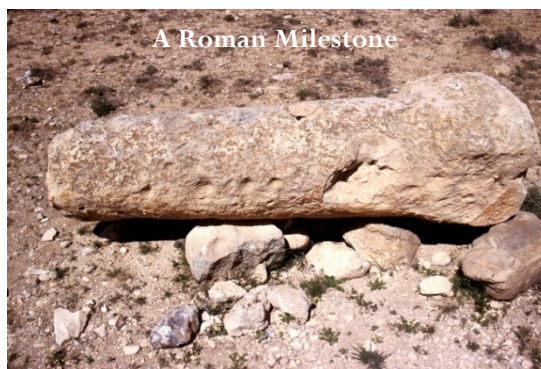


### *The Romans*

One of the things you may have learned in your study of history is that events and concepts do not fit into nicely packaged explanations. Facts about the past are very complicated and require complex descriptions. This is related to the fact that ancient and modern historians often provide what appears to be conflicting historical accounts, which creates a lot of work for people like me! When you read history, it is impossible for you to have a complete knowledge of any particular event. After all, a historical account only includes a witness' memory, and that memory only includes parts of the event. The reason this is being pointed out to you, is because Romans history is intertwined with the Maccabean Period, as well as the Herodian Dynasty, which is the next lesson. The Roman Empire had risen to power during the Maccabean Period. Therefore, we will first back up in time to explain how. After that, we will look at each Roman Emperor of the New Testament. So, from a chronological perspective, this lesson is not one slice of New Testament History. It will cover the whole New Testament from the standpoint of the Imperial Rome. In the next lesson, you will read about the Herodian Dynasty which was the Roman authority localized in the Jewish territory. Rome was the final power to rise in biblical history. The Roman Empire continued to exist until the time of Augustine (AD 395-430), when invading Barbarian tribes disjointed a weak empire. However, the period that we refer to as Byzantium, considered itself completely Roman until the Ottoman Turks (Muslims) invaded Constantinople (modern Istanbul) in AD 1453.

#### **The Road to and from the Republic**

Prior to the days of the Roman Republic, the Italian Peninsula was inhabited by Greek city states in the south, the Etruscans in the north, and the city state of Rome in the center. Some think that the Etruscans migrated from Asia Minor. Regardless, they not only maintained serious political power over Rome, but were also the source for Roman infrastructural and artistic culture. They were eventually overthrown by the Celts, Greeks, and then the Romans. When the Etruscan king was trounced, the Roman Republic was formed in 509 BC. Within the Republic, society was essentially broken down into three classes: the patricians (upper class), equestrians (business class), and the plebeians (lower class). Though ideologically, a republic incorporates the votes of the many, only the patricians held the power to vote because they owned most of the land and controlled the military. Like many historical circumstances, the majority of the population consisted of plebeians. Because of the patricians' reliance on the mass population, extensive compromises were made, and conflicts were eventually diffused by 287 BC. This further step in the unification of the Italian Peninsula empowered the Romans in its initial imperialism. What is known as the Punic Wars began in 264 BC, when Rome went



**The Romans are famous for their stone-paved roads. However, the Celts had built wooded plank roads first.**

## THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD: LESSON 3

to war with the Carthage (North Africa), which was the dominant power of the Mediterranean world at the time. Led by Hannibal, the Carthaginians surrendered in 202 BC. Yes, that included the navy and the elephants too. The character of Roman expansion differed from that of the Greeks. The goal in the spread of Alexander's empire was essentially to conform the world to the ideals of Hellenism. However, the Romans assimilated other cultures into itself. While Alexander only oppressed those who rejected Hellenism, the Romans sought to convert its opponents into citizens. Unlike the devouring beast of the Hellenistic Greeks, the Roman monster continued to morph as it consumed new cultures. Keep this in mind as you compare how both empires encountered the people of Judea. By 146 BC, the Romans had obtained Egypt, Macedonia, and the surrounding western Mediterranean regions. Only thirteen years later, Rome was suffering extensive internal problems. Revolts and civil wars broke out, and generals began to take power over the military. In 60 BC, three years after Pompey had taken Judea, he, Julius Caesar, and Crassus were working together for power in Rome. However, after Crassus had died in battle, Caesar and Pompey had begun to compete for the Senate. At first, the Senate supported Pompey. But Caesar proved stronger in the civil war, and as a monarch, ruled until 44 BC when he was killed by opponents. The final stages of Rome's Republic formally became recognized as an empire when Julius Caesar's adopted son Octavian, with the help of generals Mark Antony and Lepidus crushed the armies of Brutus and Cassius (not Crassus above). These two men were the conspirators of Caesar's murder. However, Mark Antony and Octavian were soon in opposition, which resulted in the defeat of Mark Antony along with his wife Cleopatra, the queen of Egypt. At that point, there stood no contender for what became the Roman Emperor.

### Caesar Augustus (Octavius) (27 BC- AD 14)

The reign of Caesar Augustus overlaps the birth and childhood of the Lord. He is mentioned in Luke 2:1, *In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.* When Luke mentions that Quirinius was governor of Syria in the 2:2, we are reminded that Pompey had taken political power from the Hasmoean House (Maccabees) and had combined it with Syria as a province under Rome. When Octavius came to power, he formally gave the republic back to the senate. However, this was merely a façade. From a practical standpoint, Octavius maintained just as much authority as an Emperor could, but worked under the pretense of the republic. The superficial cooperation earned him back the provinces, of which there were thirty-two. Judea became a province in AD 6. He also had complete authority over the army. Octavius was given the name of Augustus, which reflected

### Rome in Judea

When Pompey invaded Judea, he intruded the Holy of Holies. The Holy of Holies was only to be entered one time a year on the Day of Atonement, by the High Priest. The capricious intrusion of a pagan gentile brought extreme insult to the Jews. Pompey was killed in Egypt by one of Caesar's men fifteen years later. Many Jews saw this as divine judgment. When Pompey had removed Aristobolus II from power, Hyrcanus II was given the priesthood. However, as Judea was primarily under the authority of Rome, it had lost its reign over neighboring territories. Because Antipater, who had the power behind Hyrcanus, had pleased the Romans, he was made procurator over Judea. This included permission to rebuild the Jerusalem's walls, and a reduced tribute. After Julius Caesar died, the Romans were more stringent with the Jews. However Antipater and his successors continued to seek Roman favor.





## THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD: LESSON 3

a religious aspect of his office. Although the Romans often made policy in attempt to divorce religion from government, a new variety of paganism developed under Augustus. The Romans had a pantheon of gods, but under Augustus emperor worship was fostered, which built unity in the empire. Normally, non-compliance with the state-religion was outlawed, but the Jews were given unique privileges. Because they only believed in one God, they were viewed as strange, and often called atheists. They were permitted to practice their religion in Judea, and throughout the empire, but were discouraged from proselytizing. Eventually, tensions between the Jews and Romans escalated, which is why many of the Jews were disappointed that Jesus did not overthrow the Romans. The chief contribution of Augustus is known as the Pax Romana (Roman Peace). When he rose to power, he developed policies which prevented the schisms and revolts in Rome's recent history. His efforts to maintain peace in the empire extended beyond political policy. In fact, because of many developments in this time, the gospel was able to easily spread throughout the Mediterranean world during and after the time of the Apostles. Augustus' contributions included the following: the building of aqueducts, distribution of grain to the poor, the development of 'firefighters', a militia (police), and the funding of gladiators. Although Augustus' successors did not always rule with an equal effectiveness, his influence carried on for several generations. The Pax Romana is generally understood to have lasted for the next two centuries which extends well beyond the New Testament and into the post-Apostolic era.



A Temple to Augustus



Model of a Roman Aqueduct

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[Augustus] seduced the army with bonuses, and his cheap food policy was successful bait for civilians. Indeed, he attracted everybody's good will by the enjoyable gift of peace. Then he gradually pushed ahead and absorbed the functions of the senate, the officials, and even the law. Oppositions did not exist.

Tacitus, *Annals* I.i.i

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### Tiberius Julius Caesar Augustus (AD 14-37)

Tiberius' reign occupied all of Jesus' adult life on earth. He is mentioned in Luke 3:1, "In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being the governor of Judea..." As Tiberius, the step-son of Augustus, came to power he made an attempt to preserve the façade of the republic. However, this began to more rapidly diminish as the true colors of the monarchy were seen. Read comments from the ancient historian Tacitus.

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Addressing the state, he offered a variety of comments on the greatness of the empire and his own unpretentiousness. Only the divine Augustus, he suggested, had possessed a personality equal to such a responsibilities- he himself, when invited by Augustus to share his labors, had found by experience what hard hazardous work it was to rule the empire. Besides, he said, a State which could not rely on so many distinguished personages ought not to concentrate the supreme power in the hands of one man- the task of government would be more easily carried out by the combined efforts of a greater number.

Tacitus, *Annals* I.i.i

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## THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD: LESSON 3

### Gaius Caesar Augustus Germanicus (Caligula) (AD 37-41)

Caligula was the nephew of Tiberius. He is not mentioned in the New Testament. However, he is not a hidden figure in the history of the Jews. Caligula ordered that a statue of him be placed in the Jewish temple. Like Antiochus Epiphanes' and Pompey's acts, this outraged the Jews. Philo was a Jew sympathetic to Hellenism, but he did organize a group to prevent the emperor's intention. Nonetheless, this was without effect. Efforts were made by King Agrippa to prevent the emperor's wishes. Petronius, the legate of Syria, had already gone to Jerusalem, and concluded it was better to cooperate with the Jews rather than execute thousands of them. When Caligula received a persuasive letter from Petronius, he was furious and decided to follow through with the plan, and to order Petronius' death. However, his letter to Petronius was delayed until after the emperor had died. Josephus describes that this kind of behavior was typical of the Gaius Caligula. It is no surprise that there were at least three conspiracies to assassinate him. The tribune, Cassius Chaerea was successful in confronting the emperor in an alley where Caligula was mowed down.

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Now Caius [Gaius] did not demonstrate his madness in offering injuries only to the Jews at Jerusalem, or to those who dwelt in his neighborhood, but suffered it to extend itself through all the earth and sea, so far as was the subjection to the Romans, and filled it with ten thousand mischiefs...He also asserted his own divinity, and insisted on greater honors to be paid him by his subjects than are due to mankind. He also frequented the temple of Jupiter...which is with them the most holy of all temples, and had boldness to call himself the brother of Jupiter.

Josephus, *Antiquities*, XIX.i.i

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### Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus (AD 41-54)

Caligula's successor was his uncle, Claudius. The Senate had been in opposition to Claudius' succession. However, he had been immediately kidnapped by guards, who privately declared him as the emperor. But with the help of Agrippa, who was in Rome, he was fully recognized as the emperor, and all opposition was removed, including Charerea who had killed Caligula. He is mentioned in two places in the New Testament. Acts 11:28 reads, *And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius).* The second mention of Claudius is in Acts 18:1-2, *After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome.* Claudius was a powerful Roman emperor, but this did not save him from being mocked in his own home. The fact that emperor was to be worshiped is an incredible irony.

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Whenever he went to sleep after dinner, which was a habit of his, he was pelted with stones of olives and dates, and sometimes he was awakened by the jesters with a whip or cane, in pretend sport. They used also to put slippers on his hands as he lay snoring, so that when he was suddenly aroused he might rub his face with them.

Suetonius, *The Lives of the Caesars*, I.v.viii

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## THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD: LESSON 3

### Nero Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus (AD 54-68)

Nero was an absolutely insane emperor. He is not mentioned in the New Testament, however, his administration had tremendous impact on the lives of Christians. According to Josephus, Claudius' wife Agrippina poisoned him in order that her son Nero (by another man), would gain the throne. Nero then killed his half brother Britannicus, and oddly his mother Agrippina as well. While James the brother of Jesus was killed in AD 62 (Acts 12), it was not until AD 64-66 that Nero formally ordered a persecution of Christians. It is likely that Paul and Peter were martyred during this time. After the New Testament period, the persecution of the church at the order of Rome was very common. However, Nero brought the first of the Imperial persecutions, and one of the worst. He also blamed a fire in Rome on the Christians. This was not one bad part of a good administration. Nero characteristically made bad decisions, which was reflected by citizens and the military. This was terminally reflected when a revolt broke out in Gaul (France), which he responded to by committing suicide in AD 68. If you ever have the unfortunate experience of hearing rock music, you may learn that there have been famous rock stars who died young due to their own irresponsibility. Like a famed musician, there were rumors that Nero did not die, and false claims of his return were acknowledged up to twenty years later. However, because Nero had left the empire in such a mess, the reality of his death brought a civil war. For several months, Rome had no permanent emperor. You also ought to be aware that many understand "the beast" in the book of Revelation to be a reference to Nero.



### The Flavian Dynasty

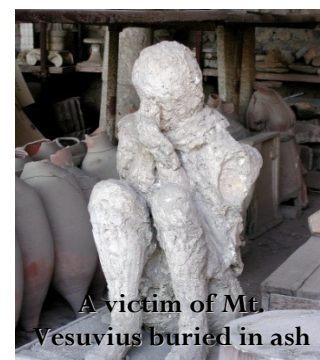
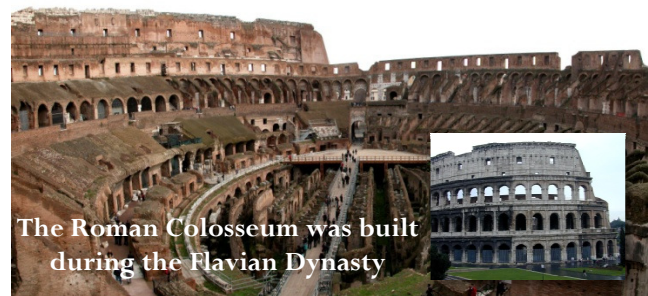
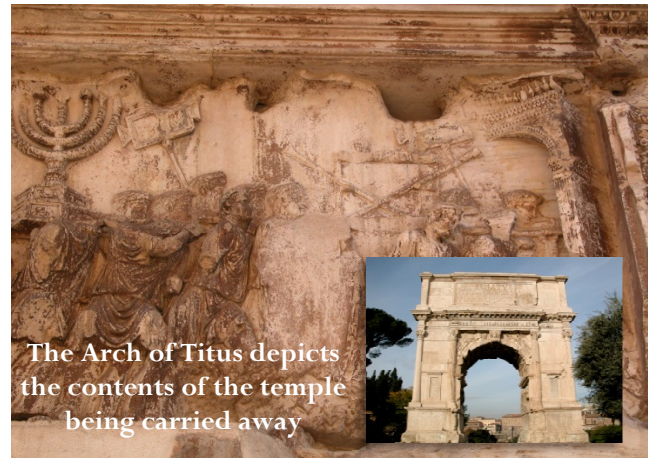
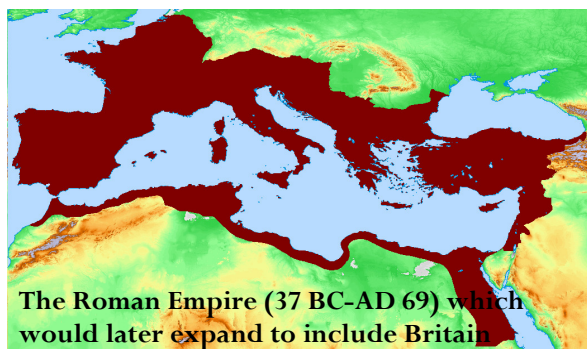
Because most of New Testament history takes place during the Julio-Claudian dynasty, less attention will be given to the Flavian dynasty. Amid the competition and wreckage for the imperial throne, Vespasian (AD 69-79) and his two sons Titus (AD 79-81) and Domitian (AD 81-96) arose. Vespasian is of special notoriety because he was the first Roman emperor to emerge from the business class. There is no positive indication that he persecuted the church. This was also the case when his son Titus was on the throne. However, he is most well known for the destruction of the Temple in AD 70 before he became emperor. Though this event typically is thought of as Jewish history more so than Christian history, it needs to be mentioned. The reason we have not given much attention to this is because it involves how Vespasian and Titus completely overtook the Negev, the Galilee and the Transjordan in response to a Jewish revolt in AD 66. It is not as directly related to events involving the Church.





## THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD: LESSON 3

What took place at this time were some of the most atrocious events in all of Jewish history. As you have read in the last two lessons, the Jews never gave in to the enemy. After the temple was burned to the ground by Titus (we are told that he tried to prevent this), the remaining Jews gathered at Masada (David's Stronghold, and Herod's Masada). The Jews' persistence in refusing to give into the Romans was so strong, that some committed cannibalism because there was no food to eat. No other event in the history of Judaism had been so terrifying. The main reason why this event is highlighted is because many believe (including myself) that this event is the partial fulfillment of Matthew 24. However, not all of the contents of Matthew 24 could have been fulfilled in AD 70, which becomes obvious as you read it. There are others who believe that the entire passage refers only to a time right before the end of the world. One event during Titus' reign that you may want to be aware of was the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius which destroyed Pompeii. Domitian made wild decisions, including the execution of many Romans. However, he did not achieve the lunacy of Nero. He is remembered for having persecuted Jews, and may have persecuted Christians. Because of his unstable ability to rule, he was assassinated and replaced by Nerva, who was selected by the Senate. As the Flavian dynasty came to an end, so did the New Testament. Most Bible scholars believe the book of Revelation was written in mid-90's (AD), and that its author, the Apostle John shortly died thereafter.



## THE INTERTESTAMENTAL PERIOD: LESSON 3

If you are unclear as to how Roman history is related to the New Testament, that is okay. The final lessons in this curriculum will survey the history of the early church against the backdrop of what you have read. The next lesson will discuss the Herodian Dynasty.

Greek	Pronunciation	English	Part of Speech
εἰμι	<i>ei-mee</i>	<b>I am</b>	<i>verb</i>
λέγω	<i>lego</i>	<b>I say/speak</b>	<i>verb</i>
εἰς	<i>ace</i>	<b>into</b>	<i>preposition</i>
λέω	<i>la-lay-o</i>	<b>I speak</b>	<i>verb</i>
ἄνθρωπος	<i>ann-air</i>	<b>a man</b>	<i>noun</i>