

Today we finish our story about how in the 50 years or so before Jesus was born, Rome changed from being ruled by a senate and assemblies and various people appointed to look after Rome's interests, into a city and an empire that was ruled by one person. The process began in 49 BC when JULIUS CAESAR invaded Italy with his army and took over Rome. But it was completed by 30 BC when Caesar's nephew and heir OCTAVIAN became undisputed ruler of Rome, after the death of ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA, and the son that Cleopatra had with Caesar. Octavian was 33 when he became undisputed leader of Rome, and three years later the Roman Senate (which was completely under Octavian's thumb) gave Octavian the name AUGUSTUS (which means 'illustrious one') - and that's the name by which he has always been known ever since. Augustus would continue to rule Rome until his death in 14 AD, when he was 77 years old. So Octavian got to rule Rome for 44 years - and after all the killing that started with killing Julius Caesar, those 44 years were extremely peaceful - a 'golden age' in the history of Rome.



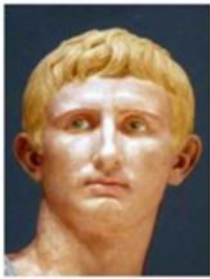
When it came to the arts and culture, Rome had always existed in the shadow of Greece, which produced some amazing playwrights, poets, historians and thinkers round about 400 BC. But under Augustus, Rome started producing its own writers - most importantly, the poets VIRGIL (pronounced 'Ver - jill'), HORACE and OVID (pronounced 'Oh - vid') and historians such as LIVY (pronounced 'Liv - ee'). VIRGIL was most famous for his epic (very, very long) poem THE AENEID (pronounced 'Ee - nee - id') which told the story of how Rome was founded by the Trojan prince AENEAS (pronounced 'In - nee - ass'), who escaped from TROY when it was being burned to the ground by the Greeks with this son and his grandfather, and made his way to Italy to create a new life for them all.

In another set of poems, called THE ECLOGUES (pronounced 'Ek - logs'), Virgil talked about a 'Maid' returning and 'a new generation' in the form of a boy 'descending from high heaven' which will result in a golden age arising 'all over the world'. Many people take this to be a prophecy of the birth of JESUS CHRIST, and indeed Augustus played an important part in the birth of Jesus: the first verse of chapter 2 of the GOSPEL OF LUKE says that 'In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world', where the names and details of everyone in the Roman Empire would be recorded. And this resulted in MARY and JOSEPH travelling to BETHLEHEM, the town from which Joseph's family came from, and that's where Jesus was born. You wonder whether one J.C. (Julius Caesar) had to die in order for another J.C. (Jesus Christ) to be born in the way He was.

Despite the peaceful and golden nature of Augustus' rule, it was not to be repeated under any of the Emperors of Rome who followed him. In fact, being Emperor of Rome became a very dangerous thing to be - you would have a target on your back, with anyone who wanted to rule Rome in your place scheming and plotting to kill you. Here is a picture of the first 18 rulers of Rome since Julius Caesar:



Julius Ceasar
49BC - 44BC



Augustus
27BC - 14AD



Tiberius
14 - 37AD



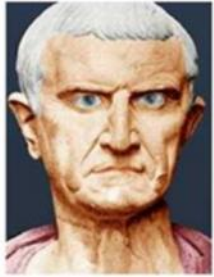
Caligula
37 - 41AD



Claudius
37 - 54AD



Nero
54 - 68AD



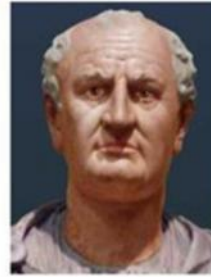
Galba
68AD - 69AD



Otho
69AD



Vitellius
69AD



Vespasian
69 - 79AD



Titus
69AD - 81AD



Domitian
81- 96AD



Nerva
96 - 98AD



Trajan
98 - 117AD



Hadrian
117 - 138AD



Antoninus Pius
138 - 161AD



Marcus Aurelius
161 - 180AD



Commodus
177 - 192AD

These wonderful pictures have been produced by taking a bust of the Roman ruler, and then colourising them using information from the history books written around the time these rulers existed. The lucky/unlucky 16 rulers who followed Augustus were as follows - I give their name, why they became Emperor, how long they lasted as Emperor, and how they died:

TIBERIUS - adopted son of Augustus; lasted 23 years; poisoned by Caligula.

CALIGULA - son of Augustus' granddaughter; lasted 4 years; killed by his bodyguards.

CLAUDIUS - grandchild of Augustus' sister; lasted 17 years; killed by his wife.

NERO - son of Claudius' wife; lasted 14 years; killed himself to avoid being executed.

GALBA - Roman general; lasted 7 months; killed by his bodyguards.

OTHO - Roman general; lasted 3 months; killed himself after losing a battle.

VITELIUS - Roman general; lasted 8 months; killed by supporters of Vespasian.

VESPASIAN - Roman general; lasted 10 years; died of diarrhoea.

TITUS - Vespasian's son; lasted 12 years; died of swelling of the brain.

DOMITIAN - brother of Titus; lasted 15 years; killed by palace officials.

NERVA - worked for Emperors going back to Nero; lasted 2 years; killed by stroke and fever.

TRAJAN - Roman general and heir to Nerva; lasted 19 years; death through illness.

HADRIAN - Roman general and heir to Trajan; lasted 21 years; death through illness.

ANTONINUS PIUS - adopted as son of Hadrian; lasted 23 years; died of fever.

MARCUS AURELIUS - nephew of Hadrian; lasted 19 years; died of natural causes.

COMMODUS - son of Marcus Aurelius; lasted 15 years; killed by his enemies.

So of these 16 Emperors, half of them were violently killed, and the first six Emperors who followed Augustus all had a violent end. But despite all these disruptions, the Roman Empire would be ruled by Emperors until its end - with the Western half of the Empire (based around Rome) lasting for another 280 years after Commodus died, and the Eastern half (based round the city of CONSTANTINOPLE, which is now ISTANBUL, in Turkey) lasting until 1453 AD, with the very last Roman Emperor being CONSTANTINE XI PALAIOLOGOS (pronounced 'Pal - aye - oh - log - os'). He was killed when Constantinople was overrun by Turkish forces fighting for the OTTOMAN EMPIRE.