

History

Notes for Courses:

Church History (1): The Historical Background to the New Testament and Jewish History: Jews and Romans

Lesson Title: Roman Emperors

Timeline

Year

27 BC Augustus becomes emperor

12 BC Augustus becomes Pontifex Maximus

c.7-6 BC Birth of Jesus

4 BC Death of Herod

AD

14 Augustus dies, Tiberius becomes emperor

37 Tiberius dies, Caligula becomes emperor

41 Caligula is murdered, Claudius becomes emperor

54 Claudius dies, Nero becomes emperor

62. James martyred in Jerusalem (Josephus)

64. Fire of Rome

64 Persecution by Nero begins (Tacitus)

c.64 Martyrdom of Peter and Paul

68 Nero commits suicide

69. Vespasian becomes emperor

70. Destruction of Jerusalem

79 Death of Vespasian, Titus becomes emperor.

81 Death of Titus, Domitian becomes emperor.

95. Persecution by Domitian, John exiled on Patmos

100. Death of the Apostle John

Introduction: The Roman Empire during the time of the New Testament

- **The Roman Empire**

1. Peace - Pax Romana
2. Roads – Travel
3. Roman Government – Judea and Samaria ruled by Roman procurator (AD 6). Roman citizenship gave great prestige.
4. Language – Latin in the West, Greek in the East.
5. Roman Religion – Sacrifice to the Emperor. Jewish religion was 'religio licita'. Christianity initially seen as Jewish religion.

- **The Roman Emperors**

Julio-Claudian Emperors (Birth of Jesus – Death of Paul in Rome)

1. Augustus Caesar (27BC – 14AD)
2. Tiberius Caesar (14 – 37)

3. Caligula (37 – 41)
4. Claudius (41 – 54)
5. Nero (54 – 68)

Flavian Emperors (Siege of Jerusalem – Exile of John on Patmos)

1. Vespasian (69 – 79)
2. Titus (79 – 81) son of Vespasian
3. Domitian (81 – 96) son of Vespasian, younger brother of Titus.

Main Points

1. Augustus Caesar (63 BC – AD 14)

Augustus was the first emperor of the Roman Empire (27 BC - AD 14)

Pontifex Maximus

Augustus took the title Pontifex Maximus in 12 BC

Pontifex Maximus was the head of the priesthood of Ancient Rome

The office was held for life.

People were commanded to offer sacrifice to the Emperor.

The title Pontifex Maximus was retained by the Bishop of Rome after the fall of the Roman Empire.

The birth of Jesus took place when Augustus was Emperor (c. 6-5 BC)

Census under Augustus

Death of Herod the Great (4 BC)

Herod's Kingdom divided between his 3 sons (4 BC)

Archelaus ethnarch of Judea

Antipas and Philip ruled as tetrarchs (a fourth part of the kingdom)

Herod Antipas tetrarch of Galilee

Herod Philip tetrarch of the north- eastern province. He reigned 37 years – died 20th year of Tiberius (AD 34)

Judea becomes a Roman Province (AD 6)

After complaints from Jews and Samaritans, Archelaus was banished by Rome to Vienna in AD 6 and Judea became a Roman province.

Then Judea was governed by a procurator, Coponius, but came under the supervision of the legate of Syria, Quirinius.

Census made in AD 6 providing details of population and resources for the purpose of taxing the Jews.

Formation of Zealots

Taxation by Rome led to formation of Zealots led by Judas of Galilee.

Judas was killed but he is mentioned in Acts 5:37.

2. Emperor Tiberius (14-37) [Notes on Tiberius](#)

There was a time of good government in Rome from AD 14 – 26.

In AD 26 Tiberius went to Capri in a self imposed exile.

Sejanus was left in control of Rome.

Sejanus was head of the praetorium guard and trusted by Tiberius.

Sejanus betrayed this trust and conspired against the imperial family.

Sejanus was killed in AD 31.

The ministry of Jesus took place during the time of unrest in Rome (c.26 - 29)

3. Caligula (12-41)

Caligula regarded himself as a god. He had an incestuous affair with his sister who he murdered. Caligula ordered his image to be placed in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. The order was never carried out and Caligula was murdered in AD 41.

4. Claudius (10BC - 54AD)

Claudius was the friend of Herod Agrippa (10BC-44AD) - Acts 12

Suetonius (69-c.130) Roman biographer

The Twelve Caesars, Claudius, par. 25. 'He banished from Rome all the Jews, who were continually making disturbances at the instigation of one Chrestus.' See Acts 18:2

Flavius Josephus (c.37-100)

Wrote the account of how James was stoned to death in Jerusalem (AD c.62)

Ananus assembled the sanhedrim of judges, and brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions] Book 20 Chapter 9:1.

5. Nero (37-68)

Nero became emperor through the scheming of his mother, Agrippina.

Agrippina married Claudius who then adopted Nero as his son.

Nero later murdered his mother, Agrippina.

The Fire of Rome (64)

Tacitus (55-117)

The Annals of Rome (109) Book XV

'Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome, where all things hideous and shameful from every part of the world find their centre and become popular. 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's Golden Palace and Gardens

Nero offered his gardens for the spectacle, and was exhibiting a show in the circus, while he mingled with the people in the dress of a charioteer or stood aloft on a car. Hence, even for criminals who deserved extreme and exemplary punishment, there arose a feeling of compassion; for it was not, as it seemed, for the public good, but to glut one man's cruelty, that they were being destroyed.

6. Vespasian and Titus

The War of the Jews (AD 66 – 70)

Vespasian left Judea during the Jewish revolt to be Emperor.

His son Titus was left to put down the rebellion.

Josephus gives a detailed account of the war of the Jews which ended with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70

Titus held a procession in Rome commemorating his victory over the Jews
Arch of Titus in Rome depicts the procession showing the carrying of spoils from Jerusalem – Golden Lampstand

Titus became Emperor after his father.

7. Domitian (51-96)

Domitian was the son of Vespasian and the brother of Titus.

The Persecution of Apostle John under Domitian

Eusebius Chapter XVIII

'It is said that in this persecution the apostle and evangelist John, who was still alive, was condemned to dwell on the island of Patmos in consequence of his testimony to the divine word. Irenaeus, in the fifth book of his work Against Heresies, where he discusses the number of the name of Antichrist which is given in the so-called Apocalypse of John, speaks as follows concerning him: "If it were necessary for his name to be proclaimed openly at the present time, it would have been declared by him who saw the revelation. For it was seen not long ago, but almost in our own generation, at the end of the reign of Domitian."

To such a degree, indeed, did the teaching of our faith flourish at that time that even those writers who were far from our religion did not hesitate to mention in their histories the persecution and the martyrdoms which took place during it. And they, indeed, accurately indicated the time. For they recorded that in the fifteenth year of Domitian Flavia Domitilla, daughter of a sister of Flavius Clement, who at that time was one of the consuls of Rome, was exiled with many others to the island of Pontia in consequence of testimony borne to Christ.'