



KATOOMBA

— BAPTIST CHURCH —

CHRIST'S CHURCH THROUGH THE AGES

LESSON 4: THE WORLD OF THE NEW TESTAMENT (PART 3)

THE GRECO-ROMAN WORLD

- Describes the regions of the world that, culturally and historically, were directly influenced and shaped by the civilisation of the ancient Greeks and Romans.
- Through the conquests of the Macedonian Empire under Alexander the Great, followed by the later conquests of the Roman Republic/Empire, this common civilisation would come to rule the world.
- This common civilisation would include a:
 - Common political system
 - Common economy
 - Common language
 - Common culture
 - Common religion
 - Philosophical religions
 - Mystery religions
 - Civic religion

COMMON POLITICAL SYSTEM

- By the 1st Century A.D., Rome had evolved into an empire.
- The exact nature of what this empire looked like politically is complex – and its popular perception, even more so.
- The three major foundations of the Imperial Roman state were the central government (Emperor + Senate), the military, and the provincial governments.

- Throughout history, the emperors were known by numerous titles, offices, and positions:
 - *Augustus*: 'Majestic', 'Great', 'Venerable'; exclusive to the emperor; associated with divinity
 - *Caesar*: originally a cognomen of Julius Caesar; later made into an honorific title of descent from Caesar himself.
 - *Imperator*: 'Commander'; victory title taken by generals after major military victory ('triumph').
 - *Pontifex Maximus*: 'Supreme Pontiff'/'Chief Priest'; Head of the College of Pontiff; oversaw the public religions of the Romans.
 - *Princeps (Senatus)*: 'First Citizen'; republican term for leading citizen of the State; commonly used by early emperors to keep up the façade of the 'restored Republic'.
 - *Dominus*: 'Lord'/'Master'; honorific title; popular in late Imperial period; 'Kaisar Kyrios' ('Caesar is Lord').

COMMON ECONOMY

- The major cities across the empire depended on significant world-wide trade and commerce for the necessities of everyday life.
- Coastal port cities (Alexandria), as well as cities accessible by river (Rome) were therefore major hubs of economic activity across the world.
- The Roman road networks and peace on the high seas made trade and transport greater than ever before.
- For example: grain from Libya (North Africa) primarily fed the people of Rome; wine from the Italian peninsula was exported throughout the Mediterranean; tin and iron from Britain could be exported to Byzantium; gold and silver from Spain could be sold in Alexandria.
- Such interconnected trade networks united distant lands, and made for a prosperous, one-world economy.
- The earliest banks in the empire were located in the temples.
- With the construction of Roman temples (as well as the incorporation of local temples), there developed an elaborate global banking system.
- The system allowed for the exchange of massive sums of money without physical currency transfers, leading to the creation of fiat currency in the Roman economy.

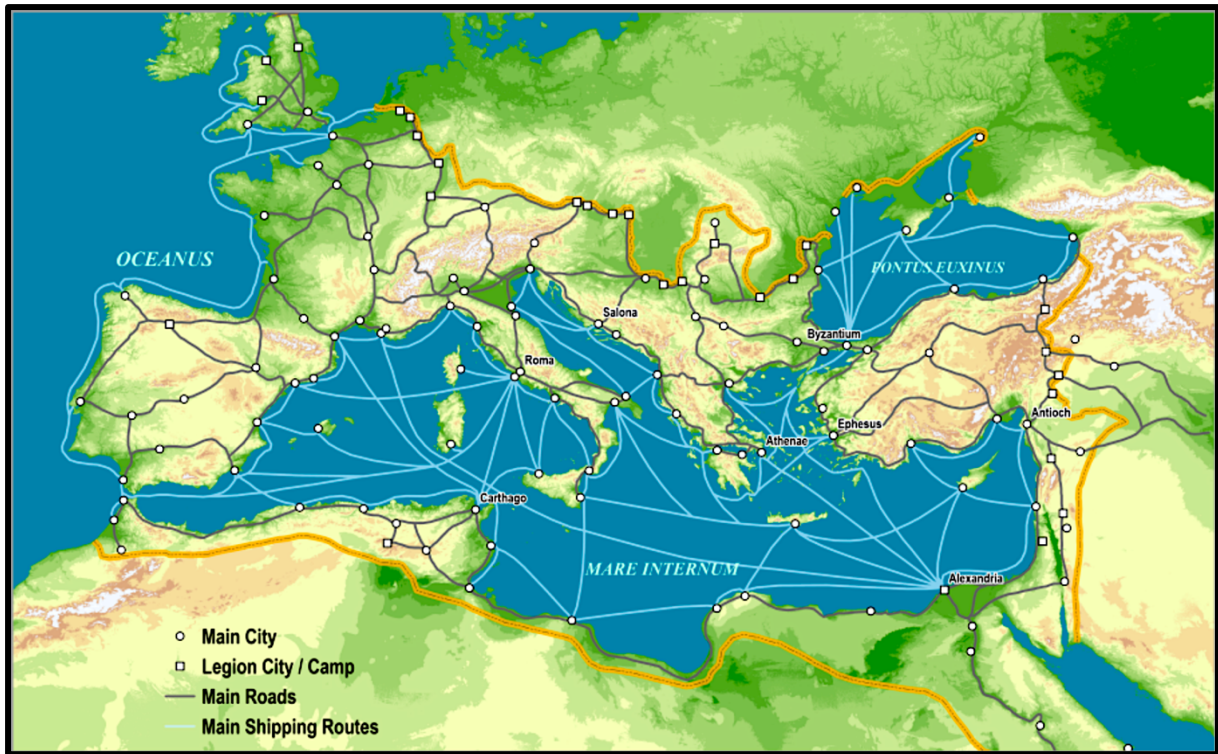


FIGURE 1: ROMAN TRANSPORT LANES



FIGURE 2: ROMAN ROAD NETWORK

COMMON LANGUAGE

- Following the conquests of Alexander the Great, Hellenistic culture spread around the world.
- Consequently, Greek became the common tongue that united the people under the Roman Empire.
- Latin still played an important role in Italia and the western provinces of the empire (especially in politics and law), but Greek was the first or second language across the various sectors of life (economics, academia, etc.).

COMMON CULTURE

- The dominant culture of the empire was not strictly Roman - but rather, Greek.
- Hellenistic culture had been predominant and widespread for centuries by the time Octavian is declared *Augustus* by the Roman Senate in 27 B.C.
- *"The armies of Rome vanquished the East, but Eastern culture vanquished Rome."* (2000 Years of Christ's Power; Needham, 2016)
- By the 1st Century A.D., Greek language, education, philosophy, science, arts, literature, and architecture had become essentially universal around the world.
- Such commonality made for a strong sense of cultural unity and shared customs.

COMMON RELIGION

- Religion was an absolutely vital and central element of the everyday lives of people across the Roman Empire.
- Roman scholar Varro (116-27 B.C.) explains that there were three main, interconnected forms of religion (all unified with each other into a one-world religion):
 - Philosophical Religions (Greek philosophical schools)
 - Mystery Religions (Mystery Cults)
 - Civic Religion (Traditional Paganism + Imperial Cult)



FIGURE 3: THE ANCIENT AGORA OF ATHENS (ILLUSTRATED)

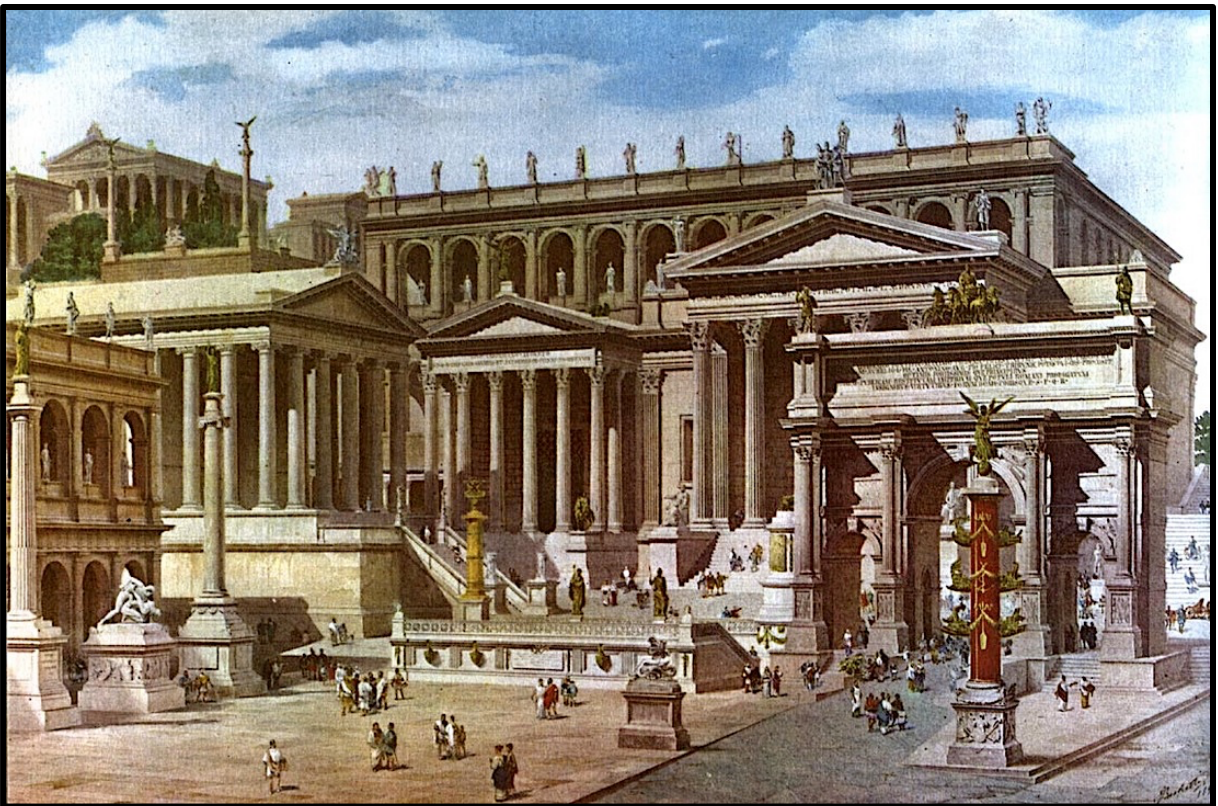


FIGURE 4: THE ANCIENT ROMAN FORUM (ILLUSTRATED)



FIGURE 5: *Pericles' Funeral Oration*, by PHILIPP FOLTZ (1852)



FIGURE 6: *The Martyrdom of St. Agnes in the Roman Forum* by JOSEPH DÉSIRÉ COURT (1864)

COMMON RELIGION

PHILOSOPHICAL SCHOOLS

- Greek philosophies that arose during the Classical Period (500-323 B.C.) & Hellenistic Period (323-31 B.C.)
- By the 1st Century A.D., the three predominant schools of philosophy in the Roman Empire were:
 - Platonism (Plato of Athens, 427-347 B.C.)
 - Epicureanism (Epicurus of Samos, 341-270 B.C.)
 - Stoicism (Zeno of Citium, 334-262 B.C.)
- Philosophy in the Roman Empire was not a subject to be studied at university - it was an entire way of life.
- It was the very system that formed one's worldview.
- Philosophers and their students came almost exclusively from the educated upper classes.
- A number of the Early Church Fathers were converts from Platonism.

MYSTERY CULTS

- Were newer in origin than traditional Roman Paganism.
- Developed in the Eastern regions of the world; directly tied to Hellenistic culture.
- Famous mystery cults include:
 - Cybele (Asia Minor)
 - Isis (Egypt)
 - Mithras (Persia; practiced in Western Empire/Rome)

CIVIC RELIGION - TRADITIONAL PAGANISM

- The temples were the centre of religious life.
- The worship of the family of gods, headed by a king of the gods (Zeus to Greeks; Jupiter to Romans).
- Different gods for different aspects of culture and life (Ares/Mars, god of war; Aphrodite/Venus, goddess of love; Artemis/Diana, goddess of nature & wildlife, etc.).
- Involved animal sacrifices, prayers, rituals, oracles, etc., trying to find the will and blessings of the gods.
- Regarded as the official faith of the Roman Empire, funded, upheld, and defended by the State, and regarded as absolutely essential to its survival.
- Intimately connected to Greco-Roman art and culture.
- Roman Emperor himself was the *Pontifex Maximus*.

CIVIC RELIGION – IMPERIAL CULT

- *Cultus* speaks to the view that the emperors were the divinely sanctioned authority of the Roman State.
- As *Princeps*, he was expected to maintain peace, prosperity, and security throughout the empire; especially through ensuring harmony between the Roman Military and the Senate & People.
- The emperor's office and rule were divinely approved, which came with religious and moral expectations.
- A living emperor was expected to demonstrate *pietas* ('piety', 'religious devotion').
- A deceased emperor was able to be declared *divus* ('divine') by the Senate, and elevated as such through undergoing apotheosis ('deification') e.g. Julius Caesar.



FIGURE 7: STATUE OF AUGUSTUS AS JUPITER (1ST CENTURY A.D.)



FIGURE 8: ROMAN DENARIUS (MINTED c. 18 B.C.)



FIGURE 9: ROMAN AUREUS (MINTED c. A.D. 13)