

In The Fullness Of Time



Temple of Augustus in Ankara, Turkey

“But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law...” (Galatians 4:4)

David Padfield

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The photograph on the front cover is of the Temple of Augustus in Ankara, Turkey. On the walls of this temple were inscribed *The Achievements of the Divine Augustus (Res Gestae Divi Augusti)*, the funerary inscription of the Roman Emperor Augustus Caesar.

Abbreviations

For Primary Sources

b.	<i>Babylonian Talmud</i>
y.	<i>Jerusalem Talmud</i>
m.	<i>Mishnah</i>
‘Abod. Zar.	The tractate <i>Avodah Zarah</i> from the Mishnah or Talmud
Avot	The tractate <i>Avot</i> from the Mishnah or Talmud
Ber.	The tractate <i>Berakhot</i> from the Mishnah or Talmud
Meg.	The tractate <i>Megillah</i> from the Mishnah or Talmud
Menah.	The tractate <i>Menahot</i> from the Mishnah or Talmud
Mid.	The tractate <i>Middot</i> from the Mishnah or Talmud
Nid.	The tractate <i>Niddah</i> from the Mishnah or Talmud
Sotah	The tractate <i>Sotah</i> from the Mishnah or Talmud
J.W.	<i>Jewish War</i> , by Flavius Josephus
Ant.	<i>Jewish Antiquities</i> , by Flavius Josephus
Moses	<i>On the Life of Moses</i> , by Philo
Free	<i>Every Good Man Is Free</i> , by Philo

Bible Translations

ASV	American Standard Version (1901)
CEV	Contemporary English Version (1995)
CJB	Complete Jewish Bible (1998)
CSB	Christian Standard Bible (2017)
ESV	English Standard Version (2016)
HCSB	Holman Christian Standard Bible (2003)
KJV	King James Version (1769)
NAS	New American Standard (2020)
NET	NET Bible (2019)
NKJV	New King James Version (1982)
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version (1989)
YNG	Young’s Literal Translation (1862)

I have tried to follow the guidelines given *The SBL Handbook of Style* as much as possible. However, their handbook has not kept up with electronic media sources as much as I would like, so I have adopted a system where serious students can find my sources without too much trouble. In addition, SBL does not always follow the rules of modern typography, so for the sake of clean graphic design, I have bent a few other rules as well.

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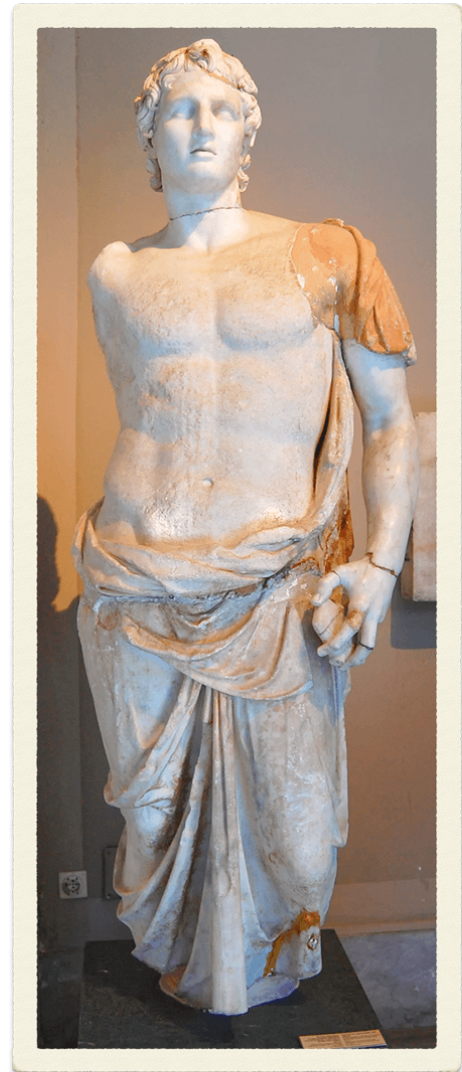
“In The Fullness Of Time”

Introduction

- I. Our Lord came into the world at the perfect moment in human history, or, as Paul would say, He came “in the fullness of time” (Gal 4:4).
 - A. Bible students can see God’s providential hand moving behind the scenes of human history to direct world events to prepare for the coming of His Son.
 - B. Throughout the centuries, God’s divine oversight of the world’s affairs had prepared men and nations for the Messiah and the proclamation of the gospel.
 - C. “*The fulness of time* refers to the completion of the period of preparation in God’s sovereign timetable of redemption. When the law had fully accomplished its purpose of showing man his utter sinfulness and inability to live up to God’s perfect standard of righteousness, God ushered in a new era of redemption.” (MacArthur, *Galatians*, 107)
 - D. “Had Christ come directly after the fall, the enormity and deadly fruits of sin would not have been realized fully by man, so as to feel his desperate state and need of a Savior. Sin was fully developed. Man’s inability to save himself by obedience to the law, whether that of Moses, or that of conscience, was completely manifested; all the prophecies of various ages found their common center in this particular time: and Providence, by various arrangements in the social and political, as well as the moral world, had fully prepared the way for the coming Redeemer.” (Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *A Commentary, Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, comments on Galatians 4:4)
 - E. “Why is the period of Christ’s coming termed ‘the fulness of the time’ (AV)? Various factors combined to make it such. For instance, it was the time when Rome had conquered and subdued the known inhabited earth, when Roman roads had been built to facilitate travel and Roman legions had been stationed to guard them. It was also the time when the Greek language and culture had given a certain cohesion to society. At the same time, the old mythological gods of Greece and Rome were losing their hold on the common people, so that the hearts and minds of men everywhere were hungry for a religion that was real and satisfying. Further, it was the time when the law of Moses had done its work of preparing men for Christ, holding them under its tutelage and in its prison, so that they longed ardently for the freedom with which Christ could make them free.” (Stott, *The Message of Galatians*, 105–106)
- II. Over 500 years before Christ came into the world, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon dreamed about a “great image” made of gold, silver, bronze, and iron (Dan 2:31–36).
 - A. Daniel explained to Nebuchadnezzar that this “great image” represented four world empires, beginning with Babylon (Dan 2:37–43).
 - B. God used these four empires (Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Grecian, and Roman) to move forward with His eternal plan.
 - C. During the days of the fourth empire, Rome, the kingdom of God would begin, and it would “break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” (Dan 2:44).

I. The Hand Of God

- A. We see God's hand in the dispersion (*Diaspora*) of the Jews during the days of Babylonian captivity, beginning in 598/597 BC, which resulted in the formation of synagogues and the creation of the sect of the Pharisees.
1. The breadth of this dispersion can be seen in the composition of the audience that was present on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Christ when Peter preached the first gospel sermon ever given in the name of our risen Lord (Acts 2:5-11).
 2. The Jews of the Eastern Diaspora are included in the phrase, "Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia" (Acts 2:9).
 3. The Jews of the Western Diaspora were mentioned by the Jews who heard Jesus, and then spoke of "the Dispersion among the Greeks" (John 7:35).
 4. Luke referred to the Jews of the Western Diaspora as "the Hellenists" (Acts 6:1; 9:29; 11:20).
- B. We see God's hand in moving Cyrus, the king of Persia, to allow the Jews to return from Babylonian captivity, beginning in 538 BC (2 Chr 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4).
1. God said of Cyrus, "He is My shepherd, and he shall perform all My pleasure, saying to Jerusalem, 'You shall be built'" (Isa 44:28).
 2. Josephus also saw the hand of God as He "stirred up the mind of Cyrus" to allow the Jews to return to their homeland (Josephus, *Ant.* 11.1-14).
 3. Even though Cyrus allowed the Jews to return home, more Jews lived outside of Palestine than inside the country by the first century AD.
- C. We see God's hand in the conquests of Alexander the Great as he spread the Grecian empire eastward past the border of India and introduced Greek culture, language, and civilization to vast portions of the ancient world.
1. Alexander the Great was the "male goat" in Daniel's vision who crushed Persia with amazing speed (Dan 8:2, 5-7, 21).
 2. Josephus connected the "male goat" in Daniel 8:21 to Alexander the Great and the Grecian empire (Josephus, *Ant.* 10.270-274).



Alexander the Great

- D. We see God’s hand in the rise, and eventual fall, of the Roman Empire.
 - 1. The early church grew and flourished under the protection of Rome.
 - 2. Early Christians traveled on over 50,000 miles of well-built stone-paved Roman roads to spread the gospel across the known world during the time of *Pax Romana* (Roman Peace).
 - 3. As people traveled by land, they were protected on the roads by the mighty Roman legions.
 - 4. They could also travel safely by sea as the Roman navy had swept pirates off the Mediterranean Sea.
- E. The first century AD was the time, prophesied by Isaiah, when God would set up His house and “all nations shall flow to it” (Isa 2:2–4; cf. 1 Tim 3:15).
 - 1. This was the time that Joel looked forward to when “whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved” (Joel 2:28–32; cf. Acts 2:14–21).
 - 2. The kingdom of heaven came into being at the exact time of God’s choosing—when the perfect moment in human history had arrived (Mark 1:14–15).

II. The Greco-Roman World Was Ready

- A. When our Savior was born in the first century AD, there was a general expectation among Jews and Gentiles that a great king would come from Israel.
- B. As the gospel of Christ spread from Judea and Samaria “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8), it found a pagan world that was longing for something better.
 - 1. The Greco-Roman gods were losing their grasp on the common people.
 - 2. The moral corruption that was so prevalent in paganism created a spiritual hunger that only the gospel of Christ could fill.
 - 3. “Gentiles were impressed by three features of Judaism. First, the concept of one God who created, sustains, and rules all things was clearly superior to polytheistic views. Second, Judaism stressed a lifestyle of moral responsibility with its monotheism. Third, it was a religion of ancient and stable tradition in contrast to the faddish cults of the time. Proselytes usually embraced Judaism gradually because much needed to be learned, such as the proper observance of the Sabbath and the careful following of the dietary rules, before one could win acceptance into the Jewish community. Persons attracted to Judaism and keeping the Sabbath and food laws were termed fearers or worshipers of God.” (Songer, “Proselytes,” *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*)
- C. Roman authors often spoke about the belief that a ruler would come out of Judea, though they applied this belief to the Roman Emperor.
 - 1. Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus (c. AD 69–140) was a Roman lawyer and former secretary to Hadrian—he is a primary source of the history of the Roman Empire during New Testament times.
 - 2. “An ancient superstition was current in the East, that out of Judaea at this time would come the rulers of the world. This prediction, as the event later proved, referred to a Roman Emperor, but the rebellious Jews, who read it as referring to themselves, murdered their Governor, routed the Governor of Syria when he came down to restore order, and captured an Eagle.” (Suetonius, *The Twelve Caesars*, 281)

3. Cornelius Tacitus (c. AD 56–118) wrote two main works dealing with the lives of the Roman emperors: the *Annals* (from the accession of Tiberius through the emperorship of Nero) and the *Histories* (from the death of Nero to the death of Domitian).
4. “Most people held the belief that, according to the ancient priestly writings, this was the moment at which the East was fated to prevail: men would now start forth from Judaea and conquer the world. This enigmatic prophecy really applied to Vespasian and Titus; but men are blinded by their greed.” (Tacitus, *The Histories*, 241)

III. Gentiles Seeking Jesus

- A. Wise men from the East visited Jesus shortly after His birth (Matt 2:1–11).
 1. The term “wise men” (Gr. *magos*) is defined as a “wise man and priest, who was expert in astrology, interpretation of dreams and various other occult arts” (Bauer et al., *BDAG*, 608).
 2. “The East” has been variously identified as any country from Arabia to Persia.
 3. The preponderance of evidence points to Mesopotamian or Persian origins for these men, an old and powerful priestly caste among Medes and Persians.
 4. These men were well educated for their day and were specialists in medicine, religion, astronomy, astrology, and divination.
 5. These “wise men” were pagans, not Jews, and the fact that Gentile wise men performed the same acts of worship as Jewish shepherds did symbolize the universal appeal for the future gospel of Christ.
 6. Centuries before our Lord’s birth, Isaiah said, “The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising” (Isa 60:3).
- B. On one occasion, Jesus passed through Samaria and spoke to a woman near Sychar at Jacob’s well (John 4:3–30).
 1. In 721 BC, after the fall of the Northern kingdom of Israel, the king of Assyria brought foreign people to settle in the region of Samaria (2 Kgs 17:24–31).
 2. These pagan foreigners intermarried with the remaining Jews in the area, and become known as “Samaritans.”
 3. The result was an ethnically and religiously mixed group of people hated by Jews and non-Jews alike.
 4. Like most Samaritans, the women looked forward to the coming of the Messiah (John 4:25–26).
- C. On the Sunday before His death, Jesus made His “triumphant entry” into the city of Jerusalem (Matt 21:1–9; Mark 11:1–10; Luke 19:28–44; John 12:12–18).
 1. The following day Jesus cleansed the temple (Mark 11:15–17; Luke 19:45–46).
 2. As Jesus went into the temple, he “drove out all those who bought and sold in the temple, and overturned the tables of the money changers,” and said, “It is written, *My house shall be called a house of prayer;*’ but you have made it a *den of thieves*” (Matt 21:12–13).
 3. The temple complex consisted of a series of courts leading into the temple.
 4. While foreigners were not permitted to enter the temple (Deut 23:1–8; Jer 51:51; Ezek 44:9), they were allowed to become a part of Israel (Ezek 47:22).
 5. The temple of the New Testament era featured a large outer Court of the Gentiles that covered several acres.

6. God desired that the temple precincts would be “a house of prayer for all peoples” (Isa 56:7), but unscrupulous Jewish merchants had turned it into a “den of thieves” (Jer 7:11).
 7. The money-changers and sellers of doves set up business in the Court of the Gentiles, the only place into which a Gentile might enter, and turned it into an open-air market.
 8. While Jesus was in Jerusalem, a group of Greeks who had come to the holy city to “worship at the feast” of Passover found Philip and told him that they wished “to see Jesus” (John 12:20–21).
 - a) It is *possible* that these Greeks were proselytes to Judaism, but in all likelihood, they were among the many “God-fearers” who frequently visited Jerusalem (Josephus, *J.W.* 6.427; cf. *Ant.* 3.318–319).
 - b) “These Greeks (Ἑλληνές τινες, *hellēnes tines*) who had come up to worship at the feast were probably ‘God-fearers’ rather than proselytes in the strict sense. Had they been true proselytes, they would probably not have been referred to as Greeks any longer. Many came to worship at the major Jewish festivals without being proselytes to Judaism...” (Harris, *The NET Bible Notes*, comment on John 12:20)
 9. Have you ever wondered *why* these Greeks were interested in seeing Jesus?
 10. Had these Greeks witnessed Jesus cleansing the temple and desired to know more about a man capable of doing such things as this?
- D. On his first evangelistic journey, around AD 50, Paul visited Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:13–14), and his first recorded sermon was preached there (Acts 13:15–51).
1. In the synagogue at Antioch, there were devout Jews, along with some “god-fearers” (Acts 13:16 CJB), i.e., Gentiles who were sympathetic to the worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
 2. “God-fearers were non-Jews who believed in one God, attended the synagogue and respected the moral and ethical teachings of the Jews but who did not fully embrace all of the Jewish customs, such as the rite of circumcision...” (Walton, *Archaeological Study Bible*, on Acts 10:2).
 3. When Paul finished his sermon at Antioch, “the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath” (Acts 13:42).
 4. I have no doubt that Paul and Barnabas spent the next few days teaching the word and answering questions, and the whole city was stirred up.
 5. “On the next Sabbath almost the whole city came together to hear the word of God” (Acts 13:44).
 6. Paul reached out to the Gentiles at the synagogue, and they, in turn, went to tell their friends and family about the good news of Jesus Christ.
 7. When “the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy; and contradicting and blaspheming, they opposed the things spoken by Paul” (Acts 13:45).
 8. Having rejected the word of God and judging themselves “unworthy of everlasting life,” Paul turned to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46–47; cf. Isa 49:6).
 9. We will talk more about the “god-fearers” in our lesson on the synagogue (lesson seven in this series).

Conclusion

- I. “When the ‘fulness of the time’ came, Judaism was a dead religion, a religion of rite and ritual, of form and ceremony, of tradition and crushing legalism. The Gentiles, weary to death of their own bankrupt religions, turned hopefully toward Judaism only to be repelled by Jewish hostility and hypocrisy and by its bitter exclusiveness and rigid bondage to dead forms and narrow views. The great Gentile world was equally bankrupt. The Greeks had come and gone and left their indelible mark on the world. The golden age of Greece had dazzled the world. Art, science, and government flourished. Then Alexander the Great conquered the world. Greek philosophy, culture, and religion challenged all realms of thought, and Hellenism rose and flourished. It was all, however, just a hollow promise. Greek religion was able to offer men only a pantheon of ridiculous, warring, lusting gods made in the image and likeness of warring, lusting men. Then the Romans had their day. They sent their legions far and wide, hammered down all who stood before them, and imposed a Roman peace on the world. They brought with them iron-fisted law. They built magnificent roads and ruled over an empire of slaves. However, the Romans built no hospitals, no orphanages, and no public schools. The Roman idea of a holiday was to assemble in the amphitheater to watch gladiators fight to the death or wretched prisoners fight with bare hands against wild beasts to the accompaniment of the howls and cheers of a blood-maddened populace.” (Phillips, *Exploring Galatians*, 117–118)
- II. The Greco-Roman world was tired of the moral corruption in paganism and had a spiritual hunger that only the gospel of Christ could fill.

Jewish Expectations

Introduction

- I. Bible students can see God's providential hand moving behind the scenes of human history to direct world events to prepare for the coming of His Son.
- II. The kingdom of heaven came into being at the exact time of God's choosing—when the perfect moment in human history had arrived (Mark 1:14-15).
- III. When our Savior was born in the first century AD, there was a general expectation among Jews and Gentiles that a great king would come from Israel.
 - A. As the gospel of Christ spread from Judea and Samaria “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8), it found a pagan world that was longing for something better.
 - B. Roman authors often spoke about the belief that a ruler would come out of Judea.
- IV. Among the Jews, there “was an ambiguous oracle that was also found in their sacred writings, how, ‘about that time, one from their country should become governor of the habitable earth’” (Josephus, *J. W.* 6.312).

Discussion

I. Jewish Expectations In The Gospels

- A. When the wise men visited Herod after the birth of Jesus, the chief priests and scribes quickly told Herod *where* the Messiah would be born by quoting the word of Micah the prophet (Matt 2:1-6; cf. Mic 5:2).
 1. Jews understood that the Messiah had to come from Bethlehem (John 7:42).
 2. Jesus had fulfilled the prophecy of Micah when He was born in Bethlehem, the city of David.
 3. Jesus was indeed the long-awaited Jewish Messiah.
- B. Forty days after His birth, Mary and Joseph took Jesus to Jerusalem to present Him at the temple and make the customary sacrifices (Luke 2:22-24; Lev 12:6-8).
 1. In Jerusalem, there was a man named Simeon, a “just and devout” man who was “waiting for the Consolation of Israel” (Luke 2:25).
 - a) God had revealed to Simeon that he would not die until he had seen the Messiah (Luke 2:26).
 - b) When Mary and Joseph came to the temple complex, Simeon picked up the Christ Child and blessed Him (Luke 2:27-32).
 2. The prophetess Anna was also at the temple complex, an elderly widow “who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day” (Luke 2:36-37).
 - a) There had been no prophets in Israel for over 400 years, but God raised up this prophetess to announce the arrival of His Son!
 - b) When Jesus was presented at the temple, Anna “spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem” (Luke 2:38).
 - c) Anna and Simeon were not the only people in the holy city who were waiting for the Messiah!

- C. As John the Baptist was teaching in the wilderness, “the people were in expectation, and all were questioning in their hearts concerning John, whether he might be the Christ...” (Luke 3:15 ESV).
 - 1. The people did not know if John was the Messiah (cf. John 1:19–25), but they confidently expected His arrival!
 - 2. John said that he was not the Messiah but that He was soon to appear (Luke 3:16–17).
- D. During our Lord’s earthly ministry, the common people thought Jesus was “the Prophet who is to come into the world” (John 6:14; 7:40).
 - 1. The people saw Jesus as the fulfillment of the prophecy made by Moses (Deut 18:15–18).
 - 2. In the book of Acts, Peter identifies Jesus as the fulfillment of this prophecy (Acts 3:22–23; cf. Acts 7:37).
- E. At the death of Christ, we are introduced to Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Great Sanhedrin who “had not consented to their decision and deed” (Luke 23:50–51).
 - 1. Joseph “went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus” (Luke 23:52).
 - 2. Pilate granted the request, and Joseph buried Jesus “in a tomb that was hewn out of the rock, where no one had ever lain before” (Luke 23:53).
 - 3. Like Simeon (Luke 2:25) and Anna (Luke 2:38), Joseph was a man who had been “waiting for the kingdom of God” (Luke 23:51; Mark 15:43).

II. Extra-Biblical Writings Among The Jews

- A. The *Apocrypha* (Gr., “things that are hidden”) is a collection of non-canonical (i.e., uninspired) books of unknown authorship or of dubious origin, written between circa 200 BC and 70 BC.
 - 1. The books of the Apocrypha also looked for a Davidic King.
 - 2. The books of the Apocrypha include 1 Esdras (aka, III Ezra), 2 Esdras (aka, IV Ezra), Tobit, Judith, additions to the Book of Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Wisdom of Sirach (aka, Ecclesiasticus), Baruch and Letter of Jeremiah, the Prayer of Azariah, the Song of the Three Young Men, Susanna, Bel and the Dragon, the Prayer of Manasseh, 1 Maccabees, and 2 Maccabees.
 - 3. These books are not found in the Masoretic Hebrew text, which is considered authoritative among orthodox Jewish rabbis.
 - 4. Most scholars will point out that the Apocrypha does not contain “false doctrine,” they just have doubts concerning the origin, authorship, and authenticity of these books.
 - 5. Seven of these apocryphal books officially made their way into the Catholic Bible on April 4, 1546, during the Council of Trent by a narrow margin (24 voted yea, 15 nays, and 16 abstained).
 - 6. The books of the Apocrypha are called *Deuterocanonical* by Roman Catholics.
 - 7. In Martin Luther’s translation of the Bible into German (1534), he ordered the Greek Apocrypha placed between the Old Testament and the New Testament in his Bible, with the inscription: “Apocrypha: these are book which are not held equal to the Sacred Scriptures and yet are useful and good for reading.” (“Old Testament Apocrypha,” Goodnews Christian Ministry)

8. *The Belgic Confession*, written in 1561, is a confession of faith for the Christian Reformed Church, which originated in the Southern Netherlands (now known as Belgium).
 9. Article 6 of *The Belgic Confession* says, “The church may certainly read these books and learn from them as far as they agree with the canonical books. But they do not have such power and virtue that one could confirm from their testimony any point of faith or of the Christian religion. Much less can they detract from the authority of the other holy books.”
 10. The author of *2 Esdras* pictures the Messiah as a lion from the lineage of David, who will triumph over “the eagle” (the Romans)—and He will judge the world and deliver the faithful remnant of Israel (*RSV Apocrypha*, *2 Esdras* 12:31–34; cf. 13:3–11, 26–38).
- B. The *Pseudepigrapha* usually refers to an assorted collection of Jewish religious writings to be written c. 300 BC to AD 300.
1. These writings were not given by the inspiration of God, and thus they are not contained in the Holy Scriptures.
 - a) However, these books give us an insight into some of the doctrines held by many Jews during the time when our Lord walked upon the earth.
 - b) By studying the Pseudepigrapha, we see that Jews at the time of our Lord were living in anticipation of the Messiah.
 - c) The word *pseudepigrapha* comes from the Greek *pseudo*, meaning “false,” and *epigraphain*, meaning “to inscribe,” thus, “to write falsely.”
 - d) These books were written under false names, i.e., the claimed author is *not* the actual author (they did this to hide their own identity and boost the credibility of the book).
 - e) “Since Roman Catholics use ‘Deuterocanonical’ for the books Protestants call the Apocrypha, they call ‘Apocrypha’ what Protestants have called Pseudepigrapha. Actually both terms are arbitrary: there is much ‘hidden’ about the Pseudepigrapha, and some writings in the Apocrypha are pseudepigraphical.” (Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 448–449)
 2. Psalms of Solomon 17:21–25, written in the first century BC, expresses the earnest longing for a mighty Davidic king to come and reign: “Behold, O Lord, and raise up to them their king, the son of David, at the time, in the which you choose, O God, that he may reign over Israel your servant. And gird him with strength, that he may shatter unrighteous rulers. And that he may purge Jerusalem from nations that trample (her) down to destruction. In the wisdom of righteousness he will thrust out sinners from (the) inheritance, He will destroy the pride of the sinner as a potter’s vessel. With a rod of iron he will break in pieces all their substance. He will destroy the godless nations with the word of his mouth. At his rebuke nations will flee before him. And he will reprove sinners for the thoughts of their heart.” (Evans, *The Pseudepigrapha*)
 - a) “Prior to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, the only clear evidence from the last two centuries before the turn of the era for the use of the term *messiah* (χρῖστος) with reference to a future Davidic king, and indeed for the expectation of a Davidic messiah in any terms, lay in the *Psalms of Solomon*. This document is a collection of eighteen psalms preserved in Greek and Syriac. It is sometimes listed with the Apocrypha, such as the books of Maccabees and the Wisdom of Solomon, in ancient canonical

lists, and it is printed in modern editions of the Septuagint. While the real author is unknown, and it is not certain that all the psalms are by the same author, the psalms betray their original setting more clearly than do most of the Pseudepigrapha.” (Collins, *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, 52)

- b) The plea to “purge Jerusalem from nations that trample her” is obviously a reference to the Romans.
 - c) With this as a background, you can quickly see how John the Baptist stirred up the nationalistic hopes of some (Luke 3:15).
 - d) You can also see how Jesus, the son of David, would invite the attention of many (Matt 1:1; 9:27; 12:23; 21:9, 15).
3. Another pseudepigraphal book is 1 Enoch, which is not found in any English Bible and is missing from even the most liberal editions of the Apocrypha.
- a) 1 Enoch was probably written in the second century before Christ.
 - b) “The Book of Enoch is part of the canon of Scripture in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church; in fact, the book is often called ‘Ethiopic Enoch’ since the complete work survives only in that language.” (Olson, *1 Enoch*, 919–904)
 - c) “On the day of their weariness, there shall be an obstacle on the earth and they shall fall on their faces; and they shall not rise up (again), nor anyone (be found) who will take them with his hands and raise them up. For they have denied the Lord of the Spirits and his Messiah. Blessed be the name of the Lord of the Spirits!” (1 Enoch 48:10)
 - d) Please note that the word “Messiah” is found in 1 Enoch 48:10 (the first reference to the Messiah in that book).
 - e) “The context is significant, for the reference to the kings and the powerful denying ‘the Lord of Spirits and his Messiah’ probably alludes to Ps 2:2, an enthronement psalm. A third important facet is therefore added to the messianic portrait: he is the Davidic king as well as the Danielic son of man and the Isaianic servant. This is confirmed beyond doubt in the next chapter, which repeats that wisdom flows like water in the presence of the Lord of Spirits and the ‘Chosen One’ (49:1–2; the alternate title is again taken up), and that within him ‘dwells the spirit of wisdom, the spirit which gives understanding, the spirit of knowledge, and of power, and the spirit of those who have fallen asleep in righteousness’ (49:3). This is a clear allusion to Isa 11:2, a passage not from the Servant Songs but from a prediction about the ‘shoot’ out of ‘the stump of Jesse’—the idealized Davidic king.” (Olson, *1 Enoch*, 919–920)
- C. The *Targums* are explanations of the Hebrew Scriptures written in Aramaic to benefit those Jews who had either partially or entirely ceased to understand the Hebrew language.
1. These explanations of the Scripture became necessary near the end of the first century BC, as the common language was in transition and Hebrew was used for little more than schooling and worship.
 2. “The Targums are interpretive renderings of the books of the Hebrew Scriptures (with the exception of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Daniel) into Aramaic. Such versions were needed when Hebrew ceased to be the normal medium of communication among the Jews. In synagogue services the reading of the

Scriptures was followed by a translation into the Aramaic vernacular of the populace. For a reading from the Pentateuch the Aramaic translation followed each verse of the Hebrew; for a reading from the Prophets three verses were followed by the Aramaic translation. At first the oral Targum was a simple paraphrase in Aramaic, but eventually it became more elaborate and incorporated explanatory details inserted here and there into the translation of the Hebrew text.” (Metzger, “Important Early Translations of the Bible,” 40)

3. As Jacob pronounced his blessing upon Judah, he said, “Binding his donkey to the vine, and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine, he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes” (Gen 49:11).
 4. The *Targum Neofiti* to Genesis 49:11 applies these words of Jacob to the Messiah and proclaims: “How beautiful is King Messiah who will rise up from those of the house of Judah. He will gird his loins and go out to battle against his enemies, and he will slaughter kings with rulers; he will redden the mountains from the blood of their slain, and he will whiten hills from the fat of their men. His clothing will be soiled from blood, resembling a treader of grapes.” (Clem, *Translation of Targum Neofiti*)
- D. Along the northwest shore of the Dead Sea, there was a community of Jews known as the Essenes—they lived at Khirbet Qumran during the days of our Lord.
1. The Essenes, an ascetic group, believed that the Pharisees and the Sadducees had corrupted Jerusalem and the Temple.
 - a) They moved out of Jerusalem and lived a monastic life in the desert, adopting strict dietary laws and a commitment to celibacy.
 - b) They refrained from worshiping at the temple in Jerusalem because they believed the priests defiled the sanctuary, but they had very high regard for the Scriptures.
 - c) They shared all things in common, including food and clothing, and they cared for their sick and elderly.
 - d) They were meticulous about maintaining moral purity and dressed only in white linen.
 - e) The Essenes had a firm belief in a Messiah who would come to fulfill their expectations.
 2. The *Dead Sea Scrolls* were found in the eleven caves around Qumran between 1947 and 1954.
 3. These scrolls contain over 800 documents, including most of the Old Testament, Pseudepigrapha, and various administrative documents.
 4. 1QS (formerly known as the *Manual of Discipline*, or *Rule of the Community*) was one of the first scrolls to be discovered near Wadi Qumran Cave 1.
 5. “*Rule of the Community* (1QS) was among the first seven Dead Sea Scrolls discovered in Qumran Cave 1 in 1947 ... the *Rule* is a collection of rules and ideals for life within a distinct sectarian community, which consist of the community’s application of biblical law (e.g., purity laws) and regulations particular to the sectarian way of life (e.g., initiation rites, communal property). The Rule further outlines many of the central theological and ideological bases of the sectarian community.” (Jassen, “Rule of the Community,” *Outside The Bible*, 2923)

6. “The sons of Aaron alone shall have authority in judicial and financial matters. They shall decide on governing precepts for the men of the Yahad and on money matters for the holy men who walk blamelessly. Their wealth is not to be admixed with that of rebellious men, who have failed to cleanse their path by separating from perversity and walking blamelessly. They shall deviate from none of the teachings of the Law, whereby they would walk in their willful heart completely. They shall govern themselves using the original precepts by which the men of the Yahad began to be instructed, doing so until there come the Prophet and the Messiahs of Aaron and Israel.” (1QS 9:7–11)
- a) The “sons of Aaron” probably refer to the leaders of the Qumran community.
 - b) The “men of the Yahad” in the Dead Sea Scrolls is a reference to the members of its community at Qumran.
 - c) The “Prophet” at the end of days probably refers to Elijah, the herald of the Messiah.
 - d) The “Messiahs of Aaron and Israel” points to the community’s expectation of two Messiahs, one priestly and one royal.
- E. The most extensive treatment I’ve read concerning first century Jewish expectations of the Messiah can be found in *The Scepter and the Star: Messianism in Light of the Dead Sea Scrolls* by John J. Collins.



Cave Four at Qumran

Conclusion

- I. “From a purely human standpoint, if Jesus had been born seventy years earlier, when the Parthians occupied Jerusalem, you would never have heard His name. Nor would you have heard His name had He been born seventy years later, after the fall of Jerusalem. But during that brief interval, for the first time in human history it became possible for a story to spread throughout the Western world. For the first time in human history an idea could be heard by men and women everywhere. For the first time in human history it was possible for a man born in a little village in a small country, never traveling more than forty miles from His hometown, to become known and loved by thousands in countries and cultures far different from His own.” (Brown, *If Jesus Has Come*, 26)
- II. In the centuries before the coming of Christ, most Jews and many Gentiles alike lived in expectation of a Messiah.
 - A. Many in the Greco-Roman world were tired of the moral corruption in paganism and had a spiritual hunger that only the gospel of Christ could fill.
 - B. Some Jews, like Simeon, Anna, and Joseph of Arimathea, understood the Old Testament prophecies concerning the Messiah and were living in expectation of His arrival.
 - C. Other Jews, influenced by extra-Biblical writings, were also looking forward to the Messiah, even though they were misguided concerning His mission.
 - D. As the beautiful Christmas hymn, *O Holy Night*, suggests, “Long lay the world in sin and error pining, ’Til He appear’d and the soul felt its worth.”

Universal Empire

Introduction

- I. When our Savior was born in the first century AD, there was a general expectation among Jews and Gentiles that a great king would come from Israel.
 - A. Throughout the centuries, God had been preparing the Jewish world to receive a Savior, and in “in the fullness of time” (Gal 4:4) He arrived.
 - B. The Greco-Roman world was tired of the moral corruption in paganism and had a spiritual hunger that only the gospel of Christ could fill.
- II. When our Lord came into the world, the entire Mediterranean region was under the scepter of Rome.
 - A. Through Divine Providence, the Roman Empire provided the perfect environment for the establishment of the church and the spread of the gospel of Christ.
 - B. The rise and fall of the mighty Roman Empire was not an accident.
 - C. Centuries before Rome became a world power, the God of heaven had already determined her destiny and place in His eternal purpose.
 - D. The first hint of an earthly kingdom as “strong as iron” (Dan 2:40) was in a dream of Nebuchadnezzar, the great Babylonian king.

Discussion

I. Nebuchadnezzar’s Dream

- A. In the second year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign (603–602 BC), the Babylonian king had a dream that left him deeply troubled (Dan 2:1).
 1. Nebuchadnezzar demanded his wise men tell him the dream *and* give an explanation of it (Dan 2:2–3).
 2. His counselors wanted Nebuchadnezzar to tell them the dream first; *then*, they could explain it (Dan 2:4).
 3. However, Nebuchadnezzar knew that if he told them the dream, they could make up a story about what would happen after he died (Dan 2:5–9).
 4. Nebuchadnezzar threatened to kill all of his counselors if they did not tell him the dream *and* its interpretation (Dan 2:12–13).
- B. In the process of time, Daniel, a young Hebrew prophet, stood before Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 2:25–26).
 1. Daniel said the God of heaven could make known the dream (Dan 2:27–30).
 2. Nebuchadnezzar’s dream was about “a great image” (Dan 2:31–35).
 3. The great image that Nebuchadnezzar saw was a statue of a man composed of four metals and clay.
 4. Commentators usually point out that the metals degenerate from most precious to least precious—gold, silver, bronze, and iron.
 5. This great image stood shining before Nebuchadnezzar, and he was full of dread and terror.
 6. The scene then moves from a static image to one of violent action.
 7. While Nebuchadnezzar gazed at the image, he saw “a stone was cut out without hands,” and it struck the image on its feet (Dan 2:34).
 8. The entire image was broken into pieces, crushed, and ground to powder.

9. The image was destroyed, never to exist again.
 10. "And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth" (Dan 2:35).
- C. Daniel explained to Nebuchadnezzar that God had given him his kingdom, power, strength, and glory (Dan 2:37).
1. The "head of gold" represented Nebuchadnezzar and his kingdom (Dan 2:38).
 - a) Nebuchadnezzar's kingdom was not the greatest in territory nor the longest-lasting in history (626–539 BC).
 - b) However, his kingdom was important because it was the beginning of the other kingdoms that would spring from it.
 - c) On the other hand, gold was certainly a fitting representation of the glory of ancient Babylon!
 - d) Approximately 90 years after the time of Nebuchadnezzar, Herodotus, the Greek historian, visited Babylon and was amazed by the amount of gold found in her temples.
 - e) "In the temple of Babylon there is a second shrine lower down, in which is a great sitting figure of Bel, all of gold on a golden throne, supported on a base of gold, with a golden table standing beside it. I was told by the Chaldaeans that, to make all this, more than twenty-two tons of gold were used. Outside the temple is a golden altar, and there is another one, not of gold, but of great size, on which full-grown sheep are sacrificed. (The golden altar is reserved for the sacrifice of sucklings only.) On the larger altar the Chaldaeans also offer something like twenty-eight and a half tons of frankincense every year at the festival of Bel. In the time of Cyrus there was also in this sacred building a solid golden statue of a man some fifteen feet high—I have this on the authority of the Chaldaeans, though I never saw it myself." (Herodotus, *The Histories*, 1.183)
 2. The "chest and arms of silver" (Dan 2:39) represented the Medo-Persian empire (539–330 BC).
 - a) Darius the Mede took control of the Chaldean kingdom following the death of Belshazzar (cf. Dan 5:28–6:2).
 - b) "He is best remembered for the unalterable decree his officers tricked him into signing, which resulted in Daniel being cast into a den of lions (6:7–18). In contrast to Nebuchadnezzar, this ruler was helpless to reverse his own decree, vividly illustrating the inferiority of the silver kingdom of Medo-Persia to the golden kingdom of Babylon in the matter of royal sovereignty." (Whitcomb, *Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 2.33)
 - c) Though an old man, Daniel prospered under both the Median king's rule and that of Cyrus the Persian (cf. Dan 6:29f).
 3. The "belly and thighs of bronze" (Dan 2:39) represented the Greek empire (330–63 BC).
 - a) The Greek empire began with Philip of Macedon and was brought to its greatest glory under his son, Alexander the Great.
 - b) The fantastic speed with which Alexander conquered nation after nation is more fully discussed in the seventh chapter of Daniel's book.
 - c) When Alexander died in Babylon on June 10, 323 BC, at the age of 33, his empire was divided among his four generals.

- d) “After Alexander the Macedonian, Philip’s son, who came from the land of Kittim, had defeated Darius, king of the Persians and Medes, he became king in his place, having first ruled in Greece. He fought many battles, captured fortresses, and put the kings of the earth to death. He advanced to the ends of the earth, gathering plunder from many nations; the earth fell silent before him, and his heart became proud and arrogant. He collected a very strong army and won dominion over provinces, nations, and rulers, and they paid him tribute. But after all this he took to his bed, realizing that he was going to die. So he summoned his noblest officers, who had been brought up with him from his youth, and divided his kingdom among them while he was still alive.” (1 Macc 1:1–6 RSV)
- (1) Ptolemy I Soter (305–282 BC) gained control of Egypt and Palestine and made Alexandria the capital.
 - (2) Seleucus I Nicator (305–281 BC) and the Seleucid empire were centered in Syria, with Antioch as the capital.
 - (3) Lysimachus ruled Thrace and Bithynia.
 - (4) Cassander ruled Macedonia.
- e) “Alexander’s success was enormous. He first defeated a Persian army led by satraps at Granicus in northwest Asia Minor (in spring 334 BCE), then one led by King Darius himself at Issus in southeast Asia Minor in autumn 333. From there he moved to conquer the Syrian coast (332) and occupy Egypt in the winter of 332/331 BCE, before returning to defeat decisively King Darius at Gaugmela in northern Iraq in late 331. Darius fled to the Median capital of Ecbatana while Alexander occupied Babylon and Persia. Darius hastily retreated further, but was finally arrested and killed by his own satraps. The last Achaemenid was dead, and Alexander was master of Asia. But he was still not content; he pushed on through present-day northern Iran and Afghanistan to Pakistan and the Punjab valley before turning back; he died at Babylon on June 10, 323 BCE. While he may not have conquered the ends of the earth—his western ambitions remained unfulfilled—Alexander had united a formidable empire, inaugurating the Hellenistic world.” (Doran, *1 Maccabees–Psalms*, 4.30)
4. The “legs of iron” represented the Roman Empire (Dan 2:40).
- a) The Roman Empire was strong as iron in conquering, crushing, breaking in pieces, and bringing conquered peoples under its control (63 BC +).
 - b) “The Roman empire, in this sense of the word, is that period of Roman history that begins with the final victory of Octavian in the republic’s last civil war and ends with the collapse of all Roman authority, first in the W and then in the E—the final termination of the great historical movement that began with the coherence of the tribes of the Latin enclave around the fortified hills of the Lower Tiber River valley.” (Tenney and Silva, *Zondervan Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 5.163)
 - c) As they conquered nation after nation, they gained control of the civilized world.

- d) However, there was a weak point—this great image had “feet of iron and clay” (Dan 2:41–43).
 - (1) While Rome conquered many nations, she could not hold them together due to economic, social, and cultural differences.
 - (2) As iron and clay cannot be fused, so Rome could not amalgamate its conquered people.
 - (3) It tried to unite the world by emperor worship but failed.
- e) Daniel prophesied that in the days of Rome, the fourth world empire, the God of heaven would set up His kingdom (Dan 2:44).
 - (1) Early in the first century AD, as John the Baptist began his ministry in the wilderness of Judea, he proclaimed, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt 3:2).
 - (2) When Jesus began His earthly ministry, He said, “The *time* is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand” (Mark 1:15).
 - (3) The word for *time* (Gr. *kairos*) in Mark 1:15 is “not simply chronological time, but opportune time, appointed time” (Bratcher and Nida, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Gospel of Mark*, on Mark 1:15).
 - (4) This was the *time* when a world in darkness would see a great light—the time that all of world history had been marching toward.
 - (5) This announcement by Jesus concerning His kingdom happened “in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene...” (Luke 3:1).
 - (6) Near the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus said some in His audience would “not taste death till they see the kingdom of God present with power” (Mark 9:1).
- 5. Nebuchadnezzar also saw a stone cut out of a mountain “without hands,” and it struck the image and broke it into pieces (Dan 2:34, 45).
 - a) Then “the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth” (Dan 2:35).
 - b) The stone was to *begin* smiting the image during the days of the Roman Empire.
 - c) This is a picture of the church of our Lord, which came into being on the first Pentecost after the resurrection of Jesus from the dead (Acts 2:29–36).

II. The Scepter Of Rome

- A. It is hard to pinpoint the exact date when the city of Rome was established.
 - 1. Many legends and myths surround the history of the city.
 - 2. According to one ancient legend, Rome was founded by two brothers, Romulus and Remus, in 753 BC.

3. “According to ancient tradition, Rome was founded in 753 BC, but its origins were much disputed even by Roman historians. As there were no early written records documenting Rome’s origins, the history of this time is a mixture of legend, mythology and fact. In the 5th century BC, Greek historians wrote that Rome was founded by the Trojan hero Aeneas. He was a mythological figure (the son of Venus by Anchises) who was supposed to have fled to Italy after the sack of Troy (which occurred in the 12th century BC). Another explanation was that the twins Romulus and Remus were abandoned as children on the banks of the River Tiber. They were saved and suckled by a she-wolf, and then rescued by a shepherd who brought them up on the left bank of the river. It was there, on the Palatine Hill, that Romulus later founded the city of Rome, having killed his brother Remus in a quarrel.” (Adkins, *Introduction to the Romans*, 9)
4. Regardless of how the city came into being, it went from being a small town on the banks of the Tiber to a world power.



The Temple of Saturn in the Forum at Rome

- B. The Roman *Empire* began in 27 BC when the Republic of Rome died.
1. Julius Caesar declared himself a perpetual dictator in 44 BC, which ended with his assassination by a group of senators led by Brutus and Cassius.
 2. “Caesar’s generals, Antony and Lepidus along with Caesar’s heir Octavian, formed a temporary ruling triumvirate. They defeated Caesar’s assassins in the battle at Philippi in 42 B.C. This finally resulted in the exclusion of Lepidus and the division of the empire into the West, controlled by Octavian, and the East, controlled by Antony. Antony’s military failure against the Parthians led to his excessive reliance on Egyptian resources and created a correspondingly inordinate influence of Egypt’s Queen Cleopatra on the Roman ruler. Octavian was able to use Antony’s reliance on Egypt against him, persuading the senate that Antony wanted to make Alexandria the capital of the empire. The two led their armies against each other in 31 B.C. at Actium in Greece, resulting in the defeat of Antony and the eventual suicide of both Antony and Cleopatra. Octavian became sole ruler and in 27 B.C. took the name Augustus Caesar. The republic became the empire, and Octavian became what Julius had only dreamed of becoming—the first emperor of Rome.” (McRay, “Rome,” *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*)
 3. Caesar Augustus (Octavian) was the adopted son of Julius Caesar and the first emperor of Rome (r. 27 BC–AD 14).
 4. Caesar Augustus was followed by Tiberius (r. AD 14–37), one of Rome’s greatest generals.
 5. Tiberius was succeeded by his grandnephew, Gaius (Caligula), who was mentally unbalanced and unfit for office (r. AD 37–41).
 6. The successor of Gaius, Claudius (r. AD 41–54), was in power during most of the ministry of Paul (cf. Acts 18:2).
 7. Claudius was succeeded by Nero (r. AD 54–68), a hedonistic man who was in power during the burning of Rome in AD 64.
- C. In the days of our Lord, the breadth of the Roman Empire was enormous, and her power seemed unlimited.
1. In the first paragraph of *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Edward Gibbon praised the Roman Empire, as it existed in the second century AD, as the pinnacle of human civilization.
 2. “In the second century of the Christian era, the empire of Rome comprehended the fairest part of the earth, and the most civilized portion of mankind. The frontiers of that extensive monarchy were guarded by ancient renown and disciplined valour. The gentle, but powerful, influence of laws and manners had gradually cemented the union of the provinces. Their peaceful inhabitants enjoyed and abused the advantages of wealth and luxury. The image of a free constitution was preserved with decent reverence. The Roman senate appeared to possess the sovereign authority, and devolved on the emperors all the executive powers of government. During a happy period of more than four score years, the public administration was conducted by the virtue and abilities of Nerva, Trajan, Hadrian, and the two Antonines.” (Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1.1)

D. Our Lord was born during the reign of Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1) and carried out His earthly ministry during the reign of Tiberius Caesar (Luke 3:1).

1. The early church grew and flourished in the Roman Empire and used her roads to take the gospel of Christ “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).
2. A generation later, even as Christians were being persecuted, the gospel continued to make inroads into the very heart of the Roman Empire.

E. When Paul arrived in Rome as a prisoner, he was handed over to the Prefect of the Praetorian Guard (Acts 28:16).

1. The Praetorian Guard’s primary role in the New Testament age was to protect the emperor and imperial family and squash any potential rebellions—they were the only military force allowed in the capital.
2. Prisoners sent to Rome from the provinces in appeal cases were entrusted to the care of the Prefect of the Praetorian Guard (Tacitus, *Annals* 3.14; 13.15).
3. Though allowed some freedom, Paul was still under constant guard.
4. While in prison, Paul wrote to the church at Philippi and told them that the gospel was being made known to “the whole palace guard” (Phil 1:12–13).
 - a) The word *palace* in Philippians 1:13 is *praetorium*, which refers to the Praetorian Guard—the Imperial Guard of the city of Rome.
 - b) In the course of two years, one by one, members of the Praetorian Guard would be on duty with Paul.
 - c) They could not help overhearing what Paul taught others.
 - d) They could hear Paul as he spoke to others.
 - e) They would hear him pray and sing praises to God.
 - f) They would note his courage, sincerity, and devotion to Christ.



Caesar Augustus

5. All the Praetorian Guard knew why Paul was in prison—and many of them were touched by the gospel.
 - a) It is no wonder Paul declared that his imprisonment had been for the furtherance of the gospel (Phil 1:12).
 - b) At the end of Paul's letter to the Philippians, he spoke about the saints in "Caesar's household" (Phil 4:22).
 - c) "The 'household of Caesar' could refer to anyone in the Roman civil service directly dependent on Caesar, including all his slaves and freedmen; it always indicated great prestige. It most likely refers here to the Praetorian Guard; if Paul was in Rome at this point, anyone who guarded him (Acts 28:16, 30) would naturally be exposed to his teaching. Even Caesar's slaves wielded more power and prestige than most well-off free persons; the Praetorian Guard itself held the prestige of the Roman military's elite, often rewarded by Caesar himself. Paul's greeting would impress his readers: his imprisonment has indeed advanced the gospel (1:12–13)." (Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 567)
 - d) If the gospel of Christ could make inroads into the Praetorian Guard, the finest regiment in the Roman army, it could break down any walls that were intended to keep it out.

Conclusion

- I. Do you remember how Nebuchadnezzar saw a stone that was cut out of a mountain "without hands," and it struck the image and broke it into pieces (Dan 2:45)?
 - A. That stone is the church of our Lord!
 - B. The church struck the great image and broke it into pieces.
 - C. The church brought about the fall of the Roman Empire—it has been broken into pieces, crushed, and ground to powder, never to rise again.
- II. "The greatest of historians held that Christianity was the chief cause of Rome's fall. For this religion, he and his followers argued, had destroyed the old faith that had given moral character to the Roman soul and stability to the Roman state. It had declared war upon the classic culture—upon science, philosophy, literature, and art. It had brought an enfeebling Oriental mysticism into the realistic stoicism of Roman life; it had turned men's thoughts from the tasks of this world to an enervating preparation for some cosmic catastrophe, and had lured them into seeking individual salvation through asceticism and prayer, rather than collective salvation through devotion to the state. It had disrupted the unity of the Empire while soldier emperors were struggling to preserve it; it had discouraged its adherents from holding office, or rendering military service; it had preached an ethic of nonresistance and peace when the survival of the Empire had demanded a will to war. Christ's victory had been Rome's death." (Durant, *Caesar And Christ*, 667)

Universal Peace

Introduction

- I. In the first century AD, the Roman Empire governed the civilized world—the breadth of the empire was enormous, and its power seemed unlimited.
- II. In Nebuchadnezzar’s dream, the Roman Empire was as “strong as iron” (Dan 2:40).
- III. God’s perfect timing prepared the Mediterranean world to receive the Messiah by having Him enter the world at a rare time when the world was at peace.

Discussion

I. Pax Romana

- A. When Caesar Augustus (r. 27 BC–AD 14) established his government in 27 BC, he began 200 years of peace, the *Pax Romana* (Roman peace), which provided economic and political stability in the Mediterranean region.
 1. “Caesar Augustus was ruler of the Roman Empire when Jesus was born (Lk 2:1). He ruled for 45 years, from 31 B.C. to A.D. 14. Born Gaius Octavius, he was adopted by his maternal uncle, Julius Caesar (100–44 B.C.), and, as was common, assumed the name of his adoptive father. Thus, he was known as Gaius Julius Caesar Octavian. The name Augustus, ‘revered one,’ was bestowed upon him by the Roman Senate in 27 B.C. Augustus put an end to the civil wars that had raged since the dictatorship of Julius Caesar and established the *Pax Romana* (‘Roman peace’) throughout the empire.” (Walton, *Archaeological Study Bible*, comments on Luke 2:1)
 2. “In his will, Caesar had adopted Octavian as his son. Now known as Gaius Julius Caesar Octavianus, Octavian at first shared power with a three man ‘triumvirate,’ or board of three, including himself and two of Julius Caesar’s aids, Marcus Lepidus and Mark Antony. After Lepidus fell from power in 36 B.C., civil war broke out between Antony and Octavian. Antony allied himself with Cleopatra, queen of Egypt, but their combined forces were defeated by Octavian at Actium in 31 B.C. Octavian conquered Egypt in the following year and Antony and Cleopatra committed suicide. The Roman Senate recognized Octavian as supreme leader of Rome, and in 27 B.C. bestowed on him the title ‘Augustus’ (‘exalted’ or ‘venerable’ one). Augustus ruled as emperor until his death in A.D. 14, when he was replaced by Tiberius (see Luke 3:1).” (Strauss, *Luke*, 342)
 3. *Pax Romana* ended with the death of Roman emperor Caesar Marcus Aurelius in AD 180.
- B. Caesar Augustus brought in a period of monetary and civic security that allowed people to travel from one end of the empire to the other in relative peace and safety—far more so than at any other time in world history.
 1. “For some two hundred years following the accession of Augustus, the Mediterranean world was virtually at peace. War, when it was waged at all, was confined almost entirely to frontier areas. Never in human history had there been so long a span of general tranquility, and never again was peace to be maintained so steadily among so many people. One mighty state seemed almost to embrace the world, with only the savage tribes of northern Europe

and of central Africa and the mysterious nations of the Orient living beyond the pale. The *pax Romana*, the Roman peace, extended from Scotland to the vast Sahara Desert, and from Portugal to the borders of Persia. Throughout much of the empire, men lived out their lives in quiet contentment, safe from marauding armies, going about their affairs in the knowledge that they were sheltered by Rome, a stern but generous master that demanded unyielding obedience to its laws, at the same time granting to each community the right to adapt those laws to local circumstances. Under Roman protection trade flourished, cultivation was extended, and prosperity was brought to regions that had never before progressed beyond mere subsistence.” (Payne, *Ancient Rome*, 181–182)

2. “In Imperial Rome, aqueducts appeared with the development of urbanism and a well-preserved example of such a structure can be seen at Antioch. Especially as a result of the *Pax Romana* (Roman Peace), the problem of supplying the needs of fast growing populations was solved by these structures. The aqueduct arches were constructed robustly to bear the weight of the water and they are still standing despite many earthquakes.” (Demirer, *Pisidian Antioch*, 91–92)
- C. Peaceful world conditions allowed Jews from both the Eastern and Western Diaspora (dispersion) to travel *to* Jerusalem for the feasts—including the Day of Pentecost when the Lord’s church was established (Acts 2:5–11).
1. Those same peaceful conditions allowed Christians to travel *from* Jerusalem with the gospel as they journeyed from “Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).
 2. By the time Paul wrote his epistle to the Colossians, he could speak of the gospel “which was preached to every creature under heaven” (Col 1:23).
 3. From the city of Rome, the very heart of the empire, the faith of Christians was “spoken of throughout the whole world” (Rom 1:8).
 4. Sadly, most Bible students do not realize how important *Pax Romana* was for spreading the gospel.
 5. Fortunately, the ancient Romans left numerous monuments to testify to us of the importance of Roman peace.

II. Monuments To Roman Peace

- A. The *Ara Pacis Augustae* (the “Altar of Augustan Peace”), commonly called the *Ara Pacis*, was dedicated to *Pax*, the Roman goddess of peace, in honor of the peaceful conditions that Emperor Augustus brought to the Roman Empire.
1. “Two millennia ago, the ancient Roman senate decreed a sacrificial altar, the *ara Pacis Augustae* (*ara* meaning ‘altar,’ *pacis* meaning ‘peace’), to give thanks for the safe return of Augustus *imperator* (victorious general) from the northern provinces, Spain and Gaul. Over a three-year absence from Rome, he’d been there to settle outbreaks of affairs that threatened the Empire’s economic health.” (Andersen, *The Ara Pacis of Augustus and Mussolini*, 1)
 2. This altar was dedicated on January 30, 9 BC.
 3. “In its time it was apparently the largest of all Roman temples and the most skillfully designed.” (Payne, *Ancient Rome*, 173)

4. The altar was located on the swampy grounds of the Campus Martius, a military parade ground on the east side of the Tiber river (about one mile north of the Roman Forum).
 5. Due to the frequent flooding of the Tiber, this altar became buried under several feet of debris until it was partially reassembled in 1938.
 6. “Under the auspices of Mussolini and the Italian Fascist Empire, it was reassembled for our time at the bi-millennial celebration of Augustus’ birth—an altar of peace ironically reconstituted at the onset of World War II.”
(Andersen, *The Ara Pacis of Augustus and Mussolini*, x)
- B. *The Achievements of the Divine Augustus (Res Gestae Divi Augusti)* is the funerary inscription of the Roman Emperor Augustus Caesar.
1. “Before his death in 14 BC, Augustus drew up a summary of what he’d accomplished over his tenure as *princeps* (principal, leading citizen, head man), the title by which he chose to be known rather than emperor. Officially, the document was Augustus’ *Res Gestae*, a description of the state of the nation as he altered it, reigned over, and left it. *Gestae* means ‘performance,’ or ‘what has been made to come about,’ as in ‘gestation.’ The word *res* may refer to one’s own acts, but in political life the designation also applies to the State, the common weal, as expressed by *res publica*, meaning acts of state or civil affairs,



Temple of Augustus at Antioch of Pisidia

or *res novae*, meaning changes the State had undergone during a period of reform and progress. The *Res Gestae* is an abstract of Augustus' deeds, ranging from military victories and closing of the Janus doors to lock in peace, to a summary of the many wild animals he'd provided for slaughter as public entertainment." (Andersen, *The Ara Pacis of Augustus and Mussolini*, 21)

2. The original *Achievements of the Divine Augustus* has not survived; however, a few copies of the text were made and carved in stone on monuments and temples throughout the Roman Empire.
3. One copy of the *Achievements of the Divine Augustus* was found at the Augusteum (Imperial Sanctuary) in Antioch of Pisidia.
 - a) This temple was dedicated to the mother goddess Cybele (Kybele).
 - b) In 1914 one of the most breathtaking discoveries of archaeology was found as fragments in front of the Imperial Sanctuary.
 - c) "One of the three surviving copies of '*Res Gestae Divi Augusti*,' the famous inscription recording the noble deeds of the Emperor Augustus was found in front of the Augusteum in Antioch. The original was carved on bronze tablets and exhibited in front of the Mausoleum of Augustus in Rome, but unfortunately has not survived. The Antioch copy on stone was written in Latin which is a sign of the importance of the city as a military and cultural base of Rome in Asia." (Demirer, *Pisidian Antioch*, 28)
 - d) Sixty pieces of this *Res Gestae* are on display in Yalvaç Museum in Turkey.
4. The most intact copy of *The Achievements of the Divine Augustus* is found in the Temple of Augustus in Ankara, Turkey (the *Monumentum Ancyranum*).
 - a) After the death of Augustus in AD 14, a copy of the Latin text of *The Achievements of the Divine Augustus* was inscribed on both walls inside the entrance of the temple, with a Greek translation on an exterior wall of the temple.
 - (1) Early in the "Christian era," the temple was turned into a basilica.
 - (2) When the Seljuks conquered the area, a mosque (the *Haci Bayram*) was built near the northwest corner of the temple.
 - b) "The present capital of Turkey, Ankara, was founded by Phrygians in the eighth century B.C. Among the interesting places to see, there is what is left of the Temple of Augustus. This was reconstructed from an earlier temple as thanks to Augustus for the city's semi-independence. On the walls of that temple is an inscription in both Latin and Greek recording the public acts of Caesar Augustus which included a census (Luke 2:1). Parts of copies of this have also been found in Antioch of Pisidia (Yalvaç) and Apollonia (Uluborlu)." (Blake & Edmonds, *Biblical Sites in Turkey*, 80)
 - c) "This is one of the very few contemporary records of the early Roman Empire that confirm the events reported in the Bible: It states that Caesar Augustus ordered the census that is a reference for the date of the birth of Christ." (Edmonds, *Turkey's Religious Sites*, 185)

5. “I extended the territory of all those provinces of the Roman people on whose borders lay peoples not subject to our government. **I brought peace** to the Gallic and Spanish provinces as well as to Germany, throughout the area bordering on the Ocean from Cadiz to the mouth of the Elbe. I secured the pacification of the Alps from the district nearest the Adriatic to the Tuscan sea, **yet without waging an unjust war on any people**. My fleet sailed through the Ocean eastwards from the mouth of the Rhine to the territory of the Cimbri, a country which no Roman had visited before either by land or sea, and the Cimbri, Charydes, Semnones and other German peoples of that region sent ambassadors and sought my friendship and that of the Roman people. At my command and under my auspices two armies were led almost at the same time into Ethiopia and Arabia Felix; vast enemy forces of both peoples were cut down in battle and many towns captured. Ethiopia was penetrated as far as the town of Nabata, which adjoins Meroe; in Arabia the army advanced into the territory of the Sabaeans to the town of Mariba.” (Augustus, *The Achievements of the Divine Augustus*, 26)

C. In ancient Rome, a small temple of Janus stood in the Roman Forum.

1. Janus was “thought of as the sun god, the sky, the thunderer, and the governor of all beginnings and entrances” (Payne, *Ancient Rome*, 43).
 - a) This temple had doors on both ends, and these doors were known as the “Gates of Janus.”
 - b) These temple doors were *closed* in times of peace and *opened* in times of war.
2. Plutarch (AD 46–c. AD 119) was a Greek philosopher, historian, and priest at the temple of Apollo in Delphi.
 - a) He is best known for his book, *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, which is a series of biographies of famous Greeks and Romans, including Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and Cicero.
 - b) His biography of Numa Pompilius, an early Roman king, contains a fascinating history of the early Roman calendar, and how the months of the year got their names.
 - c) Plutarch also gives us valuable information on the temple of Janus.
 - d) “His temple at Rome has two gates, which they call the gates of war, because they stand open in the time of war, and shut in the times of peace; of which latter there was very seldom an example, for, as the Roman empire was enlarged and extended, it was so encompassed with barbarous nations and enemies to be resisted, that it was seldom or never at peace. Only in the time of Augustus Caesar, after he had overcome Antony, this temple was shut; as likewise once before, when Marcus Atilius and Titus Manlius were consuls; but then it was not long before, wars breaking out, the gates were again opened. But, during the reign of Numa, those gates were never seen open a single day, but continued constantly shut for a space of forty-three years together; such an entire and universal cessation of war existed.” (Plutarch, *Plutarch’s Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, 98)

3. Titus Livius (64/59 BC–AD 12/17), better known as Livy, was a Roman historian.
 - a) Livy wrote a monumental history of Rome, titled, *From the Founding of the City (Ab Urbe Condita)*, which discusses the most ancient legends of Rome's founding and its history up through the reign of Augustus Caesar.
 - b) Very early in his book, Livy tells how Numa Pompilius built the temple of Janus and he explained how the temple operated.
 - c) “With this view, he built a temple to Janus, near the foot of the hill Argiletum, which was to notify a state either of war or of peace: when open, it denoted that the state was engaged in war; when shut, that there was peace with all the surrounding nations. Since the reign of Numa, it has been shut but twice; once, in the consulate of Titus Manlius, upon the conclusion of the first Punic war: the happiness of seeing it once more shut, the gods granted to our own times, when, after the battle of Actium, the emperor Caesar Augustus established universal peace, on land and sea. This temple he then shut; and having, by treaties and alliances, secured the friendship of all his neighbors, and thereby removed all apprehension of danger from abroad, he made it his first aim, lest the dispositions of the people, which had hitherto been restrained by fear of their enemies, and by military discipline, should, in time of tranquillity, grow licentious, to inspire them with fear of the gods; a principle of the greatest efficacy with the multitude, in that rude and ignorant age.” (Livy, *The History of Rome*, 1.19)
4. Augustus Caesar also boasted that the gates of the temple of Janus were closed during much of his reign.
 - a) In Augustus’ *Res Gestae*, he claims that the gates of Janus were closed on three separate occasions during his rule.
 - b) “It was the will of our ancestors that the gateway of Janus Quirinus should be shut when victories had secured peace by land and sea throughout the whole empire of the Roman people; from the foundation of the city down to my birth, tradition records that it was shut only twice, but while I was the leading citizen the senate resolved that it should be shut on three occasions.” (Augustus, *The Achievements of the Divine Augustus* 13)
5. From the accounts of Plutarch, Livy, and Augustus Caesar, we see that the closing of the doors at the temple of Janus was rare—for, in ancient days, peace was a very rare event.
 - a) It happened for the first time under king Numa Pompilius, the legendary second king of Rome (r. 715–673 BC).
 - b) The doors were closed for the second time under the consulship of Titus Manlius on the termination of the first Punic war (235 BC).
 - c) The third time these doors were closed was after the battle of Actium—the famous naval battle between Augustus and the combined fleets of Mark Antony and Cleopatra in 31 BC.
 - d) This means that the “Gates of Janus” were closed at the time of the birth of Christ.
 - e) What an appropriate time for the true “Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6) to come!

D. Philo of Alexandria (c. 20 BC–c. AD 50) was a Hellenistic Jew who lived in Alexandria, Egypt, during the days of our Lord.

1. While many of Philo's writings have been lost, most of his surviving work deals with the Torah (the first five books of the Bible).
2. We also have his *Embassy to Gaius* (*Legatio ad Gaium*), where he describes his diplomatic mission to Gaius Caligula in AD 38.
3. Josephus also spoke of Philo's encounter with Caligula (*Ant.* 18.259).
4. In his *Embassy to Gaius*, Philo expressed his admiration of the reign of Augustus.
5. "This is Caesar, who calmed the storms which were raging in every direction, who healed the common diseases which were afflicting both Greeks and barbarians, who descended from the south and from the east, and ran on and penetrated as far as the north and the west, in such a way as to fill all the neighbouring districts and waters with unexpected miseries. This is he who did not only loosen but utterly abolish the bonds in which the whole of the habitable world was previously bound and weighed down. This is he who destroyed both the evident and the unseen wars which arose from the attacks of robbers. This is he who rendered the sea free from the vessels of pirates, and filled it with merchantmen. This is he who gave freedom to every city, who brought disorder into order, who civilized and made obedient and harmonious, nations which before his time were unsociable, hostile, and brutal. This is he who increased Greece by many Greeces, and who Grecised the regions of the barbarians in their most important divisions: the guardian of peace, the distributor to every man of what was suited to him, the man who proffered to all the citizens favours with the most ungrudging liberality, who never once in his whole life concealed or reserved for himself anything that was good or excellent ... And yet if ever there was a man to whom it was proper that new and unprecedented honours should be voted, it was certainly fitting that such should be decreed to him, not only because he was as it were the origin and fountain of the family of Augustus, not because he was the first, and greatest, and universal benefactor, having, instead of the multitude of governors who existed before, entrusted the common vessel of the state to himself as one pilot of admirable skill in the science of government to steer and govern ... the whole of the rest of the habitable world had decreed him honours equal to those of the Olympian gods. And we have evidence of this in the temples, and porticoes, and sacred precincts, and groves, and colonnades which have been erected, so that all the cities put together, ancient and modern, which exhibit magnificent works, are surpassed, by the beauty and magnitude of the buildings erected in honour of Caesar ... They were aware of the attention which he paid to every thing, and of the very exceeding care which he took that the national laws and customs prevailing in each nation should be confirmed and preserved, being equally anxious for the preservation of the rights of foreign nations in this respect, as for those of the Romans; and that he received his honours, not for the destruction of the laws existing in any people, filling himself with pride and arrogance, but in a spirit of proper conformity with the magnitude of so vast an empire, which is dignified and honoured by such marks of respect being paid to the emperor. And there is most undeniable proof that he was never influenced or puffed up by the

excessive honours paid to him, in the fact that he did not approve of any one's addressing him as master or god, but if any one used such expressions he was angry; and we may see it too in his approbation of the Jews, who he well knew most religiously avoided all such language." (Philo, *Embassy to Gaius* 145-154)

III. Who Brought Peace To The World?

- A. The New Testament claims that Christ brought peace to the world.
 1. This was the purpose of His coming into the world (Luke 2:14).
 2. Jesus promised peace to His disciples (John 14:27; 16:33).
 3. He accomplished His mission (Rom 5:1; Eph 2:14-16).
- B. On the other hand, consider what Roman writers said of Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor at the time Jesus was born.
 1. Horace, a leading Roman Poet during the time of Augustus, said, "Thy age, great Caesar, has restored to squalid fields the plenteous grain ... Given back to Rome's almighty Lord our standards ... The glorious name of Latium spread to where the sun illumes the east from where he seeks his western bed ... While Caesar rules, no civil strife shall break our rest, nor violence rude, nor rage, that whets the slaughtering knife and plunges wretched towns in feud." (Horace, *Odes* 4.15)
 2. Virgil, the renowned Roman poet, said of Augustus, "But next behold the youth of form divine, Caesar himself, exalted in his line; Augustus, promised oft, and long foretold, sent to the realm that Saturn ruled of old; born to restore a better age of gold." (Virgil, *Aeneid* 6.238)
 3. The *Priene Calendar Inscription*, now housed in the Berlin Museum, is inscribed on two stones found in the marketplace in the ancient city of Priene.
 - a) Priene is a city in Western Turkey where a fascinating inscription has been found—it uses the word *gospel* while referring to Caesar Augustus.
 - b) The inscription dates to around 9 BC, and it refers to the birthday of Caesar Augustus as the beginning of an era of "tidings of joy" (i.e., the gospel).
 - c) This inscription contains a "remarkable sentence referring to the birthday of the Emperor Augustus:— But the birthday of the god was for the world the beginning of tidings of joy on his account" (Deissmann, *Light From The Ancient East*, 371).



Temple of Athena at Priene, Turkey

- C. From ancient Roman writers, we see how Caesar Augustus was regarded.
1. He was the “divine” son of God (Virgil).
 2. The one who was “long foretold” (Virgil).
 3. The one who brought the “glad tidings,” i.e., “the gospel” (*Priene Calendar Inscription*).
 4. The one who brought peace to all people “from east to west” (Horace).
 5. The one who brought salvation and “given back to Rome’s almighty Lord our standards” (Horace).
 6. “Meanwhile, Augustus’s court poets and historians did a great job with their propaganda. They told the thousand-year story of Rome as a long and winding narrative that had reached its great climax at last; the golden age had begun with the birth of the new child through whom peace and prosperity would spread to the whole world. The whole world is now being renewed, sang Virgil in a passage that some later Christians saw as a pagan prophecy of the Messiah.” (Wright, *Simply Jesus*, 29)
- D. Do you remember what the angel told the shepherds at the birth of Jesus Christ?
1. “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you **good tidings of great joy** which will be **to all people**. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a **Savior**, who is Christ the **Lord**” (Luke 2:10-11).
 2. “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth **peace...**” (Luke 2:14).

Conclusion

- I. Caesar Augustus brought an end to hostilities throughout much of the world and thus created a fertile environment for the gospel to germinate, grow, and populate the earth.
- II. Jesus Christ brought peace between men and between God and man—He is the only One who can truly be called the “Prince of Peace” (Isa 9:6).

Universal Language

Introduction

- I. The conquest of the Mediterranean region by the Roman Empire changed life in that world forever.
- II. Caesar Augustus (r. 27 BC–AD 14) ushered in an era of *Pax Romana* (Roman peace) which brought with it a period of economic and political stability that allowed people to travel from one end of the empire to the other in relative peace and safety—far more so than at any other time in world history.
- III. Though the empire of Alexander the Great had long since collapsed, it left its mark on the culture and language of the ancient world.
- IV. “All we are able to say is that God knew when the proper time had arrived. Judaism was bankrupt, and paganism had always been so. We can enumerate some of the providences which helped to open the way for the gospel such as the vast extent of the Roman Empire, the spread of the Greek language, the facility of travel throughout the empire, the extensive diaspora of the Jews, its many proselytes from Gentilism, etc. All of these aided the spread of the gospel.” (Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s Epistles to the Galatians*, 197–198)
- V. In this lesson, we want to notice the spread of the Greek language and see how it impacted the preaching of the gospel of Christ.

Discussion

I. The Evolution Of Koine Greek

- A. As Alexander the Great conquered other nations to expand his kingdom’s borders, he introduced Greek culture and civilization to vast portions of the ancient world.
 1. Daniel 8:1–9 gives us a picture of the might of Alexander as he, with lightning speed, defeated the Medo-Persian empire.
 2. “Alexander the Great’s kingdom extended all the way to India, exceeding any kingdom before it in size (approx. 1.5 million square miles).” (*The ESV Study Bible*, comments on Dan 8:4)
- B. As the Greek language was introduced to foreign lands, it evolved from the Attic Greek of Alexander’s ancestors into Koine Greek, which soon became his empire’s *lingua franca* (common language).
 1. The word *koine* “means simply common language or dialect common to all, a worldspeech” (Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, 49).
 2. “The clearest example of soft Hellenization, which happened by default more than intent, was the development of Koine (common) Greek. It was the by-product of many non-native Greeks learning to speak Greek, leading to a simpler language, which became the *lingua franca* of the Hellenistic world (and subsequently of the Roman world).” (Sandy, “Alexander the Great and Hellenism,” 235)

3. The Greek language was so deeply embedded in the ancient world's culture that it continued to dominate long after Rome succeeded Greece as world ruler—it held societies together.
 4. You would have to go back to the days of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9) to find a time when so many people spoke the same language!
 5. “The Koine was born out of the conquests of Alexander the Great. First, his troops, which came from Athens as well as other Greek cities and regions, had to speak to one another. This close contact produced a melting-pot Greek that inevitably softened the rough edges of some dialects and abandoned the subtleties of others. Second, the conquered cities and colonies learned Greek as a second language. By the first century CE, Greek was the *lingua franca* of the whole Mediterranean region and beyond. Since the majority of Greek-speakers learned it as a second language, this further increased its loss of subtleties and moved it toward greater explicitness...” (Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, 15)
 6. “Herodotus in the fifth century already assumed everyone could understand Greek, if it was spoken loudly enough and sternly enough. The form of Greek that emerged is called *koinē* (common) Greek, and is largely based on the Attic dialect. In the third century B.C. Berossus, a Babylonian priest, and Manetho, an Egyptian priest, wrote histories of their respective countries in Greek.” (Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 14)
- C. At the end of his *Antiquities of the Jews*, Josephus spoke about his knowledge of the Greek language.
1. “For those of my own nation freely acknowledge that I far exceed them in the learning belonging to the Jews. I have also taken a great deal of pains to obtain the learning of the Greeks, and understand the elements of the Greek language, although I have so long accustomed myself to speak our own tongue, that I cannot pronounce Greek with sufficient exactness: for our nation does not encourage those that learn the languages of many nations, and so adorn their discourses with the smoothness of their periods; because they look upon this sort of accomplishment as common, not only to all sorts of freemen, but to as many of the servants as please to learn them. But they give him the testimony of being a wise man who is fully acquainted with our laws, and is able to interpret their meaning; on which account, as there have been many who have done their endeavors with great patience to obtain this learning, there have yet hardly been so many as two or three that have succeeded therein, who were immediately well rewarded for their pains.” (Josephus, *Ant.* 20.263-265)
 2. Josephus implies that few Palestinian Jews could speak Greek *well*, but that does not mean they could not converse in Greek.
 3. Josephus had also acted as an interpreter for Titus, the Roman general (Josephus, *J. W.* 5.356-361).

D. “The form of Greek used by writers from Homer (8th century B.C.) through Plato (4th century B.C.) is called ‘Classical Greek.’ It was a marvelous form of the language, capable of exact expression and subtle nuances. Its alphabet was derived from the Phoenician’s as was that of Hebrew. Classical Greek existed in many dialects of which three were primary: Doric, Aeolic, and Ionic (of which Attic was a branch). Athens was conquered in the fourth century B.C. by King Philip of Macedonia. Alexander the Great, Philip’s son, was tutored by the Greek philosopher Aristotle. Alexander set out to conquer the world and spread Greek culture and language. Because he spoke Attic Greek, it was this dialect that was spread. It was also the dialect spoken by the famous Athenian writers. This was the beginning of the Hellenistic Age. As the Greek language spread across the world and met other languages, it was altered (which is true of any language). The dialects also interacted with each other. Eventually this adaptation resulted in what today we call Koine Greek. ‘Koine’ (κοινή) means ‘common’ and describes the common, everyday form of the language, used by everyday people. It was not considered a polished literary form of the language, and in fact some writers of this era purposefully imitated the older style of Greek (which is like someone today writing in King James English). Koine was a simplified form of Classical Greek and unfortunately many of the subtleties of Classical Greek were lost...” (Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*, 1–2)

II. The Septuagint

- A. The dispersion (*Diaspora*) of the Jews, which began with Babylonian captivity in 598/597 BC, led to the acceptance of Greek culture and the widespread use of the Greek language by Jews who were scattered abroad.
1. “From the start of the Hellenistic era (the final quarter of the fourth century B.C.E.), Jews began to use Greek. That process most probably began in the then rapidly growing Diaspora in the eastern part of the Mediterranean (not in the Babylonian Diaspora, however, where Jews continued to speak Aramaic), but in the long run it also took place in the Jewish homeland of Palestine.” (Horst, *Eerdmans Dictionary of Early Judaism*, 690)
 2. “An undisputed example of the Jews adopting Greek culture is language. All across the Mediterranean world Jews were speaking and writing Greek, composing history, philosophy, fiction, and so forth. Most notable of all is the translation of the Jewish Scriptures into Koine, beginning as early as the third century BCE. Many adopted it as being as authoritative as the Hebrew version itself.” (Sandy, “Alexander the Great and Hellenism,” 236)
 3. “The essence of hellenization, of course, is the Greek language; the root meaning of the verb ‘to hellenize’ is to speak Greek, or to speak Greek properly. In the Diaspora, the triumph of the Greek language was complete. Hebrew was virtually unknown to Egyptian Jewry. Even Philo, certainly the most learned and literate Jew produced by the Jewish community of Alexandria, was no Hebraist; in all likelihood his knowledge of Hebrew did not extend beyond select words and phrases of the Torah. Elsewhere in the Diaspora, the situation was the same. Virtually all the inscriptions engraved by Diaspora Jewry, from Egypt to Rome to Asia Minor, were in Greek. In Rome, a few were in Latin, and a few epitaphs append the Hebrew word *shalom*, but again there is no sign that the Jews of these places spoke or knew any Semitic

language. The earliest literary work produced by Diaspora Jewry was a translation of the Torah into Greek, known as the Septuagint (third century BCE). By the second century BCE, the Jews of Egypt were writing scholarly essays, philosophical tracts, and poetry based on this Greek translation.” (Cohen, *From the Maccabees to the Mishnah*, 30–31)

- B. The work of translating the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, known as the *Septuagint* (from the Latin for *seventy*; usually abbreviated as LXX), began in Alexandria, Egypt, around 280 BC.
1. Outside of Palestine, no place on earth had a greater number of Jewish inhabitants than Alexandria.
 2. “The foundation of all Judaeo-Hellenistic culture is the ancient anonymous Greek translation of the Scriptures, known by the name of the Septuagint, and preserved entire by the tradition of the Christian Church; Hellenistic Judaism is as inconceivable without it as the evangelical Church of Germany without Luther’s translation of the Bible.” (Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, 2.3.159)
- C. According to Jewish tradition, King Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–246 BC) desired to have the Pentateuch translated into Greek for his library.
1. The king sent his request to the Jewish high priest, Eleazar, who, in turn, provided 70 capable men (a later tradition says 72) who finished the translation process in just 72 days.
 2. “*As is taught*: An episode about Ptolemy, who gathered 72 elders and cloistered them in seventy-two buildings, and did not tell them why he had gathered them: He entered to [speak with] each and every one and said to them: Write for me the Torah of Moses your master. The Holy One, Blessed Be He, advised each and every one of them, and they all agreed to one position [on a number of problematic passages]...” (b. *Meg.* 9a)
 3. “And yet who is there who does not know that every language, and the Greek language above all others, is rich in a variety of words, and that it is possible to vary a sentence and to paraphrase the same idea, so as to set it forth in a great variety of manners, adapting many different forms of expression to it at different times. But this, they say, did not happen at all in the case of this translation of the law, but that, in every case, exactly corresponding Greek words were employed to translate literally the appropriate Chaldaic words, being adapted with exceeding propriety to the matters which were to be explained...” (Philo, *Moses* 2:38)
- D. After a Greek translation of the Pentateuch was available, Hellenistic Jews soon wanted the rest of the Old Testament translated as well.
1. When New Testament writers quote from the Old Testament, they quote from the Septuagint most of the time instead of the Hebrew text.
 2. Although Paul usually quotes from the Septuagint version when citing the Old Testament, sometimes he used the Hebrew text instead (Job 41:11 in Rom 11:35; Job 5:13 in 1 Cor 3:19; Num 16:5 in 2 Tim 2:19).

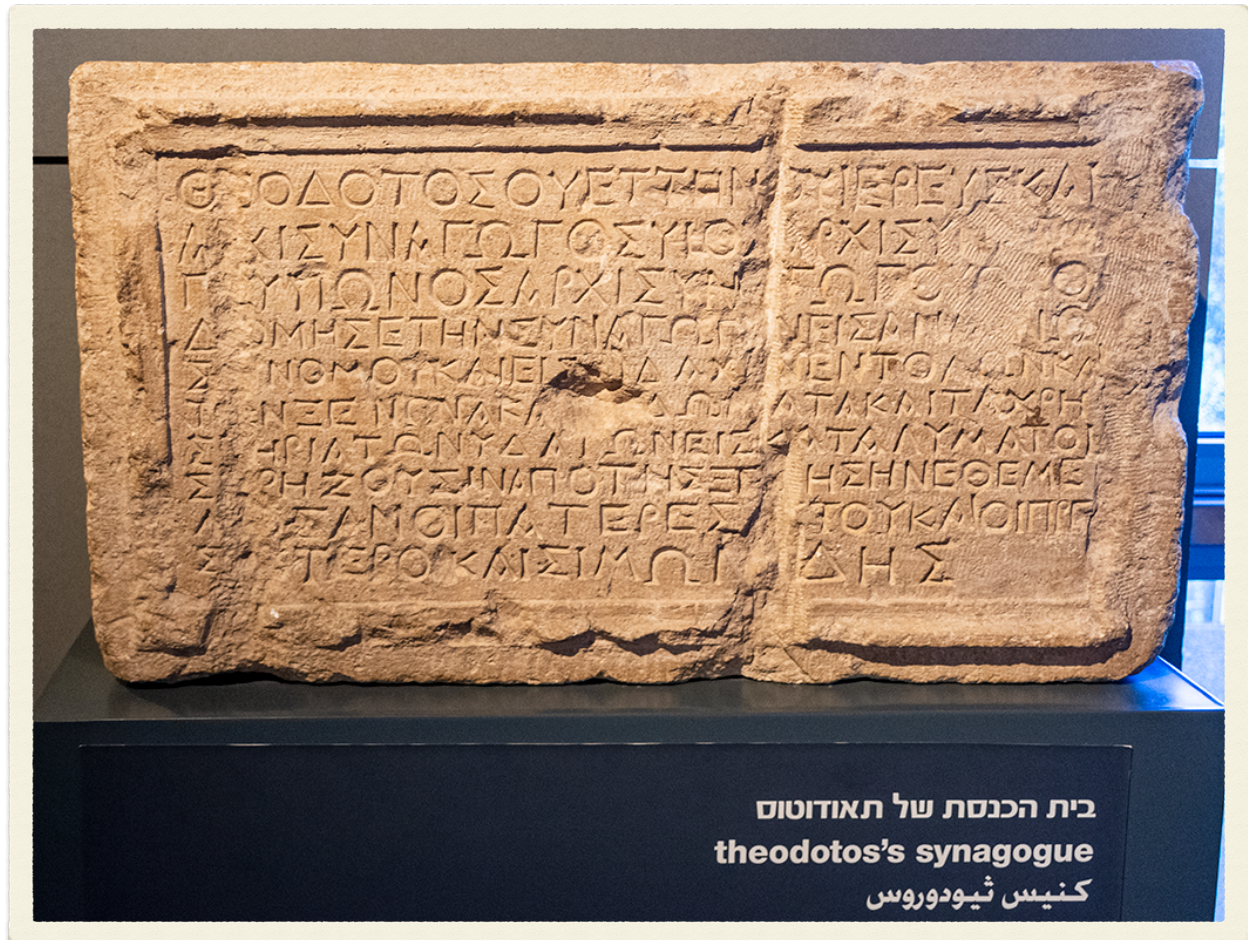
3. “Much of the grammar, vocabulary, and thought-world of the New Testament finds its best parallel and illustration in the Septuagint. The distinctive religious meaning of many New Testament words (e.g., *ekklēsia*, *baptisma*, *presbyteros*, *psallō*, *cheirotomia*) is to be found not from etymology or classical usage but from the adaptations already made by Greek-speaking Jews, as known from the Septuagint, Philo, Josephus, the Apocrypha, and the Pseudepigrapha. On such theological and religious terms and on ways of thinking, the influence of the Septuagint on New Testament vocabulary and theology is extensive; on other matters, such as structure of the language, the influence is not so much.” (Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 435–436)
4. As William Barclay observed, “When the Old Testament remained in Hebrew its sphere was strictly limited to the Jews; when it was translated into Greek it became the possession of the world” (Barclay, *Introducing The Bible*, 28).

III. An Aid To Preaching

- A. The Greek language made it possible for the gospel of Christ to move outside the borders of ancient Israel—and even to Hellenized Jews at home.
 1. Through Divine Providence, as the gospel spread “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8), it was preached in the “universal” language of the day—Greek.
 2. Those first-century messengers of Christ had a common language with those they taught—regardless of which area of the Roman Empire they found themselves.
 3. “The Old Testament was a Hebrew book, but before the Christian era it had been translated into Greek. From the beginning Christianity was provided with a Greek Bible. It is always difficult to make a new translation of the Bible. Every missionary knows that. The introduction of a new translation takes time. It was fortunate, then, that a Greek-speaking Church had a Greek Bible ready to hand. Everything was prepared for the gospel. God’s time had come. Roman rule had brought peace. Greek culture had produced unity of speech. There was a Greek world, there were Greek-speaking missionaries, and there was a Greek Bible. In the first century, the salvation that was of the Jews could become a salvation for the whole world.” (Machen, *The Literature and History of the New Testament*, 17)
 4. “This embracing of Greek culture and language, called Hellenization, led to Greek becoming the common international language of the known world. For the first time since Babel (Gen. 11), the world was united around one language. It was this language, Greek, that the New Testament writers used in penning their works—writings that were understood throughout the entire Roman Empire. As a result, the apostles and Paul could travel over much of the known world and speak the good news of Jesus in this one language.” (Hoffedit, *Walking in the Sandals of a First-Century Jew*, 13)

5. Claudius Galenus or Aelius Galenus (129–c. 216 AD), better known as Galen, was a Greek physician, surgeon, writer, and philosopher.
 - a) Galen was a widely-traveled man who exposed himself to many different medical theories and discoveries.
 - b) He finally settled in Rome, attended to many wealthy members of society, and eventually became the personal physician to several emperors.
 - c) In her book on Galen, Susan Mattern points out that Galen always spoke Greek—even while in Rome itself!
 - d) “He proudly portrays himself as Greek. If he had a Roman name, he never used it; no reference to himself as ‘Aelius’ survives. He never quotes a Latin author and, although he lived in Rome for many decades, we have no real evidence that he knew Latin at all. He did not need to; every educated person at Rome, and most of their slaves, spoke Greek. He considered his connection to the emperor Marcus Aurelius his highest accomplishment; but he otherwise remained aloof from Roman culture and vested all his political loyalty in his home city.” (Mattern, *Galen, The Prince of Medicine*, 15)
- B. In the early days of the New Testament church, “there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution” (Acts 6:1).
 1. The *Hellenists* in the passage were Jews born outside of Israel who spoke the Greek language and were more Grecian than Hebraic in their life and dress.
 2. “Now in those days, when the disciples were growing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Greek-speaking Jews against the native Hebraic Jews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food” (Acts 6:1 NET).
 3. The apostles appointed seven men to the task of taking care of these “Greek speaking Jews.”
 4. All seven of the men mentioned had Greek names—among them was Stephen, “a man full of faith and the Holy Spirit” (Acts 6:5).
 5. Stephen later disputed with some men from “the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia)” (Acts 6:9).
 - a) The word *freedmen* in Acts 6:9 (Gr. *libertinos*) is a term used to designate emancipated slaves.
 - b) These freed Jews came from all over the Diaspora.
 - c) Cyrenians and Alexandrians represent those from North Africa.
 - d) Cilicia and Asia represent the area covered by modern Turkey.
- C. The *Theodotos Inscription* is one of the earliest known inscriptions from a Jewish synagogue.
 1. It was found near the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and is currently on display in the Israel Museum.
 2. This first century BC dedicatory inscription mentions a priest named Theodotos who established a synagogue during the Second Temple period.
 3. The language on this limestone inscription is written in Greek, not Hebrew.

4. The inscription says, “Theodotos, son of Vettenos, priest and head of the synagogue, son of the head of the synagogue, who was also the son of the head of the synagogue, built the synagogue for the reading of the Law and for the study of the precepts, as well as the hospice and the chambers and the bathing-establishment, for lodging those who need them, from abroad; it (the synagogue) was founded by his ancestors and the elders and Simonides.”
(Translated from Greek provided by the Israel Museum)



The Theodotus Synagogue Inscription

5. The inscription mentions those who have come “from abroad,” which suggests that this synagogue was used by Jews from the Diaspora.
6. Many scholars identified this inscription with the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Acts 6:9).
 - a) Philo told about a section of ancient Rome that “was occupied and inhabited by the Jews” who “were mostly Roman citizens, having been emancipated” (Philo, *Gaius* 155).

- b) Tacitus, the Roman historian, tells how the Roman Senate determined that 4,000 Egyptian and Jewish “adult ex-slaves tainted with those superstitions should be transported to Sardinia to suppress banditry there. If the unhealthy climate killed them, the loss would be small. The rest, unless they repudiated their unholy practices by a given date, must leave Italy.” (Tacitus, *Annals* II.85)
- 7. It was only natural that Stephen, a Hellenistic Jew, discussed the Scriptures with those who also knew the Greek language.
- 8. When they debated the meaning of Scripture, do you suppose they were reading from the Hebrew text or the Septuagint translation?
- D. When Philip was sitting beside the Ethiopian nobleman on the road to Gaza, they read Isaiah 53 from the Septuagint translation (Acts 8:32).
 - 1. The Ethiopian had a copy of the scroll of Isaiah with him, which he might have recently purchased while in Jerusalem.
 - 2. Ethiopia was the ancient Nubian Kingdom and stretched from the modern Aswan Dam on the Nile River southward into Sudan as far as Khartoum.
 - a) In the Greco-Roman era, Ethiopia referred to the land south of Egypt in what is now known as Sudan and modern Ethiopia.
 - b) In the Old Testament, Ethiopia is known as *Cush*.
 - 3. The Jews had contact with Ethiopia in ancient days, so this man was probably a Gentile who had converted to Judaism (a proselyte).
 - a) In the region of Heliopolis, just south of modern Cairo, stood the temple of Onias—a temple of the Hellenistic and Roman period established in Egypt for Jewish worship and sacrifice.
 - b) According to Josephus, the temple of Onias was built in Leontopolis in Egypt by the son of the High Priest Onias III (c. 155 BC).
 - c) This temple was established for the worship of “Almighty God,” as was the temple at Jerusalem (Josephus, *Ant.* 13.62–68).
 - d) The Mishnah states that some vows made in the temple of Jerusalem could be redeemed in the temple of Onias (m. *Menah.* 13:10).
 - e) The Ethiopian nobleman bypassed this temple to travel to Jerusalem—which means he traveled over 1,000 miles to worship God!
 - 4. In preaching the gospel to the Ethiopian, Philip was doing his part to take the gospel “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).
- E. In the process of time, when the Holy Spirit guided the apostles to write the New Testament, it was written in the Greek language.
 - 1. Although Jesus and His apostles probably spoke Aramaic as their primary language, the New Testament was written in Koine Greek.

2. “Although the first century was a more important period in the history of the Latin language than of the Greek, Greek remained the dominant language in the eastern Mediterranean and the principal language of commerce throughout the Roman world. Following the conquests of Alexander the Great, throughout the east Greek was the official language, the language of communication between those of different races, and the language of settlers in the Greek cities. Although Palestine was multilingual in the first century—Greek, various Aramaic dialects, Hebrew, and some Latin—Greek was clearly the language of choice in order to disseminate a message as widely as possible. Therefore, all the New Testament was written entirely in Greek. Attic Greek had developed into the so-called *koinē* (common or everyday) Greek of the Hellenistic age. This in turn became the Byzantine, and finally modern Greek.” (Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 135–136)

Conclusion

- I. In the New Testament, we read of certain Gentiles, known as *God-fearers*, who worshiped the God of Abraham, attended the synagogue, and often kept the Mosaic law, but did not take the final step of circumcision necessary to become a proselyte to Judaism (Acts 13:16, 26; 16:14; 17:4, 17; 18:7).
- II. These God-fearers would probably never have existed if it were not for the Septuagint, making it possible to read the Scriptures in their own language.

Universal Roadways

Introduction

- I. The first century AD was a time in which a universal empire (Rome) brought universal peace (*Pax Romana*) to the civilized world—a world that was united by a universal language (Koine Greek).
 - A. Rome used her military engineers to build a vast network of sophisticated roads to aid military transport across the empire.
 - B. Around 108 AD, the Stoic philosopher Epictetus said, “You perceive that Caesar has procured us a profound peace; there are neither wars nor battles, nor great robberies nor piracies; but we may travel at all hours, and sail from east to west” (Epictetus, *Discourses* 3.13).
 - C. Early Christians used those same roads to carry the message of Christ “to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8).
- II. When I was a child, Bible classes teachers would frequently ask us to turn to the maps found at the back of the Bible.
 - A. Often, the teacher would have us look up the distance between different cities where Paul had preached (for example, the distance between Philippi and Thessalonica).
 - B. Measuring the distance between cities gave us a rough idea of mileage, but those distances were only “as the crow flies.”
 - C. Those maps could never adequately portray the difficulty of traveling over mountains or through barren wilderness areas.
- III. Travel in ancient days was challenging to say the least and was usually undertaken with great difficulty and many perils.
 - A. “The Roman empire brought a unified rule to the Mediterranean world—and with it an end to the almost constant warfare there since the death of Alexander the Great. Even on the frontiers of the empire there were extended periods of peace. The blessings of a single, stable government were an important external factor in the growth and spread of Christianity. Not least of these blessings was the resultant ease of travel. Along with maintaining external peace Rome attempted to suppress piracy and brigandage; this too contributed to the safety of travel routes. Further, Rome’s practice of building and maintaining roads greatly facilitated land travel. The Roman peace encouraged commerce; and travelers as well as merchants, missionaries as well as government officials benefited.” (Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 617)
 - B. “The international character of the Greek and Roman empires required reliable and well-kept travel routes. Since ancient times Palestine had relied on the Via Maris, the King’s Highway, and a system of roads that had expanded with the fortunes of the Israelite monarchy. With the coming of the Greeks and Romans, however, the network of roads throughout the Near East markedly expanded and improved. There were still dangers along these roads (Lk 10:30) from robbers, but a real attempt was made by the Romans to keep them open. For instance, Pompey’s swift rise to political power and notoriety in Rome came after ridding the Mediterranean Sea of pirates. With travel to distant places becoming more feasible for large numbers of people (Acts 18:2, 16:4; 1 Cor 1:12), a general upsurge in

commercial activity took place. Along with this was an increase in cultural exchange as these improved trade routes were travelled by eager merchants carrying goods, gossip, and religious beliefs.” (Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible*, n.p.)

Discussion

I. Roman Engineering At Its Finest

- A. Through Divine providence, the Roman Empire built over 50,000 miles of highways—from Scotland to the Tigris-Euphrates river system and along the coast of North Africa.
 1. Along these roads marched the greatest army in history (up to that time) to enforce peace—they could move as far as twenty miles a day to respond to political or military threats at home or abroad.
 2. These Roman roads were “the arteries of the empire.”
 3. Twenty-nine highways radiated out from Rome and connected with numerous other local roads.
 4. These roads also allowed for increased trade and cultural exchange throughout the empire.
 5. Those who walked these Roman roads could usually travel in safety since the Roman army protected the roads.
 6. These roads allowed for faster communication from different parts of the world than at any other time in world history.
 7. The apostles and other preachers of the gospel used these same roads to take “the gospel of peace” (Rom 10:15) to the civilized world.
- B. Roman land surveyors used sighting poles to carefully chart the most direct route from one location to another.
 1. The roads they built often went straight up steep hills, and small bridges and tunnels were constructed to ensure the path could cross rivers or pass right through mountains.
 2. Roman engineers used local materials to construct their roads and always employed multiple layers for durability and flatness.
 3. The building of the roads would begin with a shallow, three-foot trench with small retaining walls on the sides.
 4. The base layer was usually compacted dirt, topped with sand and small stones, followed by layers of crushed rocks held together with lime mortar.
 5. The top layer was usually made from durable stone blocks, and the road was slightly “crowned” to aid in water runoff.
- C. The most famous Roman road was the Appian Way (*Via Appia*), constructed from 312 BC and covered 132 Roman miles, linking Rome to Brindisi in as straight a line as possible.
 1. In 71 BC, after the rebellion led by the ex-gladiator, Spartacus, was defeated, some 6,000 slaves “were crucified along the Appian Way from Capua to Rome” (Durant, *Caesar And Christ*, 138).
 2. While our modern asphalt roads might offer a smoother ride than the Appian Way, Roman roadways win the prize for durability!

3. “Rome had a sizable army and enjoyed long stretches of peace. At such times the soldiers became civil servants, carrying out a variety of public works, and the military engineers turned their attention to roads, bridges, and aqueducts.” (Schwartz, *Machines, Buildings, Weaponry of Biblical Times*, 166)
4. Some of these ancient Roman bridges, tunnels, and aqueducts are still in use today.

II. Navigation Was Easy

- A. “To assist the traveller, numerous maps and itineraries seem to have been available, and copies of a few have survived. The *Peutinger Table* is a 13th-century copy of a late Roman map of the whole Roman Empire and beyond, from Britain to India, and survives virtually intact. It is a continuous elongated chart 22 ft (6.75 m) long and 13 in (34 cm) wide, and was a road map intended for the imperial courier service (*cursus publicus*). The map is actually a schematic diagram showing the main roads, towns, road stations, rivers, mountains and distances. In all, 555 cities are shown, each represented by small illustrations. The imperial courier service used the main roads which had official stations along them for a change of horse and an overnight halt. For the ordinary traveller there were staging posts or inns (*mansiones*) where the distance between two towns was too great to travel in one day.” (Adkins, *Introduction to the Romans*, 91)
- B. A Roman *mile* was 1,000 Roman paces (roughly 1,611 yards).
 1. Milestones (mile markers) were usually erected every mile along the roadways.
 2. Several thousand of these milestones have been discovered.
 3. Much like the road signs on our interstate highways, these stone markers gave the distance to the nearest town in Roman miles.
 4. They instructed the traveler on the best places to stop, while others had carved inscriptions concerning when the road was built, who constructed it, and who last repaired it.



Roman Milestone at Capernaum

5. “Inscriptions on the mile markers list the name of the emperor, the official in charge of road construction, and the distance in Roman miles from the capital of the local district.” (Schwartz, *Machines, Buildings, Weaponry of Biblical Times*, 166)
 6. Our Lord might have had these milestones in mind when He said, “And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two” (Matt 5:41).
- C. I have had the opportunity to photograph Roman milestones in Italy, Greece, Turkey, Jordan, and Israel.
1. I’ve always thought that if someone from the first century saw what I was doing, they would have a good laugh.
 2. To them, photographing a milestone would be about as interesting as photographing every McDonald’s restaurant would be to us.
 3. However, since these mile markers give us so much information, I feel compelled to photograph everyone I can find!

III. Roman Roads And The Gospel Of Christ

A. Paul grew up in Tarsus of Cilicia (Acts 21:39).

1. About nine miles north of Tarsus in modern-day Turkey, near the village of Saglikli, there is a section of a paved first-century AD Roman road.
2. In Turkish, it is called the *Roma Yolu*.
3. The road led from Tarsus to the Cilician Gates.
4. Only about 1.5 miles of the road has been unearthed, and it runs through a hilly and very barren landscape.
5. An arch from the time of Septimius Severus (AD 193–211) still spans the nearly ten-foot-wide road.
6. In Tarsus today, there is an exposed section of a first century AD Roman road that has only recently been uncovered, and it has not yet been determined if this road intersected (or maybe is) the road found in Saglikli.
7. Dr. Randall Smith estimates that Paul traveled over 10,000 miles while preaching the gospel of Christ—and one has to wonder how many miles he traveled on the Roman roads near his home before he took the gospel to the Roman world (cf. Smith, *Paul’s Response to the Roman World*, 107).



Roman Road Near Tarsus (the Roma Yolu)

B. Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13–14).

1. After preaching on the island of Cyprus, Paul sailed 170 miles northwest to Perga, on the southern coast of modern Turkey.
2. From there he went inland to visit the cities of Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe, and Attalia.
3. In the 1800s, William M. Ramsay, an archaeologist from Oxford University, traveled throughout Turkey and found numerous Roman inscriptions that supported Luke's account of Paul's travels in the book of Acts.
4. Ramsay concluded that the journeys of Paul and Barnabas, as recorded in Acts 13–14, closely followed the Roman highway known as the *Via Sebaste*.
5. "A Roman road led from Laranda by Derbe and Lystra to Pisidian Antioch. A Roman milestone on this road was found by us in 1890 at a bridge over Tcharshamba River, about fifteen miles north-west from Derbe and twenty or twenty-five south of Lystra. Others have been found close to Lystra, and at intervals on the way to Antiocheia. Only the interval of about twenty-five miles northwest of Lystra still remains unexamined and unknown: the discovery of a milestone in this section would be a welcome completion to our knowledge. Iconium lay off the line of this road, which was built by Augustus and bore the name *Via Sebaste*, 'Imperial Road,' as several of the original milestones show..." (Ramsay, *The Cities of St. Paul*, 396)

C. Paul's second missionary journey (Acts 15:36–18:22).

1. While revisiting some of the congregations he had established on his first journey, Paul took the overland route from Antioch of Syria through the Amanus Mountains to the province of Cilicia (though there were few paved roads in Cilicia).
2. After reaching Troas on the western shores of Asia Minor, Paul received the Macedonian call (Acts 16:6–10).
3. After sailing from Troas to Samothrace, Paul landed in Europe at Neapolis (modern day Kavala) (Acts 16:11–40).
 - a) You can still see portions of the *Via Egnatia* as it goes up from Neapolis towards Philippi (it is only a six-mile journey).
 - b) "The *Via Egnatia* was begun c. 145 B.C., soon after Macedonia was conquered. It ran from Dyrrachium on the west coast of Greece (modern Albania) to Neapolis on the northeast coast and eventually to Byzantium. Roman armies moved across it in the struggles between Caesar and Pompey and between Octavian and the forces of Brutus and Cassius. Roman roads were named for their builders or their destination, and an



The Harbor at Neapolis, Greece (Modern Kavala)

inscription confirms that this road takes its name from the proconsul of Macedonia. It would have been the route taken by Paul from Neapolis to Philippi, Amphipolis, Apollonia, and Thessalonica (Acts 16:12; 17:1). He left the road when he was smuggled off to Beroea (Acts 17:10) rather than follow it on to Pella and the west.” (Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 89)



The Via Egnatia from Neapolis to Philippi

4. After leaving Philippi, Paul and Silas traveled west on the Via Egnatia through the cities of Amphipolis, Apollonia, and Thessalonica (Acts 16:12; 17:1).
 - a) Neither Amphipolis nor Apollonia had a Jewish synagogue, and in all likelihood, Paul spent the night in these cities on his journey to Thessalonica.
 - b) While there is no record of Paul having preached in either Amphipolis or Apollonia, a modern monument in Apollonia, written in Greek and English, says, “Here Took Place St. Paul’s Speech.”
 - (1) The inscription also includes the text of Acts 17:1.
 - (2) The plaque is located on the side of a small hill less than a mile from the modern Via Egnatia.

5. While in Thessalonica, he preached at the “synagogue of the Jews” (Acts 17:1).
 - a) There is not much left of Thessalonica from the New Testament age.
 - b) One of the more important monuments from the Roman age is the majestic Arch of Galerius, located on the Via Egnatia in modern Thessaloniki.



The Arch of Galerius at Thessalonica, Greece

- c) Early in the fourth century AD the Roman tetrarch Galerius transferred the capital of the province to Thessalonica and erected a series of monuments, mainly for personal use.
- d) This arch contains relief scenes extolling the victories of Galerius over the Persians in AD 297.
- e) Two of the four original pillars of the monument remain.
- f) Galerius later served as Roman emperor from AD 305 to 311.

D. Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 18:23–21:16).

1. Once again, Paul traveled through much of Asia Minor, from Antioch of Syria, through Lystra, Laodicea, Ephesus, and then across the Aegean Sea to Greece to visit Philippi, Thessalonica, and Corinth.
2. Near the end of this journey, Paul walked from Troas south to Assos (38 miles), and then sailed for the nearby city of Mitylene (Acts 20:13–14).
3. Today, a portion of the Roman road from Troas to Assos can still be seen.



Roman Road From Assos to Troas

E. Paul's journey to Rome (Acts 27:1–28:16).

1. After a tumultuous voyage across the Mediterranean Sea from Israel to Italy, Paul traveled overland from Puteoli to Rome.
2. He was met by fellow Christians who came to meet him at the Appii Forum and Three Inns (Acts 28:13–15).
3. Both the Appii Forum and Three Inns are situated on the Appian Way on the road to Rome.
4. "The Via Appia ran south from Rome to Capua and angled across Italy to Tarentum and Brundisium on the Adriatic coast. Begun in 312 B.C., it was considered by Rome's historians as the city's oldest road. Although in rough condition, stretches of the Appian Way are still in use. It was the route on which Paul's party made their approach to Rome from Puteoli (Acts 28:15–16)." (Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 89)

Conclusion

- I. Rome built a magnificent system of roads throughout the civilized world to assist the rapid movement of her legions to enforce Roman peace—and soon after that, early Christians walked those same roads to bring the "gospel of peace."
- II. "And how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things!'" (Rom 10:15; cf. Isa 52:7)

The Synagogue Of The Jews

Introduction

- I. Synagogues are Jewish houses of worship, and they played a crucial part in the spread of the gospel in the early days of the New Testament church.
 - A. The word *synagogue* is derived from the Greek *synagōgē*, and it describes a place of prayer and worship for Jews.
 - B. The English word *synagogue* appears more than sixty-seven times in the New Testament (NKJV).
 - C. Philo, the first century AD Jewish historian, described synagogues as “schools of wisdom, and courage, and temperance, and justice, and piety, and holiness, and every virtue” (Philo, *Moses* 2.216), where “they sit according to their age in classes, the younger sitting under the elder, and listening with eager attention in becoming order” (Philo, *Free* 81).
 - D. “Renan called the synagogue ‘the most original and fruitful creation of the Jewish people.’ The word *synagogue* is Greek in origin and means ‘a gathering of people’ or ‘a congregation.’ The Hebrew word for such an assembly is *keneset*, the very same name that is used for the parliament in the modern state of Israel. Thus the name synagogue came to be used for the local congregation of Jews and also the building in which they met. In Hebrew, the building would be called *bet hakkeneset*, ‘the house of assembly.’” (Kaiser, *A History of Israel*, 454)
- II. Synagogues are intertwined with the spread of the gospel.
 - A. Our Lord grew up attending the synagogue at Nazareth (Luke 4:15–16) and began His ministry by teaching in the synagogues in Galilee (Matt 4:23; 9:35).
 1. He taught and performed many of His miracles in the vicinity of local synagogues in Galilee (Matt 4:23; Luke 4:15).
 2. He also returned to the synagogue in His hometown of Nazareth to teach (Matt 13:54; Mark 6:2).
 3. He frequently taught in the synagogue of His adopted hometown of Capernaum (Mark 1:21; John 6:59; cf. Luke 7:1–5).
 - B. Simon Peter’s house in Capernaum was located very close to the synagogue (Mark 1:29; Luke 4:38).
 - C. After his conversion, Paul immediately “preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God” (Acts 9:20; cf. 13:5, 14; 14:1; 17:1–3, 10, 17; 18:19).
 1. Synagogues are mentioned nineteen times in the book of Acts, and the majority of these synagogues were located outside of Israel.
 2. As Luke recorded Paul’s missionary journeys throughout Asia Minor, Macedonia, and Greece, he mentions the synagogues at Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Ephesus, Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, Corinth, and Salamis.
 3. As you read the book of Acts, you realize that Paul’s custom was to visit the synagogue first in every city he entered.
 - D. Early Christians often met in the synagogues (Acts 22:19; 26:11; Jas 2:2).
 - E. As the gospel moved outside of Israel, the synagogues of the Diaspora became places where both Jews and some Gentiles could hear the message of the Cross (Acts 13:43; 14:1).

III. Josephus, Philo, and early rabbinic literature give us additional insights into the synagogue's working and worship.

- A. The remains of ancient synagogues at places like Capernaum, Gamla, Chorazin, Masada, Herodium, and Magdala shed more light on the matter.
- B. Recorded in the *Jerusalem Talmud* is a saying of Rabbi Hoshaiyah, quoted by Rabbi Pinhas, that, "There were 480 synagogues in Jerusalem and every one of them had a schoolhouse and a house for learning, a schoolhouse for Scripture and a house of learning for Mishnah" (*y. Meg.* 73d).

Discussion

I. The Origin Of The Synagogue

- A. The Old Testament does not mention the existence of the synagogues.
 1. However, in his speech at Jerusalem, James pointed out the ancient origins of the synagogue when he said, "For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath" (Acts 15:21).
 2. "The origin of the synagogue, in which the congregation gathered to worship and to receive the religious instruction connected therewith, is wrapped in obscurity. By the time it had become the central institution of Judaism (no period of the history of Israel is conceivable without it), it was already regarded as of ancient origin, dating back to the time of Moses..." (Dembitz, "Synagogue," 619)
 3. "Archaeological evidence indicates synagogues in Egypt from the third century B.C. Synagogues were certainly a well-developed reality by the first century, when they were located throughout Palestine and the Diaspora. Philo, for instance, has numerous references to synagogues (clearly referring to meeting places)." (Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity*, 573-574)
 4. As we mentioned in a previous lesson, the *Theodotos Inscription* in Jerusalem is one of the earliest known inscriptions from a Jewish synagogue.
 - a) This 25x17 inch limestone inscription was found near the Temple Mount and is currently displayed in the Israel Museum.
 - b) This first century BC dedicatory inscription mentions a priest named Theodotos, who established a synagogue during the Second Temple period.
 - c) The inscription mentions three generations of men who had served as "head of the synagogue."
- B. In Jewish writings, the earliest mention of the synagogue goes back to the days of Babylonian captivity, where Israel finally decided to forsake idolatry.
 1. In the *Babylonian Talmud*, a question is asked, "Where in Babylonia is the Divine Presence?" (*b. Meg.* 29a).
 2. The answer was, "In the synagogue of Hotzal, and in the synagogue of Shaf VeYativ in Nehardea" (*b. Meg.* 29a).
 3. Hotzal and Shaf VeYativ were believed to be the locations of two ancient synagogues that date back to the Babylonian captivity.
 4. These synagogues were used as houses of worship and places for both religious and secular education.

5. “During the Babylonian exile, Israel was cut off from the temple, divested of nationhood and surrounded by pagan religious practices. The nation’s faith was threatened. Under these circumstances, the exiles turned their religious focus from what they had lost to what they retained—the Torah and the belief that they were God’s people. They concentrated on the law rather than nationhood, on personal piety rather than sacramental rectitude and on prayer as an acceptable replacement for the sacrifices denied to them. When they returned from the exile, they brought with them this new form of religious expression, as well as the synagogue (its center), and Judaism became a faith that could be practiced wherever the Torah could be carried. The emphases on personal piety and a relationship with God, which characterized synagogue worship, not only helped preserve Judaism but also prepared the way for the Christian gospel.” (Walton and Keener, *NIV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible*)
 6. “It is a common assertion of students of both Hebrew Scripture and Jewish history that while the precise setting for the origin of the synagogue is not known, the idea for it originated in the Exile, after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in 587–86 B.C.E. By the waters of Babylon, where the exiled Judeans ‘wept and remembered’ Zion (Psalm 137:1), they were forced to face the urgent issues of how to maintain their identity; how to address their God, who in the eyes of many had forsaken them or judged them too harshly; and how to worship without a holy sanctuary that was linked to a holy space, Jerusalem. The prophet Ezekiel may have played a special role in this regard when he spoke of the *miqdash me’at* (‘little temple,’ Ezek. 11:16), or the prophet Jeremiah, when he referred to the *beit am*, house of the people (Jer. 39:8). Together with their immediate concerns of collecting and editing their sacred documents, through which they would ensure the portability of their national history and corpus of law and lore, coping with the trauma of the Exile by developing a new worship system without a temple left an indelible imprint on the collective memory of the Jewish people.” (Meyers, *Sacred Realm*, 9–10)
- C. It appears that when the Jews returned from Babylonian exile, they brought the synagogue system of worship back with them.

II. Worship In The Synagogue

- A. It took a quorum of ten Jewish men (a *minyan*) to constitute a synagogue.
 1. “Said R. Yohanan, ‘When the Holy One, blessed be he, comes to a synagogue and does not find ten present, he forthwith becomes angry’” (b. *Ber.* 6b).
 2. “And R. Joshua b. Levi said, ‘A person should always get up early to go to the synagogue, so that he will derive the merit of being counted among the first ten’” (b. *Ber.* 47b).
 3. “There was the precedent involving R. Eliezer, who came into the synagogue and did not find a quorum of ten, so he freed his slave and thereby completed the necessary quorum of ten” (b. *Ber.* 47b).
 4. “Said R. Simeon b. Laqish, ‘Whoever has a synagogue in his town and does not go in there to pray is called a bad neighbor’” (b. *Ber.* 8a).

5. “Said Rab to R. Hiyya, ‘How do women gain merit? It is by having their children learn to recite Scripture in the synagogue, and having their husbands learn to repeat Mishnah-traditions at the rabbis’ house, and by watching for their husbands until they come from the rabbis’ house’” (*b. Ber.* 17a).
- B. While the *Mishnah* contains no specific instructions for the orientation of the synagogues, the *Tosefta* says that those praying should turn their faces toward Jerusalem.
1. “Those who are outside the Land turn toward the Land of Israel, as Scripture states, *And pray toward their land [which thou gavest to their fathers, the city which thou has chosen, and the house which I have built for thy name]* (II Chron. 6:38). Those who are in the Land of Israel turn toward Jerusalem, as Scripture states, *And they pray to thee toward this city which thou hast chosen [and the house which I have built for thy name]* (II Chron. 6:34).” (*t. Ber.* 3.15)
 2. The doors of the synagogues at Gamla, Chorazin, and Masada in Israel all face towards Jerusalem.
- C. “The central focus of attention in the synagogue was the ‘ark,’ which held the scrolls of the Law, and those of the Prophets and the Writings of the sacred Scriptures. The ark stood near the wall at the farthest end of the synagogue from the entrance. In the center of the building was a raised platform called the *bēma*, on which the lectern was located. Wooden seats faced the lectern with the chief seats being those nearest the ark. From at least the Middle Ages on, the women viewed and participated in the service from the balcony in orthodox synagogues, but this appears to be a late innovation, for evidence exists to show that women could occupy even the chief seats in earlier times.” (Kaiser, *A History of Israel*, 456)
- D. Worship services in the synagogues consisted of a set order.
1. The *Shema* was recited (Deut 6:4-9; 11:13-21; Num 15:37-41).
 2. Prayer.
 3. Reading from the Law.
 4. Reading from the Prophets (Acts 13:27-28).
 5. A sermon or explanation of the Law was given (Acts 13:15).
 6. The benediction.
- E. “The *order of divine worship* was in New Testament times already tolerably developed and established. The congregation sat in an appointed order, the most distinguished members in the front seats, the younger behind; men and women probably apart. In the great synagogue at Alexandria the men are said to have sat apart according to their respective trades... The chief parts of the service were, according to the Mishna, the recitation of the *Shema*, *prayer*, *the reading of the Torah*, *the reading of the prophets*, *the blessing of the priest*. To these were added the *translation* of the portions of Scripture read, which is assumed in the Mishna, and the explanation of what had been read by an edifying discourse, which in Philo figures as the chief matter in the whole service.” (Schürer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, 2.2.75-76)

- F. “On the Sabbath morning the entire family went to the synagogue service. The synagogue was the most imposing building in the community. No structure was permitted to ‘look down’ on the synagogue. The father washed his hands in the court in preparation for the service, and then entered the center door with the rest of the men of the congregation. The women and the boys under 12 years of age had to go around to the side where they found some stone steps which led up to a second story. Here they entered a gallery that ran around three sides of the building. In front of the gallery was a wooden grill so the women and boys could see and hear the reader, while they themselves would be barely discernible. This was the women’s gallery. In the middle of the synagogue floor was a structure about twice the height of a man. It was called ‘ark.’ On top of this ark were the Scrolls, or their copy of the Old Testament. When the service began, the ruler of the Synagogue climbed the ladder-like stairs and took his seat near the Scrolls. He was not a teacher but was held in high honor in the community. It was his duty to keep the sacred Scrolls in good condition. He appointed the reader and the speaker for the day.” (Gilbertson, *The Way It Was In Bible Times*, 76–77)
- G. In Second Temple Judaism, the scribes and Pharisees did most of the teaching in the synagogues.
1. In the language of our Lord, they sat “in Moses’ seat” (Matt 23:1–3).
 2. The phrase, “in Moses’ seat,” does not just refer to one who spoke with the authority of Moses, but rather, there was an actual chair from whence one could teach.
 3. “In 1926 a unique stone seat was found near the southern wall of the Chorazin synagogue. Since then it has been called the ‘Chair of Moses.’ The Chair of Moses is a special seat that is used in some synagogues, even today, on certain occasions, usually located near the most important wall, that which faces Jerusalem.” (Yeivin, “Ancient Chorazin Comes Back to Life,” n.p.)
 4. This “chair of Moses” from Chorazin is now on display in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.



The “Seat Of Moses” From Chorazin

III. Jesus And The Synagogue At Nazareth

- A. The most vivid portrayal of the teaching method of Jesus in the synagogue can be seen in Luke 4:16–29.
1. Luke tells us that it was the *custom* of Jesus to be in the synagogue on the Sabbath.

2. “Sabbath morn dawned, and early He repaired to that Synagogue where, as a Child, a Youth, a Man, He had so often worshipped in the humble retirement of His rank, sitting, not up there among the elders and the honored, but far back. The old well-known faces were around Him, the old well-remembered words and services fell on His ear. How different they had always been to Him than to them, with whom He had thus mingled in common worship! And now He was again among them, truly a stranger among His own countrymen; this time, to be looked at, listened to, tested, tried, used or cast aside, as the case might be. It was the first time, so far as we know, that He taught in a Synagogue, and this Synagogue that of His own Nazareth.” (Edersheim, *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, on Luke 4:16)
- B. On this occasion, Jesus “stood up to read.”
1. “Rabbinic sources give some indication of what a synagogue service in the first century entailed. Part of the service included the invitation for any qualified male present to give a homily—an invitation Jesus accepted on this occasion” (Cabal, *The Apologetics Study Bible*, on Luke 4:16).
 2. In this period, it is possible that there were no assigned readings from the Prophets, so the reader could choose his passage to read.
 3. The “scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him” (Luke 4:16 NET).
 4. The synagogue “attendant” (Luke 4:20) who gave the sacred scroll to Jesus filled the role of what came to be known as the *chazan* (or *chazzan*).
- C. Jesus chose to read Isaiah 61:1–2, with a line from Isaiah 58:6 (Luke 4:18–19).
1. Isaiah takes the language concerning the year of Jubilee (Lev 25) to proclaim deliverance for those in Babylonian exile.
 2. Jesus uses the same language and applies it to His ministry of deliverance from sin.
 3. Usually, after the reading of a Scripture, most teachers would expound upon it—but Jesus sat down (it was often the custom of rabbis to sit while teaching).
 4. “Though prayer in the synagogues was not unknown (Matthew 6:5), the main religious activity that took place in the synagogue was the reading of a Torah portion on the Sabbath and holidays, its translation into Aramaic or Greek, and a reading from the Prophets, as Luke describes (Luke 4:16–17). As a sign of respect for the Holy Scriptures, Jesus would probably have stood to read the Torah, possibly on a wooden dais in the center of the room. But unlike modern-day teachers and preachers who stand to deliver their message, in order to address the congregation, he would have taken the seat reserved for the teacher known as the ‘Moses seat’ (Matt. 23:2).” (Vamosh, *Daily Life at the Time of Jesus*, 56)
- D. Only after “the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him” did Jesus begin to speak (Luke 4:20–21).
1. He claimed that Isaiah had prophesied about Him.
 2. The audience marveled at what He said, but some of them remembered that He was the son of an ordinary carpenter (cf. Matt 13:55–57).
 3. Jesus responded by reminding them that “No prophet is accepted in his own country” (Luke 4:24; cf. Jer 26:20–23; 11:18–23).

- E. Jesus then spoke of how both Elijah and Elisha had performed miracles (raising the dead and curing leprosy) for the benefit of Gentiles (Luke 4:25–27).
 - 1. In response, the hearers were filled with wrath and attempted to kill Him (Luke 4:28–29; cf. Deut 13:1–5).
 - 2. Jewish law prohibited an execution without trial; and prohibited executions from taking place on the Sabbath!

IV. Paul And The Synagogue At Antioch Of Pisidia

- A. Around AD 50, Paul visited Antioch of Pisidia on his first evangelistic journey, and his first recorded sermon was preached there (Acts 13:14–51).
 - 1. More than 200 years before Paul came to this city, Antiochus III ordered 2,000 Jewish families to be moved from Babylonia to specific areas in Lydia and Phrygia because he believed they would be loyal supporters of the Seleucids (Josephus, *Ant.* 12.146–153).
 - 2. In the synagogue at Antioch, there were devout Jews, along with some “god-fearers” (Acts 13:16 CJB), i.e., Gentiles who were sympathetic to the worship of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
 - 3. “The numberless synagogues scattered throughout the cities of the Greco-Roman world were not attended, as Jewish synagogues are attended today, only by Jews, but were also filled with hosts of Gentiles, some of whom had accepted circumcision and become full Jews, but others of whom, forming the class called in the Book of Acts ‘God-fearers’ or ‘God-worshippers,’ had accepted the monotheism of the Jews and the lofty morality of the Old Testament without definitely uniting themselves with the people of Israel.” (Machen, *The Origin of Paul’s Religion*, 10)
- B. Following the customs of the day, the worship service included a “reading of the Law and the Prophets” (Acts 13:15).
 - 1. After the reading, the “the rulers of the synagogue” invited Paul and Barnabas to give a “word of exhortation” to the people.
 - 2. “The invitation indicates that the synagogue rulers recognized the distinguished and learned character of their guests, and that they anticipated from the text of the day a message of encouragement. Since Antioch was the most important city in southern Galatia, this represented no mean invitation. Some have suggested Paul may have worn his official pharisaical robes to the service and therefore been recognized immediately as one who could contribute. I have no idea what text Paul built upon that day (though scholars speculate freely), but we do know from established synagogue practice that he tied together passages from the Pentateuch and the prophets and that the theme, as we have already noted, centered on encouragement.” (Gangel, *Acts*, 214)

- C. Paul's sermon was a summary of Jewish history and beliefs.
1. God is the God of the people of Israel (Acts 13:17).
 2. God chose the patriarchs for Himself (Acts 13:17).
 3. God redeemed His people from Egypt and led them through their 40 years in the desert (Acts 13:18).
 4. God gave them the Promised Land as an inheritance (Acts 13:19).
 5. God gave them judges and then kings (Acts 13:20–21).
 6. God raised up David, Israel's greatest king (Acts 13:22).
 7. God promised that through David's seed, a Savior would come (Acts 13:23–24).
 8. God raised up John the Baptist to prepare the way for the Messiah (Acts 13:25).
 9. God sent His Son, Jesus, to bring salvation (Acts 13:26).
 10. Jewish leaders in Jerusalem unjustly caused the death of Jesus (Acts 13:27–29).
 11. God raised Jesus from the dead (Acts 13:30–37).
- D. Paul ended his sermon with a call to repentance (Acts 13:38–41).
1. This call was based on a quotation from Habakkuk 1:5.
 2. Paul warned the congregation that Habakkuk's words applied to all who rejected Jesus as the Messiah.
 3. "So when the Jews went out of the synagogue, the Gentiles begged that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath" (Acts 13:42).
 4. As Paul and Barnabas saw it, the Jews in Antioch of Pisidia had rejected the very thing they were looking for, i.e., "eternal life" (Acts 13:43–51).
- E. The first excavations of Antioch of Pisidia were carried out in 1913–14 and 1924 by archaeologists William Ramsay and D. M. Robinson.
1. Excavations at Antioch were resumed in 1979 and revealed the remains of many important buildings dating from the Roman era and later.
 2. A fourth-century Byzantine church building, a basilica dedicated to Paul, stood on the city's west side.
 3. At the time it was built, it was one of the largest church buildings in the world; it is still one of the largest ever discovered in Asia Minor.
 4. Most of the walls have disappeared, but the mosaics and inscriptions covering the floor are worth seeing.
 5. At the lower-left corner of the basilica are the remnants of what is believed to be a first century synagogue.
 6. A mosaic floor in the church building has been found with Psalm 42:4 inscribed on it.



Byzantine Era "Church of Saint Paul" at Antioch of Pisidia

Conclusion

- I. Synagogues began to appear after Babylonian captivity, and by the first century AD, they could be found throughout the Greco-Roman world.
 - A. These houses of worship contained copies of the Old Testament scrolls, as well as a group of religious people who were waiting for the Messiah.
 - B. By custom and practice, these buildings were constructed near flowing water (needed for the *mikvah*), and provided an ideal place for converts to be baptized.
 - C. It is no wonder that in every city Paul visited, his first stop was at the local synagogue (Acts 17:1-3).
- II. As Jesus had foretold, synagogues eventually became a place of persecution for early Christians (Matt 10:17; 23:34; Mark 13:9; Luke 12:11; 21:12; John 16:2).

Multiculturalism In The New Testament

Introduction

- I. Christians in North America live 6,000 miles and 2,000 years away from life in first century Palestine.
- II. It is often difficult for us to understand how ancient cultures often met or, more often, collided, at different times and places.
- III. In first century Jerusalem, you would have found yourself under the civil authority of the Romans, under the religious authority of the Jews, and would have probably communicated with travelers by use of the Greek language.
- IV. “We must be careful lest we presuppose that *our cultural instincts* are the same as those represented in the Bible. We must be *culturally aware* of our own place in time—and we must work to comprehend the cultural context of the Scriptures that we wish to understand. Too often interpreters have lacked cultural awareness when reading the Scriptures. We have failed to recognize the gulf that exists between who we are today and the context of the Bible. We have forgotten that we read the Bible as foreigners, as visitors who have traveled not only to a new geography, but to a new century. We are literary tourists who are deeply in need of a guide.” (Burge, *The Bible and the Land*, 11)
- V. On several occasions, the New Testament gives us a glimpse into the multicultural setting of first century Palestine.

Discussion

I. The Trilingual Inscription On The Cross

- A. When our Lord was crucified at Calvary, “Pilate wrote a title and put it on the cross” (John 19:19–22).
 1. John tells us that this sign was placed on the cross.
 - a) Luke and Mark tell us it was placed “over Him” (Luke 23:38; Mark 15:26).
 - b) Matthew informs us that it was placed “over His head” (Matt 27:37).
 2. This sign, a Roman *titulus*, was a wooden placard that served as a deterrent against any who dared to rebel against Rome.
 3. A *titulus* was usually carried by the condemned criminal or hung around his neck on the way to his place of execution and then affixed to his cross as he died.
 4. In the case of our Lord, the sign was incredibly ironic—Pilate had it posted to purposely offend the Jews, but he never saw the truth behind the sign.
 5. “To claim to be the king of the Jews was equivalent to claiming to be the Messiah, which the Sanhedrin had declared to be blasphemy and worthy of death. However, the charge was written by the Romans, and its intended meaning had more to do with the crime of treason or insurrection. To claim to be a king over any of the peoples in the Roman Empire was to challenge the authority of Caesar. Whenever the Romans heard of anyone claiming to be the Messiah in Israel, their greatest concern was that he might try to lead Israel in a revolt against them. Insurrection was a capital crime under Roman law.” (Weber, “Matthew,” 464)

- B. John and Luke inform us that this sign was a trilingual inscription, written in “Hebrew, Greek, and Latin” (John 19:20; Luke 23:38).
1. Because Jesus was crucified during the feast of the Passover, at a time when devout Jews from throughout the Greco-Roman world would be in Jerusalem, Pilate made the inscription readable to the broadest audience possible.
 - a) Hebrew (Aramaic) was the language most widely understood by the Jews in Palestine.
 - b) Latin was the official language throughout the Roman Empire.
 - c) Greek was the *lingua franca* of the empire and was understood by both Jews and Gentiles alike.
 - d) “This is an interesting detail. For one thing, it provided us with one explanation of why the precise wording of the title in each of the Gospels differs from that in the others. The difference is not great, of course. But the suggestion has been made that it is due to the evangelists having translated different versions of the title. Pink suggests that Matthew most likely translated the Hebrew, Luke the Greek, and Mark and John the Latin.” (Boice, *Triumph through Tragedy (John 18–21)*, 1502)
 2. Thus, in one inscription, Pilate made it possible for Judean Jews, Romans, Jews of the Diaspora, Gentile God-fearers, and proselytes to read the official reason as to why Jesus was being crucified.
 3. “Jewish inscriptions to foreigners were written in Greek and Latin. Even in Jerusalem, some very important inscriptions meant to warn all peoples were in both Greek and Latin (Josephus *J.W.* 5.194). Greek was the *lingua franca* of the eastern Roman Empire, and Latin of the western; Aramaic predominated further to the east. These are also the three languages (along with some Hebrew) in Roman Jewish inscriptions. Jewish people in Judea, Parthia, and some of Syria spoke Aramaic; those in urban north Africa and the northern Mediterranean world spoke mostly Greek. Many Jews also spoke Greek alongside Aramaic in Jerusalem and Lower Galilee. (Hebrew, of course, remained the holy language).” (Keener, “John,” 191–192)

II. The Middle Wall Of Separation

- A. While writing to the church at Ephesus, Paul spoke of the “middle wall of separation” that kept Jews and Gentiles apart (Eph 2:14–16).
1. This “middle wall of separation” probably refers to a wall located on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem.
 - a) Babylon had plundered Solomon’s Temple in 597 BC (Jer 28:1–3) and burned it in 587 BC (Jer 52:13).
 2. When Herod the Great rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem, it contained a large outer court that covered 37 acres, and an inner court subdivided into the courts of the women, men, and priests.
 3. This outer court was called the Court of the Gentiles.

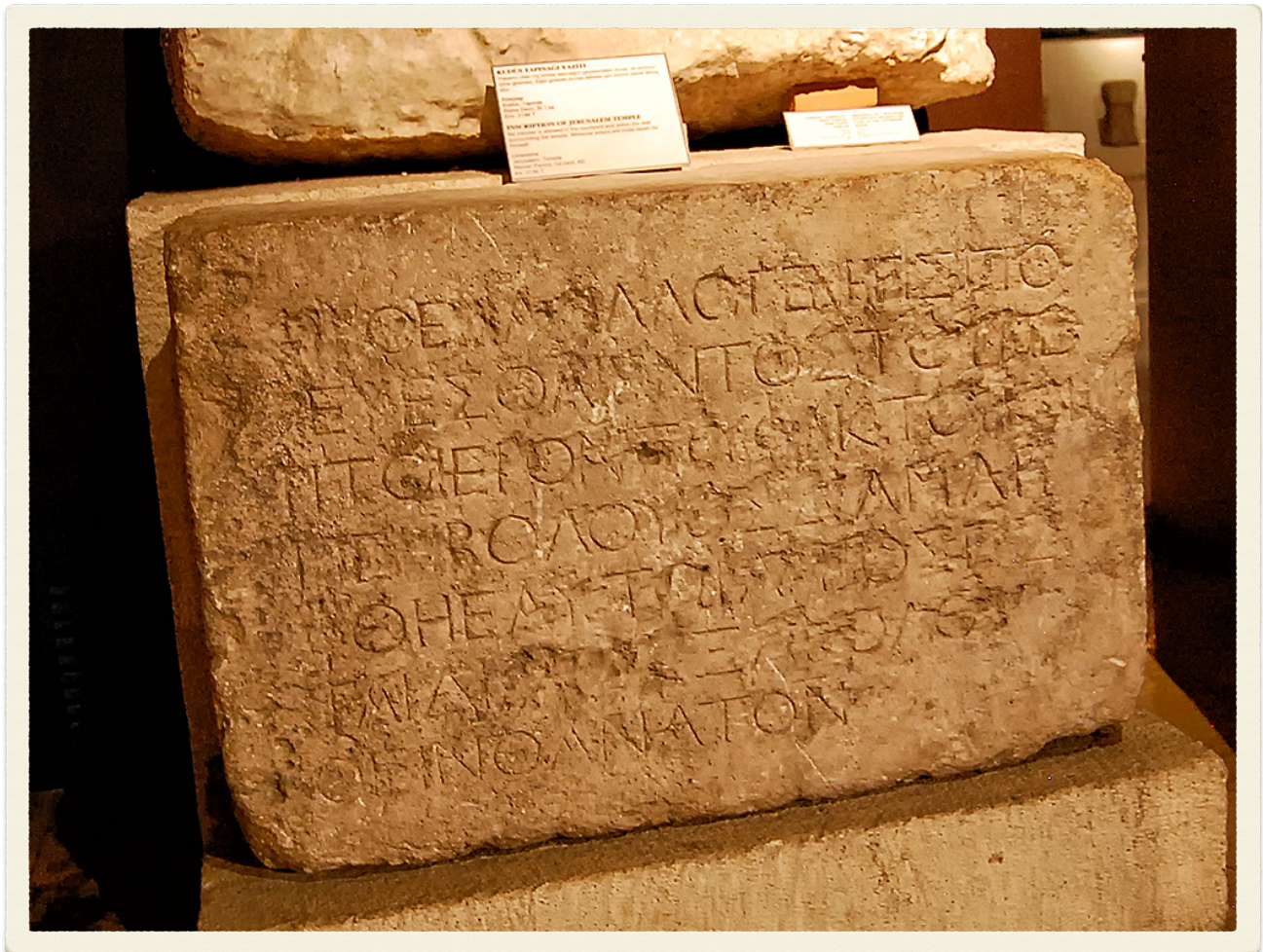
- B. Gentiles were physically prevented access to the inner courts of the temple by a latticed wall called the *soreg* (“boundary wall”).
1. The Mishnah describes this wall as “a latticed railing, ten handbreadths high” (m. *Mid.* 2:3); a “handbreadth” is between 2.5 and 4 inches, which means the wall was about 40 inches tall.
 2. The Jewish historian Josephus says the wall was “very elegant” and was “three cubits” tall, which would be between 54 and 66 inches.
 3. This wall had thirteen openings (m. *Mid.* 2:3), and at every entrance, there was a sign, written in Greek and Latin, warning Gentiles not to enter.



The Temple and the Soreg (“Boundary Wall”)

4. “When you go through these [first] cloisters, unto the second [court of the] temple, there was a partition made of stone all round, whose height was three cubits: its construction was very elegant; upon it stood pillars, at equal distances from one another, declaring the law of purity, some in Greek, and some in Roman letters, that ‘no foreigner should go within that sanctuary;’ for that second [court of the] temple was called ‘the Sanctuary...’” (Josephus, *J.W.* 5.193–194)

5. “Thus was the first enclosure. In the midst of which, and not far from it, was the second, to be gone up to by a few steps; this was encompassed by a stone wall for a partition, with an inscription, which forbade any foreigner to go in, under pain of death.” (Josephus, *Ant.* 15.417)
6. This death threat even applied to Roman citizens (Josephus, *J.W.* 6:124–126).
7. Archaeologists have discovered two of these warning inscriptions.
 - a) The one on display in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum in Turkey is an intact limestone block discovered by archaeologists in Israel in 1871.
 - b) The inscription reads: “No foreigner is allowed to enter within the balustrade surrounding the sanctuary and the court. Whoever is caught will be personally responsible for his ensuing death.”
 - c) The second inscription was discovered in 1936, and while not as well preserved, is on display at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.



The Warning Inscription (Now in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum)

8. “That it was written in Latin is consistent with the way that official decrees were promulgated during Roman times. This inscription was written in the early Roman imperial period as a warning to non-Jews of the death penalty for entry into the inner court of the temple. There is some question of whether the Jews or the Romans erected the inscription and whether it was written only for non-Jews. Although it is apparently complete, the inscription contains the edict, not information regarding who erected it, such as is often contained on other inscriptions. It is likely that the Jews had it erected, in the language that those who were not Jewish would be expected to read or have read to them, as well as it being available in a language that numerous Jews, especially those from outside of Palestine, would have been able to read as well. This inscription offers insights into some of the linguistic and cultural issues at play in first-century Palestine.” (Porter, “Inscriptions and Papyri: Greco-Roman,” 533)
- C. This “middle wall of separation” had great significance for Paul.
1. Paul wrote the Ephesian letter from prison because he had been accused of taking a Gentile, Trophimus the Ephesian, to the temple (Acts 21:27–29).
 2. This accusation was a lie, but it inflamed the crowds (Acts 21:30).
 3. The angry mob would have stoned Paul to death had he not been “rescued” by Roman soldiers (Acts 21:31–33).
 4. “The fact that the Romans were prepared to ratify death sentences even apparently on Romans for committing this breach of Jewish temple regulations indicates how significant it was, and how much emotion attached to the Jewish ideas of the purity of the temple. It is no wonder that the charge made against Paul led to such an outburst of feeling.” (Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, 367)

III. Paul’s Sermon On The Stairs

- A. After Claudius Lysias (cf. Acts 23:26), a Roman tribune in Jerusalem, sent armed soldiers to rescue Paul on the Temple Mount, they had a conversation on the stairs that led from the Court of the Gentiles up to the Fortress Antonia (Acts 21:34–40).
1. While the angry crowd called out for his death, Paul asked the commander, “May I speak with you?” (Acts 21:37–38).
 2. Paul made his request to the tribune in Greek, a language he undoubtedly learned from his childhood in Tarsus, and which was the language commonly employed by Roman soldiers in the eastern part of the empire.
 3. The commander responded by asking Paul, “Can you speak Greek?”
 - a) “*Do you speak Greek?* is not really a question asking for the information, for the commander obviously understood from Paul’s statement to him that he did speak Greek. Therefore, this question must be rendered in some languages as ‘then you obviously speak Greek’ or ‘then you must speak Greek.’ If the question is changed into a statement, the verb relating to the commander’s comment must be changed from asked to ‘said.’” (Newman and Nida, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Acts of the Apostles*, on Acts 21:37)

- b) “As he was about to be brought into the barracks, Paul said to the commander, ‘Am I allowed to say something to you?’ He replied, ‘You know how to speak Greek?’” (Acts 21:37 CSB)
- c) “When Paul was about to be taken into the fortress, he asked the commander, ‘Can I say something to you?’ ‘How do you know Greek?’ the commander asked.” (Acts 21:37 CEV)



Model of the Temple Mount (Temple on the left; Fortress Antonia in the upper right)

- 4. According to Josephus (*Ant.* 20:169–172; *J. W.* 2:261–263), around 54 AD, when Felix was governor of Palestine, an Egyptian false prophet deceived 30,000 men and caused them to rebel against Rome—and Roman soldiers quickly smashed this rebellion.
 - a) The followers of this Egyptian are called *assassins* (Gr. *sikarios*).
 - b) The NIV calls these men *terrorists* (Acts 21:38).
 - c) Paul was neither an Egyptian nor a terrorist, but a Jew and a citizen of the important city of Tarsus—the capital of Cilicia.
 - d) As a Jew, Paul had every right to be in the temple.
 - e) Being a citizen of Tarsus, a culturally significant city, would explain his use of the Greek language.

5. “The captain was amazed to hear a cultured Greek accent coming from this man whom the crowd were out to lynch. Somewhere about AD 54, an Egyptian had led a band of desperate men out to the Mount of Olives with a promise that he could make the walls of the city fall down in front of him. The Romans had dealt swiftly and efficiently with his followers; but he himself had escaped, and the captain had thought that Paul was this revolutionary Egyptian come back.” (Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 186)
 6. “The Roman official appears surprised when Paul addresses him in Greek. It was not astonishing to him that a Jew from Palestine would know Greek. Most Jews have probably learned at least some Greek. In listening to Paul, the tribune most likely discerns that Paul knows the language as well as any native Greek speaker. This may lead the tribune to conclude that Paul is not a local Judean revolutionary.” (Arnold, *John, Acts*, 426)
 7. “In the eastern part of the empire, Latin was confined to use in the military and in documents concerning Roman citizens. The public administration of Syria-Palestine used Greek, which was also the first language of the Jerusalem aristocracy, and most Jewish people in Palestine knew at least some Greek. The ‘tribune’ (NRSV) or ‘commander’ assumes that Paul is a particular troublemaker (v. 38); most rabble-rousers he would know of would have spoken Aramaic by choice. But most Egyptian business documents of this period were in Greek, which Egyptian Jews normally spoke; he thus should not be surprised that one he supposes to be an Egyptian speaks Greek. The point is not that Paul speaks Greek; it is that he speaks it without an accent, like someone educated and fluent in the language by Aegean standards, which the tribune assumes the Egyptian Jew who had caused problems would not be. Egyptians were normally supposed to have a distinctively Egyptian accent.” (Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 394)
- B. After clearing up his identity, i.e., he was not the Egyptian who had led a rebellion some years before, but rather a Jew from Tarsus, Paul asked for and was granted permission to address the Jewish mob (Acts 21:39–40).
1. While on the stairs that led from the Temple Mount up to the Fortress Antonia, Paul addressed the Jewish mob below him.
 2. As Paul began to speak, Luke says, “there was a great silence, he spoke to them in the Hebrew language...” (Acts 21:40).
 - a) Many translations of the Bible use the phrase “Hebrew language” (NKJV, HCSB, ASV, RSV).
 - b) Other translations render it as “Hebrew dialect” (NAS, YNG).
 - c) Some translations render it as “Aramaic” (NIV, CSB, NET).
 3. With little effort, Paul switches his language from Greek to Aramaic, the vernacular of the Jewish people in Jerusalem.
 - a) “In an age when 85% of the Jews in the world were living in the Diaspora, being a Hebrew-speaker would confer higher status as a Jew” (Stearn, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 600).
 - b) The ability to speak Hebrew (Aramaic) set Paul apart from many other Jews of the day.

- c) Even Philo of Alexandria, a great first century Jewish scholar, could not read the Torah in Hebrew.
 - d) Because Paul chose to deliver this speech in Hebrew, it seems that the sermon was for the benefit of his Jewish hearers, not the Romans.
4. “Aramaic is a Semitic language closely related to the Hebrew, which was widely spoken throughout ancient Palestine, Nabatea, Syria, Persia, and Parthia. It would have been the mother-tongue of Jews living in the Holy Land. Not all the crowd knows Hebrew and, if Paul were to address them in Greek, it would be a serious insult given their concerns that Paul is much too friendly with Gentiles.” (Arnold, *John, Acts*, 2B.439)
 5. “All would have understood Paul if he had spoken Greek; but the fact that he should stand there among the Roman soldiers and use Aramaic instead of Greek surprised this mass of Jews and so pleased them in spite of the speaker that their silence became intent. Luke wants us to catch the contrast: a moment ago the roar of an enraged mob, this moment, after a single sentence from Paul’s lips, absolute silence. Visualize the scene; few of a more dramatic nature are found even in the New Testament. What was passing through the mind of the chiliarch as he eyed Paul and glanced at the crowds and yet understood not a word of what the apostle said?” (Lenski, *The Interpretation of The Acts of the Apostles 14–28*, 900–901)

Conclusion

- I. “Multiculturalism” and “cultural diversity” are political buzzwords at the moment.
 - A. From the founding of our nation, the United States has been a “melting pot” where immigrants from throughout the world could bring their cultural traditions to a new land where they would honor old traditions and form new ones as well.
 - B. The Greco-Roman world was composed of many different ethnic backgrounds and languages and was held together by a powerful Roman army.
- II. The gospel of Christ proved itself to be well suited to men and women of all nations—regardless of the language they spoke or the color of their skin.
- III. Our Lord was born at the perfect moment in human history!

Paul, The Ambassador Of Christ

Introduction

- I. For the gospel of Christ to conquer the Greco-Roman world, someone would have to bridge the gap between Jews and Gentiles.
 - A. Finding such a man would not be an easy task!
 - B. In the providence of God, Saul of Tarsus was selected (Acts 9:15-16; 26:12-18).
- II. In addition to his unimpeachable Jewish background, Paul was also a Roman citizen and well acquainted with Greek philosophy and culture.
- III. “He was a good guy, well educated, properly spoken and sharply adorned. He came from a good family, and got a first-class education. He was a free Roman and a Jew. He had a Latin mind for organization, a Greek tongue for the study of human wisdom, and a Hebrew heart to know God—the perfect combination for the task that God outlined for his life.” (Smith, *Paul’s Response to the Roman World*, 100)
- IV. Paul declared himself an *ambassador* of Christ (2 Cor 5:20; Eph 6:20).
 - A. In the Greco-Roman world, ambassadors were selected from among the educated and eloquent who could best represent the interests of their government.
 - B. The apostle Paul was selected by Christ to be His ambassador.
 - C. In this lesson, we want to notice why Paul was the perfect ambassador of the kingdom of heaven to the Greco-Roman world.

Discussion

I. A Hebrew Of The Hebrews

- A. In describing his early life and upbringing, Paul said he was “circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews; concerning the law, a Pharisee...” (Phil 3:5).
 1. “Circumcised the eighth day.”
 - a) This was done in strict accordance with the Law (Gen 17:12; Lev 12:3).
 - b) Gentile proselytes were circumcised as adults.
 2. “Of the stock of Israel” (cf. 2 Cor 11:22).
 - a) He was a member of the covenant nation; he was not of mixed stock, like many Jews who dwelt in Palestine.
 - b) He was not a proselyte but of the original stock.
 - c) To be *of the seed of Abraham* was to have absolute racial purity.
 3. “Of the tribe of Benjamin” (cf. Rom 11:1).
 - a) By the first century AD, many Jews could not trace their genealogy or were descended from proselytes.
 - b) It was from Benjamin that the first king of Israel had come (1 Sam 9:1-2).
 - c) When the tragic split of the kingdom came, Benjamin and Judah were the only two tribes who had remained faithful (1 Kgs 12:21).

4. "A Hebrew of the Hebrews" (cf. 2 Cor 11:22).
 - a) A *Hebrew* was a Jew who could still speak Hebrew as opposed to the Jews of the Dispersion who had forsaken their native language for the Greek of their adopted countries.
 - b) "The expression implies characteristics of language and manners. He might be an Israelite and yet a child of Greek-speaking Jews: but his parents had retained their native tongue and customs, and he himself, while understanding and speaking Greek, also spoke in Hebrew on occasion." (Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament*, 3.446)
 - c) "In an age when 85% of the Jews in the world were living in the Diaspora, being a Hebrew-speaker would confer higher status as a Jew" (Stearn, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 600).
- B. Paul probably lived in Tarsus of Cilicia until he was eleven or twelve years of age since most Jewish parents put their sons in training at twelve.
 1. According to Jewish tradition, a Jewish boy became responsible for observing the law when he was thirteen years old.
 2. "(1) At five to Scripture, (2) ten to Mishnah, (3) thirteen to religious duties, (4) fifteen to Talmud, (5) eighteen to the wedding canopy, (6) twenty to responsibility for providing for a family, (7) thirty to fullness of strength, (8) forty to understanding, (9) fifty to counsel, (10) sixty to old age, (11) seventy to ripe old age, (12) eighty to remarkable strength, (13) ninety to a bowed back, and (14) at a hundred—he is like a corpse who has already passed and gone from this world." (m. *Avot* 5:21; cf. m. *Nid.* 5:6)
 3. "At the age of 6, the Jewish boys took up the study of the Pentateuch, writing, and arithmetic. At the age of 10, the Mishna was added to the curriculum. The Mishna was in oral form in Paul's day, and the teacher would recite the lesson to the pupil; and then the pupil was to recite the lesson back to the teacher verbatim... At the age of 15, Gemara was added. The Gemara was a still later and more extensive development of the Midrash which was a part of the Mishna: the *Gemara* contained the discussion of the rabbis down through the centuries." (Reese, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Acts*, 345–356)
- C. Paul had the privilege of learning from the most distinguished and revered living rabbi during the early days of the New Testament church!
 1. "I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city and trained at the feet of *Gamliel* in every detail of the *Torah* of our forefathers. I was a zealot for God, as all of you are today." (Acts 22:3 CJB)
 2. According to the Talmud, Gamaliel was the grandson of Hillel, the founder of the more liberal of the two rabbinical schools in Jerusalem (the other was the strictly orthodox school of Shammai).
 3. Gamaliel is usually referred to as Gamaliel the Elder.
 4. Lightfoot claims he was the 35th "receiver of the traditions" (Lightfoot, *A Commentary on the New Testament from the Talmud and Hebraica*, 4.52).
 5. "...he was certainly one of the most influential men of his day, as well as one of the finest intellects. There were about 1,000 students in the House of interpretation, or rabbinical college, during the period that Paul was studying." (Bradford, *Paul the Traveller*, 35)

6. “He was one of the seven Rabbis to whom the Jews gave the highest title *Rabban* (our Rabbi). *Rabbi* (my teacher) was next, the lowest being *Rab* (teacher).” (Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 3:387)
7. Luke described Gamaliel as “a teacher of the law held in respect by all the people” (Acts 5:34).
8. Gamaliel died in AD 52, just 18 years before the destruction of Jerusalem.
9. “When Rabban Gamaliel the Elder died, the glory of the Law ceased and purity and abstinence died” (m. *Sotah* 9:15).

II. A Roman Citizen From Birth

- A. He was probably called both *Saul* and *Paul* from birth (Acts 13:9).
 1. *Saul* was his Jewish name and what he was called at home.
 2. *Paul* (Paulos) was his Roman name and the name by which he was known among the Gentiles.
 3. “Up to this point, Luke only refers to the apostle by his Hebrew name, ‘Saul.’ Now, as the apostle begins his mission to the Gentiles, Luke will refer to him as ‘Paul.’ The change probably reflects the historical reality that Paul himself begins using his Roman name as he ventures into Gentile territory with the gospel.” (Arnold, *Acts*, 2B.338–339)
- B. In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul told the brethren to greet two of his relatives, Andronicus and Junia, who both had Roman names (Rom 16:7).
 1. Andronicus and Junia were probably a married couple, though it is possible that they were brother and sister.
 2. The KJV and ESV refer to Andronicus and Junia as Paul’s “kinsmen,” while the NAS calls them his “kinsfolk,” and the NRSV calls them his “relatives.”
 3. The word translated as “countrymen” in the NJKV of Romans 16:7 is the Greek word *syngenēs* (συγγενής) which means “a kinsman or kinswoman, relative” (*Mounce Concise Greek–English Dictionary of the New Testament*).
 4. Later in the same chapter, Paul uses the same Greek word to describe Lucius, Jason, and Sosipater (Rom 16:21).
- C. Paul described his hometown, Tarsus of Cilicia, as “no mean city” (Acts 21:39).
 1. In the first century AD, Tarsus had a large Jewish population.
 - a) Tarsus was the capital in the province of Cilicia and was one of the great centers at which the trade of the Mediterranean and the hinterland of Asia Minor converged.
 - b) It was famous for the manufacture of goats’ hair felt, out of which tent-cloth, blankets, clothing, belts, and saddles were made.
 - c) As a young man, Saul was taught the tent-making trade (Acts 18:3).
 2. Tarsus was also a “university town,” though not as distinguished as the universities of some of the older cities.
 3. Strabo, the Greek historian, geographer, and philosopher, described Tarsus as having “surpassed Athens, Alexandria, or any other place that can be named where there have been schools and lectures of philosophers” (Strabo, *Geography*, 14.5.13).

4. “It is important to recognize that to a great extent in antiquity people were judged by the importance of the place where they were born. Their own personal honor and dignity was in part derived from the honor rating of the place from which they came. Paul is making a claim here to be a person of considerable social status, indeed probably higher status than the tribune himself, which can explain why the tribune allows him to address the crowd.” (Witherington, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 663)
5. “Paul identifies himself as a ‘citizen’ (πολίτης) of Tarsus. Paul and his family evidently possessed both Tarsian and Roman citizenship. Greek cities made citizenship dependent on the fulfillment of specific conditions, often financial contributions or involvement in public building projects. Paul’s assertion that he was a Tarsian is made with pride—Tarsus is (lit.) ‘a not unimportant city’; this reflects the municipal patriotism of the citizens of Greek cities whose identity always remained associated with their native city. The Roman commander may have known that Mark Antony and then Augustus had rewarded Tarsus because its citizens had remained faithful to Caesar in the battle against Brutus and Cassius, Caesar’s killers, granting Tarsus the status of a free city and tax exemption. Paul’s insistence that he is a Tarsian citizen can be understood as a rebuttal of someone who resents being mistaken for an Egyptian.” (Schnabel, “Acts,” 897–898)



Roman Road at Tarsus

- D. Paul was also a Roman citizen and used his citizenship to great advantage in spreading the gospel throughout the Greco-Roman world.
1. “To be a Roman citizen was no small honor. In A.D. 47 the Emperor Claudius had a census taken of the whole empire. The officials recorded that there were just under 6,000,000 citizens out of a total population of something like 80,000,000. Quite apart from the privilege of the vote, citizenship also guaranteed that the holder could not be flogged without a fair trial. He was also protected by Roman law and, in the event of a grave charge being brought against him, he might take his appeal to the highest court of all—the judgment of the emperor. The dignity and majesty of Roman law were the foundations upon which the whole fabric of the empire rested, and it was unique in the ancient world.” (Bradford, *Paul the Traveller*, 12)
 2. At Philippi, Paul declared his Roman citizenship, which caused the city magistrates to fear because they had beaten an “uncondemned” Roman citizen (Acts 16:37–38).
 - a) As William Ramsay points out, Paul would have asserted his legal rights in Latin, not Greek.
 - b) “Yet Paul, as a Roman citizen, must have known his rights; and it seems clear that he could not have used the exact words which Luke reports. Now, when we consider the facts, we see that it must be so. No *civis Romanus* would claim his rights in Greek; the very idea is ludicrous. Paul claimed them in the Roman tongue; and we may fairly understand that the officials of a Roman colony were expected to understand Latin; for the official language even of far less important colonies in Asia Minor was Latin.” (Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveler and Roman Citizen*, n.p.)
 3. In Jerusalem, Paul used his Roman citizenship to avoid being questioned under torture (Acts 22:23–29).
 - a) After the uproar on the Temple Mount, a Roman centurion planned to take Paul into the Fortress Antonia to have him “examined under scourging” (Acts 22:24).
 - b) However, Roman law exempted her citizens from such beatings without a proper trial.
 - c) As the Roman commander questioned Paul about his citizenship status, the commander admitted that he had purchased his citizenship with a “large sum” of money (Acts 22:28).
 - d) Paul, on the other hand, was “born a citizen” (Acts 22:28).
 - e) “In first century Roman courts, legal judgments were inevitably biased by the social standing of the person being charged. If Paul had bought his citizenship, he and the Tribune were social equals. But if Paul had been born a Roman, Lysias was his social inferior. The Tribune would have had to tread very carefully in dealing with Paul, especially since he had placed Paul in chains and threatened him with torture. It was illegal to do either of these things to a Roman citizen.” (White, *Evidences & Paul’s Journeys*, 51)

4. While standing before Festus at Caesarea Maritima, Paul used his rights as a Roman citizen to have his case moved to Rome and be heard by Caesar himself (Acts 25:9–12).
 - a) The Jewish leaders had wanted Paul to go to Jerusalem to stand trial.
 - b) However, Paul knew there was no way of getting a fair trial in that city, even if Festus was overseeing the proceedings.
 - c) One of the privileges of Roman citizenship was that you could ask for your trial to be moved from a provincial court and appear before the Emperor himself (*provocatio ad Caesarem*).
 - d) “This type of appeal is one of the oldest Roman ancient rights, dating back to 509 BC.” (Bock, *Acts*, 703)
5. After a tumultuous journey across the Mediterranean Sea, Paul was delivered to the Praetorian Guard in Rome to await trial before the Emperor (Acts 28:16).
 - a) In the course of two years, one by one, Praetorian Guards would be on duty with Paul.
 - b) But these guards were also under the constant influence of Paul and the gospel!
 - c) Paul’s imprisonment had opened the way for preaching the gospel to the finest regiment in the Roman army!
 - d) All the Praetorian Guard knew why Paul was in prison—and many of them were touched by the gospel.
 - e) The news spread from guard to guard, to the guard’s families, and then to Caesar’s household (Phil 4:22).

III. A Student Of Greek Literature And Philosophy

- A. Paul’s teacher in Jerusalem, Rabban Gamaliel the Elder, was a true scholar who knew Greek literature, and advised his students to study it as well.
 1. In the days of the Hasmonean dynasty, Jewish leaders had ruled, “It is forbidden for someone to raise pigs, and it is forbidden for anyone to teach Greek learning to his son” (b. *Sotah* 49b).
 2. However, the *Babylonian Talmud* claims, “The household of Rabban Gamaliel is in a separate category [and may study Greek], for they had a relationship with the government” (b. *Sotah* 49b).
 3. On one occasion, Gamaliel is said to have washed in a bathhouse where there was a statue of the Greek goddess Aphrodite.
 - a) He defended his practice because the statue was purely decorative and in no way dedicated to the goddess.
 - b) “I never came into her domain. She came into mine. They don’t say, ‘Let’s make a bathhouse as an ornament for Aphrodite.’ But they say, ‘Let’s make Aphrodite as an ornament for the bathhouse.’” (m. *Abod. Zar.* 3:4)
 4. Since Paul was a disciple of Gamaliel, he had been taught to read and study Greek history and literature from an early age, which benefited him as he took the gospel to the Greco-Roman world.

- B. Although he had been brought up in a strict Jewish home, Paul had the wealth of Greek literature and philosophy before him.
 - 1. Even a casual reader of Paul's writings can see that he was very familiar with Greek philosophy, history, and culture.
 - 2. "No matter where Paul traveled he could be understood. But there is another lesson here that is perhaps a little closer to the pastor's heart. God used the common language to communicate the gospel. The gospel does not belong to the erudite alone; it belongs to all people. It now becomes our task to learn this marvelous language so that we can more effectively make known the grace of God to all people." (Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*, 2)
- C. In his sermon to the philosophers at the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:22-31), Paul quoted from Greek philosophers twice.
 - 1. The first quotation, "for in Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28), appears to be from a poem, *Cretica*, by Epimenides of Crete (c. 600 BC).
 - 2. His second quotation was from the Greek Stoic poet, Aratus of Soli in Cilicia (c. 310-245 BC), in his poem *Phaenomena*, "We are also his offspring" (Acts 17:28).
- D. In Titus 1:12, Paul quotes from Epimenides of Crete once again, when he said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons."
- E. Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 15:33, "evil company corrupts good habits," was a well-known Greek proverb from a line of poetry in Menander's comedy, *Thais*.
- F. "J. Rendel Harris claims that he finds allusions in Paul's Epistles to Pindar, Aristophanes, and other Greek writers. There is no reason in the world why Paul should not have acquaintance with Greek literature, though one need not strain a point to prove it." (Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, 3.289)

Conclusion

- I. Before His death on the cross, Jesus promised to establish His kingdom during the lifetime of His hearers (Mark 9:1; Matt 16:18).
 - A. The kingdom of Christ has been established (Col 1:13; 1 Tim 3:15; Heb 12:28).
 - B. God's scheme of redemption had been hidden in other ages (Eph 3:1-12).
- II. Through divine providence, Jesus came into this world at the perfect moment in human history (Gal 4:4).
 - A. "The Christian movement began in the midst of a very peculiar people; in 35 A.D. it would have appeared to a superficial observer to be a Jewish sect. Thirty years later it was plainly a world religion. True, the number of its adherents was still small. But the really important steps had been taken. The conquest of the world was now a mere matter of time." (Machen, *The Origin of Paul's Religion*, 7-8)
 - B. "He made this world. He came to dwell in it. He will return at the end of history to wind it all up. That is the Christian hope. History is moving steadily towards that grand day. We shall not go out like a light. We shall not be blown sky-high in a nuclear holocaust. We shall not destroy the Earth by our environmental vandalism. This world will not, however, go on forever. Jesus will come again, not this time to suffer but to judge. And His coming will settle the future destiny of all people." (Green, *The Message of Matthew*, 250)

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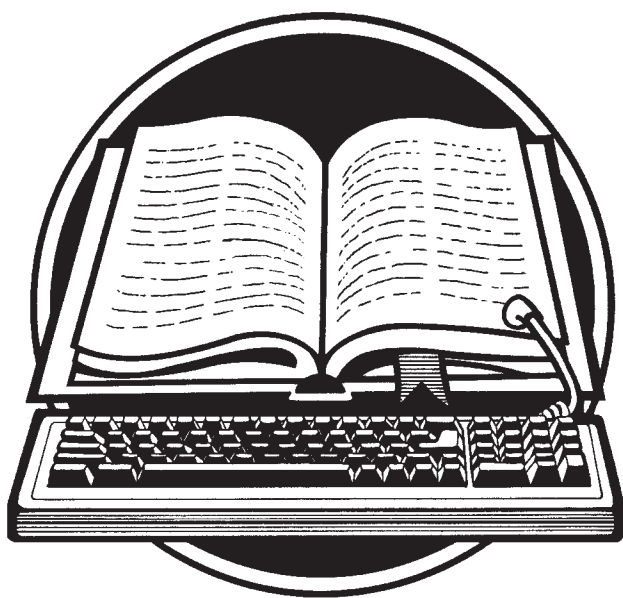
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