Roman Empire At The Time Of Jesus
27 BC - 33 AD

I. Political

A. Augustus was emperor (27 BC – 14 AD)
   1. Instituted Pax Romana
   2. Jewish people had to pay high taxes.
   3. Roman legions were everywhere and unpopular with the Jewish people.
   4. Political unrest - quarrels between religious and political groups.
   5. This is when people began looking for a Political _Messiah_ who would free them from Roman _oppression._

B. _Tiberius_ succeeded Augustus in 14 AD.

C. Palestine
   1. Palestine was not an independent country.
      a. Came under Roman rule, which then split the country into Judea, Galilee, and Samaria and Perea.
b. Now present day **Israel** (Holy Land)

2. Governed by **Herod the Great**  
(37 BC to 4 AD)

   a. Strong and shrewd  
   b. Eliminated **rivals**, such as wives and sons if they got in his way  
   c. Established a very powerful **kingdom**  
   d. Built **fortresses for security** and Jerusalem’s new temple.  
   e. Built **roads** and **drainage system**.  
   f. Extremely **high taxes** were paid by the **Jews**.  
   g. Roman rule was **unpopular**.

3. **Herod Antipas**

   a. Governed **Galilee and Perea**  
      (_4 AD – 39 AD_)  
   b. Disregarded **Jewish Law** (married his brother’s wife)  
   c. Had **John the Baptist** beheaded
4. Pontius Pilate

a. Governed **Judea** (26 AD – 36 AD)
b. Called the **procurator**
c. His job was to **maintain peace and order**.
d. Reported directly to **Emperor Tiberius**
e. Had the power of **life or death over the people**.

II. Geographical Features
   A. Country of **Palestine**

1. Lies at the **eastern** part of the **Mediterranean Sea** (Great Sea) in the **Middle East**.
2. In the **Old Testament** this area was called **Canaan**.
3. Early **inhabitants** settled there because the land was **fertile for farming**.
4. This was the **Promised Land** God gave to **Moses**.
B. Desert

1. Judaism wilderness is a rocky desert.
2. Many Biblical figures spent time in the desert.
   a. John the Baptist survived eating locusts and wild honey.
   b. Jesus spent 40 days and nights in the desert where He prepared for His ministry; was tempted by the devil.

C. Sea of Galilee

1. Freshwater lake; 12 miles long and 7 miles wide; 800 ft. below sea level
2. Fishing was the main occupation around the lake.
3. Important cities around the sea with a thriving fish industry
   a. Capernaum
   b. Tiberius (only town remaining)
   c. Bethsaida
4. Important **events and miracles of Jesus’ ministry** took place in the cities and countryside around the sea.

5. Cold air causes **sudden, violent storms** on the lake.

6. Over **20 species of fish** live in the lake (**St. Peter fish** or **Talipia**)

D. **Jordan River**

1. Longest river in **Israel**.
2. Flows **south** through the **Sea of Galilee** to the **Dead Sea**.
3. Temperatures can reach higher than **100 degrees F** in the summer.
4. Mentioned often in the bible
   a. **Israelites** had to cross the **Jordan** to reach the **Promised Land**.
   b. **John the Baptist baptized** people in the river, including **Jesus**.
E. **Dead Sea**

1. Lies **1,300 feet below sea level** ( lowest place on earth )
2. So **salty** no fish can live in this sea
3. Contains **minerals** that are thought to have **healing powers** for the skin
4. Bible story of **Sodom and Gomorrah** took place here

III. Social / Daily Life

A. Occupations

1. **Fishing**
   a. Fisherman would set out on the **Sea of Galilee** every evening in small, **wooden sailboats**.
   b. Used **nets** that they pulled through the water and then hauled back into the boat
   c. At dawn, they returned to shore to sort fish into baskets.
d. Sold fresh, salted and dried fish.
e. The day was spent repairing boats and mending nets and sails.

2. Farmers

a. Grew vineyards for grapes, wheat, and barley, fruit and olives.
b. Livestock- sheep, cattle, goats, donkeys and camels.
c. Shepherds were considered lower class.

3. Craftsmen

a. Carpenters, potters, weavers, blacksmiths; sold crafts at the market place, which was the main meeting place in the town.
b. **Apprentices** would **learn the trade** from the craftsmen

c. Many **apprentices were slaves** that had been sold to the craftsmen (often they were treated poorly)

### 4. Tax Collector

a. Could be **any nationality**
b. Collected taxes for the **emperor of Rome**
c. **Unpopular** among the population thought of as bad as a Roman)
d. **St. Matthew** was a tax collector

### 5. Religious Occupations

a. **Rabbi**
b. **Priests / Chief** or **High Priests (scribe)**
6. **Military**
a. Could serve in the **Roman Army**.

7. **Women** did not work outside the home but may have **sold their crafts** at the marketplace.

8. **Slaves**
a. Used in the **household**
b. **Apprentices** of **craftsmen**

B. **Education**

1. Jewish **boys** were taught the **Jewish Law** by the **Rabbi**.
2. **Schools** were attached to the **synagogues**
3. **Aramaic** was the Jewish **language** that was spoken
4. Boys learned to **read and write Hebrew**, in which the **Torah** was written. Then they **memorized** the **Law**.
5. **Girls** didn’t go to school. They were taught **weaving, cooking, and household skills.**

C. Travel

1. Restricted to **walking** or **riding a donkey.**
2. Rough, desert terrain
3. **Thieves** lurked in lonely spots waiting to rob travelers.
   a. It was especially **dangerous** on the **roads in Samaria.**
   b. **The Good Samaritan**

4. A family traveling on foot from Nazareth to Jerusalem for the **Passover Feast** would have taken them **six days.**
D. Main Cities

1. **Nazareth**
   a. Small isolated village; **15 miles west** of the **Sea of Galilee** and **70 miles north** of **Jerusalem**.
   b. This is where Jesus was raised as a **child** and lived until **His ministry**.
   c. Only a **few hundred inhabitants**
   d. Main occupations were **farmers** and **craftsmen**
   e. Where Jesus started **His ministry**; people didn’t accept Him preaching at the **synagogue** because He was a **local man** and **son** of a **carpenter (lower class)**
2. Jerusalem
   a. In Judea; 25,000 inhabitants
   b. Holy City for three major religions- Jews, Christians, and Muslims.
   c. Many important events in Jesus’ life took place in this city.
   d. King Herod built the Temple here
   e. Home to the Roman Governor
   f. King David made Jerusalem the capital of his kingdom and the center of worship of Yahweh.
   g. David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem
   h. Solomon built the first temple to house the Ark.
3. **Bethlehem**

   a. Small village in **Judea**; **5 miles south** of **Jerusalem**.
   b. **birthplace** of **King David**; 1,000 years later, **Jesus** was **born here**.

4. **Capernaum, Tiberius, Bethsaida**

   a. **fishing towns** around the **Sea of Galilee**
   b. **miracles** and **events in the life of Jesus** took place here

E. Housing

1. Jewish people lived in houses made of **stone, timber**, and **plaster**
2. They were often built into a **wall** or **side of a hill**
3. Many houses had a **courtyard**
4. Most had **one main room** used for cooking, eating, and sleeping.

5. **Stables** for sheep, goats, and chickens
6. **Staircase** outside that led up to a **flat roof** made of **beams** and covered with **reeds, mud, grass** and **clay**.

7. Family spent a lot of time on the **roof**
   a. **Weaved** and **baked**
   b. Dried **dates, figs** and **flax**
   c. **Washed** clothes
   d. Families relaxed on the roof because it was **cooler** and even **slept** there in the summer.
F. Religion

1. Roman Empire was **polytheistic**
   (____________- ______ ______)

2. Jewish people were **monotheistic**
   (____________-______ ______)

3. **Sabbath**
   a. Jews observed this day of **rest and prayer**
   b. Started at **sunset** on ______ ________
      and **ended** at ______ __ ______ ______
   c. Friday evening meal for family

4. ________________
   a. A **building** where Jewish people went to **worship God** and **study the Law**.
   b. The **Prayer Hall** always **faced the Holy City** of __________
   c. Men and women **sat in separate areas**
d. Most important part of the service was the reading and studying of the Torah (first 5 books of the Old Testament), which contained the Jewish Law.

e. Jesus read and taught in the synagogues and studied there as a boy.

G. Jewish Religious sects in Palestine

1. **Pharisees**
   a. Most membership in this group
   b. Members were middle class merchants and tradesmen; arrogant

   c. Viewed the entire Old Testament as Law (Torah, Law, Writings)
d. **Strict** keeping of the **Sabbath**, **tithing**, and **purification** rites.

e. Taught the way to God was through absolute obedience to the **Law**

f. Established and controlled the **synagogues**

g. **Opposed Jesus** because He would not accept the teachings of the **Oral Law** and performed miracles on the **Sabbath**

2. **Sadduccees**
   a. **Aristocrats** - rich descendents of the high priest; **members of the Sanhedrin**
   b. Accepted only the Torah as **Law**
   c. In **charge of the Temple** and **services**
   d. More **political**, and worked with the **Romans** for their own benefit
e. **Opposed Jesus** for fear their wealth and political position would be threatened

3. **Essenes**
   a. Scattered throughout the villages of **Judea**
   b. Believed in **self-denial, rejection of wealth**, **sharing property** and **were pacifists**
c. Believed in **strict Jewish Law**
d. Lived almost like a **hermits**_: most did not marry_
e. **Rejected temple worship and offerings as corrupt**
f. **Dead Sea Scrolls** are believed to have been written by them

4. **Zealots**

a. They were **extreme, fanatic Pharisees**
b. Believed that **only God had the right to rule over the Jews (not the Romans)**
c. Prepared to **take up arms against Romans**; extremely opposed to **Roman rule**
d. Believed the **Messiah** would be a **strong warrior** who would **crush** the **Roman rule** with his army
e. **Opposed** to **any peace with Rome**
f. Refused to **pay taxes to emperor**
g. Engaged in **terrorist acts**
h. Many were **unemployed bandits**