



ROME

THE CHURCH IN THE HEART OF THE EMPIRE

THE CITY OF ROME



- ▶ Founded in 8th Century B.C.
- ▶ Burned by Gauls in 386 B.C., but re-built & became stronger than ever
- ▶ Influence expanded around entire Mediterranean
- ▶ Evolved from “Roman Republic” to “Roman Empire” during reign of Augustus (c. 27 B.C.)
- ▶ Center of government, trade, & a crossroads of ideas from all over the Empire
- ▶ Population in NT times approx. 1 million

Circus Maximus (model)



Colosseum (model)



BEGINNINGS OF THE CHURCH

- ▶ Establishment not recorded in NT
- ▶ Earliest evidence of a church in Rome is Paul's letter (A.D. 57-58)
- ▶ Paul says he had never visited Rome (Rom 1:13-15), so not the church's founder
- ▶ RCs claim Peter founded the church, but no evidence of this
- ▶ Acts 2:10-11 says there were "visitors from Rome" present on Day of Pentecost. Some likely converted & took their new-found faith home with them
- ▶ Acts 18:2 says Priscilla & Aquila were Jewish Christians who came from Corinth to Rome b/c of "Edict of Claudius" (A.D. 49), so Christianity was there at least by the late 40s

LATER DEVELOPMENTS - PAUL

- ▶ Letter to Romans indicates a division between Jewish & Gentile Christians
- ▶ Probably a result of Edict of Claudius: Jews expelled for several yrs. Once returned, re-integration apparently difficult
- ▶ Led to disagreements over what foods could/couldn't be eaten & the observance of certain "special days"
- ▶ Paul teaches the primacy of love for one another & willingness to surrender "rights"

DEVELOPMENTS/PAUL (continued)

- ▶ Eventually visited Rome c. A.D. 60, after arrest in Jerusalem. Claimed right to trial by Caesar's court
- ▶ Voyage to Rome long & difficult, but eventually, "we came to Rome" (Acts 28:14)
- ▶ Met by brothers from Rome who accompanied them into the city
- ▶ Paul held under house arrest for 2 yrs. Attempted to evangelize local Jews, but rejected, so turned attention to Gentiles.
- ▶ Spent remainder of time evangelizing

FIRE OF ROME (A.D. 64)



DEVELOPMENTS/PAUL (cont'd.)

- ▶ Apparently released after 2 yrs. Preached as far west as Spain (*1 Clement*)
- ▶ Re-arrested & brought to Rome again around A.D. 64-67
- ▶ In A.D. 64, Nero blamed fire of Rome on Christians; resulted in terrible persecutions
- ▶ Eusebius says Paul was beheaded during this time (64-67)

LATER DEVELOPMENTS - PETER

- ▶ Eusebius says Peter died in Rome about same time as Paul, but by crucifixion
- ▶ Not clear when Peter came to Rome, but wrote 1 Peter from there
- ▶ Refers to Rome as “Babylon” b/c of the evil & persecutions there
- ▶ Peter says he was an elder (1 Peter 5), so presumably of the church in Rome

AFTER THE APOSTLES

- ▶ Clement, a Roman church leader, wrote to Corinth about the beginning of the 2nd Century A.D.
- ▶ Letter indicates the influence of the Roman church, since Clement offers advice & exhortation to Corinth
- ▶ Also, indicates Roman church continued to suffer persecutions, but had remained steadfast
- ▶ Marcion & various Gnostic teachers influenced Rome in 2nd Cent., but generally resisted
- ▶ By end of 1st Century, church in Rome, along with many others, had adopted “single-bishop rule”
- ▶ In subsequent centuries, church in Rome gained in influence. In 5th Century, “bishop of Rome” designated as “Pope” – father of the church universal

LESSONS FROM ROME



1. When we lead someone to Christ, we never know how far the gospel will spread as a result.
2. God can use even our adversities to further the kingdom.
3. Even the most severe persecution/opposition cannot overpower the church if we remain faithful to our calling.
4. Strong churches can (& should) have a positive influence on other churches.
5. No church is immune to the dangers of apostasy.