

### **The Roman Environment During the Life of Christ.**

*Bibliographic note: apart from the Bible, these notes were formed from Donald Guthrie's New Testament Introduction, F.F. Bruce's New Testament History, and Eduard Lohse's The New Testament Environment.*

#### **1A The Pax Romanum.**

- 1B** After many wars, the Roman Empire was established.
- 2B** After the death of Julius Caesar, there was a civil war, and then Augustus Caesar was given absolute power over the senate and people of Rome.
- 3B** Augustus was a good man who desired peace and prosperity for Rome. After many long years of warfare, external and internal, the people were tired of it, and longed for peace.
- 4B** Augustus was sensitive and thoughtful, a good ruler. Through his long rule many great things were provided.
- 5B** Because of the state of peace, there was a great emphasis on trade and commerce. Many Romans made their fortunes because of the advantages of freedom through military victory and peace through military strength.
- 6B** There were great building programs in every city, financed by donations from the private sector. Theatres and temples and viaducts all sprouted as if there were a spring season for buildings.
- 7B** There was a fantastic system of roads and trade routes on the sea, all protected by the police and the Roman equivalent of the coast guard. Piracy and highway robbery remained at a minimum through capital punishment.
- 8B** Augustus also preached the virtues of morality and discipline and justice and courage. He realized that the Roman empire was centered on the family, and that its stability depended on it.
- 9B** There was a rigidly pro-family bank of legislation, which encouraged marriage and children inside the marriage relationship. Some of this was circumvented, while much of it was taken to heart.
- 10B** Augustus was Caesar at the time of the birth of Christ. Although he died in 14 A.D., Tiberius continued the Augustian tradition of the Pax Romanum.
- 11B** Tiberius was the emperor for the remainder of the life of Christ.
- 12B** The Jews (and especially the Pharisees and Zealots) had absolutely nothing to complain about.
- 13B** The peace of Rome was very pro-establishment.

#### **2A Koine' Greek, the language of the Roman Empire.**

- 1B** Koine' Greek was the language of Alexander's conquest. Attic Greek was a difficult language to master.
- 2B** When Alexander expanded the Greek empire as far as Afghanistan and India, the people had to assimilate in order to be a part of that empire. Without Greek the foreigners could not trade or prosper.
- 3B** However, since Attic Greek was so difficult, the people of the empire commonized it, so that

- it could be easily used.
- 4B This commonization was a great simplification which retained the subtle and detailed nature of its predecessor.
  - 5B Koine' Greek was the greatest language in history for written communication. Through it many complex and subtle concepts could be communicated with clarity.
  - 6B Koine' Greek was retained in the Roman Empire as the language of the common man. Nearly everyone knew it and used it throughout their lives.
- 3A The Romans borrowed much of their culture from their Greeks. Greek literature, drama, and games were all retained by the Romans.
- 1B The Romans admired almost all aspects of Greek culture, even the most debauched things.
  - 2B The Romans had spent much of their developing years in war and in a very disciplined and workaholic environment, and so they lacked cultural self-esteem.
  - 3B The Greeks had much to offer in the way of culture although much of theirs was corrupt.
  - 4B The Greeks had died from their cultural debauchery - it was the ruin of their empire.
  - 5B No nation has ever survived the corruption of their morals.
  - 6B The homosexuality of the Greeks was rampant; it destroyed them.
  - 7B The Romans adopted even this - even to the point of pederasty. It would also destroyed them.
  - 8B Analogous to this is the popularity of all things American to the Japanese. Whether its baseball or disco or Madonna, the Japanese people love it, as long as it is American. The contrast is that while Japan was conquered by the U.S. and it adopted much of U.S. culture, the Greeks were conquered by the Romans, and yet the Romans adopted the Greek culture.
  - 9B However, at the time of Christ, the Romans remained for the most part moral and family oriented. It was the most stable time in the history of the world.
- 4A The Roman postal service was for government use only - a great idea. Imagine the reduction in garbage from the elimination of junk mail. Personal mail went with travellers and traders.
- 5A The Romans had no public schools. The education of their children was a two-tiered system.
- 1B The first tier was that of the disciplinary training. This was usually administered by a well educated and trusted household slave. He would teach manners and self-discipline to the children of the household.
  - 2B The second tier was that of the educational training. Science, math, astronomy, medicine, botany, zoology, linguistics, literature, music, and sports were all common subjects in the education of the child. There was also a great emphasis on logic and rhetoric.
- 6A Next, there was the institution of slavery.
- 1B It is important to note that the Romans could never imagine a state of total abolition, so ingrained was the institution of slavery in their nation and their culture and even their thinking.
  - 2B The moral question of slavery was never raised.
  - 3B Slaves became slaves because of the conquests of the Roman Empire. Whenever a new territory was conquered, much of the population was deported back to population centers elsewhere in the empire.

- 4B This served a twofold purpose: it provided cheap labor, and the insurance against guerrilla warfare in the conquered territory.
- 5B The people who were deported received a low form of welfare: they would have the basic logistics provided in exchange for their labor. Slavery did much to provide for those who would otherwise be charity cases.
  - 1C The slaves of the Roman Empire took on what was considered the menial tasks of the day - much of the manual labor was done by them. As the Empire grew and prospered, the more educated and presentable slaves become household helpers and educators.
  - 2C Slaves were always dependent on their masters, and as long as the Empire stayed on the virtuous side.
- 6B Manumission was often granted to faithful slaves.
- 7B Emancipated slaves had great opportunities for upward mobility.
- 8B There was not an extreme prejudice against slaves - often they were respected for who they were.
  - 1C Although slaves were considered property, they were allowed to have their own lives, marrying and producing families.
  - 2C The New Testament is written from this frame of reference.
- 9B Masters are considered legitimate authority, as long as they stayed within the laws of Divine established. Therefore, slaves are called upon to obey their masters.
- 10B Masters are called upon to emancipate their slaves.
- 7A Finally, there is the matter of the Roman military.
  - 1B Rome was a very martial society. The military was an important part of their everyday lives.
  - 2B Good soldiers received tremendous rewards for their performance on the battlefield.
  - 3B The military was considered a very virtuous profession, and soldiers were given great respect.
  - 4B Even at the edges of the empire, soldiers were always around.