

First Century, Continued

We will begin this lesson by looking at the end of Matthew. Last time we looked at the beginning of Matthew, so this time it might be good to look at the end. Part of the reason for this is because the beginning and the end of a story are often very important in signaling what the author wants the reader to get out of it all. In this lesson we will look at what Matthew wanted us to get out of the story.

Last time we talked about Abraham, David, and the exile and how these three themes were relevant to Jesus. Abraham, David, and the exile are in the opening of the story of Matthew. We noted that Jesus is the Davidic Messiah, the one who came in the line of David. He is therefore the Christ, the Anointed One, and the Messiah. He is also in the lineage of Abraham, and Abraham was given promises that not only would he be blessed, but also he would be a blessing to all the nations. When you come to the end of the story at the end of Matthew, the Great Commission says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations.” You see this fulfillment at the end of the promise at the beginning that this Messiah Jesus is in the line of Abraham, who will be a blessing to all nations.

We also saw in the very first lesson a major theme that ties into the end of the story. It was in Matthew 2 with the magi and the way that they came to worship. That theme of worship is also tied into the end of the story of Matthew. When the 11 disciples proceed to Galilee and see Jesus, they worship Him. That is significant, although the worship and the magi are not strictly speaking in the beginning of Matthew. It is the first time you meet Jesus in the story. The first response to Jesus in Matthew is worship, and the last response to Jesus in Matthew is worship. All that is review; we have touched on some of the themes of the Great Commission at the end of Matthew.

I want to look at the Great Commission now. I do this with some hesitation, because if you have worshiped in evangelical churches for a period of time, you are very aware of the Great Commission. We become dull of hearing because we hear so often. We just had a missions conference at our church, and we had a wonderful sermon on the Great Commission on Sunday. That is not the whole reason I had already planned on talking about this, but it motivated me yet again to talk about the Great Commission. Every time a sermon comes up on the Great Commission, I honestly feel like it is repetitive. If you have the “here we go again” feeling, I understand. Let me suggest that, generally, because the Great Commission only comes up at missions conference time, we have missed a lot of what is going on in the Great Commission. I have already pointed out the worship theme, which I have yet to hear somebody bring out in any significant way in any sermon on the Great Commission. I think that is one of the most striking themes in the whole of Matthew, especially in Matthew 28. Let us look at a few other things here. Along the way we will talk about missions; we cannot omit that, and we would be in sin if we did. There is other stuff going on here as well.

Turn to Matthew 28:16-20. There are only 11 disciples by the time of this passage because Judas previously killed himself in Matthew for his betrayal. It says, “Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’” I often think of the Great Commission as being in and around Jerusalem because the last part of Jesus’ ministry was in and around Jerusalem. But He is up north in Galilee yet again. He is back in His home territory. This is removed from Jerusalem and the

center of the beginning of Christianity with Pentecost. This is in Galilee where there is more of a mixing of Gentiles and Jewish people. It is also Jesus' country land.

I do not know about you, but the word "doubtful" bothers me quite a lot. Here they are seeing the risen Jesus, and this is not the only time they saw Him. He is about to deliver to them His last and greatest commandment. We are dealing with his 11 disciples. It does not mention anybody else. There could have been other people present, but the natural way to read this is that this is the 11 disciples. These are the people who have been with Jesus from the beginning. They saw His crucifixion, they witnessed His resurrection, and they heard His teaching. You would think all of them would bow down in full faith and submission to Him, and yet the narrative says some were doubtful. I am not wholly sure what to do with that. I have a few ideas, though.

One, this goes against what a lot of people say went on in the Gospels. The secular world says that Jesus' followers, especially because of His miracles, were inclined to believe almost anything. They say people in ancient times were in the dark period before science, computers, and Palm Pilots. This was before people were aware of the nature of cause and effect and the sequence of events. Therefore they had no problem going in and believing anything that Jesus did was a miracle even if He was actually walking on a sand bar rather than walking in the middle of the lake. That is found in a number of commentaries to explain Jesus' walking on water. When I come to this passage I see instead a realism that is here by Matthew as the author. He did not simply say that everybody followed Jesus; he acknowledged that some people were doubtful.

If you look just prior to this in Matthew 28, there is a narrative about the guards who were supposed to guard the tomb. All of a sudden the tomb was empty, so what were they going to do about it? In theory the guards should have been put to death, but the high priest and people around them take counsel and offer money to the soldiers instead. They tell them to say that the disciples stole away the body. Then Matthew says that the story was widely circulated to his day. This shows that Matthew was not only aware of alternative possibilities for the resurrection, but he was also aware of the stories that were going around in his day. He frankly acknowledged them, so we should not be surprised that he frankly acknowledged people's doubt even when they saw the risen Lord. In my mind this actually increases the historical reliability of the author. Aside from that, I have to wonder if there are some possible theological themes going on in Matthew at this stage.

There are a couple of other places in the book of Matthew where doubt is explicitly mentioned, especially with regard to Jesus' disciples. One is found in Matthew 14:31, but read the context as well. Verses 29-33 say, "'Come,' he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, 'Lord, save me!' Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. 'You of little faith,' he said, 'why did you doubt?' And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, 'Truly you are the Son of God.'" Notice the worship theme is in this passage again. This is a very interesting combination of worship and doubt occurring simultaneously with one another. This passage indicts Peter for his doubt, but no other disciple hopped out of the boat and walked around to Jesus. Would you hop out of the boat and walk to Jesus? As we read the narrative we are supposed to ask that question of ourselves. To the extent that there is any little part of us that would say no, Jesus would reply, "You of little faith. Why did you doubt?" I am not saying we need to hop out of every boat. Jesus has to be present, and there have to be clearer circumstances for a miracle. The point is, where are the limits of your faith? Where do you doubt?

The other place where the word "doubt" shows up is in Matthew 21:21, but let me read the context

again. Verses 19-22 say, “Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, ‘May you never bear fruit again!’ Immediately the tree withered. When the disciples saw this, they were amazed. ‘How did the fig tree wither so quickly?’ they asked. Jesus replied, ‘I tell you the truth, if you have faith and do not doubt, not only can you do what was done to the fig tree, but also you can say to this mountain, “Go, throw yourself into the sea,” and it will be done. If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.’” That is the end of the narrative, but what is striking is what follows next in Matthew 21. Verse 23 says, “Jesus entered the temple courts, and, while he was teaching, the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. ‘By what authority are you doing these things?’ they asked. ‘And who gave you this authority?’” In Matthew 28, right after they are doubtful, Jesus comes and speaks to them and says, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.” There are some interesting connections with the Matthew 21 fig tree passage as there are with the Peter-in-the-water passage. Both of them call the disciples to determine what the limits of their faith are and to ask why they have any doubt at all.

I am not certain why in Matthew 28 at the beginning of the Great Commission Matthew reports that they worshiped Him and some were doubtful. I suspect that he is calling all of us to ask ourselves at the end of the whole story of Jesus if we are among those who are doubtful. We have just gone through this wonderful narrative about Jesus from His birth, through His miracles and teachings, to His crucifixion and resurrection. I suspect that is the question we are supposed to ask ourselves at this stage.

To be overt in my methodology, notice what I did here. I did not go outside to compare doubt in the book of John, Acts, or any place else. There is some validity to that, but I am principally interested in how this word and the associations with it work in the book of Matthew. At the end of the book of Matthew he uses that same term that Jesus used, and he is using it thematically to bring it up against the motifs that were earlier in the book. I am asking, what is going on in the book of Matthew? I suspect Matthew is calling us to ask our own faith status there. Where are you in respect to Jesus? Are you doubtful? Where is your faith? Second, what is your response? Are you really worshipping God in all of your life?

Matthew 28:18 goes on, “Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’” These are words that we read over. Usually the preacher uses them as an opportunity to talk about how great Jesus is on the way to getting you convinced that you need to be doing missions. We need to ask if there is more to this word “authority” in the book of Matthew. This too might be a theological motif throughout the book of Matthew.

Let me give some examples of authority in Matthew. I have a list that I will go through quickly. Although it will be best to look at these entirely in context, just giving you the clip that I give you may be sufficient. Matthew 7:29 says, “People were amazed for he was teaching them as one having authority.” Jesus teaches them as one having authority and not as their scribes. Toward the beginning of Matthew after He finishes teaching the Sermon on the Mount, which was the first great long passage of Jesus’ teaching in the book of Matthew, the response was that they were amazed. He was teaching as one having authority. Jesus was claiming authority vis-à-vis His teaching. Matthew 9:6 is at the end of the healing of a man who was a paralytic. Right after Jesus forgave him his sins, Matthew 9:6 says, “‘But in order that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins,’ then he said to the paralytic, ‘Rise, take up your bed, and go home.’” There are two interesting things with the authority in that context. One is that the display of Jesus’ authority comes via the miracle. The authority He is actually claiming is the authority to forgive sins. That belongs only to the prerogative of God. In some sense He is already claiming the authority of God Almighty. From the perspective of the scribes and Pharisees, He is usurping the authority of God Almighty. He is claiming the authority to forgive

sins. The response uses the word as well in verse 8, “When the multitudes saw this they were filled with awe and glorified God who had given such authority to men.” It is interesting that shortly after that in Matthew 10 Jesus chooses to send out His disciples. That is exactly what He does in Matthew 28 in the Great Commission. This verse says, “Having summoned his twelve disciples, he gave them authority over unclean spirits to cast them out and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.” Jesus not only possesses authority but he also possesses the authority to give away authority. His disciples have the authority to perform some of the same miracles that He Himself has performed. This leads to the question we saw earlier in Matthew 21 when we were talking about doubting. When Jesus comes to the temple after performing a number of amazing miracles, “the chief priests and the elders of the people came to him. ‘By what authority are you doing these things?’ they asked. ‘And who gave you this authority?’” There His authority is being challenged yet again. Matthew 21:24 goes on, “Jesus replied, ‘I will also ask you one question. If you answer me, I will tell you by what authority I am doing these things.’” In that respect He challenges them. Jesus is claiming authority. They recognized His claim to authority, but they questioned it. Those are the main places where the same Greek word for authority is used throughout the book of Matthew.

Those are not the only places where authority is claimed. You can do something and claim authority without using the actual word. Probably one of the most interesting passages that does this is in Matthew 26. This is where Jesus is on trial. I prefer to think of it as a preliminary hearing before the Sanhedrin. There are a number of false charges that are being brought against Him. They are looking for some excuse to put Him to death. Verse 62 and following say, “Then the high priest stood up and said to Jesus, ‘Are you not going to answer? What is this testimony that these men are bringing against you?’ But Jesus remained silent. The high priest said to him, ‘I charge you under oath by the living God: Tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God.’ ‘Yes, it is as you say,’ Jesus replied. ‘But I say to all of you: In the future you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.’ Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, ‘He has spoken blasphemy!’” They were giving false witness against Jesus, and He just kept silent. We will talk in a few days about the implications for the trial of Jesus.

There is a question as to what constituted the blasphemy here. Among evangelicals it is typically thought that the claim to being the Messiah is what led to Jesus’ downfall and to the claim of blasphemy. But if you read ancient Jewish sources it is not blasphemy to claim to be the Messiah. In addition, if you read Jewish sources you will find that Jesus was not the only person who claimed to be the Messiah. Those who claimed to be the Messiah were not put to death for blasphemy. So Jesus’ claim to be the Messiah cannot be what brought about this accusation of blasphemy. I suggest that the charge of blasphemy came when Jesus said, “You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven.” They called that blasphemy because He claimed to have the very authority of God Almighty. He claimed that He would be the one sitting at the right hand of God. Notice He said, “The Son of Man.” Everybody knew that that was Jesus’ self-designation for who He was. When He says, “You will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Mighty One,” He is referring to Himself. They were amazed that He would claim to be sitting at the right hand of God, the Father Almighty, dispensing His authority to the rest of the nations. That is the very authority that Jesus is claiming there.

He was put to death for claiming that authority. Honestly, if He was not the Son of God, then it was blasphemy. In short, if He was not who He claimed to be, they were right to put Him to death according to the Old Testament law. But the whole deal with Matthew is that the resurrection proved that Jesus was who He claimed to be. Therefore He has the authority He claimed, so at the end of Matthew when He says that all authority in heaven and on earth is vested in Him, we are called to agree. He is exactly

right.

Through the book of Matthew is an escalation of the realization of who Jesus is. At the beginning, people come to worship Him because He is born King of the Jews. There is some inherent authority implicit. We start to see that worked out when He started teaching with authority. He healed with authority. He forgave sins with authority, thus claiming the prerogative of God Himself. Note the escalation that goes on. He dispenses His authority to His disciples. Finally, at the end right in the moments before He is put to death, He claims to have the very authority of God Himself. Then He is crucified. The resurrection proved that all of those claims to authority were true. At the end, instead of claiming the authority to heal or forgive sins, He says, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." When we see that we should be blown over. But we are so dull of hearing because we think of Him as God incarnate. We do not realize how amazing a claim that was. And it is an amazing truth as well.

We did not get into the Great Commission. We will have to leave that for next time. I guarantee that there is information there in the Greek that you need to be aware of. You are not aware of it because your English translations smooth it over. We will talk about that later. This is who our Jesus is. He is worthy of our faith, therefore we have to confront our doubt. He is worthy of our worship, and He is worthy of all of it because He possesses all authority in heaven and on earth.

Let us pray, and then we will move onto our next topic for discussion.

Jesus, as we look at a passage such as this we have to rightly, first of all, ask Your forgiveness. We recognize that there is a part of us that is indeed doubtful. There is a part of us that really has little faith. We may believe the right things, be able to utter the right things, and even deliver a good and earnest theology. But in our day-to-day life, there are times when doubt is manifested because we refuse to step out in faith. Peter himself refused to look confidently on You and simply walk across that water. Yet, Lord, we recognize in the midst of this that You forgive us, and we thank You for that. We would desire that our whole lives be an acknowledgement of the authority that You Yourself possess. Give us the faith to believe that all authority is indeed vested in You and to worship You in all aspects of our lives using even these next few minutes in this lesson to that end. In Your wonderful name we pray. Amen.

Last time we were discussing the history and backgrounds of early Judaism near the time of Jesus. We did a few things, and let me remind you of some of them. We talked about the geographic context in which Jewish people in the time of Jesus found themselves. We noted that it was a very pleasant land in many ways. This is because it had agricultural property to the west of the Judean Hills, the coastal plain, and near the Jordan River. It was therefore not just good agricultural land, but it also made for significant economic trade.

The Fertile Crescent from Mesopotamia into Egypt went right through Israel. This explains much of Old Testament history because Israel found itself constantly between the warring nations of Egypt and the various rulers of the Mesopotamian areas and lands. This was also true even right before the time of the New Testament when Alexander the Great marched through as the great Hellenistic conqueror. He brought with him Hellenism and its language (Greek), its literary culture, its culture of plays, and its worship of multiple deities. Many of these deities were added to the recognized deities in the local lands throughout the Mediterranean world.

A sense of commerce and a desire to link many territories in trade also came with Alexander. Alexander died at a very early age and did not leave a designated heir. In fact, his generals basically broke up the territory. The two territories that we were most concerned about were Seleucid territory and the Ptolemaic territory.

The Ptolemies ruled Egypt, and the Seleucids ruled Mesopotamia/Ancient Persia. Right in between was Palestine. Until 198 BC, Palestine was in control of the Ptolemies, but after that it went into Seleucid control. The Seleucids had a much more aggressive Hellenization process that they wanted to inflict on Palestine. This happened especially when Palestine did not provide sufficient assistance to Antiochus Epiphanes in his war against the Ptolemies. He insisted on setting up worship to Zeus in the temple in Jerusalem. For that reason, he and that time period is known as “the abomination of desolation.” This is a term that comes up again in the New Testament, and it is a term that came from the book of Daniel.

After Alexander the Great was the rise of the Romans in the West. As the Romans conquered Carthage, Greece, Macedonia, and Asia Minor, they headed further and further east until they became a power that the different rulers in Judea eventually had to reckon with. It is notable that when we get to the time of Herod the Great, Herod’s power was ultimately established by the Romans. Herod’s only potential claim to the Hasmonean throne was that he was married to one of the great granddaughters of the Hasmoneans. He had no direct lineage himself. He had to divorce his first wife in order to marry the Hasmonean second wife in order to even have that claim to the throne. Eventually he divorced her and married three other women. So Herod’s claim to the throne was extremely tenuous. There were other proper claimants to the throne, but because he had Rome on his side, he was able to take Judea. Herod was also of Idumean descent, so he was at best a half-blood. He did not have the right Jewish claim to the throne either.

F. F. Bruce points out that Herod the Great is known for his building programs. He is known for having built the temple again. The temple was built under the time of Ezra, but it was a paltry example of a temple. Its glory was not the same as the glory of the first temple despite the prophetic promises. Herod took it upon himself to build the temple into a great and glorious temple. That did three things for him. First, it made his Jewish subjects pleased because he built the great temple. Even the rabbis, who despised Herod, wrote about the glory of the temple as many as 200 years after Herod. They expressed some appreciation to Herod for that even though they had a lot of other reasons to dislike him.

Second, it provided for quite an economy in Jerusalem itself. Probably a large part of Jerusalem’s economy at the end of the first century BC and well into the first century AD focused entirely on the temple. This was because of the normal temple worship practices, the need to buy and sell animals, the funds that came from the temple tax that all good Jewish people were expected to pay to the temple, and the construction project that Herod engaged in. People love to build buildings in cities, and city councils will go after major building projects because they know it will bring a lot of work to the city. The construction of the temple was not actually done until just shortly before the temple was destroyed. The bulk of it was done by Jesus’ day, enough that the temple was very much engaging in worship practices. But it was not even completely done until just before it was destroyed. This building project went on for decades, which brought a lot of economic means to Jerusalem.

The third thing this did for Herod, apart from his own Jewish people, is it showed how great a Romanized king he was. Let us step back for a second. When the Romans overtook territory they were often pleased to leave the indigenous leadership in tact—as long as the indigenous leadership realized that they were under the thumb of the real power, the Romans. If you go to Corinth, they have a place known as the Julian Basilica where the Roman governor sat. Just down the road from the Julian Basilica

was the Bouleterion where the boule (city counsel) met in Corinth. The indigenous leadership of the city, the city counsel, and others were in place in Corinth, but the real power, the Romans, were just around the corner in the Julian Basilica. They left powers in tact. In kingdoms such as Judea, they left the king in tact and made him into a client king. The term “client” is a technical term meaning they were indebted to their patron, who was the emperor himself. Client kings throughout the Roman Empire had two main characteristics that showed off their glory aside from just the opulence of their wealth. They had a palace, and they had a temple. The more glorious your palace and your temple were, the more glorious you were as a king as seen in the eyes of the rest of the colonists. The fascinating thing about Herod’s temple is that it worked well in two ways. It worked well with the Jewish people because they saw it as a glorious place for God to be and for Him to be worshiped. It worked outside of the Jewish context in the Gentile context because it showed how wonderful a king Herod was. We can see the multiple motives for doing what he did. Herod’s building programs were not limited to Judea. Like a good client king and a good benefactor in the ancient world, he gave money to multiple cities to build temples to deities outside of the one God. He also gave money to games, which were all held in honor of certain deities.

When we look at Herod, we cannot say he was a Jewish king. In the eyes of at least some of the people, they would have looked at him and had some complaints. He was Idumean, he was never of the Hasmonean line, and though he built the Jews a temple, he also built a lot of pagan temples elsewhere. You can imagine some of the concerns about Herod. He managed to kill off many of his children. He had five wives, so he had several children to choose from. He killed his oldest children, and he had to draw up a will at the last minute before his death that left his kingdom divided into three different parts. Two of the leaders were good, but one of the leaders was not worth much. Unfortunately that was the leader he put over Judea. Therefore after his death in 4 BC, the person he had declared to be his successor ruled for about 10 years until the Romans had had enough. They deposed him and put in their own leaders and made it into a Roman province under Roman prefects. That is what happened by 6 AD.

In light of this history, some have asked when Jesus was born. Matthew 2 notes that Jesus was born while Herod was still around. So Jesus was probably born in 6 BC. We tend to think of year 0, which does not exist, as the year Jesus was born. We think of AD to mean “the year of our Lord” and BC to mean “before Christ,” but it was probably closer to 6 BC when Jesus was born. When the Gregorian calendar was established, they missed the date. That is probably what happened. If Herod was willing to put to death his own children, he probably had no problem with putting to death a few youth in Bethlehem in the hopes of quenching any claim of King of Judah.

Judea was a Roman province from 6 AD to 41 AD. There were a number of Roman prefects that came through. The most important of these was Pontius Pilate, who was governor of Judea for 10 years (26 to 36 AD). That was a very long reign, in part because the emperor Tiberius liked to give long reigns to his governors.

F. F. Bruce talks about some of the stories of Pontius Pilate. Pilate did a lot of things that really upset the Jewish people. He almost had a revolt two or three times during his reign. One of the things that upset the Jews is that he brought in symbols to Jerusalem on two different occasions. The symbols signaled to the Jewish people that he was bringing pagan deities into Jerusalem itself. This caused great uproar. Between Josephus and Philo, both of whom were Jewish authors in the first century, there is hardly a kind word to be said about Pilate.

As a brief aside, when we end up talking about the trial of Jesus, one of the things that is asserted against the Gospels with regard to the trial of Jesus is that the portrayal of Pilate is too rosy a picture. People say

he is shown as not really wanting to put Jesus to death. It is almost like Pilate wanted to have mercy on Jesus. People say that is not consistent with his Jewish context. In reality, Pilate was probably acting in very strong self-interest there. If he was a Roman governor and he put to death somebody who was innocent, he could be held accountable for that to the people above him and to the emperor himself. There was good reason for him not to want to put to death an innocent person. Second, if you read the Gospels carefully, Pilate is afraid of a revolt. He had already had a few of these instances, and ultimately an instance of a revolt in 36 AD made him lose his position as governor of Judea. He probably had a whole mixture of motives going on that were conflicting. He did not want to put to death an innocent person, but he also did not want to have a little rebellion on his hands.

After Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea there was a sequence of other prefects. Eventually we end up with Agrippa I, king of Judea. Agrippa I was actually a king in one of the other territories that were initially established when Herod divided his kingdom into three different parts. Agrippa showed himself to be enough of a leader that the Romans eventually gave him his desire to be king over Judea. This would have been very exciting to the Herodian party. They were the people who looked back to the “grand old days” of Herod. There were people who liked and benefited from the reign of Herod the Great. He was at least a king, and it was better than having the Romans directly in charge. Herod also exhibited a power, and undoubtedly there was a wealthy elite that benefited very much from having him in charge. The supporters of Herod were known as the Herodians, and they were very excited to have another of the Herodian lineage on the throne. Unfortunately Agrippa I died at a very early age in 44 AD.

Like His birth date, the date of Jesus’ crucifixion is also debated. It has to do with Passover and what day that was on and when the apostolic church arose. Our sources do not give exact dates, so we have to acknowledge that. The Gospels do not give an exact date. It was probably between 30 AD and 33 AD, right in the middle of the reign of Pontius Pilate. Dating things in the New Testament is quite tricky. Usually you need to rely on a relative chronology. You know from other sources when Herod the Great ruled Judea, so you can figure out from that when Jesus was born. You know when some of the other rulers mentioned in Acts in and around Judea are in place, so you can do some calculations based on that. The most significant date for dating the whole of the New Testament, aside from the fall of the temple in 70 AD, is that we know the exact year that Galeo was in charge in Corinth. We know that in Acts Paul went before Galeo in Corinth. That provides one of our very few firm dates in the whole of the New Testament. Usually we are dealing with a several-year reign of rulers. The normal way to keep dates in the ancient world was according to rulers: “in the tenth year of Tiberius” or “in the second year that Verus was governor of Syria.” You would do a relative chronology such as that. But even the Gospels do not tend to do that for us.

Continuing through the Roman period, after Agrippa I died, Roman procurators ruled Judea. Further Roman leadership ruled all of Judea. Josephus says that the sequence of Roman procurators got worse and worse and worse. He blames a lot of the Jewish revolt on the poor leadership that was chosen for Judea. He is very careful not to blame it on the emperor himself. Josephus, as a writer of Jewish history, is actually funded by two emperors, Vespasian and Titus. But he is careful to also indicate that the Jewish people had some reason, even on Roman terms, for revolting.

The revolt against Rome took place in 66 to 73 AD, and the crucial date is the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD. There had long been resentment against the Romans at that stage. The party known as the zealots, which probably was less of a party and more of a general movement in society, looked to reestablish true Jewish rule in Judea. That way the high priest could be autonomous. The vestments of the high priest were actually held for much of that period by the Roman leaders themselves. When it was time to

go into the Day of Atonement, the high priest had to get his robes from the Romans. You can imagine how belittling that was and how dangerous it was from a religious perspective. There was a whole zealot movement to conquer the Romans. In 66 AD there were some initial engagements with one another. The Jewish people won, which was unfortunate because it gave them hope that they could beat the Roman Empire. That was a silly thought, though. The Roman Empire extended over such a large area and involved so many kingdoms that as soon as one rebellion came up the danger would be that it would catch like wildfire to other areas. The only way that they could hope to suppress a rebellion was, as soon as a rebellion came up, to absolutely, firmly, and categorically squash it. They made people pay so dearly that no one would want to do that again. That is what they did to the Jews.

The importance of this rebellion and the way that the Romans saw it can hardly be underestimated. If you look at a timeline of Roman emperors, you will notice a year of four emperors. They kept churning through emperors because people kept being poisoned and killed. No one could hold onto the imperial mantle. Ultimately the army, as you would expect in a coupe, came and marched toward Rome and declared who the emperor should be. Eventually the senate agreed. The army chose a general named Vespasian, who had conducted the Jewish war. When Vespasian became emperor and there was still a little bit of mopping up to do, including taking Jerusalem, Vespasian put in place his son, Titus, who became emperor after him. That is how important the Jewish revolt was. It led to two people becoming emperor. This was no small matter. When the Romans took Jerusalem, they besieged it and crucified people outside. People were dying because of lack of nutrition. There is an account in Josephus that a woman ate her own child in Jerusalem. The Romans captured Jerusalem and came in, but the temple itself was fortified. It took a while to capture the temple.

By this point the Jewish revolt turned into Jewish people actually revolting against one another; they could not get along with one another. They were fighting themselves in the temple precincts while the Romans were waiting outside to capture the temple. Josephus records the narrative of the destruction of the temple by saying the night ahead of time Titus sat outside with his main generals, and they decided what they were going to do with the temple. Should they burn it or keep it? There was a whole group of people who said to burn it. The core of the revolt of Jewish people seemed to be their religion. Therefore if they broke the back of the Jews' religion by burning the temple, the revolt should end. But others spoke of the glory of the temple. It was one of the most amazing buildings ever built. According to Josephus, Titus decided to let the temple stand. Of course, Titus sponsored Josephus' writing of the book that recounts all of this. Josephus is certainly making his sponsor look very good. It is hard to know what the exact truth is there. In any case, Josephus records that in the process of taking the temple, it is "accidentally" set on fire, and the whole temple is burned to the ground.

You may have seen pictures of the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. People go up to the wall. That is where the temple mount used to be. On top of the temple mount it was flat; there is actually a mosque up there now. The Wailing Wall is not the wall of the temple; it is the foundation wall. It is the wall that was built so they could put the land on top to put the temple on top. In other words, there was no temple left. It was completely gone. That ended the worship forever in Jerusalem. Some of you may have heard of Masada, which was a great desert fortress in the south. It fell in 73 or 74 AD, and in that time period is when the revolt really ended. Those were the last stalwarts, but with the fall of Jerusalem it was basically over.

After this you would think that that would be the end of Judaism as you knew it. However, Jerusalem and the temple had fallen before, for instance in the Babylonian exile. That lasted roughly 50 years, and it was 70 years to the reconstruction of the temple. Therefore there was precedent for hoping that the temple could be reconstructed. The idea that the temple could be reconstructed and Jewish people could

regain their autonomy, much as they did after the Babylonian exile, motivated the revolts that followed. Our sources indicate that these revolts took place outside Judea in the Diaspora, especially in Egypt.

There was a small revolt under the emperor Trajan. The one that we are most interested in is the so-called Barkokba Revolt under Hadrian. The reason it is called the Barkokba Revolt is that there was a man who came up who considered himself to be messianic. Barkokba means “son of the star,” and it is a messianic title. He took on a messianic title and claimed that their revolt would do away with the Romans, and they could reestablish worship in the temple precincts. Hadrian, through his generals, put down that revolt in 135 AD. The result was that the edict went forth from the emperor himself that no Jewish person was to ever step foot in Jerusalem. As soon as a Jewish person was found in Jerusalem, that person was to be immediately put to death. That is what really ended the hope of the refounding of the Jerusalem temple. After that, Hadrian built a temple to Zeus on the precincts of the former Jerusalem temple. In 200 AD, the Mishnah, which is the first major written codification of rabbinic law, was written. There was a transition from temple worship as the center of Judaism to the synagogue and the rabbis ruling in the synagogues as the main center of Judaism. There was overlap between those two, but the writing of the law was evidence of that transition.

When you think about the Jewish population in the Herodian period, you typically think about Palestine. But you have to realize that the Diaspora (the dispersion) had moved Jewish people throughout the Roman world. In the book of Acts, Paul calls himself the apostle to the Gentiles. But every time he stops in a new city he goes to the synagogue first. He talks to the Jewish people and the Gentile proselytes and God-fearers at the place. That is part of the reality and the nature of Judaism in the ancient world.

Let me go over some key terms, first regarding Roman social class. Today in modern America we tend to think of social class as an economic reality. The class of people you belong to has to do with the size of your car or your house. You might live in Trump Tower, or you might live in a hovel in the inner city. Those are the distinctions we make in America. There is probably a lot more complexity to American class structure than that, but that is where we typically start. The Roman world was different. There were at least three different identifying marks of class in the Roman world. They overlap and interplay with one another.

The first was that you were a slave, a freed person, or someone who was free. Those of us in America typically want to read nineteenth-century American slavery into passages about slavery in the New Testament. We have to draw some parallels but also some distinctions there. A slave in the ancient world, like slavery in much of history, meant that you were possessed by someone else. You were actually owned by that person. Slaves in the ancient world could have a very atrocious life, or they could have a very good life. It depended on where and in what capacity they were slaves. If you were a slave in the mines, it meant that you just had a few years to live. Think about the mine accidents that we have nowadays. Imagine doing that without contemporary modern technology. People lasted very few years in the mines, and they were often slaves who worked there. If you were an agricultural slave, it was a hard life but not an awful life. It depended on who your overseer was and how gently he treated you. Some could treat you very gently. Some of the books about slavery in the ancient world encouraged gentle treatment of slaves because they would become more productive. It was an economic decision. It was not the best of motives, but it was saying that people should be treated gently.

The best place to work if you were a slave usually was in the house. Household slaves were considered part of your *oikas*, which is the Greek word for “family.” Your family consisted of husband and wife, children, extended family members, and your slaves. They could receive a variety of treatment there. Household slaves could be given very important duties. They might be one of the most educated

members of the household, in charge of educating a child or leading them to their education as a pedagogue. A slave could be an accountant for your business. A slave could actually run your business for you. They could take on some very high and important responsibilities. There were slaves in Caesar's household who were wealthier than most of the people in all of Rome, especially when they became ultimately free.

The other class in society was freed persons or freed slaves. When you were freed you were given continued responsibilities to your former slave owner, but they also had responsibilities to you. They were to see your way through society and establish you in a viable business. We will talk about those later. One quote about slaves shows that they can be considered instruments for cultivating the soil alongside oxen and carts. However, another quote says, "Overseers should not be allowed to force obedience with whips rather than words if words can achieve the same result." If you look at a picture of the Celsus Library in Ephesus, you will see a very big archway leading into the agora. The archway is dedicated to Emperor Augustus and Marcus Agrippa. The interesting thing about the archway is that the people who dedicated it are identified as Mezas and Mithridates. Usually you would say, "Mithridates, son of Lucius," or something like that, but this just says, "Mithridates." That probably means that he was a former slave. He was a freed person dedicating this arch to his former slaveholders who have now freed him and are his patrons. His patrons were Marcus Agrippa and the emperor himself. The kind of money it took to build that arch is phenomenal; that is the status that a freed person could come to in ancient society.

Another category in ancient Roman thought was whether or not you were a citizen. If you were a citizen of Rome, you had legal privileges and responsibilities that others did not have. For instance, if you did a particularly heinous crime and you were not a citizen, you would be put to death, usually by very horrible means, possibly crucifixion. If you were a citizen it was very unlikely that you would be put to death. If you were put to death it would be done by the sword, which was a quick and less painful means of death. Another example is that if you were a Roman citizen who did something really heinous, most likely you would be sent to exile. There was a huge disparity between those who were citizens and those who were not. Citizenship was increasingly expanding beyond the mere inhabitants of Rome to the inhabitants of Italy and ultimately to much of the rest of the Roman Empire. It was in transition in the time period of the New Testament, but there were still people who were citizens, such as Paul, and people who were not. The distinction was very important in this period. I am not as worried about this because this does not affect the New Testament as much. Some of the upper members of society included the patricians and the plebeians. This had to do with your family lineage in Rome itself. Among the patricians, who were the upper classes, were the senators and the equities. These had to do with how much money your family had.

Another whole issue in terms of Roman social class was the relationship between patron and client. A patron was someone who agreed to oversee the welfare of a group of people known as clients. This was described as a friendship relationship. The patron would give money to the client and they would make sure that they got good deals. For instance, the patron would help his client get the best spot to open up a shop. In return, the client would honor the patron by giving him inscriptions, showing up daily on his doorstep and greeting him and by helping him run for political office if he wanted to. Let me read a quote about patron-client relationships: "Men of the lower class have only one way of either earning or repaying favors from our class. That is by working on our political campaigns and following us around." One class is patrons; the other class is clients. You follow them around and work on their political campaigns.

Political campaigns were very different in the ancient world than we typically conceive of them. If I were running for office, I would promise that I would build a building for the city if you elected me. For example, I might build a new set of stairs to the theatre. Those musty old stairs are poorly constructed, so I will build you new stairs if you elect me to leadership of the city. If you agree to that, I am obligated to do that out of my own money. That is how political office was achieved. Honor was accrued with it, and you gained power. That could help your own business because you could throw the contract for the construction project to the people who worked for you. That is why you ran for office. The clients would serve in their political campaigns.

“This constant attendance which we have come to expect from men who are honorable and generous is an appropriate activity for friends who are of a lower class and who are not as busy. Allow these men who hope to gain everything from us to have something which they can give us in return, as they themselves often say they cannot plead cases for or pledge securities or invite us to their homes.” That implies that that is what the patron does for them. If you went to court, your patron would plead your case. Therefore you were more likely to succeed. If you wanted to open a business, your patron would put down his money as security that your loan would be repaid. If you wanted to show up at someone’s home, your patron would invite you to his home if you would be his client. That was the nature of patron-client relationships. In other words, if you wanted to advance your course in society, it was best if you became a patron. There were two ways to do that. I could walk up to John, ask him if he would be my patron, and he might agree to do that. Second, I could say, “John, I want to be your slave.” After seven years of slavery I would become John’s freed person, and John would become my patron. Often people sold themselves into slavery as a means of social advancement.