

ROME
& THE BIRTH OF
CHRISTIANITY

Part 3: Introduction

Last week we considered the life of Caesar Augustus, from his birth in 63 BC until his death in Nola near Mount Vesuvius in AD 14. As the first emperor of the Roman Empire, he won victories over his enemies and brought the empire into a time of peace and order. Today, we will assess the leadership of Augustus and give our attention to the various ways he prepared the world for the coming of Christ and helped facilitate the spread of the gospel throughout the entire Empire.



Assessing Augustus

- He was ruthless in his rise to power and mellow afterwards.
- He was a methodical man and a famous administrator of Rome and of the military and praetorian guard.
- In some of the conquered provinces, he allowed the people to retain a considerable measure of home rule (if not in conflict with Rome).
- He stimulated the arts and was a great builder.
- He was better than most Roman emperors who followed.
- He accepted the title *Pontifex Maximus* or *Highest Priest* (i.e., the head of all religious worship).

Assessing Augustus

- He conquered the Mediterranean world, including northwest Spain and the Danubian lands from the Alps to the Black Sea.
- He had power over all the provinces, and his personal prestige and authority were the keys to his success.





The Roman Provincial System

- In 27 BC, there were 32 existing provinces in the Roman Empire.
- Augustus divided these into two categories: senatorial provinces (11), and imperial provinces (21).
- The senatorial provinces were governed by ex-consuls and ex-praetors. The imperial provinces were under the direct control of the emperor.
- In AD 6, Augustus deposed Archelaus, and Judea, Samaria, and Idumea were formed into a division of the prefecture of Syria (imperial province ruled by a *praefectus*, or governor). Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea from AD 26 to 36.



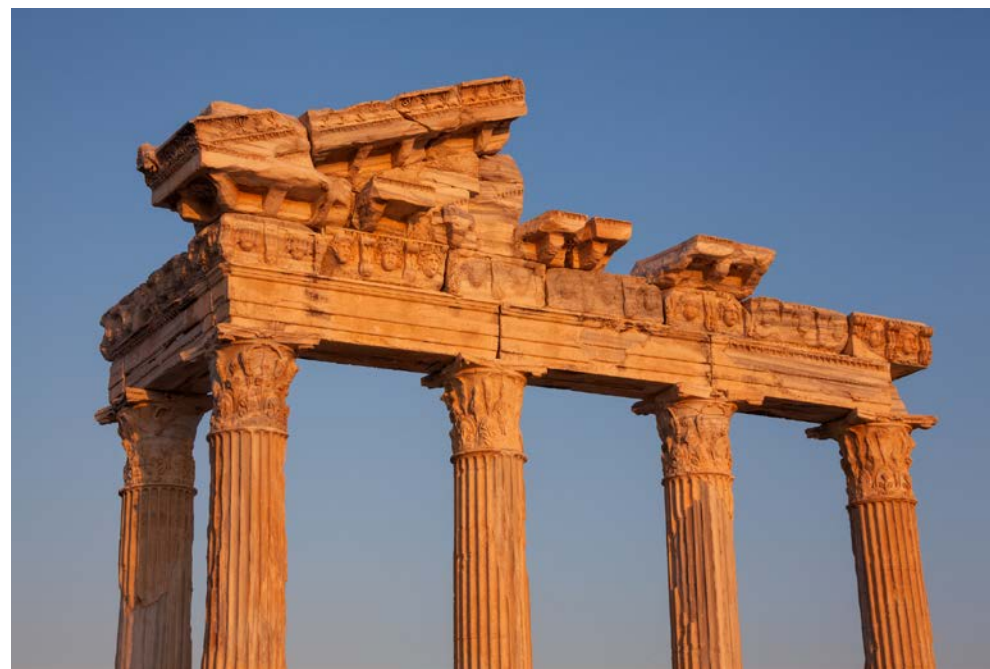
Preparing the World for Jesus Christ

“The literature of the ancient Greeks and the universal empire of the Romans were...the chief agents in preparing the world for Christianity....They laid the natural foundation for the supernatural edifice of the kingdom of heaven. God endowed the Greeks and Romans with the richest natural gifts, that they might reach the highest civilization possible without the aid of Christianity, and thus both provide the instruments of human science, art, and law for the use of the church, and yet at the same time show the utter impotence of these alone to bless and save the world” (Philip Schaff).

Conditions for the Spread of Christianity

“At the time when Christianity began and in the first three centuries of its existence more than of any preceding year, conditions in the Mediterranean world prepared the way for the spread of a new religious faith throughout the entire extent of that area.”

- Kenneth Scott Latourette (1884-1968)





The *Pax Romana*

- *Pax Romana* (the peace of Rome); there had been war, civil war, civil strife, and piracy; now internal peace as never before.
- Augustus ensured the practical unification of the whole world.
- He established law and order.
- “This ruler, Augustus, who truly deserves the title of ‘Averter of Evil,’ is the Caesar who lulled the storms which were crashing everywhere, who healed the sickness common to Greeks and barbarians alike....This is he who cleared the sea of pirate-ships and filled it with merchant-ships. This is he who set every city again at liberty, who reduced disorder to order....This is he who safeguarded peace...” (Philo, 25 BC – AD 50).



The *Pax Romana*

- Suetonius tells us that “the temple of Janus Quirinus, which had been shut twice only, from the era of the building of the city to his own time, he closed thrice in a much shorter period, having established universal peace both by sea and land.” He also records that Augustus “restored peace and prosperity to the harassed empire.”
- Suetonius again: “But, above all things, he was careful to keep the public peace against robbers, burglars, and those who were disaffected to the government. He therefore increased the number of military stations throughout Italy....He suppressed with great severity all tumults of the people on their first breaking out; and took every precaution to prevent them.”

Ara Pacis (Altar of Peace)



This monument, rediscovered in the 16th century with additional discoveries in the 19th, has been pieced together since 1939. It was commissioned by the Senate in 13 BC and dedicated four years later in 9 BC. It celebrates the peace created throughout the Mediterranean world by Emperor Augustus after his victories in Gaul and Spain.



The Spread of the Greek Language

- After Philip of Macedon was assassinated in 323 B.C., he was succeeded by his 20-year-old son, Alexander. After only 13 years, Alexander the Great had conquered virtually all of the civilized world.
- Following Alexander's death, the various cultures of the ancient world began to congeal. The officials in most of the major states were Greeks, and Greek became the universal language of government and business. The *koine*, or common language, is the term "sufficient by itself to express the Greek in common use over the world."
- While Latin continued to be the dominant language in the west, Greek was spoken and read extensively in the east.



The Spread of the Greek Language

- “But for the conquests of Alexander there might have been no *koine* in the sense of a world-speech. The other Greek *koines* were partial; this alone was a world-speech because Alexander united Greek and Persian, east and west, into one common world-empire” (Robertson).
- “The successors of Alexander could not stop the march toward universalism that had begun. The success of the Roman Empire was but another proof of this trend of history. The days of ancient nationalism were over and the *koine* was but one expression of the glacial movement. The time for the world-speech had come and it was ready for use” (Robertson).



The Spread of the Greek Language

- “The *koine* was in such general use that the Roman Senate and imperial governors had the decrees translated into the world-language and scattered over the empire....It was the language, not only of letters, but of commerce and every-day life.”
- “He (Alexander) rapidly established Greek as the *lingua franca* (Italian for *a common language*) of the empire, and this it was which gave the chief bond of union to the many countries of old civilizations, which had hitherto been isolated. This unity of culture is the remarkable thing in the history of the world.”
- “The Greeks were the school-teachers of the empire.”



The Spread of the Greek Language

- “The new religion that was to master the world began its career at the very time when the Mediterranean world had one ruler and one language. On the whole, it was the best language possible for the Graeco-Roman world of the first century A.D.”
- Cicero (106-43 BC) said that “Greek is read in almost all nations.” Under the protection of Roman law, the Apostles could travel everywhere and make themselves understood through the Greek language in every city of the Roman domain.

The Spread of the Greek Language

“Important and far-reaching consequences followed when Alexander adopted Greek as a universal language throughout the empire...It can with truth be said that Alexander paved the way for Christianity; without his spade-work, its preachers would have made slower headway in western Europe” (Agnes Savill).



Roman Roads and Commerce

- Roads to Spain and Britain in the west.
- Roads to Persia and India in the east.
- Broad, well-built highways were constructed over rivers, mountains, and deserts.
- Security of travel.
- Suppression of piracy.
- Facilitated movement of groups, individuals, and ideas.
- Christianity first expanded along the trade routes.



Iter Antoninus

“With the exception of some outlying portions, such as Britain north of the Wall, Dacia, and certain provinces east of the Euphrates, the whole Empire was penetrated by these *itinera* (plural of *iter*). There is hardly a district to which we might expect a Roman official to be sent, on service either civil or military, where we do not find roads. They reach the Wall in Britain; run along the Rhine, the Danube, and the Euphrates; and cover, as with a network, the interior provinces of the Empire.”



Roman Roads

“The Roman network of roads was both practical and impressive. The empire was united by 53,000 miles of roads from Scotland to Syria. Often built by legionaries, the roads were designed for troop movements, but civilians soon followed. Under many roads across Europe today lie Roman roads. It was not until the 19th century that Europe saw such a comprehensive road system.”

- Nigel Rodgers, Cambridge University



Appian Way



Appian Way



ROMA

ARICIA
Ariccia

ANTIUM
Anzio

ANXUR
Terracina

FUNDI
Fondi

FORMIAE
Formia

MINTURNAE
Minturno

SINUESSA
Mondragone

PUTEOLI
Pozzuoli

NEAPOLIS
Napoli

SALERNUM
Salerno

PAESTUM

VELIA
Ascea

CASINUM
Casino

BENEVENTUM
Benevento

CAPUA

CAUDIUM
Arpaia

AECLANUM
Mirabella Eclana

LUCERIA
Lucera

AECAE
Troia

AEQUUM
Tuticum

AQUILONIA

HERDONIAE
Ortona

CANUSIUM
Canosa

VENUSIA
Venosa

METAPONTUM
Metaponto

HERAKLEA
Policoro

SYBARIS
Sibari

SIPONTUM
Manfredonia

BARIUM
Bari

BUTONTI
Bitonto

EGNATIA
Egnazia

TARENTUM
Taranto

URIA
Oria

NEAPOLIS
Polignano

BRUNDISIUM
Brindisi

LUPIAE
Lecce

HYDRUNTUM
Otranto



Via Appia Via Appia Traiana





The Roman Bridge of Alcantara
Western Spain

The Roads of the Roman Empire



Simon J. Kistemaker (right)

“As Paul and Barnabas proclaimed the gospel, they selected cities situated along major Roman roads.”





Religious Tolerance

- Roman rule was indifferent to most religious groups and ideas.
- There was an extensive interchange of ideas.
- Cultural unity had been established by Alexander the Great.
- A dark picture had emerged in heathenism.
- Gladiators/beasts: 20,000 died each month.
- Stoicism was a cold and self-centered belief and flattered men's pride.
- Epicureanism appealed to man's sensualism.



Moral Concerns

- The sanctity of marriage had ceased.
- Abortion and exposure and murder of newly born children were common.
- 1,000 harlots were kept at public expense at Venus' temple in Athens.

William Hendriksen

“But when **the fullness of the time** came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, in order that He might redeem those who were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4-5).

“It is God alone who fully knows why, in his inscrutable decrees, he had decided that ‘the long period of time (chronos)’ in which all the preparatory events were to occur would run out at that specific moment. It was then that he sent out from himself his Son.”