

# Roman History in New Testament Times

## *Summary & Acts of the Apostle from First Century Graeco-Roman Perspective*

Daniel Institute  
BD IV 414 (Biblical Studies)

Dr Annang Asumang

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It is impossible to fully interpret the New Testament, with their historical, social, and cultural backgrounds, without giving serious attention to the nature and extent of the impact of the dynamics between the first century Christian movement and the Graeco-Roman Empire.

**How does knowledge of first century Graeco-Roman social and cultural history enable interpretation of the New Testament?**

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## Main Objective of Course

Acquire coherent understanding of the social, cultural and political environment of first century Graeco-Roman world necessary for competent interpretation of the New Testament

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Course Summary

Acts of the Apostles

Assessments

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## Learning Outcomes

1. Employ Acts 1:8 and 2:7-12 to explain the geographical layout of the spread of Christianity in first century Graeco-Roman Empire.
2. Employ appropriate examples to illustrate how Acts of the Apostles demonstrates the triumph of the power of the Gospel over the magical powers in the first century Graeco-Roman world.
3. Employ the narrative of Acts 10 to illustrate the invasion of the Gospel into the Roman military establishment.
4. Evaluate the relevance of Acts 19 for explaining the social, cultural, religious, and political forces that confronted the local churches of the first century.
5. How do Paul's interactions with Gallio (Acts 18), Claudius Lysias (Acts 21-23), Felix (Acts 23-24), and Festus (Acts 25-26), all representatives of the Imperial ideology, illustrate the complex nature of the interactions between nascent Christianity and first century Graeco-Roman Empire?

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## Jews & Judaism in First Century Graeco-Roman Empire

1. Political history of first century Palestine and relevance for New Testament interpretation
2. Impact of Hellenization and Romanization of Palestine on Jewish religion
3. The Temple institution, its destruction and the relevance for New Testament interpretation
4. Diaspora Judaism and first century Christianity

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## Hellenization of Mediterranean World by Alexander the Great

### • Definition:

- Intentional or unstructured processes through which Greek civilization promoted itself and assimilated other nations in order to create a unified empire of common culture.
- Hellenism is evidence of process of Hellenization under way

### • Five Features of Hellenization or Hellenism

1. Speaking of Greek (from minimal ability to full fluency) & adoption of Greek names
2. Familiarity with Greek philosophy, education, literature and rhetoric
3. Distinctively Greek architectural forms (i.e., stadiums, theatres, agora, gymnasia)
4. Use of imported Greek tableware and cookware or their local imitations
5. Civic planning and organization like a *polis*, with Grecoan constitution, and officials

### • Different levels of Hellenization

- It tended to be more urban than rural even though it also served to unite the Greek Empire
- In Alexandria, Hellenization eventually resulted in the translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek over one century starting roughly 270 BC which then mostly supplanted accessibility to the Hebrew text
- Aramaic remained predominant language of masses, but Greek became the official lingua franca, and certainly for commercial, legal and political discourse
- Jerusalem was transformed with Greek architecture and gymnasium built adjacent the temple (1 Macc. 1:14; 2 Macc. 4:9)
- In Galilee, evidence of Hellenization was late but demonstrated by completely Greek cities such as Sepphoris, Tiberias

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## Assessment : Explain the relevance of the varying responses of first century Jewish sects, namely, Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians and the Scribes, to the presence of the Roman colonial agents in Palestine for interpreting the Gospels (1000 words).

### • Pharisees

- Means "separated ones"
- Usually non-priestly though some priests and Levites joined (Acts 5:34), & some in Sanhedrin such as Nicodemus (Jn 3:1-10; 7:50; 19:39) and Gamaliel (Acts 5:34; 22:3)
- Notorious for ostentatious display of piety (Matt 23)
- Largely skeptical of Hellenization
- Theologically conservative

### • Sadducees

- Name related to Zadok meant "righteous ones"
- Elites and priestly aristocracy
- Enthusiasts of Hellenization with heavy influence by Epicurean philosophy
- Liberal theology denying resurrection (Mk 12:18-27; Lk 20:27) and spirits (Acts 23:8)

### • Essenes

- Derived from Jerusalem priests who broke away in protest of Hellenization to found their isolated community led by "Teacher of Righteousness"
- Dualistic theology with vibrant eschatology

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## More Jewish Sects

### • Herodians

- A largely political class in support of the Herodian dynasty championing Hellenization
- In Mk 3:6 they conspire with the Pharisees to kill Jesus
- In Mk 12:13-17 and Matt 22:16 they join some Pharisees to trap Jesus
- Identified in key moments of Gospel narrative Mk 6:21, 26; Matt 14:1-12; Lk 23:7-12

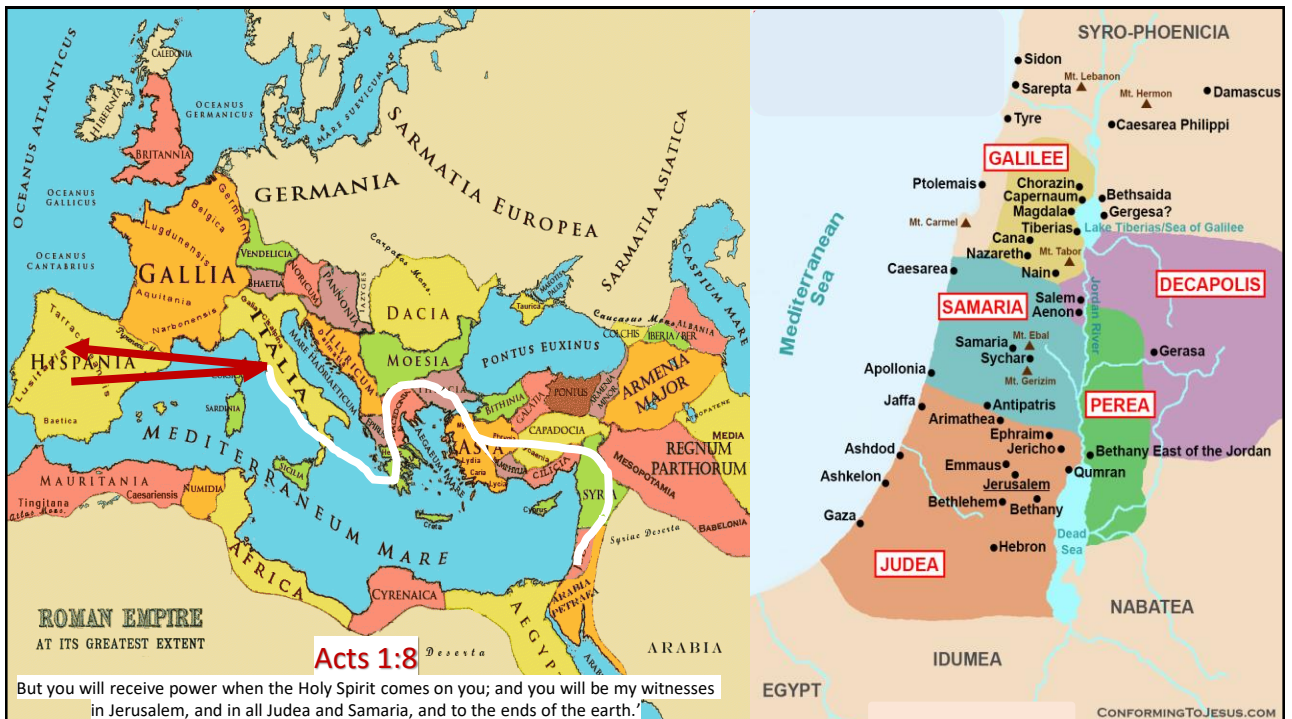
### • Scribes

- Technicians in producing legal documents, recording deeds, copying scriptures, and teaching
- Though not organized as group, were regarded as “experts” (Mk 2:16; Acts 4:5; 6:12; 23:9)
- Most are negatively portrayed, but a few appeared neutral to Jesus (Matt 13:52), or even praised by Him (Mk 12:28-34)

### • Zealots & Sicarii

- Avid revolutionaries who bitterly opposed Romanization with violence
- Some associated with Jesus & one Apostle was named Zealot (Lk 6:15 and Acts 1:13)
- Sicarii were an even more fearsome subgroup known for their terrorist activities

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## Impact of Introduction of Christianity into Jewish Diaspora

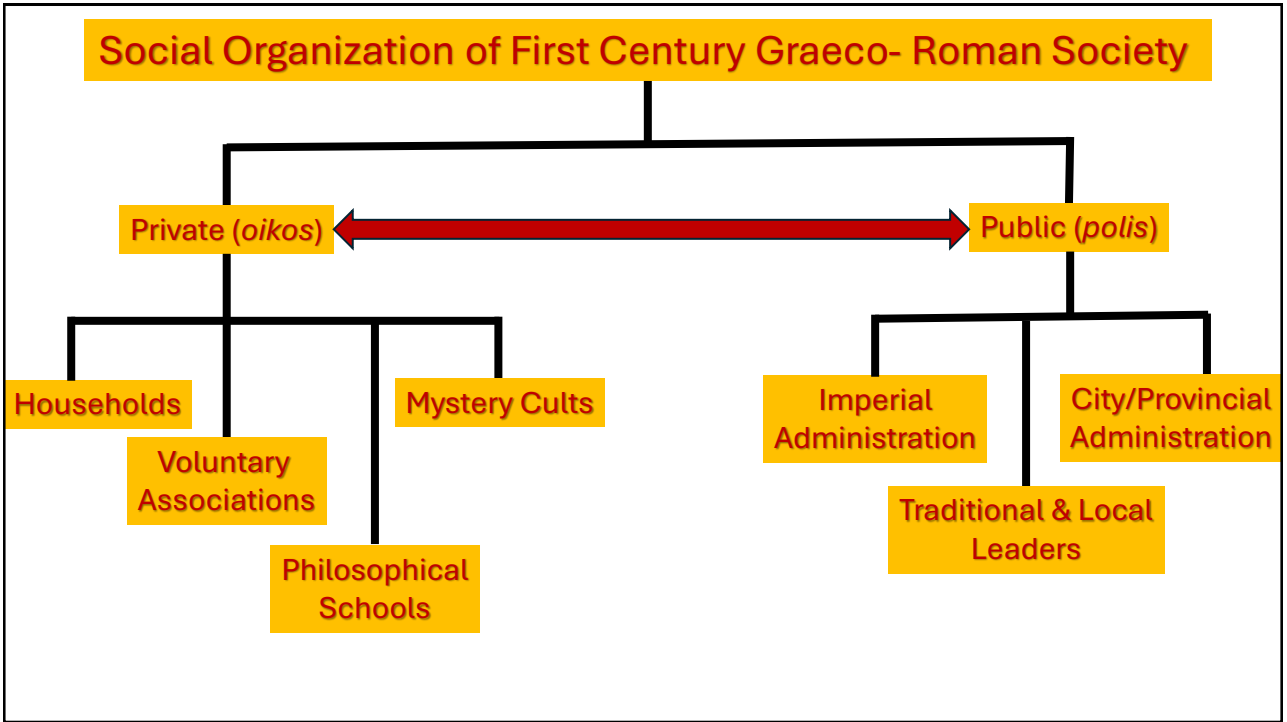
- **Complicated and Impacted by Local politics**
  - As most early Christians were Jews, and as some Gentiles in any case joined Synagogues, the first Christians in the early phases were regarded and behaved basically as a section of Judaism in diaspora
  - Depending on local Synagogue leanings the relationship with Christians varied from toleration to hostility
  - Outsiders also initially treated the two as the same until key sticking points later emerged
  - Later, Jews with political clout persecuted Christians as the later were calling undue attention from pagans
- **Radical Differences in Theology**
  - Christology played as much a role as nature of Christian practices as trigger of friction
  - Christian vision of believers' relation with Yahweh was radically different from what some diaspora Jews had accommodated themselves to. For example, refusal to eat idol food may have appeared an extreme demand for some assimilated Jews
  - Abandonment of demand for circumcision of Jews blunted the edges of the difficulties that some pagans had in their interactions with diaspora synagogues but upset Jews
- **Christian Evangelism As Major Trigger**
  - Christian evangelization set them apart from diaspora Judaism and indeed became a major source of fissure.
  - Punishment of whipping meted out to the Roman citizen Paul by the Jews in 2 Cor 11:24 was for his evangelism, not necessarily the content of his teaching.
  - **The friction between Christians and the synagogues was on two levels, namely, (a) their evangelistic fervour in including Gentiles without Judaizing them, and (b) the content of the *evangelion* they preached**

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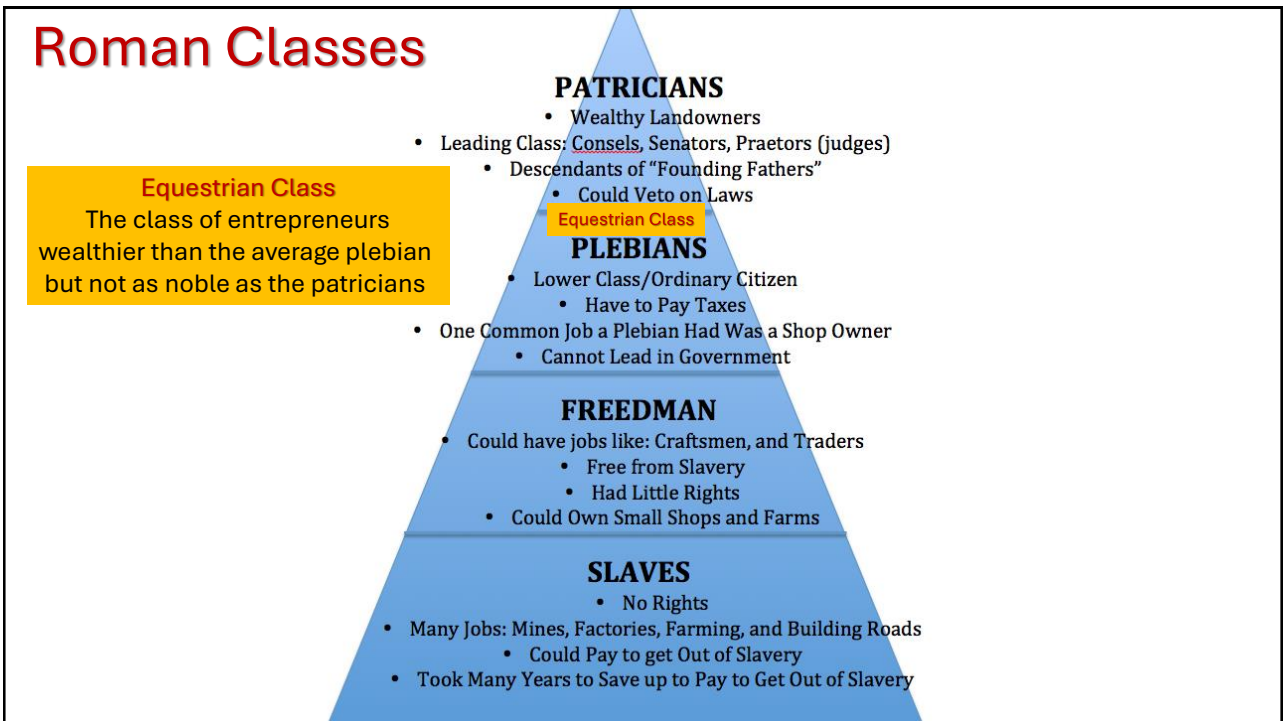
## Roman Emperor and Imperial Ideology

1. Roman Imperial Ideology and interpreting the New Testament
2. The reigns of Emperors Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius, Nero, Vespasian, Titus and Domitian on the history of New Testament Christianity.
3. Evaluation of Anti-Empire Readings of the New Testament.

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Roman Emperors of NT times		
Dates	Emperor	Contact with New Testament Concerns
27 BCE–14 CE	Augustus (Octavian)	usually regarded as the first Roman emperor; credited with establishing the <i>Pax Romana</i> ; birth of Jesus during his reign (Luke 2:1)
14–37 CE	Tiberius	ministry and death of Jesus during his reign (Luke 3:1); appointed and later removed Pilate as governor of Judea; his image would have been on the coin shown to Jesus (Mark 12:14–17); see also Luke 23:2; John 19:12, 15; Acts 17:7
37–41 CE	Caligula (Gaius)	established reputation of emperors for cruelty and decadence; demanded that a statue of himself be placed in Jewish temple but died before this could be carried out
41–54 CE	Claudius	installed as a figurehead but turned out to be surprisingly competent; expelled Jews from Rome due to a disturbance over "Chrestus," which brought Priscilla and Aquila into contact with Paul (Acts 18:1–4); made Herod Agrippa I king over Palestine (Acts 12:1–3)
54–68 CE	Nero	an exemplary ruler during first five years, then turned self-indulgent and violent; responsible for horrific persecution of Christians; Peter was crucified and Paul beheaded during his reign (ca. 62–64)
69 CE	Galba, Otho, Vitellius	a time of civil war known as the "Year of Four Emperors"; Galba, Otho, and Vitellius rose to power in quick and forgettable successions before stability was restored under Vespasian
69–79 CE	Vespasian	the Roman general in the war with the Jews; returned to Rome to seize power when Nero died
79–81 CE	Titus	son of Vespasian; took over command of troops when his father became emperor; crushed the Jewish rebellion, destroyed the temple in Jerusalem, and presided over prolonged siege of Masada
81–96 CE	Domitian	reported to have persecuted Christians, but solid evidence for this is lacking; his reign perhaps forms the background for the anti-Roman sentiments in the book of Revelation

## Julio-Claudian Dynasty

## Flavian Dynasty

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## Roman Imperial Ideology

- **Definition:**
  - Beliefs, values, and practices which served to legitimate, support and sustain the authority of the Roman emperors and gave coherence to an otherwise large empire
- **Components:**
  1. Religious : The Imperial Cult which was expected to be included in other cults
  2. Cultural: Transformation of culture to uniform appearance across empire
  3. Social: Laws and norms that regulated family and community life in empire
- **Relevance for Study:**
  - Unifying force for the Empire
  - Propaganda value to Emperor
  - Controlling Zeitgeist against which Judaism & Christianity had to negotiate
  - Should be assumed as contextually operative in studying each New Testament book
  - Study of an Emperor is of limited value to understanding the daily lives of Christians

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## Formative Assessment Question

Evaluate the merits and demerits of the scholarly view that New Testament authors sometimes employed their writings to oppose the Graeco-Roman Empire (1000 words).

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## Arguments that Paul was Pro-Empire

- Conquered people tend to respond to imperial power in three sometimes inter-related strategies:
  - Resistance,
  - Accommodation
  - Sycophantic mimicry.
- Paul's Appeal to his Citizenship
- Paul's exhortation for obedience to Empire
  - Rom 13
  - 1 Tim 2:1-3
  - 1 Thess 4:11
- Paul's Speeches in Roman Court in Acts

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## Arguments that Paul was Against Empire

- Imperial Ideological terms are ascribed to Jesus & His people
  - 1 Thess (1:10; 2:12, 19; 3:13; 4:14-18; 5:1-11, 23) God's kingdom and the true Lord,
  - “peace and security”
  - Son of God in Rom 1:4
  - Ecclesia
  
- 1 Cor 2:6-8 The rulers of this age are explained as adversaries of Christ
  
- Exalted Christology Phil 2:9 must imply and at least suggestions of anti-empire polemical sentiments
  
- **Socio-historical**
  - Evidence of life in Palestine and elsewhere in Empire painted by the Gospels and Acts & also by Josephus suggest that there were widespread anti-empire feelings among the colonized Jews to suggest the plausibility that at least many Christians, including Paul would have been anti-Empire
  - Persecution of Christians, while often local, indicates some animosity or interpretation by community of the Christian message

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## The Problems with Some Anti-Empire interpretations

- Unwarranted extrapolation of local provincial, and often urban enthusiasm for the imperial cult for every part of empire and insisting it to have been programmatic and intended by the emperor
  
- The NT seems to indicate that the problem started in later stages of the first century, especially as evidenced in Revelation. The imperial cult seems to have been treated as only one of the many manifestations of idolatry and not seem to have received the vigorous opposition that some anti-empire readings envisage
  
- In many instances, but not all some of the imperial language were clearly propaganda. The earliest Christian may well have chosen to ignore them as empty boasts rather than to have been severely pre-occupied with them as the anti-empire interpretations often envisage

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## Graeco-Roman Government and the New Testament

1. Provincial government bureaucracy of first century Graeco-Roman Empire
2. Roman laws on the family and adoption for interpreting the New Testament
3. Roman taxation system in the first century for interpreting the New Testament.
4. Concept and grades of persecution of the first Christians

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## Taxation and the New Testament

- **The two-drachma tax (Matt 17:24-27)**
  - Temple tax (Ex 30:13)
  - Test as to Jesus' loyalty to the temple
  - "the sons are free" (17:26): Prophetic prolepsis of the replacement of the temple by His kingdom
- **Caesar's tribute Tax (Matt 22:15-22; Mk 12:13-17)**
  - Three Approaches to "Render to Caesar...and to God" (Matt 22:21; Mk 12:17)
    - Legitimation of Empire Approach: Caesar has his political right to collect taxes just as God has right to demand allegiance
    - Prophetic Critique Approach: Caesar is claiming what does not belong to him by having image and inscription on the coin
    - Revolutionary Approach: Caesar deserves to be overthrown as with the tax and coin; he is claiming what is not his.
- **Roman Tax (Rom 13:5-7)**
  - Christians should pay their taxes
- **Conversion of Tax Collectors**
  - Categorized with "worst sinners" (Matt 5:46; 9:11; 11:19; 18:17; 21:31-32; Mk 2:15-16; Lk 5:29;
  - Conversion of Zacchaeus (Lk 19:1-10)
  - Conversion and Call of Levi [Matthew] (Matt 9:9; Mk 2:14)
  - The Repentant Tax Collector: Lk 18:10-13

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### Why were the first Christians Persecuted?

- **Political:** Politicians used Christians as scapegoats to pacify crowds
- **Legal:** Under Roman law of *maiestas* to accuse them of “treason”
- **Social:** Non-participation in idolatrous social events led to resentment
- **Cultural:** Fellow Jews regarded Christians as undermining their exemptions
- **Economic:** Conversions led to loss of business by opponents (e.g. Acts 19)
- **Christological:** because of Christ & His Kingdom (Matt 5:10-12, 10:22; 24:9; Mk 13:13; Lk 21:12, 17; Acts 9:16)

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### Graeco-Roman Culture & Religion and the New Testament

1. Cultural Anthropology of Ancient Graeco-Roman Societies
2. Graeco-Roman Social Entertainments and New Testament Interpretation
3. Graeco-Roman Religions and New Testament Interpretation [Judaism excluded]
4. Religion & Magic in Graeco-Roman World

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## Patron-Client Relationships

- **Definition**
  - The social system in which the acquisition of good, service, favours and social positions are dependent of networks of social relationships between patrons and their clients
  - Extension of reciprocity that governed relationships between the classes
  
- **Patron**
  - Higher social status people officially and informally acted as patron for those below them as their clients.
  - The patron protected and provided for the interests of his or her clients in the community.
  - Some patrons were benefactors of cities or communities by giving bigger gifts in exchange for honour
  - Higher status Christians effectively acted as patrons of lower status people (e.g., Lydia Acts 16:14-40, and Aquila and Priscilla Acts 18:3, Philemon Phile 1-2) provided their homes for the fellowship). Theophilus was a Patron to Luke (Lk 1:3; Acts 1:1)
  
- **Client**
  - Supported the patron in maintaining their honour, elections or did other services in the patron's favour.
  - In some cases, clients would gather each morning at the gates of the patron to greet and acknowledge and follow them to the agora/forum as their supporters and entourage
  
- **Broker**
  - A patron who provides access to another patron for his or her client
  - Effectively acts as mediator

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## Honour and Shame Social Values

- The main cultural values or currency which regulated rewarded acceptable behaviour or sanctioned inappropriate ones in social interactions
  
- Honour is the attribution of and shame as the withdrawal of esteem from peers depending on fulfilment of, or failure of fulfilling of certain expectations
  
- Honour/shame ascription was defined as dependent on one's contribution to the family, clan or socio-economic group, not on particular standalone characteristics
  
- Honour and shame may be ascribed (by birth or clan connection) and or acquired (by certain achievements or notoriety)
  
- Guilt has close relationship with shame, but they are not the same. Whereas guilt is often personal, shame in collectivist society relates more to how one's role in the community is impacted from the behaviour. An act which should bring guilt to an individual, may be perceived to be honourable in a community.

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## Christianity is Counter-Cultural

New Testament Christianity was a Counter-cultural Movement. We are methodologically required to interpret the language by taking the cultural anthropological norms of the times seriously. However, we must be wary of transferring such ideas about the society wholesale unto the Christian movement. In many cases the Christian ethos of reciprocity, patronage and honour and shame were counter to the norms. Concepts like unmerited favour (Gal 6:1-2; Heb 12:28), giving without expecting something in return (Lk 6:34-35), and forgiving offences for unlimited times (Matt 6:14-15; Col 3:13) were counter-cultural.

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## Graeco-Roman Public Entertainment

- A major expression of Graeco-Roman culture and as such heavily laced with the pivotal cultural values of patronage and honour and shame
- **Types of Entertainment**
  - Dramatic plays
  - Board games: chess-like games
  - Gambling: dice or knucklebones, which were shaken in a cup and rolled out onto a table or the ground
  - Competitive Sports: horse riding, swimming, field sports, boxing, wrestling, athletics, & ball games,
  - Charioteering
  - Gladiatorial fights
  - Roman Triumph: triumphal march celebrating victory with spectacles and weeks of festivities
- **Venues for Entertainment**
  - Theatre (e.g., Acts 19:29-31) – more in eastern Grecian parts of empire
  - The arena (amphitheatre) – more in the western Roman parts
  - The circus (or hippodrome)
  - Public Gymnasias & Baths
  - Homes & public halls for banquets

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## Some Features of Major Idol Worship

Idol	Some Features of their Worship
<b>Aphrodite / Venus</b>	Sex and love goddess with temple and prostitutes in Corinth
<b>Apollo</b>	God of music and healing with a large temple in Corinth
<b>Diana / Artemis</b>	Midwife and fertility goddess with world famous temple in Ephesus
<b>Asclepius / Aesculapius</b>	Snake god associated with healing with more than a hundred healing centres spread throughout the empire
<b>Cybele</b>	Mother goddess of the Phrygians associated with frenzied worshippers usually falling in trance-like states and prophesying
<b>Dionysus / Bacchus</b>	God of wine and fertility, it was also called Bacchus.
<b>Zeus (Jupiter) &amp; Hermes (Mercury)</b>	A joint god, regarded as the chief gods of the Greeks. The ruins of the gigantic temple in Athens are still present in the city. Hermes was regarded as god of shopkeepers and thieves
<b>Juno / Hera</b>	Queen of the gods; seen as championing women
<b>Isis &amp; Osiris</b>	Imported twin gods from Egypt associated with magic and mystery cults

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## Formative Assessment Question

Describe the relevance of the main features of the Imperial cult of first century Graeco-Roman Empire for interpretation of the New Testament (1000 words).

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## Roman Imperial Ideology

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- **Components:**

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## The Imperial Cult

- The worship of deified Roman emperor and sometimes their families, through sacrifices, obeisance, dedicated temples and even sometimes prayers directed to them.
- Starting with Augustus, the cult became widespread in the Empire and the worship practices incorporated into the polytheistic systems of the Mediterranean world.
- Despite initial reticence on the part of some patricians in Roman hierarchy, they came to regard it as an essential unifying factor for maintaining the empire so much so that it became indistinguishable from the colonial political ideology that it naturally supported.
- However, despite its pervasiveness, the degrees of intensities of the worship varied from Emperor to Emperor, and from one province to another.

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Richard Horsley on the Imperial Cult

“The most important and effective way that urban and provincial oligarchies constructed and maintained the Roman imperial order was their sponsorship of the imperial cult. To cultivate imperial favour and open access to imperial power and favours, local elites honoured the emperor or imperial family members by setting up shrines and building temples in redesigned city centers (agorai) and by funding festivals and imperial games. The imperial cult was not imposed from the imperial center, where Roman reserve required that living emperors decline to be worshiped as a god. The celebration and honouring of Augustus and his successors as divine figures, Lords and Saviors of the world, was developed by the elite in the Greek cities themselves, on the basis of the already-existing civil religion, in cities such as Ephesus, Corinth, and Thessalonica”

[Horsley, Richard A., ed. Paul and the Roman imperial order. Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2004. Page 16]

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### Learning Outcome 3: Employ appropriate examples to illustrate how Acts of the Apostles demonstrates the triumph of the power of the Gospel over the magical powers in the first century Graeco-Roman world

- **Acts 8:4-25**
  - Simon the Magician negatively contrasted with Peter
  - Narrative placed at the beginning of next phase of expansion of the Gospel indicating that it served as major obstacle to be overthrown for the phase
- **Acts 13:4-12**
  - Bar-jesus (son of Jesus, presumably God saves), Magician also called Elymas and labelled “Jewish false prophet” in Paphos
  - Involvement of Sergius Paulus demonstrates the competing influences on the provincial political leaders; pre-empting the theme of opposition of the Gospel’s advance into the ruling classes
  - Paul’s labelling him as “son of the devil” (Acts 13:10) in direct antithesis of the name
- **Acts 16:16-18**
  - Slave girl of Philippi with divination and fortune telling, though no explicit reference to magic were key features of magic
  - Her message (Acts 16:17) was classic syncretistic dangerous undermining of the Gospel and needed to be overthrown to clarify the Gospel – the European phase of expansion
- **Acts 19:13-20**
  - Mass conversion of magicians in Ephesus, ancient capital of magic
  - Most profound evidence of triumph of the Gospel over Graeco-Roman magic

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**Dirk van der Merwe**

“In each text the proclamation of the gospel, complimented by the performance of miracles, overpowered the power of evil. This could only realise through the involvement of the Holy Spirit. These successes are emphasized by the references that in each case people came to believe the proclaimed word and that they were amazed, filled with awe, about what they experienced. This proves, according to Luke, the victory of the proclamation of the Gospel over the practice and involvement in evil practices (e.g. magic).”

Van der Merwe, Dirk. "The power of the Gospel Victorious over the power of evil in Acts of the Apostles." *Scriptura: Journal for Contextual Hermeneutics in Southern Africa* 103.1 (2010): 79-94. Page 89.

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## **Graeco-Roman Philosophical Schools and the New Testament**

1. Paul and the Sophists
2. Features and presentations of Middle Platonism
3. Similarities and differences between first century Stoicism and Christianity
4. Features of Epicureanism and responses by New Testament Christians
5. Jesus and first century Cynic philosophers

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Significant Greco-Roman Philosophies & Schools					
	Main Focus	Distinctive Teaching / Influence	Characteristics	Possible Influence in NT	Sources / Adherents
(Middle) Platonism	True (invisible) nature of reality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on teachings of Plato (420-347 BCE)</li> <li>Ideal forms vs. earthly shadows</li> <li>Ideal forms are eternal and exist in the "real" world</li> <li>Humans perceive this "real world" through the senses via the copies of earthly forms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Blend of Platonic, Aristotelean, and Stoic thought</li> <li>Transcendent god behind all</li> <li>Rational element eternal given by "demiurge"</li> <li>Passions introduced "mortal" elements = passions / appetites</li> <li>Assent to deity through philosophy frees people from reincarnation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Platonic thought entered Judaism through Hellenization evident in Philo, Wis. of Sol. (9-6)</li> <li>Some find Platonic ideas in Heb 8:1-5 though this is disputed</li> <li>ANE lit &amp; the HB already conceive of another reality beyond the visible world</li> <li>Polemical against the "desires of the flesh"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plato's Dialogues</li> <li>Cicero</li> <li>Plotarch</li> <li>Philo</li> <li>Clement of Alexandria</li> <li>Origen</li> </ul>
Stoicism	How to live a meaningful, virtuous life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Founder = Zeno of Citium (333-262 BCE)</li> <li>3-fold way of life:                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>self-sufficiency: contentment in moral character;</li> <li>freedom: not captive to passions;</li> <li>apatheia: undisturbed from the lower passions</li> </ol> </li> <li>Wisdom found in valuing only things under one's control while ignoring things not under one's control</li> <li>Reality is material (even god and spirits are material)</li> <li>Spark of divine in everyone = make no distinction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Things under one's control: conception, choice, desire, aversion, i.e. everything of our own doing</li> <li>Things not under one's control: our body, property, reputation, office, i.e. everything not of our own doing</li> <li>Freedom and wisdom are found in being apathetic about anything not under one's control</li> <li>Emphasized embracing fatalism</li> <li>Lived "according to nature" = purpose for which something / someone exists</li> <li>"Kinship of humanity" = no Greek, barbarian, free, slave</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Josephus compares Pharisees with Stoics &amp; Paul was a Pharisee</li> <li>Paul quotes a stoic poet, Aratus (Acts 17:28), and stoics were present in the audience</li> <li>Focus in NT ethics on not being dominated by the flesh</li> <li>Living according to one's purpose (i.e. for the Lord) lies behind some NT ethics (cf. 1 Cor 6:13 = body is for the Lord)</li> <li>Stoics developed the ethical diatribe which is used by Paul, Hebrews, and James</li> <li>Gal 3:28 = no Jew, Greek, slave, free, etc (OCCL 539)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Epictetus' Enchiridion</li> <li>Zeno, the founder was first a Cynic</li> <li>Dio Chrysostom</li> <li>Marcus Aurelius</li> <li>Masurius Rufus</li> <li>Seneca</li> </ul>
Cynicism	How to live "according to nature"	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Founder = Antisthenes (445-360 BCE) &amp; Diogenes of Sinope (412-324 BCE)</li> <li>Criticized people's dependence on reputation and slavery to opinion and material things</li> <li>"Shameless life" = only antidote to dependence</li> <li>Openly exposed the "sins" of everyone around them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appears to have developed in response to late</li> <li>Lived "according to nature" = independent of all externals; bare essentials</li> <li>Called "dogs" for their public brashness, open speech (parrhesia), and open behavior (sex, defecation, urination)</li> <li>Begged for their existence and wandered around</li> <li>Rejected: law, family, gender, race, wealth, education</li> <li>Taught via chreia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Crossan argues Jesus was a cynic</li> <li>Paul denied race, gender (Gal 3:27-8), but elsewhere he maintains these distinctions</li> <li>nagpnotia occurs in 2 Cor 3:12; 7:4 (30+ other occurrences)</li> <li>Paul denied being a "peddler" of the Gospel (2 Cor 2:17)</li> <li>Jesus &amp; disciples did not look Cynic since they wore sandals and double tunic, and carried a bag w/staff (Mk 6:7-9)</li> <li>Crates gave up a fortune to be a Cynic, and Jesus asks the rich to give up their fortunes and follow him</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Diogenes of Sinope "the dog"</li> <li>"Cynic revival" in 1st century</li> <li>Left no writings, but there are pseudonymous epistles attributed to famous Cynics dating to the 1st centuries BCE/CE</li> </ul>
Epicureanism	How to enjoy life now	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Founder = Epicurus (341-270 BCE)</li> <li>Reality is only material (opposite of Plato)</li> <li>mechanistic explanation of all phenomena</li> <li>Gods may exist but are completely uninterested and detached from humanity</li> <li>"Fourfold remedy":                             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nothing to fear in God</li> <li>Nothing to feel in death</li> <li>Good is easily enjoyed</li> <li>Pain is readily endured</li> </ol> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Difficulty involving ethics for others</li> <li>Considered atheists due to their view of the gods</li> <li>Lived communally and held things in common</li> <li>Emphasized free will over fatalism</li> <li>Death = dissolution of one's atoms</li> <li>Universe created by chance (atoms) - reality is material</li> <li>Practiced "psychagogy" = guidance of souls + frank speech</li> <li>Pleasure of soul = expectation of bodily pleasure + absence of pain</li> <li>Politically deviant due to withdrawal from civic duty</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sadducees are not explicitly compared with Epicureans by Josephus, but the overlap would be obvious to his readers</li> <li>Epicureans were present in the audience of Paul's Acts 17 speech</li> <li>Acts 2 describes the church as having all things in common</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Piso</li> <li>Calpurnius</li> <li>Cassius</li> <li>Atticus (Cicero's friend)</li> <li>Zeno of Sidon</li> <li>Philostratus of Gadara</li> <li>Lucretius</li> <li>Digenes Laertius</li> </ul>
Skepticism	We can't know anything for sure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Founder = Pyrrhon of Elis (365-270 BCE)</li> <li>Thoroughgoing agnostics on everything</li> <li>Senses are easily deceived</li> <li>Dogmatism is rejected because the true nature of reality can never be known for certain</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Called "academics"</li> <li>Employed dialectical method like Socrates</li> </ul>	?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Timon of Phlius</li> <li>Cicero (influenced by others too)</li> </ul>
Pythagoreanism	What's your number?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Founder = Pythagoras (c. 580-500 BCE)</li> <li>Coined the term "philosophy"</li> <li>Reality is or imitates numbers</li> <li>"Transmigration" of soul = reincarnation</li> <li>Soul = fallen divinity / body = tomb or prison</li> <li>Freedom obtained through remaining pure of soul from the pollution of the body</li> <li>Practiced silence, ascetic living, self-examination, abstinence from certain parts of animals, no beans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Nature of reality centered around mathematics</li> <li>Influenced Plato on the nature of the soul, judgment &amp; death, and that the soul is more important than the body</li> <li>Discovered musical intervals used today which he believed explained the universe</li> <li>"Tetractys" or "foursome": 1 = a point; 2 = a line; 3 = a surface; 4 = an object</li> <li>Believed earth was spherical</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Josephus compares Essenes with Pythagoreans but the connection is unclear</li> <li>Unless Pythagoreans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plato was heavily influenced by him</li> <li>Golden Verses</li> <li>Pythagorean theorem</li> </ul>
Peripatetics (Aristotle & Aristotelianism)	Let's take a stroll	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Based on teachings of Aristotle (384-322 BCE)</li> <li>God was utterly transcendent (like Epicureans) but immaterial (unlike Epicureans)</li> <li>Will of God enacted through lesser gods so as to avoid contacting matter</li> <li>Rational part of humans = "seed of God"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peripatetics are so-called either because Aristotle taught while walking or because of the public path at the Lyceum</li> <li>Pupil of Plato but rejected his view of the immortal soul since it was inseparable from the body &amp; the theory of ideal forms</li> <li>Believed the earth to be stationary sphere</li> <li>Later philosophers managed to synthesize Plato and Aristotle and minimized their disagreements</li> </ul>	?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Alexander the Great (taught by him)</li> <li>Medieval Christianity greatly influenced by Aristotle</li> </ul>

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# Categories of "Private" Socializing Institutions in Graeco-Roman World

1. Household
2. Philosophical Schools
3. Synagogues
4. Voluntary Associations
5. Two common Rituals of socialization: Meals & Funerals

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### Similarities between Voluntary Associations and New Testament Churches

1. Both were small groups
2. Membership were by voluntary adults even if affected by factors such as ethnicity, profession and household dynamics
3. Both performed rituals and cultic activities, including common meals, banquets and funerals
4. Both benefited from the patronage of wealthy benefactors even though in case of associations, the patron need not be part of the organization
5. Both were generally of egalitarian principles even though limitations of leadership and leadership charisma impacted decision making

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### Differences between Voluntary Associations and New Testament Churches

1. Churches were more inclusive whereas associations tended to be selective with membership
2. Churches demanded exclusive allegiance to Jesus whereas associations were polytheistic and allowed members to pay allegiance to as many gods
3. Churches actively evangelized and welcomed new members whereas associations were at best passive in receiving new members
4. Churches tended to be more rigorous in the demands for moral and ethical conformity than many associations even though the later also was concerned about their reputation
5. First century Christians left legacy of written materials which the associations didn't though the later left epigraphs and inscriptions
6. Churches networked with others in more trans-local connections (e.g., Rom 16:16; 1 Cor 7:17; 1 1:16; 16:19; 2 Cor 8:1; 11:28; Gal 1:22; 1 Thess 2:14) than associations which tended to be self-governing and localized

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**Learning Outcome 4: Evaluate the relevance of Acts 19 for explaining the social, cultural, religious, and political forces that confronted the local churches of the first century**

- **Paul's correction of Gentile John the Baptist believers (Acts 19:1-7)**
  - Impact of changes in religion in Palestine on Diaspora Jews
- **Paul's correction of the Jews in synagogue and Jewish exorcists (Acts 19:8-16)**
  - Paul and the Jews in Diaspora
  - Culture and Syncretism
- **Paul's correction of the Magicians (Acts 19:17-22)**
  - Polytheism and Magic
- **Paul's encounter public riot in Ephesus (Acts 19:23-34)**
  - Power and impact of Voluntary Associations and their lobby
  - Role of Money on religion
- **Paul's encounter with Local Political system (Acts 19:35-41)**
  - Local Government arrangements
  - Nature of Persecution
  - Paul and the politicians of the empire

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## **Graeco-Roman Military & the New Testament**

1. Brief History of the Roman Army
2. Functions and Organizational Structure of the Army
3. The Roman Military and Jewish Messianism
4. Military Personnels in the Gospels and Acts of the Apostles
5. Military Metaphors and Interpretation of the New Testament
6. Military Attire and Interpretation of the New Testament

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## Formative Assessment

Using the references to the word “centurion” in the New Testament as anchor terminology, trace the impact of the Gospel on the Roman military establishment of the first century.

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### Centurions in the New Testament

- Most important officer during combat as he commands the fighting unit.
- Given their permanence, as they provided continuity of leadership, they became more a “class” of soldiers, rather than a “rank” as such.
- They themselves were however ranked, with the chief centurion of a legion called Primus Pilus (lit., First Pike; Equestrian rank; level of modern-day Brig Gen); the least, as Major. They earned about 15 times the pay of the legionary and evidence suggests that some played economic roles including money lending to locals.
- Most centurions were drawn from the more prosperous and better-educated classes of Roman society. Some acted as priests. They were also the most itinerant of the officer corps often changing posts actively. These factors made them also open to new religions in places where they were stationed.

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Centurions appeared to have played a key role as vectors of spread of Christianity during the first century, given their unique position and opportunities. The peacetime nature of the period as well as the non-enforcement of public worship of the Emperor clearly ensured that their participation in the Roman army was not considered problematic to being Christians, at least up onto the 80s AD. Evidence indicates that their situation became difficult in the second century onwards when Rome resumed more expansionary wars and public allegiance to the Imperial cult became more aggressively enforced.

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## Centurions in the New Testament

Passage	Identity	Comment
Matt 8:5-13; Lk 7:1-10	Capernaum Centurion	Man of great faith. Some suggest he was in Antipas' army, not Roman
John 4:43-54	Capernaum (Herodian) official	Disputed among scholars
Matt 27:50-56; Mk 15:33-39; Lk 23:44-49	Centurion at the cross	Eyewitness of the death of Jesus
Acts 10-11	Conversion of Cornelius	His conversion marked massive turning point for Gentile inclusion
Acts 22:22-29	Jerusalem Centurion	Intervened in flogging of Paul
Acts 23:23-35	Two Centurions lead team of soldiers	Protection of Paul – The Gospel is sent to Rome under full protection
Acts 27	Centurion Escort	Good relations with Paul the prisoner

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### The Cornelius Narrative (Acts 10-11), Jonah and the Expansion of Christianity

- Peter is portrayed as an “Obedient Jonah”
  - Both had something to do with Joppa (Acts 10:5 vs Jon 1:3)
  - Both are similarly commissioned: “Arise therefore, go down” (Acts 10:20) vs “Arise, go to Nineveh” (Jon 3:2)
  - Both were initially hesitant to their commission (Acts 10:14, 28 vs Jon 4:2)
  - Both received divine reminders of mission (Acts 10:9-20 vs Jon 2:1; 3:1-5)
  - Peter’s Aramaic name was *Simon bar Jonah* (Mt 16.17)
- Cornelius’ Response matches that of Nineveh
  - Both are said to “believe” the word of prophecy (Acts 10:43 vs Jon 3:5)
  - Both responded with overwhelming repentance (Acts 10:44-46 vs Jon 3:6-10)
- Immediate Outcome of Conversions
  - Both narratives get immediate resistance (Acts 11:2; Jon 4:1)
- Significance
  - Just as the conversion of Nineveh signified in the Old Testament, the divine prerogative and purpose to reach the ends of the earth, so also was the conversion of Cornelius, a highly placed Roman centurion and his household, for the expansion of Christianity in the Graeco-Roman Empire.

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## Learning Outcome 3

Employ the narrative of Acts 10 to illustrate the invasion of the Gospel into the Roman military establishment.

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## Graeco-Roman Slavery and the New Testament

1. Slavery in the Old Testament
2. Nature of Slavery in first Century Graeco-Roman world
3. Slave-Master relationships in the New Testament
4. Slaving-trading (Human Trafficking) and the New Testament
5. Slavery as Metaphor in the New Testament

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## Metaphors of Slavery in the New Testament

1. Christology
2. Soteriology
3. Christian Existence (Discipleship)
4. Christian Ethics
5. Christian Ministry

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## “Slave” Christology in the New Testament

- Christological ideas which metaphorically present Jesus as a slave or in relation to the concept of slavery
  
- Six Categories
  1. Jesus’ Self Characterization as Servant (E.g., Mk 10:45)
  2. Jesus as the Servant of the Lord (E.g., Matt 12:18-21)
  3. Jesus’ self-dramatization of His Servitude (e.g., Jn 13:1-17)
  4. Jesus as Kinsman-Redeemer (He 2:14-15)
  5. Theological account of the Christ event in terms of slavery (E.g. Phil 2:7-8)
  6. Jesus as specific exemplar to Christian slaves (1 Pet 2:18-25)

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Jesus’ washing of his disciple’s feet in John 13 was not just a lesson in humble self-sacrificing act of humility and love to be imitated. It was at the same time also a prophetic act foreshadowing His self-emptying death on the cross by which He redeems, purifies, and incorporates those who believe into union with Himself. Not only does it match the Christological hymn of Phil 2:5-11. It dramatizes Jesus’ earlier saying to His disciples in Mk 10:43-45 “whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” It was thus a potent dramatic imagery combining Slave Christology, Soteriology and Christian Discipleship.

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But they shouted, 'Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!' 'Shall I crucify your king?' Pilate asked. 'We have no king but Caesar,' the chief priests answered  
(John 19:15)

The Roman Empire      Jesus the Christ      The Judeans

**Roman imperial politics and theology came face to face with first century Judean piety and religion with Jesus in the centre. And it was out of this that Christianity emerged**

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## Formative Assessment (60% marks)

Answer two (2) of the following 5 questions, each one thousand (1000) words

1. Evaluate the merits and demerits of the scholarly view that New Testament authors sometimes employed their writings to oppose the Graeco-Roman Empire (1000 words).
2. Describe the relevance of the main features of the Imperial cult of first century Graeco-Roman Empire for interpretation of the New Testament (1000 words).
3. Explain the relevance of the varying responses of first century Jewish sects, namely, Pharisees, Sadducees, Herodians and the Scribes, to the presence of the Roman colonial agents in Palestine for interpreting the Gospels (1000 words).
4. Using the references to the word "centurion" in Gospel of Luke and Acts of the Apostles, demonstrate the impact of the interactions between first century Christianity and the Roman military establishment (1000 words).
5. How does the nature of slavery in first century Graeco-Roman context enhance your interpretation of Jesus' washing of His disciples' feet in John 13? (1000 words).

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## Submission of Formative Assessment

- Deadline: Last day of Semester
- Email essay to Dr Annang Asumang:
  - [annang@sats.ac.za](mailto:annang@sats.ac.za)

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## Summative Assessment (40% marks)

Multiple Choice Questions based on the course contents

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10	Summary & Acts of Apostles from Graeco Roman Perspectives	Summary & Acts of Apostles from Graeco Roman Perspectives	  
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+ ADD LECTURE NOTES (FOR LINKS) + ADD LECTURE NOTES (FOR DOCUMENTS)

Readings & Videos

Reading

- Aune, David E., ed. The Blackwell Companion to the New Testament. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, 2010.
- Bunson, Matthew. Encyclopedia of the Roman Empire. Infobase Publishing, 2014.
- Taylor, Joan E. "Pontius Pilate and the Imperial Cult in Roman Judaea." *New Testament Studies* 52.4 (2006): 555-582

+ ADD READING OR VIDEO (FOR LINKS) + ADD READING (FOR DOCUMENTS)

57

## Example of Question in Bank for Revision

41. Which one of the following is false regarding the New Testament's portrayal of Jesus as Divine Warrior

- In Mk 16:9-16 Jesus wanted believers to hold snakes and scorpions which will not hurt them
- In Col 2:14-25 Christ is denoted as disarming evil spiritual forces
- In Heb 2:14-15 Christ is said to have broken the stranglehold of Satan who held the power of death
- In Eph 4:8-10 the resurrected Jesus took many captives
- In Rev. 19:11-15 Jesus is depicted as leading the armies of heaven in spiritual war

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## From Handout of Lecture on Graeco-Roman Military

### Jesus as Divine Warrior in the New Testament

- Col 2:14-25
  - “[Christ] having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross”
- Heb 2:14-15
  - “[H]e too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.”
- Ephesians 4:8-10
  - “He ascended on high; he took many captives and gave gifts to his people.’ (What does ‘he ascended’ mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.)”
- Rev. 19:11-15
  - “I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and wages war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself. He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God. The armies of heaven were following him, riding on white horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean. Coming out of his mouth is a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations. ‘He will rule them with an iron sceptre.’ He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty.”

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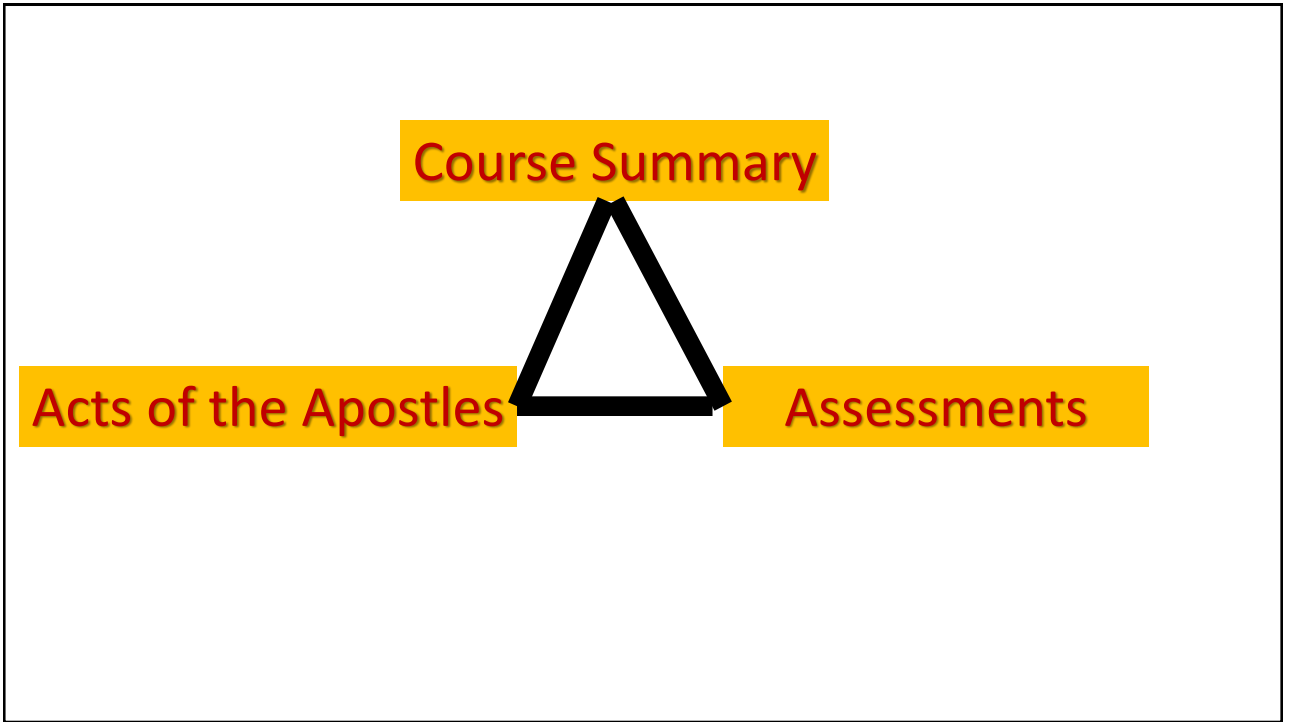
59

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Questions?

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