

The Life of Jesus Christ, Part 14

Setting the Stage, Part 13

The Roman Empire

Early history uncertain

Kingdom: 753-509 BC

- 753 BC: Founding of the city, according to legend
- Various legends: Story of twins Romulus and Remus, fathered by Mars or Hercules, abandoned to die as infants, cared for by a she-wolf, raised by a shepherd
- Rome founded by Romulus at age 18, named after himself, set up a senate
- A series of 7 kings
- There was a senate, but they didn't have much power, more like king's advisors

Republic: 509-27 BC

- The last king was overthrown by some noblemen
- Government headed by two consuls, elected by citizens for one year at a time, consuls could veto each other
- Many other offices
- Constitution, largely unwritten, separation of powers
- Dictator, appointed in times of emergency, up to 6 months
- Over these 500 years or so, the republic kept growing, conquered Italian peninsula, colonized other areas, fought wars, increased in power, Carthage, Macedonia, Seleucids
- Remember Antiochus III who tried to conquer Greece and was defeated at Magnesia, in Asia Minor in 190 BC.
- Late in the life of the Republic, a lot of social trouble
- Farmers would have to be away in the army, they would lose their farms to wealthy landowners, move to Rome
- Other revolts around the land ruled by the Romans, Spartacus (73-71 BC), problems with pirates

64-63 BC: Pompey conquered Syria, then Palestine

60 BC: Pompey, Crassus, Julius Caesar formed political alliance, called the First Triumvirate

Julius Caesar:

- 59 BC: Caesar served as consul, wanted to give public lands to the poor, intimidates the other consul, "the consulship of Julius and Caesar"
- 58-49 BC: Caesar governor of Gaul for 5 years, then extended (immune from prosecution), Gallic Wars led by Caesar
- 50 BC: Caesar commanded to return to Rome, Caesar concerned about prosecution
- January 49 BC: Caesar crossed Rubicon River with a legion, from the province over which he was governor; started civil war
- 48 BC: Caesar appointed dictator for one year, solidified his power, conquered other areas
- 46 BC: Appointed dictator for 10 years
- 45 BC: Names grandnephew Octavian as his heir
- March 15, 44 BC: Assassinated in the Senate; ironically, his assassination led to the establishment of the Roman Empire
- January 1, 42 BC: Given title "Divine Julius" by Senate

Empire: 27 BC-AD 476 (west), 1453 (east)

- 42-31 BC: Conflict between Octavian and Mark Antony (and Cleopatra), Octavian emerges triumphant
- 27 BC: Octavian given title Augustus (the great, or illustrious); was given power gradually by Senate
- Established *Pax Romana*
- AD 14: Octavian died
- AD 14-37: Reign of Tiberius, stepson of Octavian, emperor during the ministry of Christ

The importance of Greco-Roman culture to Christianity:

“Wherever [Alexander] went, he left colonies that became dispensers of Greek language and culture, known as Hellenism. When the Romans took over much of this territory two centuries later, they imposed their legal and military system. They, in turn, were conquered by Greek culture. Thus we speak of the Greco-Roman culture. When Christianity arose, it had Greek, which many linguists call the most flexible language ever devised, as a vehicle to spread its concepts.” (*Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*)

“Paul speaks of the time for Christ’s advent having ‘fully come’ (Gal. 4:4). In the first Christian century the Roman Empire had united vast areas and many peoples under her control and had established political tranquility, the ‘Pax Romana.’ Thus, travel throughout the empire was relatively easy and safe when Christian missionaries set out to fulfill the Great Commission. Yet another factor of the greatest significance in the ‘fullness of time’ was the common knowledge of Greek throughout these vast regions, making it possible to proclaim the Christian message without learning a new language at each frontier.” (*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*)