



Approaching God

Read Hebrews 4:13-15 and begin with an opening prayer (Consider that God is Omniscient & Merciful)

*Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. **15** For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. (Hebrews 4:13-15)*

Countdown To Acts

Passage Introduction: Christianity Spread throughout Rome

Christianity was born in the Roman Empire. The book of Acts tells about how the message of Christ spread throughout the Roman world by way, not only of missionary journeys, but also by word of mouth from people whose lives had been transformed by the gospel. As you look at today's passages, think about what kind of government Jesus came to establish. How and why did the apostles instruct early Christians to live in the ways they did?

Bible Reading, Study & Meditation

Start with Engaging the Text: Take a few minutes to highlight, circle, or underline key words. Use the margins to take notes.

What stands out to you in today's passages?
What questions or reflections do you have?

Isaiah 9:6-7 - 6 For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. **7** Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

Mark 12:17 - 17 Jesus said to them, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." And they marveled at him.

1 Timothy 2:1-2 - 1 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, **2** for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

1 Peter 2:17 - 17 Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor.

Close in Prayer:

What stood out to you in today's passage that was important or worth noting? What is challenging about living as a Christian in a city or country where your values are not always represented or embraced? What is challenging when the media and culture around you shows contempt for your beliefs? What do you sense God saying to you through his Word & Spirit today? Take some time to pray that wherever, whenever, and whoever you are with - that's God's grace would spread through you.

Resources for Further Study

Introduction to the Book of Acts

Christianity in Rome

The message of Christ spread quickly, and the number of those who believed grew to a size that caught Rome's attention. Early on, the Roman Empire regarded Christianity as a sect of Judaism, which explains why Rome tended to treat conflicts between Jews and Christians in Acts as internal matters (Acts 18:12-17).

Early Christians did not oppose Roman authority. Jesus taught His followers to pay their taxes (Mark 12:17). Paul and the other apostles taught that Christians should honor the government so long as Roman authorities didn't forbid them from following Christ (1 Timothy 2:1-2, 1 Peter 2:17). Because of this, early Roman persecution of Christians was more the exception than the rule.

There were, however, a few notable tumultuous periods. For example, shortly after Jesus' birth, Herod the Great, in his zeal to kill the one born "King of the Jews," slaughtered all Hebrew male children under age two (Mark 2:13-16). Later, in 64 AD, Emperor Nero blamed the great fire of Rome on Christians. It may have been during Nero's persecution when both Paul and Peter lost their lives.

Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire and, according to Romans 15:28, a Christian church existed in the city of Rome itself as early as 50 AD—less than 20 years after the death and resurrection of Christ. It is fascinating to consider how the Roman occupation of Israel—something most Israelites viewed as an unfortunate hardship—would end up setting the table for the gospel to spread from Jerusalem, Judea, and Samaria to the ends of the earth.