

Rome / Roads

Humanly speaking, the future is unknowable. Who knew a few years ago what the global impact of COVID-19 would be?

During the pandemic, Israel was the most vaccinated country, percentage-wise, in the world. The borders were closed to outsiders for almost two years. When this lesson was originally posted, they had just opened, and we were preparing to lead a fifteen-day exploration tour of Israel. Many obstacles to entering Israel lingered.

Unfortunately, there were no medicinal vaccinations to prevent foreign enemies from infecting Israel in the 400 years preceding the arrival of Jesus. In 332 B.C., the Greeks infected Israel through the "if it feels good, do it" philosophy of Hellenism. The Temple became a bank that sent funds to the occupiers. Many priests enriched themselves in the process.

Israel threw off the yoke of Greek oppression and self-ruled for about 100 years.

Talking Points

- Israel did not remain free for very long. In 63 B.C., General Pompey laid siege to Jerusalem.
- The Emperor expanded Rome's authority to conquered territories via an extensive network of roads. Roman legions marched quickly from place to place.
- News of the realm moved as fast as a horse could run. You might consider Rome's ancient highways as the internet of 2,000 years ago.
- The roads that Rome built provided connections to the great and small cities of the Roman Empire, places where the Good News of the Gospel would travel to Roman communities everywhere.

Background

Rome conquered Judea. Like Greece, the rulers in Rome wanted to extend their influence worldwide. In 63 B.C., the Roman general Pompey laid siege to Jerusalem, took the city, and profaned the Temple. Later, he appointed a High Priest that Rome could control.

As region after region fell to Roman soldiers, Roman slaves built roads connecting the Roman Empire's farthest reaches with its capital. The expansive network of roads enabled armies to move quickly in response to rebellions and lawlessness. Ruling with an iron fist, Roman peace (Pax Romana) was the law of the land.

The roads built throughout Judea were well-known by Jesus and His friends. Mary and Joseph likely used portions of this network on their journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

Upon hearing of Herod's plan to kill their son, the Via Maris (Way of the Sea) was the path of their flight into Egypt. When Herod was dead and no longer a threat, Joseph led his family back to Nazareth using Roman roads.

Most of the Jewish people in Israel during the days of Jesus lived matter-of-factly with the costs and benefits of Roman rule. One of the benefits of the road system was that the Good News of the Gospel made its way to Rome, delivered by those willing to make the journey. There were obstacles and dangers along the way. Who knew what could happen?

Worry did not stop those willing to tell the story of Jesus to those who needed to hear it beyond the borders of Israel. I owe everything to the men and women who traveled the ancient Roman roads to take the Gospel from Jerusalem into Judea, Samaria, and the rest of the world.

Bible Conversations

- Consider the different road trips you have taken. How did you navigate from place to place? What plans did you make before the trip, and what were your stopping points?
- After Pentecost, the story of Jesus and His friends spread from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and the rest of the world. Who brought the Good News to you, and what roads did they take to your life?