

## Literature Year 2



### Lesson 2 Background to Cicero (106-43 BC)

#### **Context**

Read Daniel Chapter 2. This is the familiar story of Nebuchadnezzar's dream. You can find the image he saw depicted on your synchronological chart and you will notice that the iron legs of the image foretold the Roman Empire. Look up Cicero on your synchronological chart and notice that his life is marked just where the long line of Roman Emperors take over from the Republic "stream" on the chart.

Re read Year 1 Term 3 Week 3 Day 4.

#### **The Republic**

In its early days Rome had been ruled by kings with the aid of a council of old men called the Senate. The last of the kings, Tarquinius Superbus, Tarquin the Proud, was driven out and a republic established in 535BC. The Roman **Republic** was ruled by two **Consuls** elected by an Assembly. The Senate also continued to function. Roman citizens consisted of **Patricians** (nobles) and **Plebeians** (commoners). Senate members and consuls had to be Patricians and they also controlled the vote in the Assembly. Patricians and Plebeians were at loggerheads for over 200 years as the Plebeians struggled to gain more power and the Patricians struggled to hold on to it. By now Rome was continually at war and plebeians were needed to serve in the army. In the course of time many Plebeians became rich. This did not admit them to the ranks of the Patricians, however. Gradually the Plebeians gained more rights although the struggle was bitter. First they were given the right to elect **Tribunes** who were supposed to look after their interests. Then in 366 BC the first plebeian was elected a Roman consul.

#### **Cicero**

The Rome of Cicero's day had some similarities to our own times. The morality which had characterised the earlier days of the Republic was breaking down and family life was threatened with disintegration. As in our own society unwanted babies were cruelly murdered. This is the one sin above all others that calls down God's wrath on any nation and this is exactly what happened to the Republic. At the time of Cicero's birth, many Roman citizens had a say on how the city was ruled. The Senate, and assemblies of the people proposed and enacted laws, looked after the administration of the city and took charge of foreign policy. A hierarchy of magistrates, elected by the people, held power over various spheres of city life and the highest power was shared between the two consuls. These positions were held for a single year and so power was not only shared but frequently moved from person to person to avoid any one person gaining too much power over the

city. But the **democracy** which had characterised the republic was faltering.

Slaves, usually captured in wars, did all the menial work and this meant unemployment for Roman workers. This led to a greater divide between the rich and the poor and the discontent caused by unemployment sparked violence. To prevent trouble, rich Romans with an eye to power provided free food and entertainment in the form of circuses to gain popularity. Romans became addicted to spectacles of cruelty such as gladiatorial combats and combats between prisoners and wild animals. This led to a degradation of society. There were increasing tensions within the republic and periods of unrest and eventually full-blown civil war for much of the 1st Century BC resulted. Now the powerful leaders acted not out of statesmanship for the best interests of Rome but for their own advancement, wealth and power. During this chaotic time, rich and influential individuals rose to power and fought for control, most notably **Pompey the Great** and **Julius Caesar**. Real democracy was fading away. The wars between these individuals eventually led to the rise of **Octavian**, later known as Augustus, who began to develop the role of emperor and created a monarchy in the ashes of the fallen republic. People were willing to sacrifice their democracy for peace and stability. Cicero, lived and wrote during the final years of the Republic and witnessed the turbulent civil wars.

Do a little research and make brief notes on all the topics printed in **bold** in the lesson above to be sure you understand them. The web pages below will help.

[https://www.ducksters.com/history/ancient\\_rome\\_republic.php](https://www.ducksters.com/history/ancient_rome_republic.php)

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