

BACKGROUND:

Romans, Epistle to the: The longest of St Paul's letters, it was sent from Corinth, probably c. ad 58. After a formal opening, Paul points to the universality of sin and concludes that no one can be justified before God 'by the works of the law'. Justification occurs 'by the righteousness of God', which is revealed in the Gospel of His Son, whom God 'set forth to be a propitiation [or expiation]' to reconcile sinners to God (3: 25). This free gift is appropriated by faith. Paul rebuts the suggestion that in such a situation we might as well continue in sin that grace might abound (6: 1); in reply he points to the change in character effected by Baptism. Discussing the destiny of the Jews, most of whom have rejected the salvation now offered to Jews and non-Jews alike, Paul emphasizes the sovereignty of God and claims that the falling away of Israel is only temporary. He then deals with the practical obligations of the Christian life. He ends with greetings, the 'grace', and a doxology... Romans is a text of primary importance for the Christian theological tradition. Its teaching was especially influential in St Augustine's anti-Pelagian writings, and it has profoundly affected the W. Christian outlook on sin, grace, merit, free will, justification and predestination. Modern attempts at rapprochement with Judaism take their start from Rom. 11, and Rom. 13: 1–6 has been a force for social and political conservatism, especially in German Lutheranism. SOURCE: "Romans, Epistle to the." In The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, edited by Livingstone, E. A. : Oxford University Press., 2006

**Scullard, H. H.. From the Gracchi to Nero : A
History of Rome 133 BC to AD 68. London:
Routledge, 2010.**

Pages 248-249, 260-261, & 266-268

HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

In his religious policy Claudius, though conservative by nature and antiquarian in interest, did not avoid all novelty. He did much to restore the old religion of the State, e.g. he reorganized the college of haruspices, and in 47 AD he managed to celebrate the Secular Games by reckoning their start from 613 BC. instead of 666 BC., the date used by Augustus; the Games were thus made to coincide with the eight-hundredth anniversary of the foundation of Rome. In another ceremony in 49 he extended the old sacred boundary of Rome (the pomerium) to include the Aventine and part of the Campus Martius; this privilege belonged to generals who had extended the imperial frontiers, within which Claudius had brought **Britain, Mauretania and Thrace**. Towards emperor-worship, in reaction against the wild extravagances of Gaius, Claudius reverted to the sensible attitude of Tiberius. In the famous letter that he wrote to the Alexandrians in 41 he said that he did not want a high priest or temples, 'for I do not wish to be offensive to my contemporaries', but naturally he did not in general receive less honours than had Tiberius. **Towards foreign religions he was tolerant where he regarded them as harmless to older Roman ideas**. Thus he thought of transferring the Eleusinian Mysteries to Rome, but he expelled astrologers from Italy. Towards Druidism he went further than his predecessors (see p. 235): if Tiberius had not already done so, Claudius decreed its complete suppression.

Towards the Jews he reverted to the more generous attitude prevailing before Gaius, and restored to them throughout the Empire freedom of worship and exemption from the imperial cult. But in Rome he was more severe. Though Tiberius' expulsion order had not been revoked, a large Jewish colony had re-established itself in Rome: in 41 Claudius denied them the right to hold meetings (other than those of the individual synagogues?), presumably to stop them proselytizing and perhaps as the result of some disturbance; at any rate in this same year he wrote angrily to the Alexandrine Jews, accusing them of 'fomenting a universal plague'. In 49 there was a further clash with the Jews in Rome, and they were apparently expelled; whether the emerging new religion of Christianity had any influence on these events is uncertain, but Suetonius says that a riot was provoked 'impulsore Chresto'. Claudius also admitted the festival of Attis into the Roman calendar and reorganized its priestly colleges: the cult was robbed of some of its wilder features and was 'romanized'; the chief priest, the archigallus, now had to be a Roman citizen and not an eastern eunuch... On the night of 18 July 64, when the sky was bright with a full moon, a fire broke out in Rome which raged for over a week; it destroyed at least ten of the fourteen Augustan regions, three of them being totally gutted. Nero, who was at Antium when the disaster started, hurried back to Rome, helped to direct the firefighting and undertook energetic measures to relieve the homeless. He then used the opportunity to benefit both Rome and himself. The re-building of the city was planned on more scientific lines compared with its earlier haphazard growth, with a rectangular street system and blocks of skyscrapers (insulae).

For himself Nero started to build on the ground between the Esquiline and Caelian hills (where later the Colosseum was built) his vast Golden Palace (Domus Aurea) with its parks, lakes, colonnades and a colossal 120-foot-high statue of Nero himself, together with statues and works of art for which his agents ransacked Greece. Here he could indulge his artistic sense and his mania for the grandiose, while wits might declare that his expropriations not only engulfed the city but would soon embrace Veii, ten miles distant. In their loss and misery the city populace turned against Nero and accused him of having started the fire, while rumour added that he had watched the burning city from the Tower of Maecenas and had sung as an aria over it his own 'Sack of Troy'. Neither charge can be taken seriously: if he had wished to destroy Rome he would hardly have chosen a bright moonlit summer night when the movement of his fire-raisers would have been hard to hide. But he was suspected and in order to divert suspicion from himself he sought a scapegoat. He might have turned to the Jews, who were always unpopular with the mob, but his wife Poppaea was interested in Judaism and her interest may have saved them. Instead there was the new sect of the Christians that was now growing up in Rome, about which little was known except that it was popularly credited with 'humani generis odium'. It is one of the anomalies of history that a sect, which on the human plane, apart from its theological claims, was preaching the brotherhood of man, should have been so misunderstood, but the secrecy of the meetings helped to give rise to such ideas that the Christians practised cannibalism, an idea based probably on a misunderstanding of the Lord's Supper.

Here were suitable victims, and Nero took savage action. In so far as Christians were charged with incendiarism the charge must normally have broken down (and it is only Tacitus that connects the persecution with the fire), and they will have been persecuted as Christians. There is little evidence for any persecution outside Rome, but here their punishment was terrible: some were thrown to the beasts in the amphitheatre, and others were smeared with pitch and used by Nero as living torches to light the games he held by night in the imperial gardens and Vatican circus... This attempt to divert hostility from himself, however, recoiled on Nero's own head, because the ruthlessness of the punishment excited pity for the victims, who were regarded as sacrificed to one man's cruelty rather than to the national interest... Nero also had some plans for Africa, though their exact nature is uncertain. In 61–63 AD a detachment of praetorian soldiers was sent up the Nile past Meroe to the marshes of the White Nile. This was perhaps a scientific expedition, designed to discover the source of the Nile, or it may have been a reconnaissance for a campaign against the king of Axum (Abyssinia). In any case no Ethiopian war ensued: on military and probably on economic grounds it was unnecessary, though a victory in such distant and mysterious lands might have appealed to Nero's vanity. The great revolt that flared up in Palestine in 66 was the result of old grievances and protracted disturbances. It was not a happy land. It suffered from internal stresses, both economic and religious: there was tension between rich and poor, between Sadducee and Pharisee, between Jew and Samaritan, between Jew and non-Jew, especially Greek, and between Jew and Christian.

Little wonder that some men had turned to a less complicated life like that of the Essenes and, a landmark in history, established the monastic community at Qumran on the Dead Sea, whose scriptures now partially survive, the famous Dead Sea Scrolls. Above all, there was a common hatred of Rome, although this was moderated among the upper class which looked to Rome to protect its interests. This sentiment naturally was nationalistic in aim and sought to throw off the yoke of the unclean and idolatrous Gentile. Feelings were often further aggravated by Roman lack of tact, since Roman policy towards the Jews in general had tended to fluctuate between great generosity or undue harshness. True, there had been no religious persecution as such, and the Jews had been granted freedom of worship and association. The mad folly of Gaius had been counteracted by Claudius' re-establishment of a native ruler, but the reversion to provincial status after Agrippa's brief rule (41–44) will have re-emphasized Judaea's dependence on Rome. His son, Agrippa II, was well treated by Rome: in 50 he was given Chalcis, the kingdom of his uncle Herod who had died, and in 53 he received in exchange for Chalcis, Philip's tetrarchy (Trachonitis, Gaulanitis, etc.) and that of Lysanias (Abilene), to which Nero added part of Galilee and Peraea. The Roman procurators obviously had no easy task with so recalcitrant a people, but they were too often incompetent. Cuspius Fadus in 44 had killed a prophet and agitator named Theudas; his successor, Tiberius Alexander, was a renegade Jew; and his successor, Ventidius Cumanus (48–52), crushed some fighting between Jews and Samaritans with such rigour that he himself was later court-martialled and exiled.

The next procurator was Antonius Felix (52–60), brother of the **freedman Pallas** and husband of a Jewess Drusilla, the sister of Agrippa II. He had to face increasing social unrest, from bands of fanatical robbers (Sicarii or ‘Men of the Knife’) who plundered the rich and pro-Romans, and also from a violent group of Zealots, led by Eleazar, son of the High Priest. He had to deal with rioting between Greeks and Jews in Caesarea and it was he who tried St. Paul whom he kept in confinement as he judged that release would be politically dangerous. Like other governors, he had only some 3000 local troops at his disposal, although in grave difficulty he could appeal to the governor of Syria for legionary help. The next governor, Porcius Festus (60–2), was relieved of the problem of St. Paul when the latter ‘appealed to Caesar’, but he had other difficulties. When Festus died and before his successor Albinus arrived, the Sadducee High Priest took the chance to crush some opponents, including James, the brother of Jesus, who was stoned to death. Finally, under Gessius Florus (64–6) the storm broke. The immediate cause was some rioting at Caesarea and in Jerusalem where the High Priest refused to sacrifice to Jehovah on behalf of the emperor and where, despite the intervention of Agrippa, the small Roman garrison was massacred. Faced with a spread of disorder, Florus called in the legate of Syria who arrived with some 30,000 men but winter was approaching and he dared not assault Jerusalem but withdrew (66). As the rebellion was extending to the whole of Palestine, Nero appointed a new governor of Syria, C. Licinius Mucianus, and put a tried soldier, T. Flavius Vespasianus, in command of the expedition against Judaea.

Vespasian's plan was to use his three legions to reduce Palestine district by district and thus isolate Jerusalem before the final attack. In 67 he reduced Galilee which was defended by Josephus, a philo-Roman Pharisee who managed to survive and to pass over to the winning side: he gained pardon and friendship from Vespasian, whose elevation to the throne he prophesied. In 68 Vespasian reduced Samaria and Idumaea, but when news came of the death of Nero he slowed down operations. During all this time Palestine had been far from united in its opposition to the Romans and there had been much fighting between Jews and Gentiles, while Jerusalem became the scene of bitter fighting between three Jewish factions. Thus when Vespasian went off to seek the Principate and left his son Titus to conduct the final siege of Jerusalem, Titus invested a city divided against itself. Nevertheless the resistance was fanatically heroic, but in August 70 the city fell and was sacked. The sequel is soon told. The temple was destroyed, the Sanhedrin and High Priesthood were abolished, the annual contribution paid by every pious Jew to the temple was diverted to Jupiter Capitolinus. The Jewish State ceased to exist as a political entity, but Judaism as a religion continued and was even protected as in the past, its followers being allowed their Sabbath, freedom from military service and exemption from the Imperial cult. Judaea remained a Roman province but the equestrian procurator now became the subordinate to a senatorial legate who commanded the Tenth Legion which henceforth garrisoned Jerusalem. When after the reign and death of Titus (81) a commemorative arch was erected in his honour, all Rome was reminded by its sculptures of the end of Jerusalem.



The Germanic tribes exerted constant pressure on the Rhine-Danube frontier, placing the Empire on the defensive. The western provinces and Italy were overrun by Germanic invaders in the 5th cent. A.D.

Trajan's conquests and of the Euxinates were abandoned by Hadrian in 117 A.D.

In 395 A.D. the Roman world was divided into east and west empires.

THE ROMAN EMPIRE AT ITS GREATEST EXTENT c. 117 A. D.



Scale of Miles



- Capital
- Maximum extent of Roman control in the time of Trajan, 98-117 A. D.
- Roman walls