

*Christianity in the Midst of the Roman Empire: Reading the New Testament alongside Ancient Images*

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This assignment invites you to reflect on images from the Roman world in which Christianity began to understand better the worldview(s) of its inhabitants. Your task is to: (1) choose an image, (2) read the short description of it, (3) examine the image closely, and (4) ask yourself two questions. What message does the image convey, and how does it accomplish this? Then, read the NT text associated with the image and, using your textbook and study Bible, investigate its most ancient meaning. Finally, compare the findings from the examinations of the image and the NT passage, asking yourself: is there a relationship between the two? If so, what? What might the author of NT text say about the image?

*Image 1: Scene from Augustus's Altar of Peace (Ara Pacis) and 1 Thess 5:1-3*



(© <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/originals/8e/75/eb/8e75eb30173ac9fb49b6a9c453f6026e.jpg>)

This is a scene from a famous altar that Augustus, the first Roman emperor, commissioned in 14 BCE and dedicated in 9 BCE to Augustan Peace, i.e., the peace that his reign brought the Roman Empire. This image depicts a personification of what is probably Earth (center) as a veiled woman with a wreath of grain in her hair, holding two babies who reach for her breasts. There are flowers and plants around Earth, fruit on her lap, and animals at her feet. The two naked women to Earth's left and right are personifications of Winds (see Diana E.E. Kleiner, *Roman Sculpture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 96-98).

*Image 2: The Gemma Augustea and Rom 13:1-7 and 1 Pet 2:13-17*



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This is a picture of a gem called the Gemma Augustea that an elite Roman commissioned (ca. 10 BCE). In the top panel, Augustus is half naked (in Roman iconography the more naked you are the more divine you are) and seated on a throne, holding a scepter in his left hand like the king of the Roman pantheon Jupiter. The personification of the Roman Empire, Oikoumene, stands behind Augustus and crowns him. The personification of the city of Rome and its power, Roma, sits to his right. To the extreme left, Tiberius descends from a chariot after his successful defeat of Germanic, barbarian tribes. Roman soldiers subdue barbarians in the bottom panel (see Paul Zanker, *Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*, trans. Alan Shapiro (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1990), 230-31).