

THE ROMAN EMPIRE

IN THE FIRST CENTURY

Episode 2 – Years of Trial

Reconstruction voiceover: O Jupiter and Mars and all gods that raised the Roman Empire to ruler of the world. I invoke you, and I pray. Guard this prosperity, this peace, now and into the future!"

Narrator: In the year 14, prayers such as these were heard around the vast dominion ruled by Rome. For in that year, the empire stood at a precipice. The emperor, Augustus had died. He had been a towering figure. He had extinguished a century of civil war. He presided over 40 years of internal peace and prosperity. He forged the vision and power that cemented the empire together. But the peace of Augustus came at a price. By the end of his life, Augustus had eclipsed the Senate, ruled as a monarch, and founded a dynasty that was fraught with troubles. His heirs: Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius would lead Rome through years of political terror, imperial madness, and assassination. They would reign through the distant founding of a new religion that would one day engulf the empire itself. The years to come would be years of trial, testing the endurance of subjects and citizens, soldiers and slaves: the men and women of the Roman Empire in the first century.

Reconstruction voiceover: "How miraculous! We can now sail to Spain in just four days, Gaul in three days. We can reach Africa, on the gentlest breeze, overnight."

Narrator: As the first century unfolded, ancient observers were awestruck by their shrinking world.

Reconstruction voiceover: "Incredibly, even Egypt is barely seven days' journey."

Narrator: For the empire that Augustus left behind was now more than a collection of conquered lands. It was a far-flung society of vibrant commerce and frequent travel. By the year 14, the people of modern day France, Turkey, Syria, Greece, Spain and North Africa were all part of Rome. They contributed to its wealth, and gained from its protection. But at Augustus' death, the family of Rome also included some troubling members: Egypt, conquered some 45 years earlier, remained an exotic land of disturbing power. Judea, added a half-century before, was a tinderbox. And in Germany, local tribes resisted full subjugation. Then there was Britain. Once, Julius Caesar had proudly claimed the island for Rome. But his claim did not hold. And at Augustus' death, Britain still lay tantalizingly beyond grasp. As he lay dying, Augustus assumed a philosophical air. "Did I play my part well in this comedy of life?" he asked. The answer was a resounding "yes." The Senate declared Augustus a god. As he passed into

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legend, he passed the torch of leadership to a man who had stood in the shadows for fifty years: his grown stepson, Tiberius.

Narrator: The years of waiting had come with wrenching sacrifice. Once, Tiberius had been happily married. But he had been forced to divorce his wife, and marry the emperor's daughter. Tiberius complied with Augustus' order. But his biographer reports that he was never the same.

Reconstruction voiceover: Tiberius had loved his wife. After the divorce, he grieved that he had pushed her away and had great anguish in his soul. The one time he caught sight of her, he watched her with such strained and swollen eyes that an officer was assigned to keep her from his presence.

Narrator: Despite his sacrifice, Tiberius had been spurned. Augustus only chose him after more favored heirs had died. And still, Tiberius' position was insecure. The Senate was leery. Its members needed leadership but hated monarchy, and many resented the turn to hereditary rule.

Keith Bradley, Professor of Greek and Roman Studies, University of Victoria: Tiberius was in an impossible situation. He did not expect to become emperor, originally. He was not Augustus' first choice. He was not Augustus. He had not accomplished what Augustus had. So the negotiation of his role with regard to those who were his social peers was very difficult indeed.

Narrator: The Senate chamber was tense as Augustus' will was read. Tiberius moved warily to claim his legacy. And he gave confusing signals. Would Tiberius assume full imperial powers, the senators asked. "No," he responded. "Which branch of government will you direct?", one member called out. Tiberius was silent. "How long will Rome remain headless?" shouted another.

Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, Director, British School, Rome: Tiberius wanted power all right! The excuse for behaving in the way he does is that that is how Augustus himself had done it. He's trying to be a good Augustus look-a-like. Augustus came to power by refusing it. He feels he too must refuse. But somehow, subtly, oddly, he got the game wrong. He refused too much. He didn't convince anyone that his refusal was genuine. He only caused resentment.

Narrator: As Tiberius groped awkwardly to define his role, events outside Rome turned ominous. A message arrived from the provinces: two armies on the northern frontier were refusing orders. It started among the legions in modern day Hungary and Austria, just ten days march from Rome. One disgruntled soldier voiced the bitter realities of army life. And mounting a rostrum made of dirt, he stoked the fires of resentment.

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Reconstruction voiceover: “Old men are enduring thirty and forty years of service, many have even lost limbs. Discharge does not end it. They do the same work by a different name. And, if by some chance one survives, he is dragged to the ends of the earth and given ‘payment’ with a swampy marsh or sterile mountainside. By Hercules! Life in the legions is brutal and unprofitable.”

Narrator: Gradually, the arguments struck home. Soldiers began showing their scars. Some looted. Officers were killed. With the words of defiance ringing in the air, mutiny gained momentum.

Reconstruction voiceover: “Why should you obey like slaves? When will you dare demand payback if not with a new and wavering emperor?”

Narrator: It was Rome’s worst nightmare. It demanded attention from the imperial family. With the new emperor busy in Rome, another family member was sent to quell the rebellion. He was called Germanicus. He was young, charismatic, and loved by the soldiers as a man of the legions. His wife had even given birth in an army outpost. The couple’s two-year-old son wore a tiny army uniform. “Bootsie,” the soldiers called him. In Latin, this was Caligula. The child was the darling of the Roman legions, their imperial mascot. When Germanicus and his family reached the mutinous camp, it was clear that more violence loomed. Their very lives were at risk. Germanicus consulted his advisors. He tearfully urged his wife to seek refuge with a nearby tribe. She agreed, leaving with little Caligula in her arms. Some years later, the historian Tacitus recorded the scene.

Reconstruction voiceover: “A wretched group of women marched away: the commander’s wife, a refugee, clutching her small son to her breast, surrounded by the weeping wives of his comrades. The wailing was noticed by the soldiers, who came out of their tents. They felt shame and pity and thought of her forefathers, and of her son – a child born and raised among the tents. They begged; they insisted that she come back.

Narrator: Rebel unity was broken. Germanicus became a hero and Caligula and his mother returned to camp.

Richard Saller, Professor of History and Classics at the University of Chicago: Caligula as a child in the middle of this mutiny must have seen the importance of the loyalty of the army. In fact, he had been the darling of the soldiers and he could appreciate the loyalty that the army felt to the Imperial Family in Rome. Yet he also could see what would happen if the soldiers’ expectations weren’t met. They were not going to maintain the loyalty.

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Narrator: Army loyalty, Caligula saw, was the core of imperial strength. But events would offer Caligula another, darker lesson: popularity could be a dangerous thing. Just five years later, Caligula's father Germanicus lay dying. Poisoned, it was believed, on orders from the emperor. Tiberius insisted he played no part in the death of Germanicus. But neither did he mourn. For he well knew that public favorites could be as threatening as army mutinies. And survival demanded brutal vigilance. Governing Rome, Tiberius mused, was like "Holding a wolf by the ears." That reality would stalk the imperial family for generations to come.

Reconstruction voiceover: "I must go and have a bath. Yes, it's time. I get myself some towels. I run and catch up with the others and I say to them all, 'How are you? Have a good bath! Have a good supper!'"

Narrator: Young and old, rich and poor, men and women, every day in mid-afternoon, countless people around the empire ended their work, and made their way to the baths.

Reconstruction voiceover: "Labor and worry be gone! I sing the baths bejeweled with shining tiles!"

Narrator: Most bath complexes were large, congenial places where all classes mingled in one of the great unifying rituals of Roman life. They included outdoor areas for exercise, food stands for snacks, and noisy attendants who offered every sort of service.

Reconstruction voiceover: "I would die if silence were as necessary to study as they say. I live just above the bath house."

Narrator: The philosopher Seneca found his local bath a mixed blessing.

Reconstruction voiceover: "Consider all the hateful voices I hear! When the brawny men exercise with their lead weights, I hear their groans and gasps. Or when someone else comes in to get a vulgar massage, I hear the slap of a hand on his shoulders. Add those who leap into the pool with a huge splash. Besides these, who at least have normal voices, consider the hair plucker, always screeching for customers, and never quiet except when he's making someone else cry."

Narrator: After several hours in the boisterous atmosphere, wealthy Romans headed home, for an evening with friends. The less privileged met at roadside cafes. But one and all, Romans cherished their late afternoon rituals as staples of life.

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Reconstruction voiceover: "Baths, wine, and sex ruin our bodies. But what makes life worth living except sex, wine, and baths?"

Narrator: Away from the public eye, Augustus' first successor lived in gloom. Emperor Tiberius was already 55 when he inherited Rome from his stepfather. And he was a dour, cynical man. Embittered by his years of obscurity, Tiberius now resented the courtiers who once scorned him. He despised their intrigues, and obsequious manners. "Men fit to be slaves," he muttered as he left the Senate House. Many senators thought little better of Tiberius. They grew to hate him for his cryptic wishes, and his unpredictable moods.

Andrew Wallace-Hadrill: What really gets up their noses is that he both demands servility from them and then pretends to be treating them like equals and saying, "Oh, no, no, don't be servile. Don't flatter me, and I don't want this adulation that you offer me." Yet it was clear to them that unless he was flattered, unless they behaved like slaves, he wasn't actually happy. That's why they called him a hypocrite.

Narrator: With mutual contempt between senators and Tiberius, the emperor sought counsel outside their ranks, in a cavalry officer named Sejanus. A man the ancient historian Tacitus called "a small town cheater."

Reconstruction voiceover: "Sejanus was brazen with great physical endurance. Outwardly, he appeared honorable, but inside he nursed a greedy nature."

Andrew Wallace-Hadrill: You have to remember that, the Romans could be extraordinarily snobbish. The Romans weren't against social mobility absolutely, but they hated to see upstarts who they saw as getting into power not because they were good, but because they cheated the system. That is, because they wormed their way into the favor of the emperors and they cheated themselves into social standing.

Narrator: Tiberius gave his new friend Sejanus command of the "Praetorian Guard", an elite battalion created to keep order and protect the emperor. Sejanus concentrated his troops in a single camp. Billeted in one place, Tacitus says, the guard enhanced Sejanus' political influence.

Reconstruction voiceover: "When the camp was finished, he insinuated himself into the soldiers' affections, speaking to each, man-to-man. He chose their leaders himself. And to senators, he hinted at offices and provincial posts for those who supported him."

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Narrator: Tiberius offered his aid the highest honors. He openly praised Sejanus, calling him "the partner of my labors" and Sejanus reveled in the emperor's trust. He would use it to clear a path for his own power, and subject Rome to a reign of terror reminiscent of its darkest past. Germanicus, the hero of the army mutiny, was dead. Now, Sejanus warned, the dead man's family was plotting to seize power. Germanicus' widow was parted from her children and sent into exile. In Rome, young Caligula was spared abuse, but his older brothers were less fortunate. Suetonius describes their fate.

Reconstruction voiceover: "Both were judged to be traitors and sentenced to death – one in the basement of the imperial palace, where starvation drove him to eat the stuffing from his pillow. It is believed that the other committed suicide when an executioner came and showed him a noose and the hooks for dragging his corpse through the city. Their ravaged remains were so scattered that it was very difficult to collect them."

Judith P. Hallett, Professor of Classics, University of Maryland, College Park: This is what's wrong with the system that Augustus established. It's a system that's only as strong as the male member of the family who comes to power is, emotionally and physically. And while there were some very impressive people, most notably Augustus, who assumed this role, there were others who had a great deal wrong with them. And a lot of what was wrong with them was merely living in this household where people are constantly vying for power and favor.

Narrator: The emperor's aide, Sejanus, soon widened his purge. He launched treason trials. Rivals were routinely convicted, and, according to Tacitus, executed.

Reconstruction voiceover: "It was a time of corruption, greed, and subservience. Not only the elite felt insecure in their positions, but even lower ranked officials competed to perform foul and slavish acts."

Narrator: Barely a decade after Augustus had died, the dynasty he founded was failing Rome. The now elderly Tiberius would not, or could not stop the purge.

Keith Bradley, Professor of Greek and Roman Studies, University of Victoria: Where was Tiberius when the trials and other atrocities and persecutions were going on towards the end of his reign? It's difficult to tell. He had withdrawn from the city because he was tired of the capital and its politics. He may have known of some of the trials that were going on. He may not. He may have simply been duped. How do we know? It's very difficult to tell.

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Narrator: In the year 26, disgusted and insecure, Tiberius had turned his back on Rome, and retreated to the island of Capri: an isolated refuge that offered security from his enemies, and diversions for his troubled mind.

Reconstruction voiceover: “Once retired to Capri, he set up rooms for his depraved urges.”

Narrator: Perched in one of twelve cliff-top villas, Tiberius sought release in astrology, in wine, and, according to his gossipy biographer, Suetonius, in all manner of self-indulgence.

Reconstruction voiceover: “He procured groups of girls and boys known for their sexual inventions. They enacted their unique depravities before him to arouse his failing sex drive. He decorated the bedrooms with erotic paintings, figurines and Egyptian pornography, so they knew the work they were expected to put out.”

Narrator: Only Sejanus had regular access to the reclusive emperor. And, after Tiberius' own son died, only Sejanus enjoyed the emperor's trust. In Rome, he assumed all the powers of his absent patron, and ruled with growing autonomy. Sejanus, it seemed, was poised to displace Tiberius himself.

Keith Bradley: Sejanus had clearly been plotting to secure the emperorship for himself. There's no doubt about that. And he had waged campaigns against members of the imperial family. It's very difficult to know what caused his undoing in the end, because we don't have a complete account.

Narrator: In the year 31, events took a surprising turn. Tiberius suddenly soured on Sejanus, and suddenly embraced, Caligula: the only surviving son of his imperial family. Tiberius called Caligula to Capri. Then he sent a secret message to the Senate condemning Sejanus. The ancient historian, Cassius Dio, tells the story as it was recounted to him.

Reconstruction voiceover: “At sunrise, the emperor's agent climbed the hill where the Senate was convening in the temple of Apollo. He found Sejanus outside. He consoled him with lies, telling him that he was about to be named next in line. Ecstatic, Sejanus ran into the building.”

Narrator: As the emperor's agent slipped away, Tiberius' letter was read aloud. Line by line, it condemned Sejanus. Slowly, senators inched away.

Reconstruction voiceover: “The presiding officer called Sejanus forward. But he did not obey because he had never taken orders. He was called a second and third time. Then the officer pointed and said, ‘Sejanus! Come here.’ Sejanus

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answered blankly, 'Are you calling me?' He whom they once worshipped, they now led to execution. "

Narrator: Sejanus was strangled. His body was dumped into the river Tiber. In an age of emperors, violence was the only recourse for the aggrieved, and brutality always lurked near the surface.

Keith Bradley: What we might understand from Sejanus' downfall is that no one was secure within the court system. This was a secretive form of government. Power was pursued by those who were unscrupulous and wanted to wield it, but no one could be secure in his control of power. The emperor could strike down anyone at a moment's notice.

Narrator: Still in Capri, Tiberius continued the business of government. His rivals had all been destroyed. So had the chance of stable succession. As Tiberius entered his last years, weary and remote, his only surviving heir was Caligula.

Reconstruction voiceover: "To the official in charge of revenues: It is now nearly two years ago that Apollonios made off with my dowry, and he left me with the female child, which we conceived together, in rags."

Narrator: Although emperors often struck down their political enemies, millions of anonymous people around the empire led less eventful lives. They paid taxes, struggled to support their families, and, when problems arose, they appealed to Roman administrators for relief.

Reconstruction voiceover: "My husband has journeyed by boat down to Alexandria and he has joined himself there to another woman. He has told his father to sell our house. Since I lack even basic nourishment, I ask you to order him to be summoned before you and to help compel him to return the dowry to me for life's necessities."

Narrator: Many lived on the brink of ruin. In their towns and cities, in Egypt, Italy, and around the Mediterranean, they endured filthy streets, rampant disease, and recurrent famine. Emperors tried to alleviate suffering by offering free grain to some quarter of a million Romans. But even this wasn't enough. For many of the nameless poor, feeding their families was an impossible task, especially in the Roman province of Judea, modern-day Israel. There, on the empire's desert fringe, the dry soil supported meager harvests. Roman taxes added to the burden. The Jews of Judea were fervently religious. Among them was a family from a village near the Sea of Galilee.

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Reconstruction voiceover: "In those days an order was sent by Emperor Augustus to register the entire world. All went to their own towns."

Narrator: Long before Tiberius' accession, Augustus had ordered a census. It was an enormous undertaking. From Gaul to Egypt, from Asia to Judea, millions registered with Roman officials.

Reconstruction voiceover: "And Joseph also went from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to be registered with Mary, whom he was to wed and who was expecting a child."

Narrator: Joseph was a Jewish carpenter. If the birth of his son caught Rome's attention at all, it was only as a statistic. But Jesus, growing to maturity in his father's trade, would leave a legacy more enduring than Augustus himself, a legacy made possible by the extraordinary ferment of the first century. For in this corner of the empire, at this moment in history, Judea was in turmoil. The population had split into hostile factions. Preachers and prophets roamed the countryside, drawing emotional crowds. At the age of 30, Jesus joined one such group and was baptized in the Jordan River. Soon, Jesus began a ministry of his own. And like other itinerant preachers of his day, he walked between villages, taking his message to the homes and synagogues of Judea's poor.

Reconstruction voiceover: "No one can serve two masters. You cannot serve God and wealth. And so I say to you: do not worry about what you will eat or what you will drink, or about what you will wear. Is life not more than food and the body more than clothes? Behold the birds in the sky, they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns and yet your father in heaven feeds them. Are you not more precious than they? Blessed are the poor in spirit for the kingdom of heaven is theirs, blessed are the meek for they will inherit the earth."

Allen Callahan, Associate Professor of New Testament, Harvard Divinity School: The Roman Empire provides historical context for Jesus' words and deeds and without taking that context seriously, much of what we know or even think we know about Jesus becomes inscrutable. Jesus speaks of the rule of God. He speaks of relief and hope for the poor, the dispossessed, the disinherited. He's speaking to a lot of people who meet that description. And he's saying that God is going to do something about the situation; that God is doing something about this situation right now.

Narrator: Jesus' talk about a "kingdom" greater than Rome electrified his listeners, but his disciples' astounding claim that Jesus was literally God's son also caused offense. And his demanding terms threatened to unravel thousands of years of social tradition.

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Reconstruction voiceover: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to pit a man against his father and a daughter against her mother."

Narrator: Even the people from his own small village were outraged. They drove Jesus out of town. They led him to a cliff and threatened to hurl Jesus over the edge. He escaped. But his ministry continued to draw fire.

Karen King, Professor of New Testament Studies and the History of Ancient Christianity, Harvard University: A young man came to Jesus and said, "I want to follow you, but first I have to go and bury my parents." And Jesus said, "Let the dead bury the dead. You come and follow me." This was an utterly provocative thing to say in a period where a child's filial responsibility to bury their parents was utterly fundamental.

Narrator: About the year 33, Jesus traveled to the city of Jerusalem for Passover. He joined throngs of pilgrims from around the world, pilgrims who arrived with foreign monies, seeking animals to sacrifice at Jerusalem's sacred temple. Jesus was appalled. Commerce, he believed, defiled the holy site.

Reconstruction voiceover: "In the temple, he found people selling cattle, sheep and doves, and money changers seated for business. Making a whip from cords, he drove them all out of the temple. He also poured out the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. To those selling the doves he said, 'Take these things out of here! Do not make my father's house a marketplace!'"

Narrator: The outburst enraged religious leaders. Worse, it threatened to disrupt the precarious political stability imposed by Rome. Jesus was arrested, probably for political subversion. And to the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, the sentence was obvious: crucifixion.

Karen King: I think it's crucial to look at the story of Jesus from the Roman point of view, what did the crucifixion of Jesus look like? It looked like they, through just processes, had gotten rid of a criminal and maintained the Roman peace, stability and social order. But what did the Christians do with this? They, they turned it on its head and they made this criminal, who the Romans had justly and rightly put to death, their hero and their god whom they worshipped. The Romans got that. The Romans understood political subversion when they heard it.

Narrator: The decision to execute Jesus would launch a religion that would one day subsume the Roman Empire, and resonate for millennia to come. But the man who ordered the crucifixion fell quickly from grace. Pontius Pilate's

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mismanagement soon brought Judea to the brink of revolt. And the Roman governor was ordered home in disgrace. Fate, however, would spare him imperial censure. For as Pilate sailed for Rome, the emperor, Tiberius died.

Reconstruction voiceover: "At the baths, there is no way to escape Menogenes. If you take some towels, he will call them whiter than snow, although they may be dirtier than a baby's lap. As you comb your thin hair, he will say you look like Achilles. He will praise everything and marvel at everything, until, worn down by his boring efforts, you invite him home."

Narrator: The antics of status-conscious Romans delighted ancient humorists. For in some circles, wheedling a place at a rich man's table was a daily dance; to fail a social disgrace.

Reconstruction voiceover: "My friend swears that he has never dined at home, and that is so. He just doesn't eat without an invitation."

Narrator: Dinner was an artful affair, upper class Romans reclined on couches, and were served by slaves. They enjoyed music, poetry, and endless delicacies. But those of more modest means enjoyed more modest amenities, as revealed by graffiti scribbled as comic dialogue two thousand years ago.

Reconstruction voiceover: "Innkeeper, let's settle my bill!"

Reconstruction voiceover: "You owe one coin for wine, one for bread and two for relish."

Reconstruction voiceover: "Agreed."

Reconstruction voiceover: "The girl you had costs eight coins."

Reconstruction voiceover: "Yes."

Reconstruction voiceover: "And the hay for your mule is two more."

Reconstruction voiceover: "That wretched mule will finish me off."

Narrator: In the year 37, the empire shifted into a lighter mood. For Caligula, now 25 years old, had become emperor.

Reconstruction voiceover: "By assuming command, Caligula fulfilled the wishes of the Roman people, or should I say the whole world."

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Narrator: Caligula had suffered mightily from palace intrigue. As the lone survivor of a charismatic father, as the grown mascot of Rome's army, many hoped Caligula would breathe energy into the gloomy city. At first, Caligula lived up to expectations. He recalled exiles and hosted a bonfire where he ceremoniously burned the records of his predecessors' treason trials. But soon Caligula began to show disturbing eccentricities. Two years into his rule, Caligula led an army north. When he reached the sea, the emperor prepared to invade Britain, the land that had eluded Julius Caesar. Then, inexplicably, Caligula ordered the legions, to gather seashells.

Judith P. Hallet: What is going on when Caligula goes up to the North Sea and starts collecting seashells? Well, Caligula had been seriously ill the preceding year. He may or may not have had something like encephalitis. There's also reason to believe that there's some troubled hereditary strain in this family and that Caligula suffers from. We might want to call it bi-polar behavior.

Narrator: Tyranny descended on Rome, as Caligula's quirks grew into abominations. Once, during a sacred ritual, Caligula was to offer an animal to the gods. But as he raised his mallet to kill the sacrifice, a whim brought it down on the nearby priest. The man died instantly. Caligula dressed in silken and jeweled robes. He forced senators to grovel on the ground and kiss his feet. He openly seduced their wives at dinner parties. And he discussed the women's sexual performance over dessert.

Keith Bradley: There's no doubt that Caligula was strange, grotesque, and perhaps even clinically insane. His reign does show the danger of hereditary succession within the system that Augustus had founded. Military monarchy of the Augustan kind did work. There's no doubt about that. But its danger was that if an hereditary system was used, you could never guarantee that the ruler of the day was going to be an effective ruler. And certainly, with Caligula, we find one emperor who was an absolute disaster. The disastrous Caligula brought Rome's elite to its knees, and other Roman subjects to the brink of despair.

Reconstruction voiceover: "In Rome, on the far side of the Tiber, there was a large Jewish neighborhood."

Narrator: The Jewish scholar, Philo belonged to one of the empire's many religious minorities. Most of the groups, most of the time had long enjoyed remarkable freedom. The Jews were just one example.

Reconstruction voiceover: "Most were Romans. They were brought into Italy as prisoners of war and had been freed by their masters. But they were not forced to

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betray the customs of their forefathers. And when Augustus distributed money and grain, the Jews received as much as everyone else.”

Narrator: But Caligula was not Augustus. And in the year 39, in Philo's city of Alexandria, Egypt, all tolerance broke down. Non-Jews put statues of human gods in the city's synagogues. When affronted Jews tore them out, violence erupted.

Reconstruction voiceover: “The mongrel crowd attacked us and ran through our houses, turning out the inhabitants. Huge mobs of men destroyed the meeting houses, setting many fires in their manic, senseless rage. They drove men, women, and children, like cattle into small pens, leaving them to starve and suffocate. And others, while still living, they bound with straps around their ankles and dragged them through the market, leaping on them, and defiling their corpses.”

Narrator: It was a gruesome tragedy. And it came at an unfortunate time. For emperors alone could mediate such disasters. And Emperor Caligula was past caring. Philo and some fellow Jews set out to seek an audience. They traveled all the way from northern Egypt to Rome. But when they entered Caligula's presence, they knew their mission was doomed.

Reconstruction voiceover: “When we were brought before him, we bowed to the ground out of humility and offered our hands, calling him the most holy emperor. Growling and snarling, he responded, ‘Are you those god-haters?’ The emperor was inspecting a villa under renovation. As he flitted from garden to building, the Jewish envoys strained to keep pace.”

Reconstruction voiceover: “We followed close behind, up and down, mocked by our enemies. When he had given some orders about the building, he asked us this solemn question, ‘Why don't you eat pork?’ Our adversaries burst into laughter. We began to speak, but with our arguments so abused and ground to dust, we stopped trying and looked forward to nothing but death.”

Narrator: Philo and his companions were not killed, but neither were they successful. As the men consoled each other back in their lodgings, they were staggered by yet another blow. Word came that Caligula had ordered a statue carved showing himself as a god, and planned to erect it in the temple of Jerusalem: the holiest place for Jews worldwide. It was the ultimate sacrilege, and sure to cause new eruptions of violence.

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Reconstruction voiceover: "Those living in and around the holy city, as if answering a single sign, left their homes and rushed as one to the camp of the Roman governor."

Narrator: Philo says that the elders swore to die on the spot rather than see their temple defiled. But their sacrifice proved unnecessary. For the Jews were not the only ones Caligula had pushed beyond endurance. Back in Rome, soon after their petition arrived, the emperor paid for his misdeeds. Caligula was murdered, killed by his closest aides.

Reconstruction voiceover: "I, an honorably discharged veteran, have made a will. I order that my two slave women, over thirty years of age, become free."

Reconstruction voiceover: "Here rests a free handmaiden. This monument testifies to the harmony she shared with her mistress and spouse. Good wishes and good-bye."

Narrator: Slavery was an abusive and degrading institution. And it had a long history in the ancient world. But in Rome, slavery had a remarkable feature: manumission. Roman owners freed their slaves in considerable numbers. Former slaves could work as craftsmen, midwives and merchants. Sometimes they achieved wealth. But, in Rome's status conscious world, even successful freedmen found the stigma of slavery hard to erase.

Reconstruction voiceover: "We approached the house. At the entrance stood a doorkeeper shelling peas into a silver bowl. Over the door, a magpie squawked a greeting to guests from his golden cage."

Narrator: The Roman nobleman, Petronius, had a sharp eye for satire. In his novel, "The Satyricon," Petronius lampooned the lifestyle of former slaves by depicting a vulgar dinner party through the eyes of a fictional guest.

Reconstruction voiceover: "We reached the dining room. Boys from Egypt poured cooled water on our hands while others ministered to our feet, removing the hangnails with precision. I began chatting with my neighbor. "Who is that woman running here and there?" I asked. "The host's wife," he replied. "She counts her money by the bushel. But take care you don't scorn the other freedmen here. They're oozing wealth too. See that one reclining at the end of the couch? Today he's worth 800,000. He's newly freed. Not too long ago, he carried wood on his back."

Andrew Wallace Hadrill: Petronius' "Satyricon" is a wonderful insight into all sorts of social prejudices. One of the big phenomena of the first century AD is the rise

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of the freed slave, the desire of the freed slave to become a look-a-like real Roman. The characters in Petronius are these ex-slaves who are all trying it on as Romans. They're dining like Romans, they're bathing like Romans. They're trying to quote bits of ancient literature, mythology as if they were proper Romans. They get it wrong all the time. Socially, subtly wrong in a way that a Roman aristocrat such as Petronius can laugh at them.

Narrator: In the imperial family, another figure was the object of ridicule. His name was Claudius. In his infancy, Claudius' body was wracked by a mysterious illness. To his family's shame, his biographer Suetonius tells us, Claudius was disfigured for the rest of his life.

Reconstruction voiceover: "When he walked, his knees buckled. He had an indecent laugh and, even more disgusting, when he was angry, spittle flew from his mouth. His nose ran, his tongue stumbled, and his head wobbled with the slightest exertion."

Narrator: Claudius was the butt of jokes. When he dozed after dinner, guests pelted him with food. They put slippers on his hands, and roared with laughter when Claudius awoke, rubbing his face with his shoes. But in the year 41, the laughter suddenly stopped. After the Emperor Caligula was murdered, Claudius became the sole surviving heir of Augustus.

Reconstruction voiceover: "Shut out by those conspiring against Caligula, Claudius retired to private rooms. Not much later, after news of the murder, he crept out, terrified, to a nearby sunroom and hid himself in the curtains. A soldier happened to notice his feet. Claudius fell to his knees in fear. But the soldier recognized him and hailed Claudius Emperor."

Andrew Wallace-Hadrill: Claudius is a strangely sympathetic figure to us. And partly, that's because he was turned into such a figure of fun by his contemporaries. It's hard not to try to see beyond what they were laughing at and see a quite serious figure trying to do something sensible.

Narrator: Claudius would surprise everyone. The unlikely emperor rose every morning just after midnight to begin work. He passed laws protecting sick slaves. He increased women's privileges. He apologized to petitioners for the lack of chairs. "This sort of behavior," Suetonius reports, "endeared him to the people."

Narrator: Surprising gestures were followed by stunning acts. Succeeding where the great Julius Caesar had failed, Claudius finally established Roman rule in Britain. It was the foremost addition to the empire since Augustus' death. But there was more. For centuries, the Roman Senate had resisted new blood. In the

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year 48, Claudius argued that men from Gaul, modern France, be seated among them.

Reconstruction voiceover: "Why did Sparta and Athens fall, though mighty in arms, if not because they kept their subjects segregated? Now that the Gauls have joined with us in marriage and culture, let them add their gold and wealth to ours, rather than keep it to themselves. What we do today, will set an example for the future."

Narrator: The old order was defiant. "He was determined," one senator sneered, "to see all Greeks, Gauls, Spaniards and Britons wearing the toga. But Claudius won the day. The empire took another step towards integration. It was a solid victory, but it would be followed by anguish. For Claudius was no less vulnerable to intrigue than those who preceded him. In fact, Tacitus tells us, he was more so.

Reconstruction voiceover: "And this was the end of his ignorance toward matters in his own house."

Narrator: In the eyes of many, Claudius' weak spot was his wife, Messalina. The emperor adored her, but she did not return his devotion. Instead, Messalina indulged her passions, for luxury, and for affairs with palace servants. Claudius always looked away. But in the year 48, the affairs of Messalina suddenly turned sinister. She took a new lover. This time, a nobleman, and her affair was widely thought to signal a coup in the making. "Act fast," a loyal freedman urged Claudius, "or her new man controls Rome!"

Claudius rushed back to the capital and ordered his guards to kill Messalina's lover. The empress fled to a friend's villa to compose an appeal. Claudius' anger began to wane. But his freedman took no chances.

Reconstruction voiceover: "He told their guards and their commander to kill Messalina. A freedman was chosen to carry out the deed. Rushing ahead of the officers, he found her cowering on the ground with her mother sitting nearby. She had often disapproved of her daughter, but was now overcome by pity. 'Life has passed,' she said, 'and there is nothing left but to seek an honorable death.' But there was no honor in that spirit so corrupted with lust. The doors gave way to the oncoming attack. The commander stood before her in silence as he delivered the fatal blow. "

Narrator: Claudius was hosting a dinner party when news reached him that his wife had died. Without asking whether it was suicide or murder, he called for more wine. Claudius, Rome's most improbable ruler, had salvaged, even

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enhanced the empire of Augustus. But he too held a wolf by the ears. And in the years ahead, Claudius would begin to lose his grip.

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