship from their owners (Luke 7.2)
7. \_\_\_\_\_ slaves generally fared better than those who worked in mines or large agricultural enterprises.

8. Several of the names mentioned in \_\_\_\_\_ 16 are common slave names (Romans 16.11)
9. \_\_\_\_\_ denotes people who had been freed from slavery (1 Cor 7.21-22)
10. Freedom could be achieved through saving up the amount equal to their \_\_\_\_\_ to the owner.
11. Most freemen remained \_\_\_\_\_ and even had less than when they were slaves.
12. Some freedmen, however, who had proved their worth to influential citizens became wealthy and influential themselves. Emperors gave great power to some freemen, appointing them as government \_\_\_\_\_ (Acts 23.26)

### Women

1. Women's status was generally \_\_\_\_\_ to men's, though it varied in different parts of the empire.
2. Baby girls were sometimes ' \_\_\_\_\_ ' (abandoned in a remote place to die) if their parents were too poor to care for them.
3. Girls often married by the age of \_\_\_\_\_, and few received an education.
4. Greek women were generally confined to \_\_\_\_\_, living a more restricted life than their Italian counterparts.

### Patrons and Clients

1. A basic building block of Greco-Roman society was the \_\_\_\_\_-client relationship.
2. In an extension of the traditional role of the \_\_\_\_\_ in a family, people with some status and wealth became patrons of others who were in a relationship of dependency to them.
3. A positive value of the patron-client structure was that ensured a measure of \_\_\_\_\_ for lowly members of society who would otherwise have been more vulnerable to debt and other misfortunes.
4. Possibly the historian \_\_\_\_\_ benefited from a similar relationship, Theophilus being the patron who financed the publication of his books. (Luke 1.3; Acts 1.1)
5. In the New Testament the \_\_\_\_\_ of patronage is reflected in the way:
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_ in the church would host meetings (Romans 16.3-5, 23)
  - b. An individual would provide some important \_\_\_\_\_ for the community (1 Cor 16.17-18)
  - c. An individual would offer \_\_\_\_\_ to missionaries and teachers (Philemon 22; 3 John 5-8). Paul calls Phoebe, a deacon at Cenchrae, his

“succourer” [Greek, **προϊσταμαι**<sup>b</sup>: to be engaged in helping or aiding—‘to be active in helping, to be involved in giving aid.’<sup>1</sup>] <sup>2</sup>

### Language and Culture

1. Although Rome ruled the world, the cultural legacy of \_\_\_\_\_ – it’s art, architecture, and literature – continued to dominate.
2. While \_\_\_\_\_ was the language of the West, Greek remained the common tongue throughout the empire from Italy eastwards.
3. Paul could write his letter to the Romans in Greek and expect it to be \_\_\_\_\_. So he and others could communicate their message over a huge area without having to learn a new language.
4. Since Greek was the language of a conquered race, the message would not be mistaken for imperial \_\_\_\_\_.

### Entertainment

1. In the Greek world there was a long tradition of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. Though some Jews attended the theatre, it is unlikely that Paul did so, because dramatic productions were \_\_\_\_\_ to Greek gods in whom he did not believe.
  - b. Paul would also not attend athletic contests, since the custom of competing \_\_\_\_\_ was contrary to Jewish tradition.
  - c. Paul, however, knew how to use athletic and theatrical \_\_\_\_\_ from these contexts to get his point across (1 Cor 9.24-27; 2 Tim 2.5)
2. The Roman masses were most passionate for the \_\_\_\_\_ and the \_\_\_\_\_.
3. The Circus was an arena for chariot racing.
4. In the Greek world, the \_\_\_\_\_ was a place where people went for physical exercise and training, and to meet their friends.

### *Religion and Philosophy*

#### Traditional Religion

1. The gods of the Greeks and Romans were seen as representing or presiding over various aspects of \_\_\_\_\_, and the function of religious practice was to keep oneself, one’s family and one’s city or state in favor with the gods.
2. What mattered was performing rituals \_\_\_\_\_ and offering the right sacrifices.

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<sup>1</sup>Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. 1996, c1989. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament : Based on Semantic Domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition.) . United Bible societies: New York

<sup>2</sup> Translated the following ways: helper (NASB; Amplified; NKJV; NIV; ESV; NCV), benefactor (NRSV; NAB; NLT; Wuest;), leader (YLT)

3. Most Italians worshipped the *lares* and *penates* which were protective \_\_\_\_\_ who presided over home and family. Both Greek and Roman homes had a small shrine and a family altar, and meals often began and ended with a religious act.
4. Romans had no great problem with \_\_\_\_\_ their gods with gods from other regions and in many cases took on the character of the local cult. Artemis of the Ephesians (Acts 19.34) was primarily a 'fertility goddess' whose key role was to ensure the productivity of the earth.
5. Greek and Roman religion was non-\_\_\_\_\_. Particular devotion to one god did not exclude worship of others, and acknowledgement of the whole 'family' of Greco-Roman gods did not preclude participation in the cult of a foreign god such as Isis or Mithras.
6. Such toleration could make life difficult for Jews and Christians, whose exclusive commitment to one \_\_\_\_\_ seemed to others strange and subversive.

### Healing Cults

1. The shrines of Asclepius, the Greek god of \_\_\_\_\_, attracted the hopeful and the desperate from all over the Greek world.
2. Among cities of the New Testament, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and Pergamum were centers of his cult.
3. People would go there seeking healing for all kinds of \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Reflection on the place of healing in the \_\_\_\_\_ of the early churches needs to be set in this wider context.

### Mystery Religions

1. 'Mysteries' (Greek μυστήριον), in the sense of religious rites kept \_\_\_\_\_ from the uninitiated, had been part of the Greek religious scene for centuries.
2. In the first century, mystery cults from the \_\_\_\_\_ gained in popularity across the Mediterranean world.
3. The mysteries proved attractive to many for whom traditional religion did not bring personal meaning, offering:
  - a. Personal \_\_\_\_\_ into the secrets and privileges of the cult, which thereby conveyed a sense of personal significance and belonging to a special group
  - b. A \_\_\_\_\_ relationship with the god
  - c. Assurance of particular \_\_\_\_\_

### Fate, Astrology and Magic

1. The fear of fate was very strong in the Greco-Roman world. Many people felt that the course of their lives was \_\_\_\_\_ and they could do nothing to change it. (Fatalism)
2. While some found release from this fear in the mystery cults, others turned to \_\_\_\_\_.

3. By understanding the movement of the heavenly bodies, which were believed to control human lives, they could at least \_\_\_\_\_ for what was to come even if they could not change it.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ was another way of gaining control. By imposing curses on others you could control them to your own advantage.
5. According to Acts 19.19, the reputation of \_\_\_\_\_ is reflected as a center of the practice of magic.
6. The sense of being \_\_\_\_\_ by fate is something from which the early Christian movement believed there was liberation through Christ. (Col 2.15; Rom 8.39)

### Romans, Jews and Christians

1. In the multi-faith world of the first century Jews, and then Christians, were \_\_\_\_\_ in their exclusive attitude toward other faiths.
2. Judaism was recognized as \_\_\_\_\_, and the earliest Christians came under the same protection.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ the Great through his friendship with the young Caesar Augustus had won certain privileges for Jews which provided the protection as a recognized religion – *religio licita*.
4. Christians at first were seen as a \_\_\_\_\_ within Judaism. They therefore experienced both the protection and the suspicions attached to the Jews.
5. By AD 64 the situation had changed. Both sharp disagreements between Jews and Christians and Nero's persecution of Christians alone, permanently \_\_\_\_\_ the two faiths.
6. The expectation of \_\_\_\_\_ by the state forms the background to the book of Revelation.