

The Roman Empire, ca. 1 - 300 C.E. (A.D.)

I. Quick facts about the Roman Empire

- A. Controlled most of Western Europe, Northern Africa, and the Middle East
- B. Rule by one man -- the Emperor -- centered in Rome
- C. Required massive occupation armies
- D. Roman roads, aqueducts built to facilitate army troop movements and occupation
- E. Unifying force behind the Empire: emperor worship, required of all civil servants
- F. Wealthy expected to finance public works such as fora, theaters, baths, and bakeries
- G. No middle class, large slave population discouraged technological innovation

II. Religious traditions in the Roman Empire

- A. Romans tolerant of native religious traditions that had a venerable past
- B. Syncretism -- borrowing from and mixing elements of many religious traditions
- C. Emperor worship the "civic religion"
- D. Mystery religions promise individual comfort and salvation
- E. Goddess worship: Isis (Egypt), Attargatis (Syria), Sophia (Judaism), Tyche/Fortuna (Luck)

III. Views of the cosmos in the Roman World

- A. Layered cosmos: earth surrounded by successive heavens
- B. Gods dwell in the highest heaven
- C. Intermediary realm between highest heaven and earth controlled by **daemones** and Tyche
- D. Mysteries promise aid and salvation to followers

IV. Judaism in the Roman World

- A. Israel controlled by Romans, ruled by local kings (Herod) and then governors (Pilate)
- B. Jesus was born and died in Roman-occupied Israel (ca. 30 C.E.)
- C. Jewish uprising against the Romans 68-70
- D. Romans razed the Temple in Jerusalem, center of Jewish worship, and killed and enslaved most of the occupants, in 70 C.E.

E. A second revolt in 135 ended with the expulsion of all Jews from Jerusalem

F. Jewish leaders regroup to form new community based on rabbis instead of priests and devotion to the Torah instead of Temple sacrifices

G. The Torah is the ancient book of Jewish revelation (first 5 books of the Bible)

H. Central features of the Torah:

1. One God created the cosmos and is manifest in it but is apart from it

2. There is a covenant between God and Jews -- God promises aid and comfort, Jews promise obedience to revelation contained in the Torah

3. Humans are made in the image of God

4. In addition to the written Torah, there is an oral Torah (later written down and forms the Talmud); prayer and study of Torah and Talmud is the way one connects with God

IV. Christianity in the Roman World

A. Christianity began as a Jewish group led by charismatic Jewish teacher, Jesus

B. Jesus was executed by the Romans as a political threat ca. 30 C.E.

C. Followers were convinced Jesus had risen from the dead

D. Paul proclaims that Jesus' death had saving power for all humans

E. Eventually broke with mainstream Judaism by asserting Jesus' divinity

F. Group developed their own scriptures (New Testament) but maintained Jewish scriptures too (now called Old Testament) and claimed to be the fulfillment of Judaism

G. Gradually developed doctrine of 3 Gods in 1 (Trinity): God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit

H. Persecuted by the Romans sporadically from 100 - 300 C.E. as a new and therefore not venerable religion which refused to recognize the divinity of the Emperor