



Exploring the Background:

The Context of *ROMANS*

RESTORATION MOVEMENT PIONEERS Thomas & Alexander Campbell (*Declaration and Address; Christianity Restored*)

- **CORRECT Hermeneutics:**

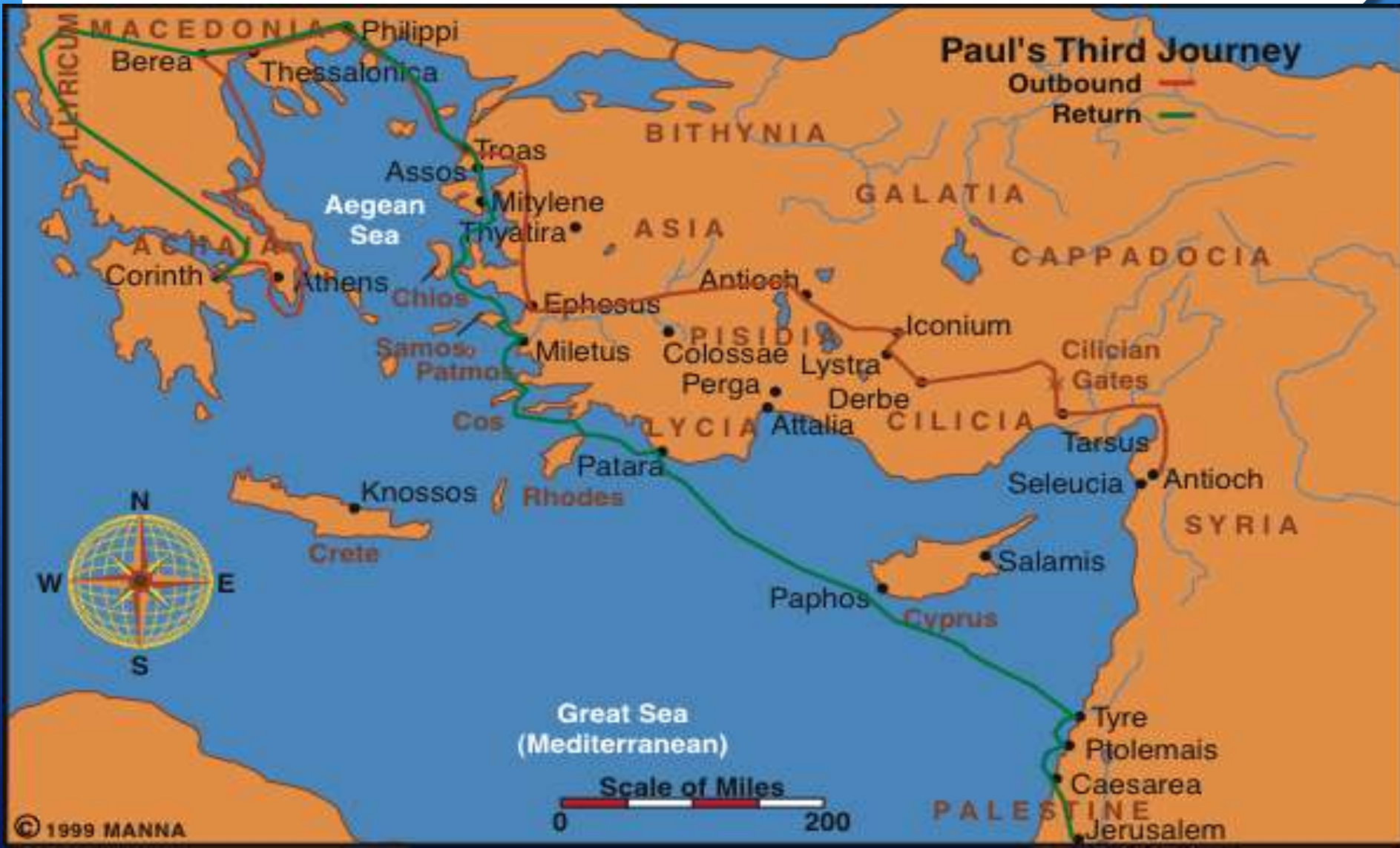
- 1. determining what a passage meant to those who first received it, AND then
- 2. applying the passage, once understood, to our present circumstances

A. : ...determining word meanings, interpreting figures, **USING CONTEXT**, determining the dispensation, **understanding the conditions which prevailed when the book was written**, noting who speaks and **to whom**, coming within an understanding distance of things written long ago.

To understand **what a passage meant to those who first received it** we must:

- + Learn from **history, archaeology, culture,** and **geography** about the conditions under which words were spoken
 - + Define **words** that need to be explored
 - + Study the **syntax** of a passage
 - + Recognize **the type of literature** we are dealing with
 - + Make sure we understand **WHO** said these words **TO WHOM**
 - + Interpret the **figures of speech** in a passage
 - + Compare to other passages by same author/apostolic age authors
- KNOW THE CONTEXT (the "big picture")**

ROMANS: at end of 3rd missionary journey, from **Corinth**, looking WEST (Spain, but first Rome)



Romans 15: 19-23

(a major transition in his ministry)

- + So that from **Jerusalem** and round about as far as **Illyricum** I have fully preached the gospel of Christ . . .
- + For this reason I have often been **prevented from coming to you**; but now, with **no further place in these regions**, and since I have had **for many years a longing to come to you** whenever I go to **Spain** - for I hope to see you in passing . . .



Roman Empire

- 1st Triumvirant c. 60 B.C.
- Julius Caesar 44 B.C.
- Augustus Caesar 14 A.D.
- Furthest extent 8-115 AD



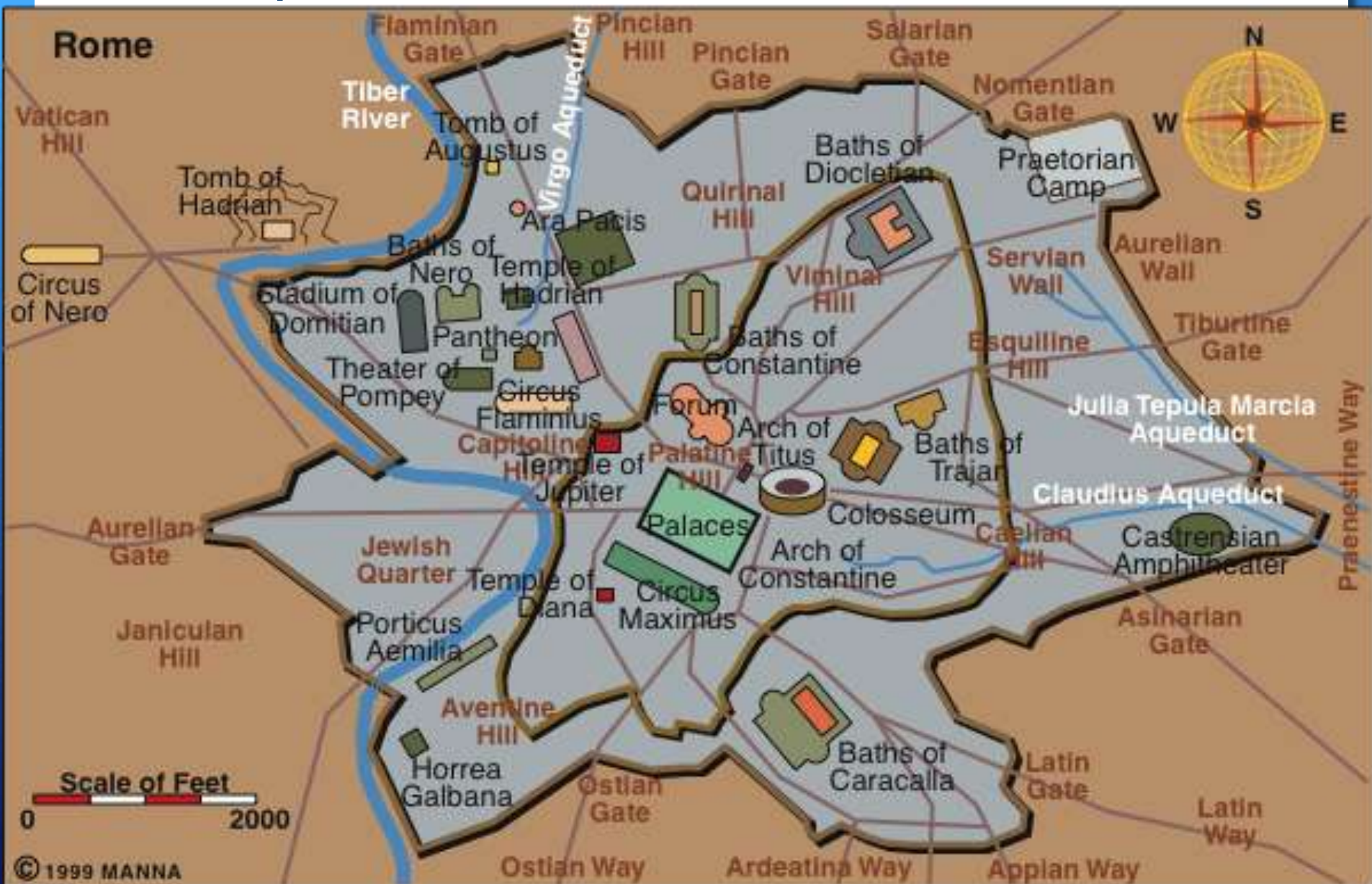
Romans

- + Paul's longest letter/in typical Greco-Roman fashion
 - + Scribe identifies himself (Tertius-16:22) – but looks like a strict dictation: has “for”(gar) 144 times!
- + Placed by church fathers as “1st” in the collection of Pauline letters
- + SOME: his best systematic treatment of the Christian faith (a treatise?)
- + OTHERS: this is not a treatise, IT IS A SERMON (=aware of critical issues that need to be addressed)
- + SOME say Paul already views with ominous undertones his return to Judea (and therefore this letter could be seen as his theological legacy/last will and testament).
- + OTHERS stress that he is looking to the Roman church to help finance his journey to Spain (NEW SUPPORTING CONGREGATION to replace Antioch of Pisidia?)

ROMANS

- + **NO** EVIDENCE HE HAD VISITED the church in ROME
- + **HOWEVER:** Christian “couriers” commonly brought news of developments throughout the Mediterranean
 - + Phoebe (from Cenchrea) is going to deliver it (16:1)
- + The Roman Christians were well known in Greece (1:8; 16:3ff)

The city of **ROME**



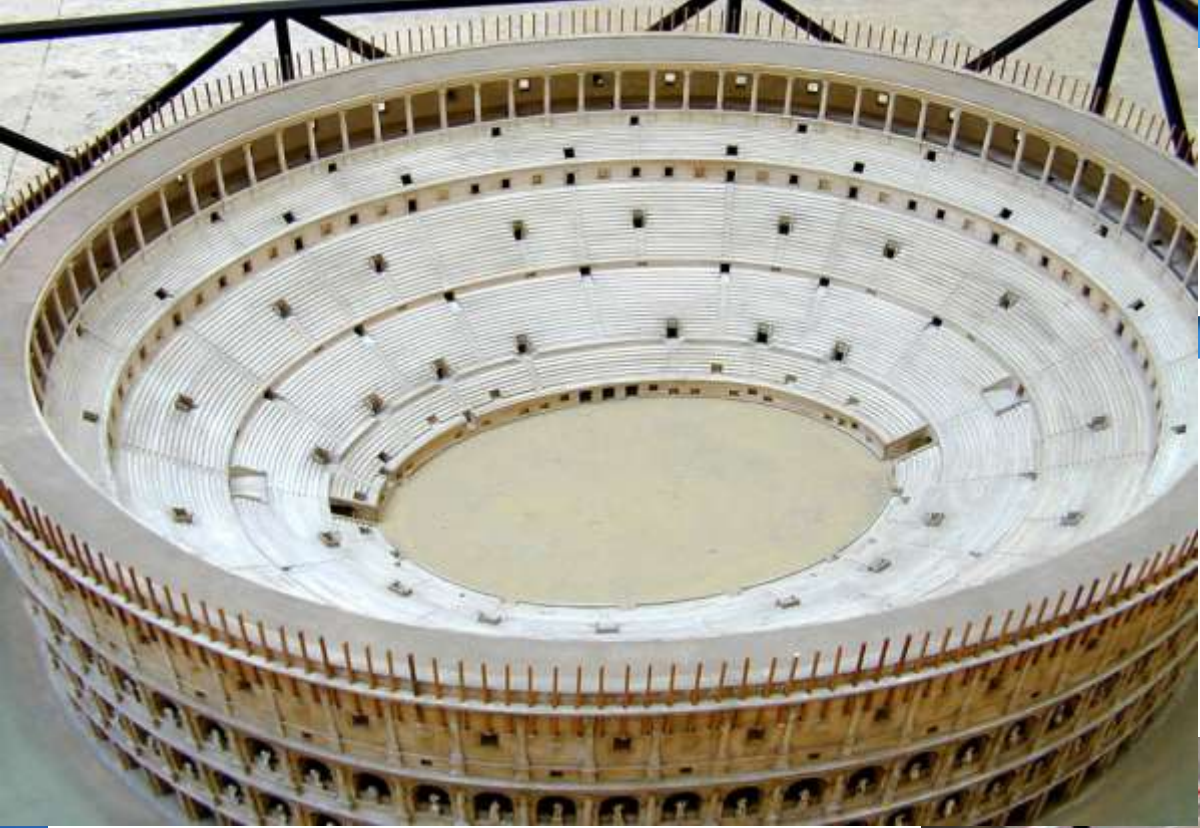




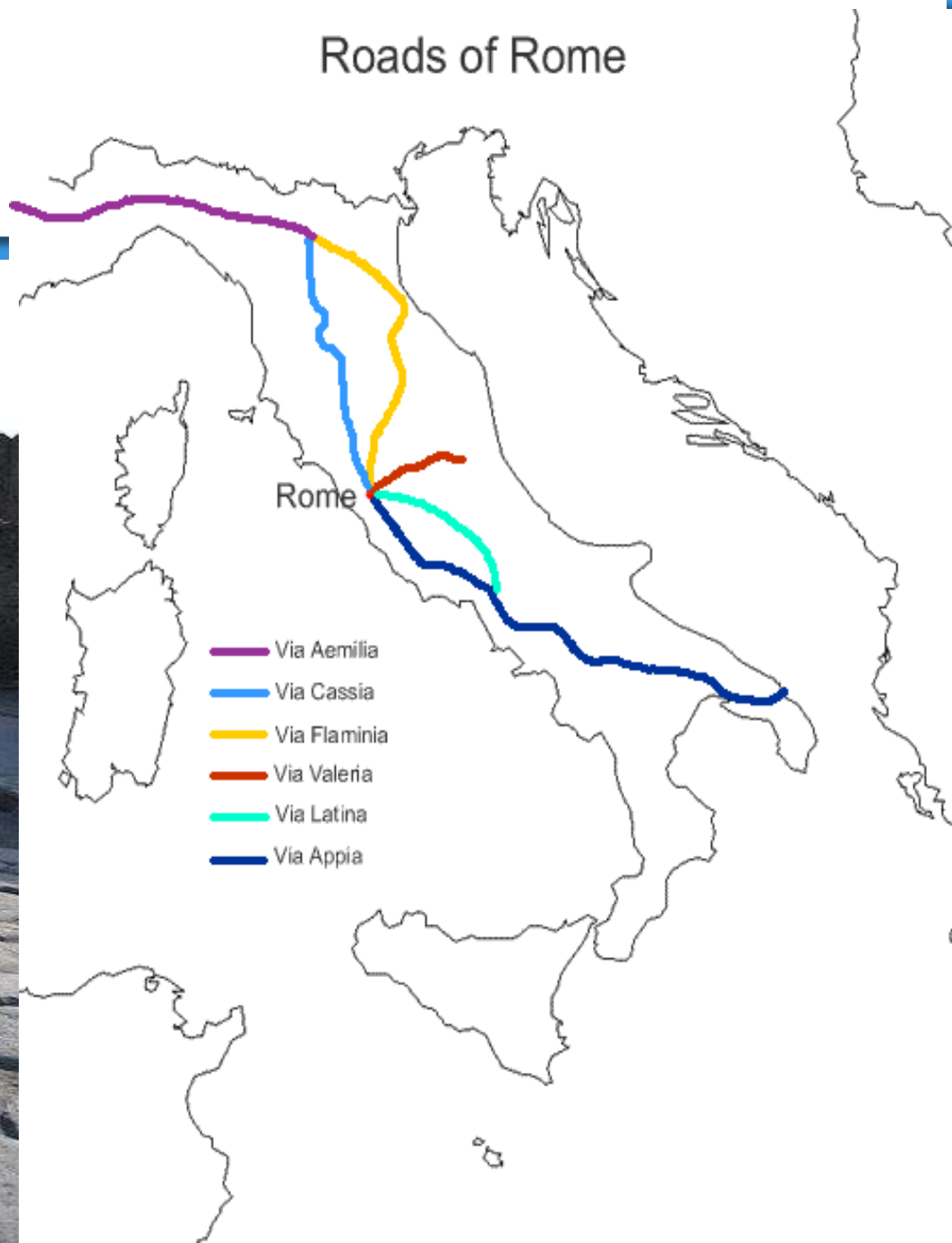








All roads lead to . . .
ROME



In the world of ...POLITICS



Claudius (41-54)

- Edict of 49 (Suetonius' *Chrestus*)
- Expulsion (Aquila & Priscilla) changed the leadership of the Roman church – more Gentile.



Paul knows the ROMAN church

+ IT IS A. *GENTILE* . . .

But is also anchored in a

+ B. *JEWISH COMMUNITY*

A. GENTILE: Greco-Roman religion

- + **Sir Edward Gibbon** (*Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*): The various modes of worship, which prevailed in the Roman world, were all considered by the people as equally true; by the philosopher, as equally false; and by the magistrates, as equally useful.
- + *Religio* = Something that binds families together, subjects to ruler, men to gods.
- + Object of Public Worship: **APPEASEMENT** (divine blessing=prosperity)
 - + NO CONCEPTS of grace, love, justice . . . MORALITY!
- + Emperors understood (& used!) importance of religion = Octavian Augustus appointed himself *Pontifex Maximus*
- + *NO SEPARATION of CHURCH & STATE*
- + *Were very TOLERANT (required assimilation; EXCEPTION= Jews!)*
- + Two arenas:
 - + **Private**: presided by *paterfamilias*
 - + **Public**: this was considered STATE WORSHIP – sign of *Romanitas* – patriotism.

Religio - **POLYTHEISTIC**

Many “choices” (diversity)

- + Ancestor worship & house gods
- + NEW: Mystery cults (Isis, Mythra, Demeter)
- + NEW: Emperor worship
- + Philosophy schools (Stoics & Epicureans)
- + Olympian gods (bankrupt, but highly visible)



M·AGRIPPA·L·F·COSTERTIVM·FECIT

Olympian gods (“Old gods”) **anthropomorphic**

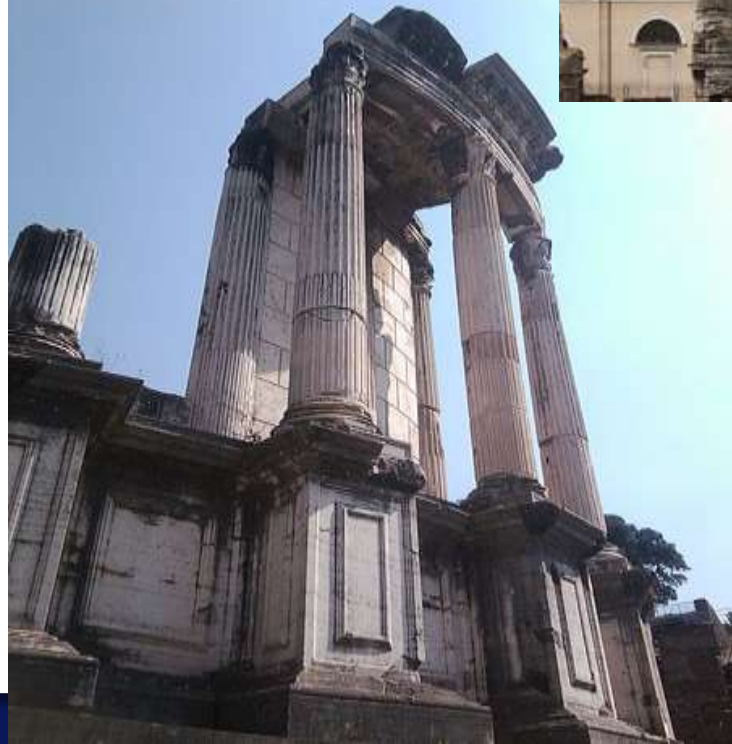
- + 1. **Zeus** (Jupiter)- supreme god, lord of the sky, rain & thunderbolt.
- + 2. **Hera** (Juno) - wife and sister of Zeus, protector of marriage, beautiful and jealous.
- + 3. **Poseidon** (Neptune) - Zeus’s brother, god of the sea (the trident).
- + 4. **Hades** (Pluto) - brother of Zeus, god of the underworld and of wealth, king of dead.
- + . Pallas **Athena** (Minerva) - daughter of Zeus; battle goddess, protector of civilized life and the city, later goddess of wisdom and reason.
- + 6. **Apollo** - son of Zeus, associated with light, truth, healing, music, honored at Delphi (the oracle).

Olympian gods - anthropomorphic

- + 7. **Artemis** (Diana) - Apollo's twin sister, lady of the wild, huntsman, protectress of the young.
- + 8. Hephaestos (**Vulcan**) - god of fire, son of Zeus (?), a blacksmith, patron of handicrafts, ugly and lame.
- + 9. **Aphrodite** (Venus) - goddess of love and beauty, sprang from foam of the sea, wife of Vulcan.
- + 10. **Hermes** (Mercury) - son of Zeus, a messenger with winged sandals, a thief, in charge of commerce!
- + 11. Ares (**Mars**) - son of Zeus, god of war, hateful to the Greeks, glorious to the Romans.
- + 12. Hestia (**Vesta**) - sister of Zeus, goddess of earth



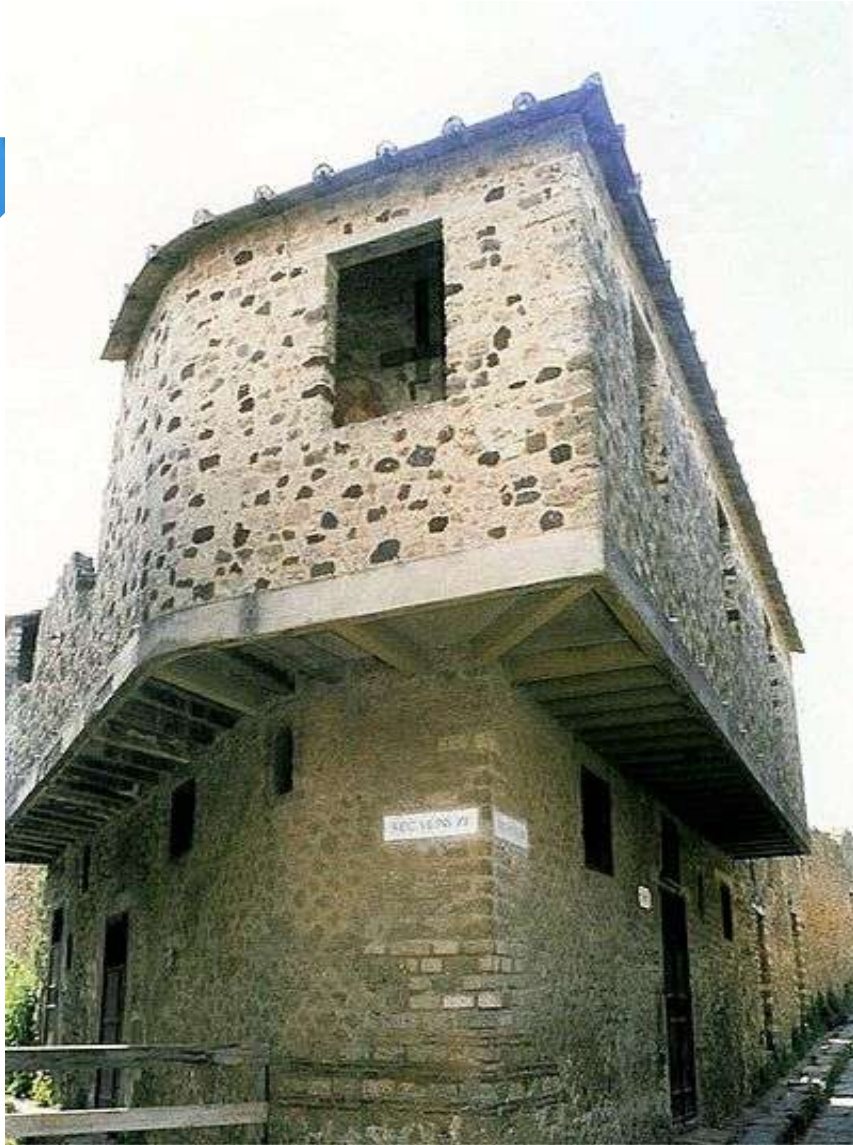
Temples of Hercules, Vesta, Saturn, Castor & Pollux



Greco-Roman religion

- + Priest frequently counseled the senate (omens)
- + Extravagant religious festivals
- + To desecrate any temple was a crime
- + **Romans 1:22-23**: " Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles."

Pompeii: *lupanara*



Ephesus advertisement



Paul knows the Roman church

+ IT IS A. *GENTILE . . .*

But is also anchored in a

+ *B. JEWISH COMMUNITY*

Jews in the Roman World (dispersion)



-6/7 million in the Empire

-50,000 in Rome

-12+ synagogues in Rome

-First Arrived in 63 BC

-Acts 2: 10



The JEWISH Diaspora in the Roman world

- + **JEWES WERE TREATED BETTER THAN ANYONE ELSE!**
- + Greeks and Romans were very aware of them, attended their synagogues, welcomed Christian Jews like Paul (see Crispus, Titius Justus in Corinth).
- + There evidently was a distinction between a “god-fearer” and a proselyte (=women underwent an ablution/initiation bath, *miqva'ot*; males had to undergo circumcision).
- + Intermarriage and the Diaspora: the law was that only children of a Jewish woman were Jews.
- + Circumcision quickly identified a Jew at public baths or gymnasiums.
- + Proselitizing: some say they were aggressive, while others say it was only for political reasons.
- + **Jews could pay the *fiscus Iudaicus*, tax sent to the temple, and count it against their taxes, (till 70 AD) & the Romans provided security!**

Paul knows the religious and social climate of **the city** (multicultural environment)

BUT HE ALSO KNOWS THAT:

+ The Roman church is mostly **GENTILE**

+ But it is anchored in a **Jewish** Community

THIS brings its own **challenges:**

- Jews might seek privilege in their ethnic heritage
- Gentiles might discriminate against Jewish believers

ISSUES: ethnic tensions, racial pride, theological differences.

NOTE: Paul's collections of funds among Gentile churches for the poorer Judean churches (15:25-27) is a delicate subject.

“Motif “of **ROMANS**

+ 1:16 . . . First to the Jew,
then to the Gentile . . .

+ Has Jews in mind when . . .

+ “the forefather of **us** Jews” (4:1)

+ Has Gentiles in mind when . . .

+ catalogues the **sins of idolatry** in ch. 2

“And so we came to Rome” (Acts 28: 15)

- + Spring of 60 AD (two year incarceration)
 - + *“For me to live is Christ, to die is gain”*
 - + Probable outcome of trial (see Philippians): RELEASE
 - + More travels, and then the aftermath of the great fire of Rome of 64 AD
 - + II Timothy (2nd arrest in Rome) – I have run the race, kept the faith
- TRADITION: beheaded on the 3rd mile marker of the OSTIAN WAY (sarcophagus in St. Paul Outside the Walls)

Rodney Stark (1996)

Exponential growth of Christianity

+ YEAR AD	Christians
+ - 30	7,530
+ - 150	40,496
+ - 200	217,795
+ - 250	1,171,356
+ - 300	6,299,832
+ - 350	35,882,008

The most EXPLOSIVE expansion of any idea, at any time, anywhere . . .

- + In spite of strong JEWISH resistance
- + In spite of a corrupt, pagan world
- + In spite of strong Roman persecution

+ NOTE: if it was done once, IT CAN BE DONE AGAIN!

+ Thus we preach ROMANS . . .