

Graeco-Roman Government in New Testament Times

Daniel Institute
BD IV 414 (Biblical Studies)

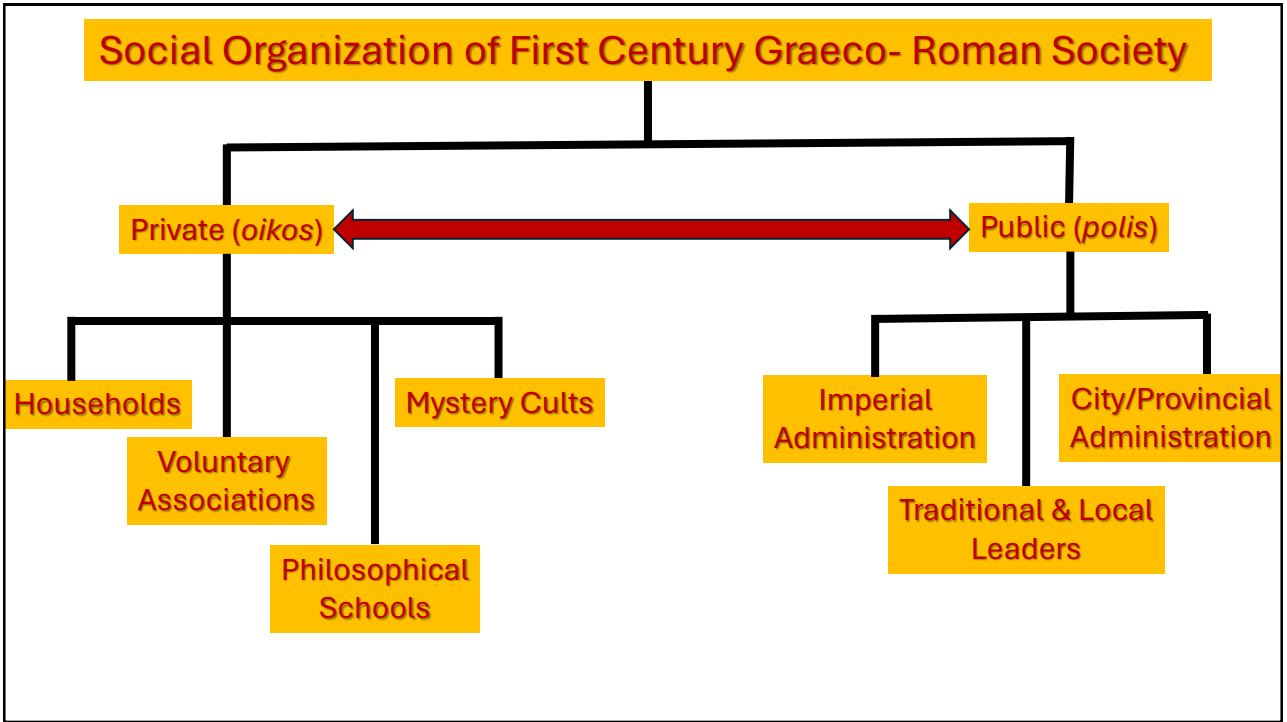
Dr Annang Asumang

1

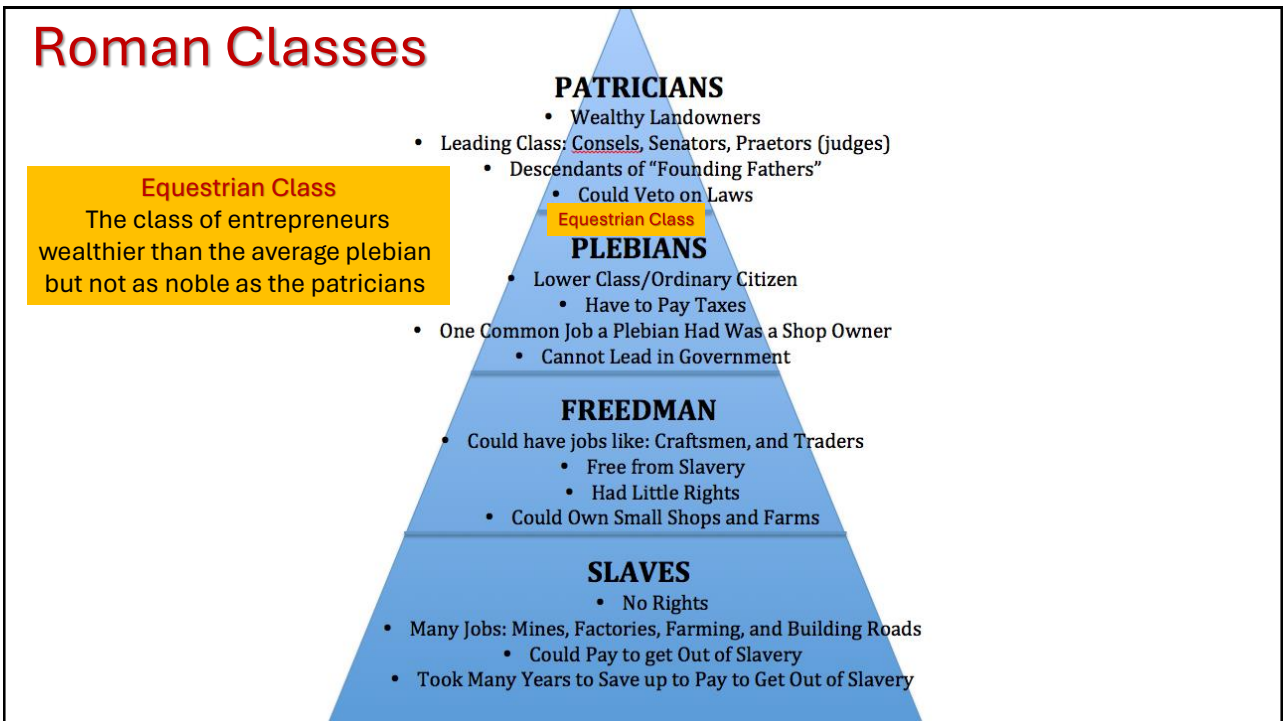
Learning Outcomes

1. Explain the varieties of provincial government bureaucracy of first century Graeco-Roman Empire and the relevance for interpreting the New Testament
2. What are the relevance of the features of first century Roman laws on the family and adoption for interpreting the New Testament?
3. Explain the relevance of the Roman taxation system in the first century for interpreting the New Testament.
4. Using examples from the New Testament, describe forms and grades of persecution of the first Christians according to the New Testament.

2



3



4

Roman Political Institutions

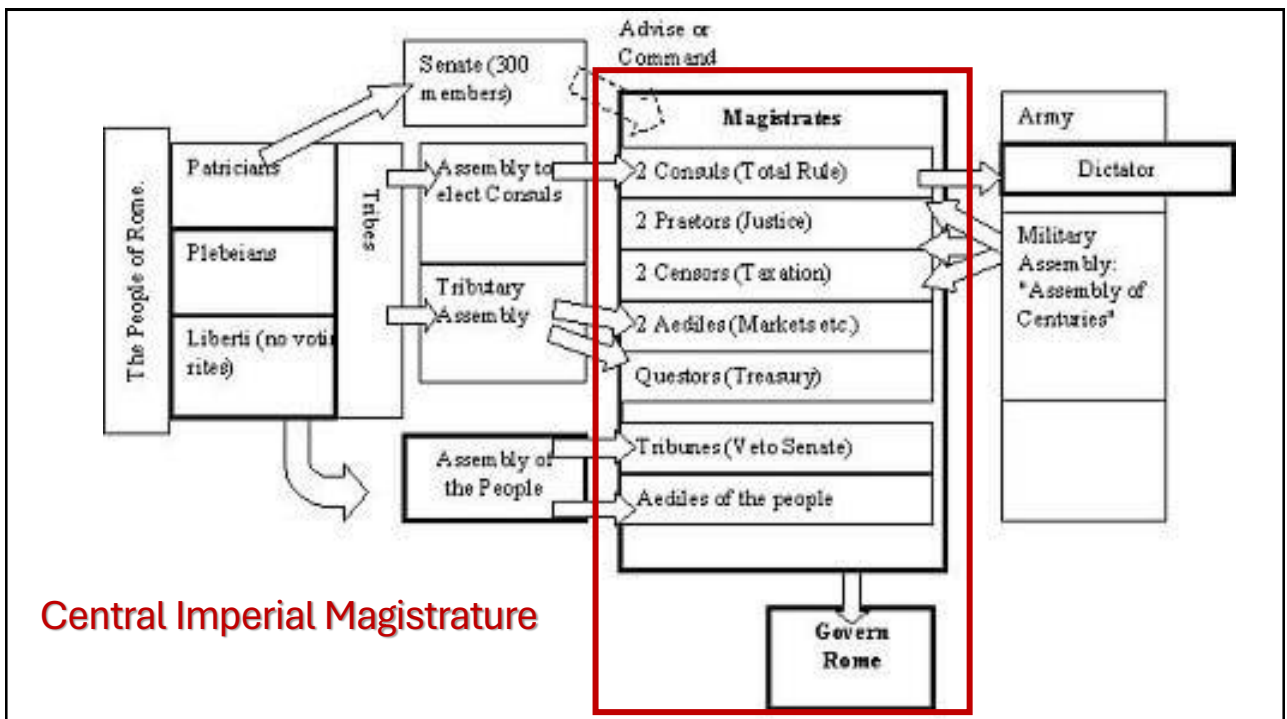
• The Senate:

- Patrician families but sizes increased during first century. Responsible for
 - Being in charge of the treasury
 - Minted copper coins as a result
 - Administered senatorial provinces including Italy
 - Passed some legal and legislative rights.

• Assembly of Representatives:

- **Assembly to Elect Consuls (*Comitia Centuriata*):** Met to elect Consuls; structured according to social class so not one man one vote
- **Tributary Assembly (*Comitia Tributa*):** citizens organized into geographical tribes vote on legislation, elect certain magistrates, and pass certain laws
- **Assembly of the Plebs (*Concilium Plebis*):** Assembly chaired by Tribunes to pass resolutions called plebiscites that applied only to the plebeian population. Later introduced for Provinces for representatives of their cities (“Provincial assembly”) Asiarchs (Acts 19:31) were members of the Concilium of Asia

5



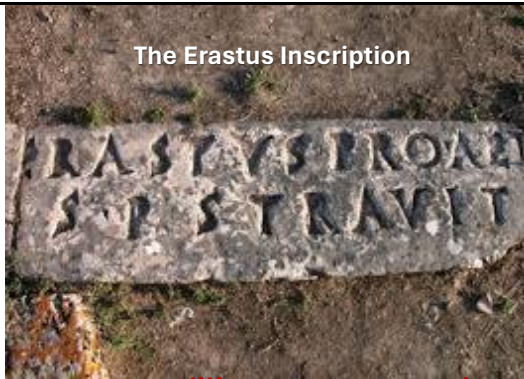
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Central Imperial Magistrature

- Consuls: Served as the chief executives
- Praetors: Judges who administer civil and criminal justice
- Censors: Conduct census, oversee public morality, and manage finances
- Aediles: Maintain public buildings, regulate festivals, and supervise market
- Quaestors: Responsible for financial management and administration
- Tribunes: Represent the interests of plebeians against abuse by patricians

7

The Erastus Inscription



Erastus pro aedilitate sua pecunia stravit

*Erastus in return for his aedileship laid (the pavement) at his own expense.
Inscription found in 1929 in archaeological ruins of ancient Corinth*

Rom 16:23b:

‘Erastus, who is the city’s director of public works, and our brother Quartus send you their greetings.’

8

Organization of Roman Provincial Government

1. Cities

- **Colonies:** Settlements for military veterans. Granted some immunity from taxation. Cultural centres. E.g., Philippi, Corinth, Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Troas.
- **Municipia:** Self-governing, partial citizenship used as provincial capitals
- **Free Cities:** Degree of independence for loyalty; e.g., Ephesus, Smyrna, Tarsus, and Antioch of Syria

2. Provinces

- **Senatorial:** set up by the senate, governed by Proconsuls with assistance of Procurators (in charge of finance) quaestors (combine judicial with treasury roles) and legates (high ranking military), e.g., provinces in Asia, Africa. No soldiers stationed in these provinces.
- **Imperial:** set up by Emperor and effectively all provinces acquired after AD 14, e.g., Syria, Gaul and Hispania & ruled by Legates appointed by the Emperor. Had legions (soldiers) stationed here
- **“Equestrian”:** Emperor may appoint an equestrian to senatorial provinces; often governed by Procurator from Equestrian class. Labelled as Prefects before mid first century AD. Strictly Prefect = military & Procurator = Financial.

3. Allied (Client) Kingdoms

- Friendly Kingdoms at edges of the Empire, not fully incorporated but remained under influence of Emperor. E.g., Pontus under King Mithridates VI
- In some cases, the King may be a “Client” King granted freedom in exchange of seeing to Rome’s interest, providing soldiers for Roman army, e.g., Judea under Herod the Great (Matt 2:1) and his descendants (Acts 12:1; 25:13)

9

Responsibilities of Provincial Governor

1. Defense:

- Maintain peace and compliance to Imperial rule

2. Administration:

- Ensure Collection and sending of taxes to Rome

3. Judicial:

- Rule on generally legal matters in relation to fulfilling the above

10

Graeco-Roman Provincial Administration & the New Testament

- Governor appointed his own staff and structures his “civil service”:
 - Quaestors – in charge of civil service and finance
 - Legates – in charge of military affairs if needed
- While the key officials would have been Roman citizen, most of the staff were drawn from local leaders and collaborators
- Thus the nature of administration on the ground was largely susceptible to local tribal and religious realpolitik
- Various commercial and religious groups became very influential in lobbying and influencing local administrative decisions
- In Thessalonica for example it was the local synagogue which spearheaded persecution of Christians (Acts 17:5)
- The local Jewish synagogues of Asia for example became very powerful agents also acquired enormous influence to oppose the Christians (Rev 2:9; 3:9)

11

Provincial Government & the New Testament

Italy:

1. Metropolitan and multi-ethnic city churches
2. Exiles and Persecution impacted the churches

Greece, Achaia & Macedonia:

1. Mixture of Senatorial & Imperial provinces
2. Some cities were colonies (Philippi & Thessalonica) and others as “free” (Athens)
3. Status of Corinth fluctuated between these
4. Paul had special relationships with each city

Asia:

1. “Breadbasket” of Empire with rich cities
2. Well organized provincial assembly of Asiarchs
3. Centre of NT Christianity in late century

Judea & Nabataean Kingdom:

1. Client Kingdom under King Herod
2. Imperial (Equestrian) Province Under Governors
3. Often under Syrian Legate
4. Intermittent unrests and agitations
5. Drew disproportionate interest from Rome
6. Paul in Nabataean Arabia (Gal 1:17; 2 Cor 11:32)

12

Graeco-Roman Law & Order and the New Testament

1. Special Sources of Roman Historical Statutes
2. Roman Citizenship & New Testament
3. Roman Judicial Punishments & New Testament
4. Roman Family, Adoption & New Testament
5. Roman Taxation & New Testament

13

Special Sources of Roman Historical Statutes

1. **The Twelve Tables**
 - Legal code drafted by a committee of 10 patricians in 450 BC
 - Inscribed on twelve bronze tablets and publicly displayed in the Roman Forum
2. **The Digest (*Pandects*)**
 - Compilation of Roman legal writings created in the 6th century AD
 - Of limited utility in NT studies as it went back only to 2nd cent; but suggestive of culture
3. **Senate resolutions**
 - Only after the Imperial period
 - Customary law from decisions after lawsuits often based on 12 Tables
4. **Edicts of Emperor**
 - Special edicts issues by Emperor
 - Decisions especially in resolving matters from provincial embassy
 - Imperial decisions regarded as having died with Emperor except successor reinstates it

14

Concept: The Twelve Tables

Table 1

If one is called to court, he is to go. If he does not, he shall be captured and brought before the court by force

Table 2

If one's witness does not come to court, he who called can wait outside the witness's house every three days to summon him to appear

Table 3

A person who owes a debt has thirty days to pay. Then he can be enslaved by the lender or sold as a slave to repay that debt

Table 4

Seriously deformed children must be put to death. A son can be free from his father if the father sells the son into slavery 3 times

Table 5

Women must always have guardians, even adult women. If a man goes insane, the nearest male relative shall take over his property

Table 6

If one makes an agreement involving property, it shall be binding by law. No one can remove beams from vineyards or buildings.

Table 7

Property owners must keep roads around their property in repair, or else other may drive their animals wherever they wish

Table 8

If one kills a thief in his own home, it is not a crime. If one purposely burns down a house, he shall be put to death

Table 9

Taking bribes or committing treason are crimes that shall be punished by death

Table 10

No one can burn or bury corpses in the city. Women are not to wail at funerals

Table 11

Marriages are not permitted between plebeians and patricians

Table 12

If a slave commits a crime, that slave shall be punished; not the master

15

Roman Citizenship

- **Uniqueness of Roman Citizenship:**
 - Only few of ancient city-states willing to grant citizenship easily
 - Status of citizenship did not change with relocation in Empire.
 - Citizenship = mobility and carried certificate (*diploma civitatis Roman*) to show when required
 - Biological (ethnic) features were not important; Slaves could become citizens after manumission
 - Citizenship did not make all citizens equal
 - Military needs made Romans increasingly flexible as to who to admit to citizenship
- **Acquisition of Citizenship:**
 - Born to a Roman mother
 - Manumitted slaves took the status of their former citizen owner
 - Concession:
 - Outstanding service to Rome, military service
 - Bestowal of citizen status upon entire non-Roman cities initially in Italy
 - Citizenship granted to colony cities
- **Rights of the Citizen**
 - Right of immunity from some taxes and certain local rules (applicable to only some citizens)
 - Right to vote in the Tribal assembly
 - Right to make legal contracts, and to hold property
 - Right to sue in the courts
 - Right to appeal from the decisions of magistrates
 - Right to have a trial (to appear before a proper court and to defend oneself)
 - Right not to be subjected to torture or scourging
 - Right of exemption from crucifixion (except in very serious crimes)

16

Concept of “Citizenship” in First Century Moral Philosophers

- **Epictetus (Stoic; 55-135 AD):**

- All human beings are citizens of Zeus (*Diatribes* 3.24.19), and of the universe (*Diatribes* 1.9.1–2)

- **Plutarch (Platonist; 45-120AD):**

- “no one is either exile (φυγάς) or foreigner (ξένος) or alien (άλλοδαπός)” (*Exile* 601A); “rather all are fellow citizens” (*Exile* 601B).
- The immature philosopher student may be considered a resident alien, but the more matured and highest philosopher become a citizen of the universe [*On Listening to Lectures* 37f]

- **Philo (Jewish Platonist; 20BC-40AD):**

- Reflects extensively on the Jewish condition from Abraham and Moses and Israelites as essentially one of resident aliens
- The good and wise person who has grown in philosophy is one who is a “κοσμοπολίτης” (world citizen; *Life of Moses* 1.157)
- Such a person is a pilgrim on their way to heaven and in this respect, God is the only citizen of this universe (*Spec.* 1.51)

17

Citizenship was such a profound socio-cultural reality that it became a central conceptual category not just in legal discussions of ancient Roman world, but also a philosophical grid for analyzing and reflecting on the nature of human existence.

It is unsurprising therefore that it also features not only in the discussions of the theological realities of the first Christians as a prism for analyzing their daily historical experiences. Citizenship was a key resource also for reflecting on Christian existence in the New Testament

18

Paul as Roman Citizen: Acts 22:23-29

As they were shouting and throwing off their cloaks and flinging dust into the air, ²⁴ the commander ordered that Paul be taken into the barracks. He directed that he be flogged and interrogated in order to find out why the people were shouting at him like this. ²⁵ As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, 'Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?' When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. 'What are you going to do?' he asked. 'This man is a Roman citizen.' The commander went to Paul and asked, 'Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?' 'Yes, I am,' he answered. Then the commander said, 'I had to pay a lot of money for my citizenship. But I was born a citizen.' Paul replied. Those who were about to interrogate him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realised that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains.

19

How did Paul become a Roman Citizen?: Scholarly Debates

1. Father or grandfather served in Roman Military?

- Observant Jews in Asia were exempted from military service from 49BC

2. Grandfather was slave to Roman citizen and manumitted?

- Capture of many Jews into slavery in 63BC [Pompey] & 37BC [Caesar]
- But Paul's grandparents were more likely based in Tarsus (Cilicia), not Judea

3. Parents Supplied Roman Army with tents (or some special service)?

- Family of tent makers supplying Roman army
- Though Rome sometimes rewarded service, there is no evidence of routine grants

4. Tarsus in Cilicia granted Free City status?

- Grandfather made citizens when captured by Pompey in 67BC?
- Little evidence of mass grant of citizenship despite the conquest

20

The Christian as Dual Citizen: What are the Pastoral implications of background of Roman Citizenship for interpreting Citizenship texts in New Testament?

• Heb 11:16

- “they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them”
- Discipleship and Christian as resident alien

• Eph 2:19

- “Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens [συμπολίται] with God’s people and also members of his household.”
- Ecclesiology and Christian citizenship

• Phil 3:20-21

- “But our citizenship [πολίτευμα] is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.”
- Eschatology & Christian as heavenly citizen

21

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22

Roman Judicial Punishment & the New Testament

• Categorization of Offences

- **Public crimes (*crimina publica*):** Offenses that were considered harmful to the state or the public order, e.g., treason, murder, theft, and crimes against the state.
- **Private wrongs (*delicta privata*):** Offenses that primarily affected individuals, e.g., assault, theft, fraud, and damage to property.

• Categories of Punishment

- **Capital Punishment:** Execution by crucifixion, beheading, or throwing criminals to wild animals
- **Fines (*Multae*):** Pay varying amounts of fines
- **Exile (*Exsilium*):** Banishment from Rome or a specific region temporarily or permanently losing citizenship rights at the time
- **Forced Labor (*Servitudo*):** Such as working in mines or on public construction
- **Flogging (*Verberatio*):** Number of lashes would vary depending on the seriousness of the crime, restricted to non-citizens
- **Confiscation of Property (*Confiscatio*):** Property confiscated as a punishment
- **Imprisonment:** Not common, except high priority prisoners (e.g., captured kings; or citizen awaiting treason trial or emperor appeal).

23

Judicial Punishment in the New Testament

- Different punishments of Christians in the New Testament illustrate the multi-layered, and sometimes conflicting criminal jurisdictions
- Jesus was crucified under Pontius Pilate after being **ἐμαστιγώσεν** (flogged Jn 19:1)
- John the Baptist & Apostles held in prison by various authorities (Matt 11:2; Acts 5)
- Stephen was stoned to death by a mob following a trial in the mid-30s
- James son of Zebedee was beheaded by Agrippa I in March or April 41 or 42 AD
- Peter crucified by Nero in Rome between 64 and 67 upside down
- Paul
 - Flogged several times by Judean authorities (2 Cor 11:24)
 - Placed under Roman arrest in Jerusalem and imprisoned in Caesarea in 58 AD
 - Transferred to Rome two years later under chains to face an imperial court (Acts 21-28).
 - According to tradition, executed by decapitation (*decollatio; capitis amputatio*)
- James Jesus' brother was thrown from the Temple wall, and stoned to death under high priest Hanan ben Hanan in 62 (*Antiquities* 20.200)

24

Key Features of Ancient Roman Conception of the Family

- **Paterfamilias:**
 - Father as head of the Roman family with unchallenged authority
- **Roles and Responsibilities:**
 - Family was the fundamental bedrock of society and Emperors regularly issued laws to regulate and enrich family
 - Clearly defined roles and responsibilities of family members
- **Multigenerational:**
 - Had several generations living together in a household. Some with adopted children, slaves, freedmen and their families
- **Ancestral devotion/veneration:**
 - Deep respect for ancestors and some often venerated or worshipped.
- **Household gods:**
 - Each household with their own household gods, with daily sacrifices & libations
- **Marriage and Children:**
 - Considered a duty and having children was highly valued even though dangerous for women
- **Education:**
 - Often household organized, usually by a tutor but few at organized schools for rhetoric

25



Prof Susan Treggiari

“Roman law safeguarded a married woman’s right to own and administer her own property (which for the upper classes seems normally to have been bigger than her dowry) and to decide how to dispose of it. She was expected (if possible) to pass it down intact or increased to her own children, if she had any, although she might will all or part to her husband”

[Susan Treggiari, ‘Women in Roman Society’, In, Kleiner, Diana EE, and Susan B. Matheson. *I, Claudia: Women in Ancient Rome*. Yale University Art gallery, 1996. Page 118]

26

Graeco-Roman Adoption into Families

- Practised more by aristocracy and less among the lower classes
- **Purposes of Adoption**
 - **Humanitarian:** Homes for orphans, bastards, and children of impaired families
 - **Progeny:** To ensure continuation of family name (*nomen*)
 - **Social:** Provide an individual or couple with an heir to their property (*pecunia*)
 - **Religious:** the family god must be catered for in continuity (*sacrum*)
- **Types of Adoption**
 - **Adrogatio:** formal ceremony and legal procedures of transfer of a legally independent person from one family to another
 - **Adoptio:**
 - Twelve Table 4.2 “If a father gives his son in sale three times, let the son be free from his father.”
 - The father sells his son who upon his release was returned to his father's control for only three occasions. On the third sale the father's authority is lost and adoption would follow.
- **Social & Religious Consequences of Adoption**
 - A break with the old family ties and a commitment to a new one
 - Potential conflict of loyalties

27

Soteriology: From Slaves to Adopted Sons and Heirs (Gal 4:1-7)

What I am saying is that as long as an heir is underage, he is no different from a slave, although he owns the whole estate. ²The heir is subject to guardians and trustees until the time set by his father. ³So also, when we were underage, we were in slavery under the elemental spiritual forces of the world. ⁴But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. ⁶Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, ‘Abba, Father.’ ⁷So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου ἡμεθα δεδουλωμένοι
Enslaved to the cosmological demonic spirits

Results of Adoption
Heir of God and Joint heir with Christ

Trinitarian Process of Adoption
Eschatological Christ event, Redemption & Pentecostal Spirit Indwelling

28

Graeco-Roman Adoption and other New Testament texts

- Rom 8:14–17
 - “For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God. 15 The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received **brought about your adoption to sonship**. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’ 16 The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. 17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.”
 - **Adoption & Pneumatology**

- Rom 8:19–24
 - “For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. 20 For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as **we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies**. 24 For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?
 - **Adoption & Eschatology**

- Rom 9:3–4
 - For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my people, those of my own race, 4 the people of Israel. **Theirs is the adoption to sonship**; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the law, the temple worship and the promises.
 - **Adoption and the Covenant**

- Eph 1:4-5
 - For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love 5 **he predestined us for adoption to sonship through Jesus Christ**, in accordance with his pleasure and will
 - **Adoption & Divine Election**

29

Types of Taxes in Roman Empire

1. **Poll (head tax - *tributum capitis*)**: flat rate on adults from the age of 12 (female) or 14 (male) to age 65.
2. **Land taxes (*tributum soli*)**: Tax on the land itself rather than the people who owned or worked on it. Was 1% of assessed value of the land. It produced the majority of total tax revenues
3. **General sales tax**: 1% tax on sale of proper
4. **Land Transfer Taxes (*centesima rerum venalium*)**: A type of general sales tax for land specifically. It was 1% of the sale
5. **Export and import custom duties (*portoria*)**: For goods such as agricultural products, minerals, and manufactured goods. Ranged from 12.5-25%
6. **Inheritance tax (*vicesima hereditatum*)**: Tax up to 5% on on inheritances received by individuals, as well as on the value of slaves who were freed in a will.

30

Roman Tax Farming through *τελῶναι* (*Publicani* or tax collectors)

- Originally applied to contractors engaged to perform public tasks, such as road building, the operation of mines, and, most famously, the collection of taxes.
- Tax money paid upfront by the contractor who then has to collect the money to defray the bid and profit
- State benefitted by receiving its tax revenues in advance and the *publicani* could make unlimited profit
- Were usually drawn from the local population and hired their own sub-agents and contractors
- They bid for 5 yr “franchise” for a particular area that empowered them to collect varieties of taxes
- Could collect taxes in-kind (crops/animals), sold them and then converted them into hard currency.
- Some may well have enslaved debt owners as Senate later passed laws banning such practices

31

Two types of Tax Collectors (*Publicani*)

1. *Gabbai*:

- General tax collectors who collected tax on property, income, and poll taxes.

2. *Mokhes*:

- Collected duties on imports and exports, goods for domestic trade, and goods moved by road.
- Established tolls on roads and bridges, taxes on beasts of burden, and taxes on transport wagons based on the number of axles.

32

Graeco-Roman Census and Taxation System

- Purposes of Roman Census
 1. Political: Device for exerting colonial control by strengthening the notion that the emperor is everywhere
 2. Economic: Aided collection of revenue and the maintenance of social hierarchy.
 3. Social: Bound the Empire together as a common feature of the imperial experience

- Roman census process
 - Registration and Valuation of property using a set formula drawn up by the censors for taxation.
 - Registration included land, buildings, cash, debts due from others, clothing, jewels, and slaves
 - In some provinces there was a statute of regular census. Example every 14 years in Egypt.
 - According to the *Res gestae Divi Augusti*, Augustus ordered three imperial enrolments

33

Implications of Taxation for First Century Jews

1. Ideological:
 - Taxation was a daily reminder of Jewish subjugation under Rome and accordingly it problematized the Jewish belief of allegiance only to God.

2. Economic:
 - Huge economic burden on the people.
 - This was not always due to Roman tax. The local tax imposed by Jewish local leaders e.g., the temple tax and the huge profiteering by the tax farmers was not just oppressive but poverty worsening.

3. Religious:
 - They were routinely regarded as beyond the pale sinners as support for the Roman rulers implied they had rejected the covenant of God with Jewish people

34

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

35

Attitudes of the Graeco-Romans to the Christian Religion

- **Acceptance**
 - As one of Judaist sects
 - Curiosities with their practices
 - Some were impressed by their mutual love and devotion to one another
 - Some were converted (note centurions in Gospels)

- **Distaste**
 - They were labelled as "atheists" as they didn't believe in polytheism
 - Resentment and malicious rumours of their practices

- **Repression**
 - Use of local government instruments to deny groups and members rights
 - Loss of business opportunities
 - Slaves and women

- **Elimination**
 - Public humiliations and punishments
 - Imprisonments
 - Overt persecution

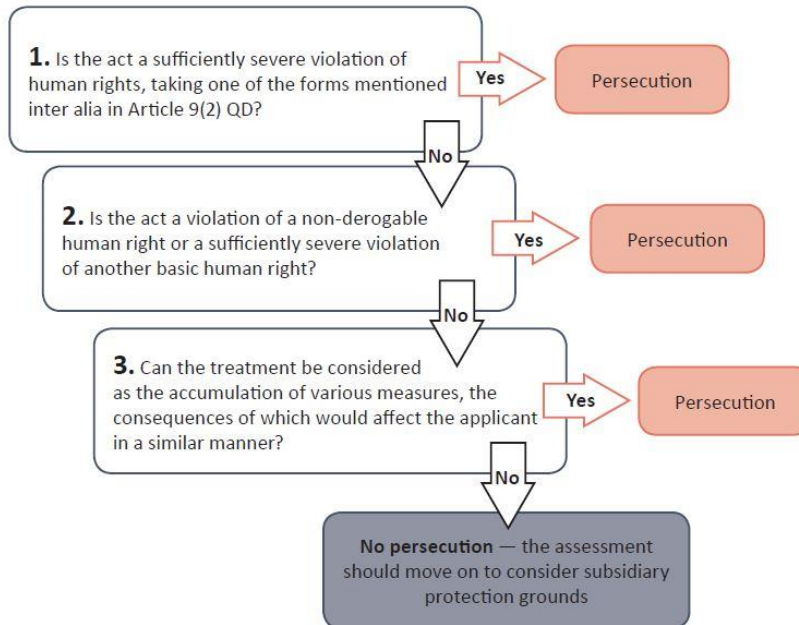
36

Persecute

Verb (used with object), per·se·cut·ed, per·se·cut·ing. to pursue with harassing or oppressive treatment, especially because of religious or political beliefs, ethnic or racial origin, gender identity, or sexual orientation. to annoy or trouble persistently.

37

European Union Definition of Persecution

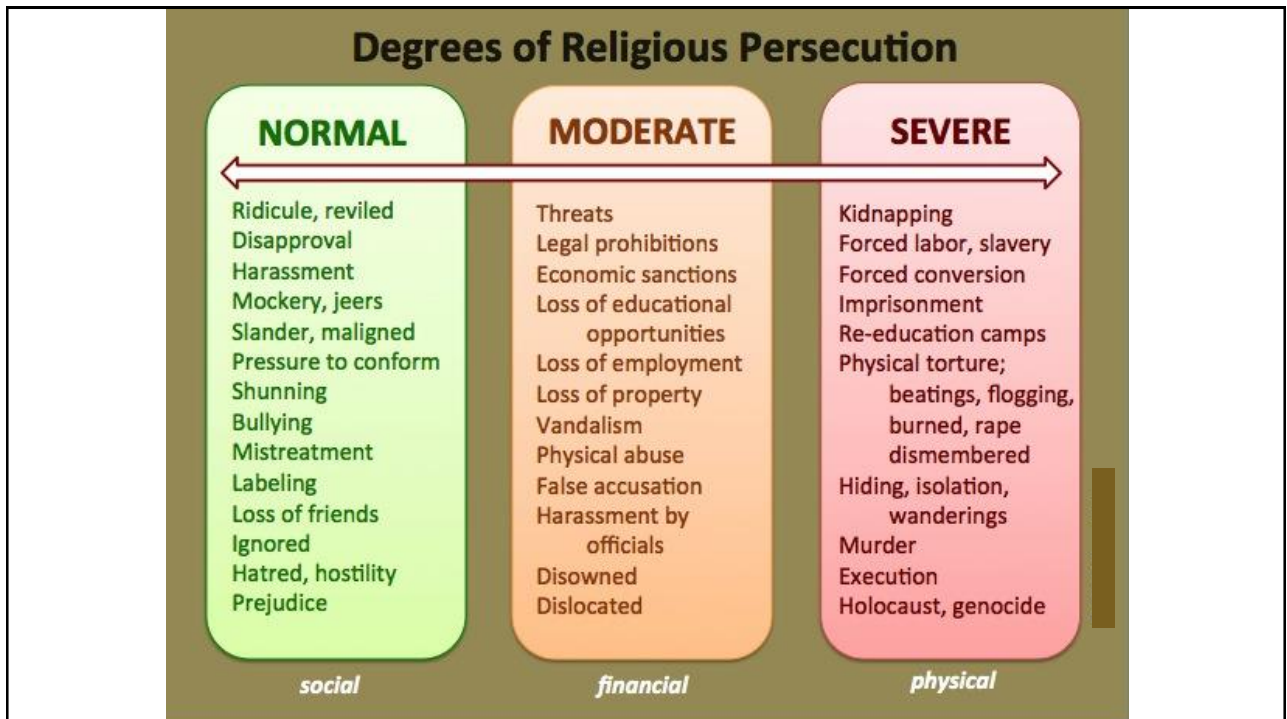


38

Forms & Grades of Persecutions of New Testament Christians

- **Mild:**
 - Verbal abuse (Lk 6:28; 1 Pet 4:14)
 - Emotional blackmail often from within family relationships (Matt 10:36)
 - Refusal of membership of prestigious trade associations
 - Ridicule, threats and social ostracism from society (Lk 23:11; Acts 4:21)
- **Moderate**
 - **Socio-cultural:** Excommunicated from synagogues and social groups (Jn 9:22; Lk 21:12)
 - **Legal:** Falsely accusations and legal intimidations (Matt 5:11; Lk 6:22)
 - **Financial:** Loss of personal goods and properties were imprisoned (Lk 6:30)
- **Severe**
 - Imprisonment & banishment (Acts 12:5)
 - Physical injury (Acts 12:1)
 - Execution (Acts 12:2)

39



40



Tacitus AD 56 -120; Historian & Politician

“Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians. Christus, the founder of the name, had undergone the death penalty in the reign of Tiberius, by sentence of the procurator Pontius Pilatus, and the pernicious superstition was checked for a moment, only to break out once more, not merely in Judaea, the home of the disease, but in the capital itself, where all things horrible or shameful in the world collect and find a vogue. First, then, the confessed members of the sect were arrested; next, on their disclosures, vast numbers were convicted, not so much on the count of arson as for hatred of the human race. And derision accompanied their end: they were covered with wild beasts' skins and torn to death by dogs,- or they were fastened on crosses, and, when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night. Nero had offered his gardens for the spectacle, and gave an exhibition in his Circus, mixing with the crowd in the habit of a charioteer, or mounted on his car. Hence, in spite of a guilt which had earned the most exemplary punishment, there arose a sentiment of pity, due to the impression that they were being sacrificed not for the welfare of the state but to the ferocity of a single man.”

Tacitus: *Annals* 15.44.

41

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)

42

Blessed are those who are persecuted **because of righteousness**, for theirs is **the kingdom of heaven**. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you **because of me**. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

Matt 5:10-12

Christians were and are persecuted because of Christ and His Kingdom's Righteousness

43

Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted

2 Tim 3:12

44

Summary

1. Provincial government bureaucracy of first century Graeco-Roman Empire and their relevance for interpreting the New Testament
2. Features of first century Roman laws on the family and adoption and implications for interpreting the New Testament
3. Roman taxation system in the first century and its implications for interpreting the New Testament
4. Forms and grades of persecution of the first Christians according to the New Testament.

45

Questions?

46