

The Attackers: Pay Tiberius What Is Tiberius's: the Lord Backs Divine Institution #4; Question of the Scribes & Pharisees Based on the Oral Law: the Mishnah's Commentary on 2d Commandment; Idolatry Begins in the Soul; Moral Degeneracy: the Cycle of Civilization & the Cycles of Discipline; Jesus Does Not View the Tiberian Denarius Idolatrous; Pay God What Is God's, Matt 22:21

18. Believers who have advanced to the sophisticated spiritual life can enjoy safety and security in the most dangerous places on earth.
19. The several men associated with this church that have been sent into harm's way have all returned home in the same physical health they enjoyed the day were deployed. When danger comes to the homeland the same principle will hold true for advanced believers associated with this church.
20. The believers of Judea during our Lord's ministry were living in a dangerous place. Although these Jews were not required to participate in emperor worship, they were legally bound to pay their poll-taxes with Tiberian denarii.
21. The attackers wanted to know from the Lord "Is it lawful to pay the poll-tax to Tiberius or not?"

Matthew 22:20 - And Jesus said to the attackers, "Whose portrait and inscription is this?" (EXT)

Matthew 22:21 - They said to Him, "Caesar's." Then He said to them, "Then render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's." (NASB)

1. The Caesar of this verse is obviously Tiberius and the Lord's initial response addresses the attackers' obligation to divine institution #4 with the aorist active imperative of the verb **ἀποδίδωμι (apodídōmi)**: to give back what is due.
2. The imperative mood is a mandate and therefore establishes the principle that whatever the host nation requires in taxes, the believer is obligated to pay.

3. The major problem for the attackers was fear that Jesus would ultimately use the legitimacy of his Davidic pedigree to claim Herod's throne in Judea.
4. What the Lord has done here is cast legitimacy on Roman rulership thus confirming the right of Tiberius to impose the poll-tax on the people of the Empire.
5. The scribes and Pharisees had taken legalism to a ridiculous level in trying to achieve the perfection the Mosaic Law demanded.
6. Overemphasis on fine-tuning of the Mosaic Law to achieve perfect application served only to deemphasize the people's understanding of the Law's objective.
7. The Torah was designed first of all to reveal the necessity of the Savior, taught by typology inherent in the Levitical sacrifices, the feast days, and furniture of the tabernacle and temple.
8. Secondly, its requirements were designed to insure that the Israelites would be forced to come to the conclusion that they simply could not consistently keep its commandments over the course of a lifetime.
9. This should have resulted in finding within the rituals the revelation of the Savior which Moses and the priesthood were ordained to teach.
10. The scribes and Pharisees had not arrived at this conclusion. To insure the achievement of perfect application they shifted emphasis away from the Torah over to the oral law.
11. The extent to which this was taken has resulted in a large collection of writings that attempt to explain the Torah and even supersede it.
12. The Jews refer to what we call the Old Testament as the *Tanach*. The first five books are called the *Torah*. The oral law that emerged over the centuries leading up to the Incarnation was reduced to writing during the second through fifth centuries AD and is called the *Talmud*.

13. The Talmud was still oral law during the Incarnation and was believed by the Jews to have been revealed by God to Moses at Sinai and was therefore inspired Scripture.
14. The revival of the scribes occurred after the Babylonian captivity and was inspired by “Ezra the scribe (סֹפֵר [sopher]: instructor or teacher)” who read the Law to the people in Nehemiah 8 after which 13 Levites, mentioned by name in verse 7, “read from the book, from the law of God, translating to give the sense so that they understood the reading.”
15. Thus began the new order of the scribes which developed the oral law that was dominant in the first century AD. The codification of the **Talmud** was constructed around the six orders of the **Mishnah**:
 - (1) **Zeraim**, dealing with prayer, blessings, tithes, and agricultural laws in 11 tractates,
 - (2) **Moed**, pertaining to the laws of the Sabbath and the Festivals in 12 tractates,
 - (3) **Nahim**, concerning marriage and divorce, forms of oaths, and laws of the Nazirite in 7 tractates,
 - (4) **Nezikin**, dealing with civil and criminal law, function of courts and oaths in 10 tractates,
 - (5) **Kodashim**, regarding sacrificial rites, the temple, and dietary laws in 11 tractates, and
 - (6) **Tohorot**, pertaining to the laws of purity and impurity including the dead, food, and the body in 12 tractates.
16. The Mishnah’s Order 4: *Nezikin*, tractate 8: *Avodah Zarah*, chapter 3, deals with laws concerning various images, idols, idolaters, and phallic symbols. It addresses the issue of cohabitation with Gentiles who were looked upon as idolaters e.g., the Romans. It gives guidance on how the Jews were to separate themselves from the act of idolatry when living in an environment that included idols and the worship of false gods.
17. The Second Commandment in the Torah forbids overt idolatry:

Exodus 20:4 - “You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth.”

18. How does the Jew orient to this commandment when living among the “idolaters?” Nezikin addresses this in tractate 8, chapter 3. But, during the Incarnation, its only resource was in the minds of the scribes and Pharisees as part of the oral law.
19. In the question posed by the attackers, the Second Commandment was implied but, in the context of the poll-tax paid with a denarius, the emphasis was on this chapter in the Mishnah dealing with idols.
20. The problem with idols does not begin with an overt act but the thought process behind it.
21. Idolatry first occurs in the soul and therefore precedes the overt act of idolatry. Once mental idolatry produces overt expressions, the process of moral degeneracy spreads while its demonic impact is reflected by historical downtrends.
22. This moral degeneracy is rampant in our nation reflected by wide-spread use of drugs, unabashed sexual immoralities, and arrogant rejection of Christianity.
23. The object of the present manifestation of idolatry is self-absorption—I want what I want and I want it now; if anyone disagrees, then he is judging me since I have a right to do what I want to do with impunity; if cultural standards prevent me from carrying out my desires, I will demonstrate for a law that will let me; if I can’t afford what I want, I will solicit largess from the government so I can get it free.
24. “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes,” Judges 21:25 (NASB).
25. So what is the divine management of this idolatrous attitude and subsequent application? First of all it is cyclic within any client nation:

Man begins his existence in *bondage*,
and rises from bondage through *spiritual faith*,
from spiritual faith to *courage*,
from courage to *liberty*,
from liberty to *abundance*,
from abundance to *selfishness*,
from selfishness to *complacency*,
from complacency to *apathy*,
from apathy to *dependency*,
from dependency back into *bondage*.¹

26. The way it all ends is described in Judges 2:11–17. As we observe this process endured by the Israelites, keep in mind the current Zeitgeist of our country.

Judges 2:11 - Then the sons of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals [**Baal was the leading Canaanite god of weather and agriculture and there were lesser Baals below him in the pantheon**],

Judges 2:12 - and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the Lord to anger.

v. 13 - So they forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Ashtaroth.²

v. 14 - The anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies among them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies.

v. 15 - Wherever they went, the hand of the Lord was against them, as the Lord had spoken and as the Lord had sworn to them, so they were severely distressed.

¹ R. B. Thieme, Jr., *In Whom Do You Trust? The True Hope of a Nation* (Houston: R. B. Thieme, Jr., Bible Ministries, 1993), 12.

² Ashtaroth: The plural form of Ashtoreth, the companion of Baal whose cult was attractive to the Israelites throughout their history. Involvement consistently led to the five cycles of discipline. Her idol was a nude statue which was present during the performance of sexual rituals.

The cycles of discipline are intimated in these verses:
(1) decline of agricultural prosperity, (2) economic recession, (3) breakdown of law and order, (4) foreign occupation, and (5) slavery to a predator nation.

27. Therefore, once idolatry is manifest in the souls of the people it plays out in the cycles of discipline. In Matthew 22, the attackers are suggesting Tiberius's portrait on the denarius qualified as idolatry.
28. Their emphasis was not Roman taxation, but its quasi idolatrous money and the oral law's application of it to the Second Commandment rather than the prophecies that identify Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah.
29. Obviously, it is not a problem to have the coin. The attackers carried it around on their persons and the Lord did not have a problem with Tiberius having his face on the front of it. So He issues them an order: "Pay back to Tiberius the things which are Tiberius's!"
30. The second part of the command is the same except for the object: "... and pay back to God the things which are God's!" The two together complete the narrative:

Matthew 22:21 - They said to Him, "Tiberius's." Then He said to them, "Pay back to Tiberius the things which are Tiberius's; and pay back to God the things which are God's!" (EXT)