

ITALY:



There is no mistaking Italy on a map. Just about everyone can find it. That's because it's shaped like a long boot kicking a deflated football. That "football" is part of Italy, too — the island of Sicily.

In the days of the New Testament, the Roman Empire ruled the Bible lands. Even Israel was part of the empire.

Rome was the most important city in Italy. One of the biggest disasters in history took place there. In the year A.D. 64, a huge fire consumed much of Rome. It burned for weeks.

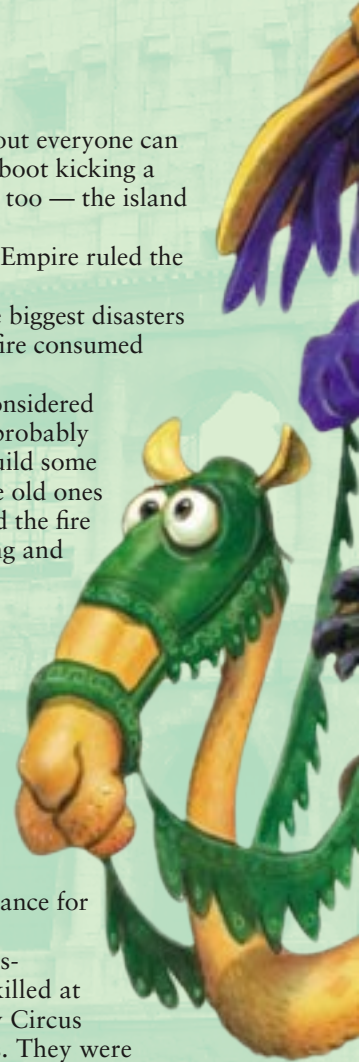
The Roman emperor at the time was Nero. He was considered crazy and cruel, but he was also sly and crafty. He was probably responsible for starting the fire himself. He wanted to build some new buildings, and a fire was the quickest way to get the old ones out of the way. To avoid rumors to this effect, he blamed the fire on Christians and began a severe persecution — torturing and killing large numbers of believers.

The apostle Paul went to Italy as a prisoner. You can read about Paul's journey to Rome in Acts 27 and 28. If you visit Rome you can still visit the Mamertine Prison, where tradition says Paul and the apostle Peter were held.

You can also visit lots of other impressive sites — some that have biblical significance, and others that have historical significance for Christians.

Many Christians were killed at the nearby Circus Maximus. They were "martyred," which means they died for their faith. Often, Christians had the opportunity to live if they would renounce their faith in Christ by saying they wanted nothing more to do with Him. Most loved Jesus so much that they chose death.

This persecution caused Christians to find safe, secret



The Roman Empire and early Christian martyrs



places where they could meet and worship, as well as bury their dead. These places were called catacombs — a series of caves that were hard to find.

Rome probably has the highest number of impressive historical artifacts of any city in the world. Many important historical sites are located across Italy, and many of the world's great works of Christian art were created in Italy.

Italian children grow up surrounded by history. Children in the United States see mostly modern things in their towns. Just about anywhere children in Italy look, they can see historical things that are centuries old — often 2,000 years or more! When children in Rome and across Italy go to school, they pass by the pages of a living history book.

They can see sights such as the Colosseum, the Forum, the Arch of Constantine, the Pantheon, and much more. These sites all carry centuries of history, which Italian children have the opportunity to learn daily. But many of the children also have a “historical” or superstitious religion. They don't know about a God who will be your personal Friend and Savior.

Terry and Marsha Peretti have been Assemblies of God missionaries in Italy for nearly 30 years. They started and pastored a church in northern Italy and also helped start a Teen Challenge Center there.

The Perettis once pastored a church in Rome that has grown to more than 500 members, and they direct Italy's International Correspondence Institute, which has more than 3,000 active students. Terry preaches throughout Italy and can be heard on a regular radio program.

In Bible times, living in Italy was hard for Christians. But that didn't stop Christians from telling others about Jesus. We know there were even Christians living in “Caesar's [the emperor's] household” (Philippians 4:22).

Today, the number of born-again Christians is growing. Pray that more Italian children will come to know Jesus as their true Friend.



— Ken Horn