

**Rome:** the famous capital of the ancient world, is situated on the Tiber at a distance of about 15 miles from its mouth. The "seven hills," ([Revelation 17:9](#)) which formed the nucleus of the ancient city stand on the left bank. On the opposite side of the river rises the far higher side of the Janiculum, the site of Peter's supposed crucifixion. Here from very early times was a fortress with a suburb beneath it extending to the river. Modern Rome lies to the north of the ancient city, covering with its principal portion the plain to the north of the seven hills, once known as the Campus Martius, and on the opposite bank extending over the low ground beneath the Vatican to the north of the ancient Janiculum. Rome is not mentioned in the Bible except in the books of Maccabees and in three books of the New Testament, viz., the Acts, the Epistle to the Romans and the Second Epistle to Timothy.

1. *Jewish inhabitants.* the conquests of Pompey seem to have given rise to the first settlement of Jews at Rome. The Jewish king Aristobulus and his son formed part of Pompey's triumph, and many Jewish captives and immigrants were brought to Rome at that time. A special district was assigned to them, not on the site of the modern Ghetto, between the Capitol and the island of the Tiber, but across the Tiber. Many of these Jews were made freedmen. Julius Caesar showed them some kindness; they were favored also by Augustus, and by Tiberius during the latter part of his reign, but were then ousted by Claudius. It is chiefly in connection with Paul's history that Rome comes before us in the Bible. In illustration of that history it may be useful to give some account of Rome in the time of Nero, the "Caesar" to whom Paul appealed, and in whose reign he suffered martyrdom.
2. *The city in Paul's time.* --The city at that time must be imagined as a large and irregular mass of buildings unprotected by an outer wall. It had long outgrown the old Servian wall; but the limits of the suburbs cannot be exactly defined. Neither the nature of the buildings nor the configuration of the ground was such as to give a striking appearance to the city viewed from without. "Ancient Rome had neither cupola nor camyanile," and the hills, never lofty or imposing, would present, when covered with the buildings and streets of a huge city, a confused appearance like the hills of modern London, to which they have sometimes been compared (Niebur, Lectures on Roman History). The visit of Paul lies between two famous epochs in the history of the city, viz, its restoration by Augustus and its restoration by Nero. The boast of Augustus is well known, "that he found the city of brick, and left it of marble." Many of the principal buildings which attract the attention of modern travelers in ancient Rome were not yet built during Paul's time as even the mighty Colosseum was not completed until A.D. 80 . The streets were generally narrow and

winding, flanked by densely crowded lodging-houses (insulae) of enormous height. Augustus found it necessary to limit their height to 70 feet. Paul's first visit to Rome took place before the Neronian configuration but even after the restoration of the city which followed upon that event, many of the old evils continued. The population of the city has been variously estimated. Famed Mediterranean historian Edward Gibbon' estimate of 1,200,000 is most likely nearest to the truth. It is important to remember that the massive armies amassed by the Roman Empire were comprised of various nations and were not completely populated in the city of Rome or in the Italian borders. One half of the population consisted, in all probability, of slaves. The larger part of the remainder consisted of pauper citizens supported in idleness by the miserable system of public gratuities. There appears to have been no middle class, and no free industrial population. Side by side with the wretched classes just mentioned was the comparatively small body of the wealthy nobility, of whose luxury and profligacy we learn so much from the secular writers of the time, Such was the population which Paul would find at Rome at the time of his visit. We learn from the Acts of the Apostles that he was detained at Rome for "two whole years," "dwelling in his own hired house with a soldier that kept him," ([Acts 28:16; 30](#)) to whom apparently, according to Roman custom, he was hound with a chain. ([Acts 28:20; Ephesians 6:20; Philemon 1:13](#)) Here he preached to all that came to him, no man forbidding him. ([Acts 28:30,31](#)) It is generally believed that on his "appeal to Caesar" he was acquitted, and after some time spent in freedom, was a second time imprisoned at Rome. Five of his epistles, viz., those to the Colossians, Ephesians, Philippians, that to Philemon, and the Second Epistle to Timothy, were in all probability written from Rome, the latter shortly before his death ([2 Timothy 4:6](#)) the others during his first imprisonment. It is universally believed that he suffered martyrdom at Rome.

## **Problems that Arose in Christianity due to Rome**

### **1. The Emperor Claudius – Persecutor of Jews**

- i. Paul is aware that there is some conflict between Gentile and Jewish Christians in the Roman church, and he addressed those concerns (chapters thirteen and the first half of fourteen). While the Roman church was presumably founded by Jewish Christians, the exile of Jews from Rome in AD 49 by Claudius resulted in Gentile Christians taking leadership positions.

## **2. Exodus 21:2, 16, 20, 26 Deuteronomy 15:9-15, 16:12 – Slavery in Rome**

- i. Prior to the Roman occupation of the areas maintained and populated by Jews, the Jewish societies had not experienced the type of harsh slavery employed by the Roman authorities. It is necessary to understand that the model of Roman slavery that ultimately found its way to the US was a vastly different form of “service” than what had been commonly accepted in the ancient world.
- ii. **Jewish Concept of Slavery – Exodus 21**
  - a. In the Jewish context, slavery was simply servitude. You were commanded not to kidnap a man Exodus 21:6 – This is in stark contrast to the Roman concept of slavery that we have seen replication of in America.
  - b. Additionally, Jews were required to release their slaves after 7 years Exodus 21:2
  - c. Jews were not allowed to harm a slave. They were to be set free if hurt
- iii. **Greek Transformation – 387 B.C. – Plato’s Advice to Dionysius**
  - a. Plato advised Dionysius that he was a tyrant
  - b. Dionysius seized Plato and sold him to the highest bidder
  - c. This set the platform for Greece’s new vision of slavery and created a new slave society that created a life sentence slavery dedicated to vindicating governmental authorities, criminal punishment and the seizure and control of “lower classes.”
  - d. Due to the prevailing concepts of Greek wisdom, the Mediterranean world began to accept this more hostile form of slavery.
  - e. Aristotle began to teach that there is a natural human condition, a birth right, if you will, that gave you freedom or gave you a position in life that made you less deserving of freedom
    1. “It is clear that there are some men that by nature are free and others slaves. And that for the latter slavery is both proper and right and that all should acknowledge that the inferior class should be slaves of the superior.” – Aristotle
    2. Greeks began to stipulate that some who were born were less human and so being are “natural” slaves born for such a purpose of degradation as they were undeserving of freedom due to their inferior human condition.
  - f. **Pedanius Secundus**
    1. Pedanius Secundus was a major Roman politician
    2. He had 400 slaves

3. He was murdered in AD 61, 3 years after the letter to the Romans was written
  4. Rome instituted new laws declaring that if a slave attacked his master that all slaves on the property must die.
- g. *It is very important to understand this context because in all of Paul's references to slavery, he was not referring to Jewish servitude, rather, he was speaking in the Greco-Roman context. Paul's idea of slavery was an extreme case in which one has lost all rights and privileges. You are owed nothing and should expect to get nothing. Yet, you are commanded to revel in your position.***