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## 1 - The Beginnings of the Roman Empire

The Roman people over a period of 500 years established a republic, conquered the Italian peninsula, and extended their influence East and West within the Mediterranean and beyond. After this, for another 500 years, they ruled the empire they had established.

## 2 - The Etruscans

The site of Rome itself, was inhabited BC 2000 . But about BC 800 a group of people, probably from Asia Minor, called the Etruscans, landed on the coast of Italy, north of the Tiber, and made their way inland. By BC 500 they had dominated a large portion of Italy, from the foothills of the Alps in the North, to the modern town of Salerno in the South. Greek colonists in the southern tip of Italy and Sicily held that section.

Throughout this time, Rome, as a city had grown. Roman legend has it that the city had three Etruscan kings, the 1st of them was Etruscan king, Tarquin the Proud. The monarchy ended in BC 509, Tarquin was deposed and Rome became a republic.

## 3 - The Republic

Although the Romans had deposed their kings, they kept the idea of supreme authority [imperium] . But, instead of letting that power reside in the King, they gave it, every year to two consuls. The imperium of the consuls was absolute, either could veto the other, and

## Beginnings

## The Monarchy BC 753-509

## The Republic BC 509-31

neither could institute a change in the law without the other's agreement.

The early Republic also included a Senate and two assemblies, the comitia curiata [which had a tribal foundation] and the comitia centuriata [which had a military basis].

From the start the Senate was technically an advisory council which was drawn from the father's [patres] of the community, that is the patricians. Any citizen of Rome could be eligible for the two assemblies, but both of these were really dominated by the patricians.

The history of the Republic in the early days was dominated by the struggle of the common people [plebians] for a larger voice in the government of the community - for they, being unable to perform the religious ceremonies which only the patricians could, were disqualified from high office. Round about BC 490-480 the establishment of the Tribune of the Plebes opened doors for better representation. The tribunes were elected from the plebian assembly and they served for a year, and had considerable power. Their personal security was guaranteed in that anyone doing them violence was punished with death. They called the plebian assembly, and could veto any action on the Senate or comitia centuriata. Eventually plebians had the right to marry into the patrician classes and also to hold the office of Consul. In BC 287 they won the right to pass laws in the plebian assembly without the permission of the Senate.

During this time of internal re alignment, Rome extended her influence into the rest of Italy and by the beginning of the fourth century she was the principal city of Italy.

## 4 - Major Military Conquests

### [1] The Gauls

Wars with the Gauls [BC 390] and the Greeks, and particularly after the defeat of Pyrrhus the Greek King of Epirus left Rome the master of the whole of the Italian peninsula.

This arrival on the Mediterranean scene of the Romans, meant that they would have to conflict with the major players, who in the order that they were dealt with included Carthage, the Seleucids in Syria, the Ptolemies in Egypt and the original empire of Alexander, the Macedonians.

### [2] Carthage

The First Punic War [Punic War, first BC 261-241]

The original settlers of Carthage were the Phoenecians [Lat. punicus] The first of three Punic Wars against Carthage began in BC 264. The Romans, mastering the sea warfare that Carthage was renowned for, defeated them and drove them from Sicily in BC 241.

The Second Punic War [BC 218-202]

This broke out at the instigation of Carthage. It was fought mainly on the land and found the Romans outmanoeuvred by Hannibal, who attacked from the North, after marching over the Alps. Hannibal harassed Rome for 15 years on their own territory. Rome counter attacked Carthage, and Hannibal hurried back to defend his own land. He was defeated at the battle of Zama, near the Carthaginian capital, in BC 202.

### [3] War with Greeks - Philip of Macedon [BC 200-167]

Philip had supported Hannibal. Rome sent an army, on the pretext of helping two small states, and in the battle of Cynoscephalae [BC 198] Philip was defeated. However, the two small states found the government of Rome equally oppressive as Philip. So Philip stepped back into the fray, yet died before he could complete the war. His son Perseus went on with it but was decisively beaten by Rome in BC 167.

### [4] War with Seleucids - Antiochus III of Syria [BC 198-190]

While the Romans were busy with Philip, Antiochus arrived on the Greek mainland and allied himself with the anti-Roman Greek states. Rome attacked and defeated him at the Battle of Magnesia in BC 190.

### [5] Carthage again - The Third Punic War [BC 149 -146]

In a dispute over treaty terms, Carthage refused to submit to the Roman terms - Rome promptly levelled the city, ploughed the site, sowed it with salt, so that nothing could be grown,

## **Military Conquests**

### **France - the Gauls**

### **Carthage - Modern Tunisia**

### **Greeks**

### **Seleucid empire**

and took the Carthaginians into slavery.

## 5 - Social change with in the Republic

### [1] Optimates, populares and equestrians

Social life in Rome throughout this militarily expanding time, was changing greatly. A gap between wealthier Romans and the ordinary farmer was growing. Political alignment was to be seen in two groups the optimates were patricians and well to do plebians were conservative in outlook. The populares, were more liberal and represented the views of the more common people. This new political picture was complicated by the emergence of a new and important social class, the equestrians or the knights. While their name was derived from the older understanding of people who could afford horses, they were really mostly merchants, middle class and liberal. By the first century what mattered was their vote., much more than their position in any military establishment.

### [2] The offices of advancement.

Rome was still governed by the aristocracy, principally because they served without pay, and the only people who could afford to serve were the wealthy. Also, these men rose to office through a specified way of advancement, which began with minor offices, and even these were denied the common people. In order of advancement the bottom rung was a petty official called a questor, then a man became an aedile, which was a peace officer and an administrator of public works. The he moved to become a praetor, or judge, and then finally rose to consul, who of course was the governor. After serving as a consul, a man became eligible to be a propraetor or a proconsul. After this he could expect to become the governor of a Roman province.

### [3] Reforms and the social changes

During the second and first centuries BC, the major political reformers, each with a way for Rome to be changed came to the fore.

Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus

Tiberius got himself elected as one of Rome's ten tribunes in BC 134. He proposed reforms to public farming and grazing lands. These lands were monopolised by the aristocracy and Tiberius request was that some of these should be allotted to the common people. The Senate balked, a sympathetic tribune to them vetoed it, Tiberius overrode his fellow tribune, a riot followed and Tiberius and 300 of his followers died.

In BC 124 his brother Gaius was elected tribune. He proposed even more sweeping land reforms than his brother, and added the proposal that the city of Rome grant Roman citizenship to some of the other major Italian cities and that jurors be taken from the equestrian class [formerly from the Senators]. The Senate provoked public violence, had him declared a public enemy - he committed suicide.

Gaius Marius. [BC107-89]

An equestrian, who supported the populares held the consulship six times between BC 107 and 100. His principal achievements were military, defeating the African chief Jugurtha, and repelling the threatened invasion of the Celtic and Germanic tribes to the North. In the course of these activities, he changed the shape of the Roman army. Formerly, soldiers had been drawn from the ranks of the Roman citizens. He permitted those without property to enlist and furnished them with weapons. So the Army became a band of organised professionals, making a career of military service, and owing loyalty to the Commanders rather than to the government of Rome.

The rivalry between Gaius Marius and Lucius Cornelius Sulla.[BC 88-79]

Sulla attempted to have the authority of the Senate strengthened. Elected to consul in BC 88 Sulla found that Marius had attempted to undermine his authority by having an army command transferred from Sulla to himself. Instead of leaving for the East against Mithridates, King of Pontus, Sulla marched back to Rome. He entered Rome quietly and Marius fled to Africa. Sulla dealt with Mithridates brutally. However, while away Marius returned to Rome, killing many of Sulla supporters. Marius, having died, was not present when in BC 83 Sulla returned and slaughtered Marius' supporters, in one instance 6000 at once. For the remainder of his po-

## Social changes

litical life he was an absolute dictator - giving the Senate more power and limiting the power of the tribunes.

In BC 79 Sulla retired and one of his generals Gnaeus Pompeius, called Pompey the Great, given permission to stand for the office of consul, being under age, was elected. He rescinded most of Sulla's objectionable laws, and after one term of office, stood down. In BC 67 he was granted a three year imperium to clear out pirates from the Mediterranean - he did it in three months; turned East and defeated Mithridates of Pontus. while he was away, Rome was in chaos under the insurrection of Catiline. Pompey returned, and with many thinking he would enter Rome to rule. However, he waited outside to be invited. The Senate granted him a "triumph" ie an official welcome, but refused to honour his deeds, or give his veterans land grants.

### *The First Triumvirate - Pompey, Caesar and Crassus*

Pompey formed a secret alliance with Caesar and Crassus, two other Romans piqued by the Senate. They did not wish to seize government, but simply to control the distribution of offices and government appointments and military commands. In this way each achieved his own desires; Pompey got the recognition for his Eastern victories, Caesar was given the command of Gaul, and Crassus was to engage the Parthians. Caesar gave his daughter Julia to Pompey in marriage. In BC 56, despite some friction, the three agreed to extend their arrangement.

In BC 54, Julia's death made the friction more acute. And in BC 53 Crassus died in battle and Pompey and Caesar came to open conflict. Caesar, in Gaul, was adding to his victories North of the Alps. Pompey was consolidating his power in Rome. The Senate and the optimates were for Pompey, the populares were for Caesar. In BC 49 Pompey threw down the gauntlet- he persuaded the Senate to order Caesar to disband the army. Caesar's reply, in defiance of the Senate order, crossed the River Rubicon, the southern limit of his command - clearly signalling that he intended to march on Rome.

With his army, and most of the Senate, Pompey withdrew to Greece, hoping to use his control of the fleet to envelope Italy. Caesar, master tactician that he was, attacked first. He defeated Pompey's adherents in Spain, and then marched on Greece, defeating Pompey at the battle of Pharsalus in BC 48. Pompey fled to Egypt, where he was assassinated as he stepped off the ship by Ptolemy's agent. Caesar, beguiled by Cleopatra, the sister of Ptolemy, made her his mistress and, after her brother's death in battle against the Romans, became master of Egypt.

Caesar returned to Rome. In defeating the army of Pompey in Greece, he had surpassed the authority of the Senate already, and so he found himself complete master of the city. He governed well - pardoned his old enemies, improved vastly the administrative system, colonised extensively, tightened laws against crime and usury, planned a highway across Italy and revised the calendar, giving us the Julian calendar, forerunner of our own. Yet, it was clear that he intended to make his power absolute, and on the Ides of March BC 44 he was stabbed to death by his conspirators.

### *The Second Triumvirate - Octavian and Mark Antony and Lepidus*

After Caesar's death, the struggle for power was between the Senate, and two of Caesar's heirs, Octavian his grand nephew and legal heir, and Mark Antony Caesar's consul. Antony claimed Caesar's authority after seizing his papers. The Senate threw their support behind Octavian, who they perceived as the milder man. However, Octavian, desiring the consulship, when refused by the Senate, invaded the city and forced his own election. He then formed an alliance between himself, Mark Antony and Lepidus, another of Caesar's top officers. Antony took command of the East, Octavian of the West, and Lepidus of Africa. All three shared the control of Italy.

They punished Caesar's murders, defeating them at Philippi in BC 42. They also killed all their own real and imagined enemies. In BC 36 Octavian ousted Lepidus from Africa simultaneously usurping sole control of Italy. Antony snubbed him by rejecting his legal wife, Octavian's sister, and marrying Cleopatra, with whom he had been captivated.

In BC 32, Octavian read a will he claimed was Antony's to the Senate. In the "will" Antony left all of Rome's Eastern lands to Cleopatra. The Senate annulled Antony's powers and declared

***The First Triumvirate -  
 Pompey, Caesar and Crassus  
 BC 56-44***

***The Second Triumvirate -  
 Octavian, Mark Antony &  
 Lepidus BC 44-31***

# The Roman Empire

*Brief Summary down to the New Testament times*

war on Cleopatra. In a year, at the Battle of Actium BC 31, the Roman fleet defeated the Egyptians. Antony and Cleopatra fled to Egypt and committed suicide.

The Battle of Actium ended the Republic-even though Octavian insisted that he had restored it. Rome's dominions had grown too vast - they needed the administration which came from a strong central authority. Octavian gave it that.

Octavian becomes Emperor in BC 27

He assumes the title of Augustus.

## 6 - The Roman Emperors of the New Testament times.

When we come to the task of establishing "when" things happened in the New Testament we need to search for those places in the NT where there is a reference to some dateable facts which we can check out from other secular sources. If we can find these places, then this gives us a check and a basis and framework upon which to build up the likely dates for events in the NT with some degree of certainty.

Before we attempt this however, it is really helpful to have the major dates of the Roman Emperors clearly in mind for the period which we are studying. This is vital as the change of the Emperor often made far reaching alterations in the provinces.

Augustus died Aug 19, AD 14

Tiberius died Mar 16, AD 37

Gaius Caligula died Jan 24, AD 41

Claudius died Oct 13, AD 54

Nero died June 9, AD 68

### AUGUSTUS [BC 27-AD 14]

[See Luke 2.1, and also Acts 25.21,25]

He was the first Roman emperor, and this title was given to him by the Senate when he attained supreme power. He was born in BC 63. He had a studious youth and came suddenly to the fore at the death of Caesar in BC 44 at the age of 19. He was politically very able and he maintained his position carefully. He marched against Antony, it was supposed in defence of the Republic. He occupied first place in the triumvirate, but he removed his rivals gradually, and with the defeat of Antony at Actium in BC 31 he was the undisputed master of the Roman world. In BC 29 he returned to Rome [aged 34] where he ruled autocratically until his death at an old age. At the end he was very morose and suspicious being saddened by family troubles. He has associated himself with Tiberius in government and he left him as his successor after him.

The Jews, being subject to Rome, came under Augustus as their supreme ruler. Following the battle at Actium, Herod, who previously had been a supporter of Antony, switched sides to the victor, and was confirmed in his area by Augustus. Later, when visited by Augustus, when he came to Syria [BC 20] Augustus added to his territory.

In honour of the Emperor, Herod erected a marble temple at Panias, built the capital, Caesarea, [BC 10] and also rebuilt Samaria calling it Sebaste. After Herod's death, Augustus carried out his wishes in the division of his kingdom among his sons, but subsequently joined Judea and Samaria to the province of Syria, exiling their ruler Archelaus.

Jesus Christ was born in the reign of Augustus, and was about 18 years old when the Emperor died. Augustus ordered a more or less complete census to be taken on four occasions. They were in BC 26, BC 6, AD 4 and AD 14.

### TIBERIUS [AD 14-37] See Luke 3.1

The second Roman emperor, he acceded to the rule on AD 14 on the death of Augustus. However, about two years before the death of Augustus, Tiberius was already ruling jointly with him. The exact year of the adoption of Tiberius into the government by his stepfather is

*The Empire*

*BC31-476 [in the West] and*

*BC31-1453 [in the East]*

*The Empire*

*Augustus BC 27-AD14*

*The Empire*

*Tiberius [AD 14-37]*



# The Roman Empire

*Brief Summary down to the New Testament times*

not known. So, when Luke 3.1 begins the ministry of John the Baptist in the 15th year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar he may be reckoning from AD 12, not AD 14 as the start of the reign. It is Tiberius, who is referred to all the way through the Lord's life whenever "Caesar" is spoken of.

He was the son of Tiberius Claudius Nero and Livia. His mother Livia, Augustus took as wife whilst her husband was still alive. Tiberius was born in BC 42. Constitutionally, the Emperor could not appoint a successor. However, Augustus got over this difficulty. He appointed Tiberius as a partner or co-regent. In this way, on Augustus' death, it was practically impossible to pass over the already ruling Tiberius. He was a competent person, of reserved temperament, influenced by early disappointments and outraged feelings, which made him weak and cruel.

Tiberius, at his accession retained Valerius Gratus as the procurator of Judea, in order to lessen the frequent changes. Because each new governor, who supposed he would be there a short time only, tended to extort as much as possible from the locals. Gratus deposed Annas and made his son-in-law Eleazar, and afterwards Caiaphas his son-in-law, high priest. Pontius Pilate, the successor of Gratus was also appointed by Tiberius. Pilate was nominated by Sejanus, the favourite of the Emperor, but an accomplished schemer, who the Emperor only realised his wickedness towards the end of his life. By this time he had retired to the island of Capri to die there on 16 March AD 37.

## GAIUS CALIGULA [AD 37-41]

The third Emperor of the Roman empire. Gaius' father, Germanicus was adopted by Tiberius, his paternal uncle. Germanicus served as quaestor [which is the lowest office of state in the senator's official career. From the time of Augustus onward there were 20 quaestors, many of them were attached as finance officers and assistants to the governors of the senatorial provinces]. Before the legal age, Germanicus became Consul, without holding the usual intermediate offices, and at Augustus' death the senate appointed him to command the forces in Germany.

Germanicus married Agrippina the Elder, who bore him nine children. Two died in infancy, a third in childhood. The surviving children were three girls Agrippina the younger, Drusilla, and Livilla, and also three boys, Nero, Drusus and Gaius. At Germanicus' death, which was arranged by Tiberius [Suetonius: The Twelve Caesars, IV,2 p.154] these children survived their father. Tiberius later had Nero and Drusus executed as public enemies.

Gaius was born 31 August AD 12 at Antium. Having accompanied his father on his army duties, he used to be called "Caligula" as Suetonius records:

He won his surname, Caligula ["Bootikin"] from an army joke, because he grew up among the troops and wore the miniature uniform of a private soldier. An undeniable proof of the hold on their affections which this early experience of camp life gave him is that when they rioted at the news of Augustus' death and were ready for any madness, the mere sight of little Gaius unquestionably calmed them down. Twelve Caesars IV,9

After accompanying his father to Syria, Gaius returned and lived with his mother, and after her exile, with his great grandmother Live [Julia Augusta] until Tiberius called him to Capri at the age of 18.

He married Junia Claudilla. When she died in childbirth, he seduced Ennia Naevia, the wife of Macro, the Guards Commander, swearing to marry her if he became Emperor. He was easily and immediately accepted as Emperor.

## CLAUDIAS [AD 41-54]

[See Acts 11.28,18.2]

The fourth emperor of the Roman Empire, was the son of Neros Claudius Drusus and of Antonia [whose mother Octavia was the sister of the emperor Augustus]. Born at Lyons 1st August BC 10 he was of weak health and feeble intellect. He was, as a consequence, kept without

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*The Empire*

*Gaius Caligula [AD 37-41]*

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*Claudias [AD 41-54]*

duties until the reign of Gaius Caligula. His time was spent in literary studies and also other activities until the praetorian guards raised him to the principate on 24th Jan AD 41 - a position he occupied until he was murdered by his wife Agrippina in the 12th Oct. AD 54. His wives Agrippina and Messalina interfered much with the course of justice in Rome and did great damage during his reign.

The carelessness of Gaius in regard to the corn supply caused a great deal of difficulty for Claudius on his accession to the power. Famines in his reign were recorded as being prevalent, and the emperor was sensitive to this point.

Acts 18.2 records that Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome. Other sources number the Jews to be too great for Claudius to have done that, hinting that all Claudius did was forbid them from assembling together. His general policy towards the Jews was favourable. This is shown in two edicts, one which related to Alexandria and the other to the whole of the empire [Josephus: Antiquities. XIX, v, 2, 3] which granted them religious toleration, exemption from military service and some measure of self government.

## NERO [AD 54 -68]

[See Acts 25.11 - he is the Caesar to which Paul appealed, and, if we assume two trials, before whose tribunal Paul appeared. It was in reference to his imperial household that Paul asserted there were fellow believers and probably converts Phil.4.22]

He was born in AD 37 of parents Domitius and Agrippina, both of whom were of the household of the Caesars. Nero was destined for the throne by his ambitious mother Agrippina who secured her own marriage to the emperor Claudius, who was her uncle. She then engineered the betrothal of Nero to Octavia [the daughter of Claudius and Messalina], and finally the adoption of Nero as the emperor's son in AD 50 and him being designated successor over Britannicus [Claudius' own son]. When Claudius died suddenly in AD 54, Nero, mainly through his mother's strategy, was peacefully accepted as the new Emperor.

For the first five years of his reign, he was under the guidance of Seneca, the philosopher and his tutor in boyhood and Burrus, a prefect in the praetorian guard. By these counselors, the early influence of Agrippina was countered.

Nero was connected with Poppaea, the wife of Otho [later to become Emperor], and her ascendancy over him personally became the chief factor in his demoralisation and often the direct or indirect reason for his many crimes. Wanting to be Empress, she coveted the position of Octavia. Agrippina's death followed and also the death of Burrus [AD 62] removed another obstacle to her goals. The appointment of Tigellinus as prefect in his stead provided her with another accomplice as well as providing Nero with a fresh evil genius for vice as well as crime. Imperial orgies became more shameless - influential senators were removed from Rome and assassinated. Seneca, in despair, withdrew into private life. Octavia, through perjured witness, was convicted of infidelity, divorced, banished and finally, murdered. Nero married Poppaea, who received the title of Augusta. Extravagance led to financial embarrassment, which was relieved by excessive taxation.

Paul's letter to the Romans, with its statements about being subject to the powers that be [Romans 13.1-5], had been written during the first five years of Nero's reign.

Paul's arrival in Rome took place probably soon after Agrippina's death. His mild imprisonment, tolerated evangelistic activity, earlier trial which some think issued in acquittal, all belong to the period of Poppaea's ascendancy.

That Paul was probably tried by Nero in person is likely, for in the midst of much carelessness, the Emperor was particular in his attention to appeals from the provinces in criminal cases. His custom was to receive from each of his assessors a written opinion, and he pronounced sentence personally from the tribunal on the following day. [Suetonius, Nero 15; see also Tacitus, Annals 13.4]. Poppaea had leanings towards Judaism [Josephus, Antiquities XX, vii.11] and had twice interceded with Nero on behalf of Jews. Without any other antagonistic influence, the eulogium of Festus would tell strongly in the apostle's favour.

In AD 64, the tolerant attitude of Nero's government toward Christianity was trans-

*The Empire  
Nero [AD 54-68]*

formed into cruel hostility. In July of that year the great fire of Rome took place. Of fourteen civic districts, three were destroyed totally, and seven partially. There was a belief in Nero's guilt for the fire. It is unlikely that he did, although the common charge of complicity was widely believed. This was due to the following

- [a] previous sanitation reforms at the time were keenly opposed
- [b] his admiration for the spectacle of the fire
- [c] his pleasure in the rebuilding of the city on a magnificent style
- [d] using a significant area of the burnt part for the building of his Golden House
- [e] some of the flames later broke out afresh in Tigellinus gardens

This common belief in Nero's guilt, the danger of revolution, for there were many ruined and homeless sufferers led to the Christians [by Poppaea's suggestion?] being blamed for the fire. This would have been believed for:

- [a] the Christians had a horror of pagan temples, many of which had been destroyed in the fire.
- [b] they were supposed to be disloyal, and hostile to society
- [c] they had an expectation of the end of the world by fire

In the Neronian persecution, we see a movement in the imperial practice with regard to the Christians from prosecution out of particular crimes, to prosecuting them for being Christians.

The Neronian persecution, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the exile of John on the island of Patmos, were three successive events which paved the way for the unification of Jewish and Gentile Christians. They moved, under suffering, from sectional friction to that of mutual sympathy.

In AD 65 there was such discontent at Nero's reign that there was a plot to depose him and replace him with a man of noble birth. The plot was discovered and became a pretext for the wholesale slaughter of all the virtuous and influential in Rome. Every prominent citizen, whose virtues rebuked Nero's vices, or whose popularity excited fear in him, was mercilessly executed.

Having visited Greece in AD 66, on his return in the spring of 68, Nero found that the armies and the citizens had conspired to place Galba, governor of Spain, on the throne. He fled from Rome to the villa of a freeman where he stabbed himself.

## 7 - The Roman Emperors after the New Testament times.

Nero is the last of the *Julio-Claudian Dynasty*. Following Nero, there was a period of civil war. During this time there were three emperors in quick succession.

Galba 68-69

Otho 69

Vitellius 69

The *Flavian Dynasty* followed:

Vespasian 69-79

Titus 79-81

Domitian 81-96

The 'adoptive' Emperors who followed these were:

Nerva 96-98

Trajan 98-117

Hadrian 117-138

***The Empire - Civil War  
Galba, Otho, and Vitellius***

***The Empire - The Flavian  
Dynasty  
Vespasian, Titus and  
Domitian***

***The Empire - The 'adoptive'  
Emperors: Nerva, Trajan and  
Hadrian***