

The New Testament and History

Volume 1

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Introduction

The New Testament is often viewed as a book of theology for the Christian faith. While this is certainly true, it is often overlooked as a book of history. Within this text are found a treasure trove of references to ancient customs, people, places, and events.

This work is the beginning phase of a project to help people better appreciate the historical value of the New Testament. In this first volume we take certain passages from it and connect them to primary sources outside of the Bible and, at times, archaeological finds. Making these connections will deepen our understanding and appreciation of the New Testament text.

Chapter 1

Who were the Magi?

Matthew 2:1-3

Among the mysteries surrounding the birth of Jesus is the identity of the Magi. We read about them in Matthew chapter 2 (excerpt below).

“1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men [Greek: Magoi] from the east to Jerusalem, 2 Saying, ‘Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.’ 3 When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him” (Matthew 2:1-3, WEB).

There are some common myths about the Magi that are necessary to address. Many people think that there were three Magi. The text does not state how many people traveled to see Jesus, but they bought three gifts (Matthew 2:11). When they came to worship Him, He was in a house, not a manger (Matthew 2:11). This means the Magi did not arrive at the time of Christ’s birth.

Despite these common misconceptions, important questions regarding their appearance remain. Who were they? Why were they looking for a king? Why was Herod **and** the city of Jerusalem troubled by their appearance? To understand these finer details, one must better understand the history of how Herod became king.

In about 40 BC, Herod and another man named Phasaelus were made rulers of Judaea by the Roman leader Marcus Antony. At that time, Antony ruled the eastern provinces as part of the third triumvirate. Throughout this chapter, we will utilize Josephus to describe the events which unfolded from that point forward.

“Thereupon Antony, because of the old friendship he had with Herod’s father when he was with Grabinus, made both Herod and Phasaelus tetrarchs, and committed the public affairs of the

Jews to them, and wrote letters to that purpose. He also put fifteen of their adversaries in bonds, and was going to kill them, but Herod obtained their pardon” (14.13.1).

Herod’s tenure in this new role was immediately challenged by the Parthians. At that time, they were the rival empire to Rome. A Jewish man named Antigonus promised the Parthians a large amount of money if they would install him as king of Judea and kill Herod. After this agreement, the Parthians commenced an invasion of the eastern Mediterranean provinces.

“Now, in the second year, Pacorus, the king of Parthia’s son, and Barzapharnes, a satrap of the Parthians, occupied Syria...Now Antigonus had promised to give the Parthians a thousand talents and five hundred women, if they would take the government away from Hyrcanus, and bestow it upon him, and also kill Herod. And although he did not give what he promised, yet did the Parthians make an expedition into Judea on that account, and carried Antigonus with them...” (ibid, 14.13.3)

The Parthians prevailed over Herod’s forces. Their troops ransacked Jerusalem and the surrounding countryside. Lastly, they installed Antigonus as king of the Jews.

Josephus continues: “But when it was day, the Parthians plundered all Jerusalem, and the palace, and abstained from nothing but Hyrcanus’ money, which was three hundred talents... However, what was in the city did not suffice the Parthians, but they went out into the country, and plundered it, and razed to the ground the powerful city of Marissa...Thus was Antigonus restored to Judaea by the king of the Parthians...” (ibid, 14.13.9-10).

Herod escaped the city and fled to Rome. While there, he reported the misfortune which befell him. He prevailed upon Antony and the Senate to support him in re-taking the city from the Parthian-backed Antigonus. This proposed venture piqued the interest of the Romans as they were eager to fight the Parthians.

The Parthians and Romans had a rocky history. Among the worst military disasters in Roman history was the battle of Carrhae (southern Turkey) in 53 BC. The Parthians defeated over 40,000

Roman troops; most of them were either killed or taken captive.

This loss was still fresh in the minds of Roman leaders. Since the Parthians were rivals of the Romans, Herod's proposition seemed like an opportunity for revenge. The Senate issued a decree supporting Herod's plan (ibid, 14.14.1-6).

In the invasion which followed, the Parthians were defeated. Pacorus, son of the Parthian king Orodes II, was slain (ibid, 14.15.1-14). Eleven legions of Roman troops and pro-Herod Jewish soldiers besieged the city of Jerusalem to finally unseat Antigonus. The situation in the city was grim, and the people hoped that God would save them from impending disaster (ibid, 14.16.1-2). The siege eventually broke through the walls of the city. Herod and his Roman forces took it; a bloody spectacle followed.

"...he [Herod] made an assault upon the city, and took it by storm; and now all parts were full of those that were slain, by the rage of the Romans at the long duration of the siege, and by the zeal of the Jews that were on Herod's side, who were not willing to leave one of their adversaries alive; so they were murdered continually in the narrow streets and in the houses by crowds, and as they were flying to the temple for shelter, and there was no pity taken of either infants or the aged, nor did they spare so much as the weaker sex; nay, although the king sent about, and besought them to spare the people, yet nobody restrained their hand from slaughter, but, as if they were a company of madmen, they fell upon persons of all ages, without distinction..." (ibid, 14.16.3).

The process of Herod losing his initial position over Judea to being re-appointed as its sole king took place over about three years. The events are usually dated 40-37 BC. Herod bribed Antony to have Antigonus put to death (ibid, 14.16.4). This made him the first conquered king put to death by the Romans and ended the Hasmonean dynasty. These events are briefly discussed by another ancient historian, Cassius Dio (*Roman History*, 49.22.1-6).

This important information from Jewish and Roman history provides an important backdrop to the appearance of the Magi in Matthew chapter 2. According to the Roman historian and geographer Strabo, the Parthians had a special class of individuals who chose their kings. They were called wise men and Magi.

“...We have enlarged on the subject of the Parthian customs in the sixth book of historical commentaries, and in the second of those, which are a sequel to Polybius we shall omit what we said, in order to avoid repetition; adding this only, that Psedidonius affirms that the council of the Parthians is composed of **two classes**, one of relatives, (of the royal family) **and another of wise men and magi, by both of which kings are chosen**” (*Strabo*, 11.9.3).

Some Parthian history also contributed to the Magi's appearance. As mentioned earlier, Pacorus was the son of the Parthian king Orodes II. After his death, Orodes placed one of his other sons, Phraates IV, on the throne. To remove any competition to the throne, Phraates had his father and brothers murdered.

His reign was a turbulent one to say the least. Towards the end of his reign, there was civil war. There was also strife concerning Phraates' marriage to an Italian slave girl named Musa. He was poisoned by her around 2 BC, which was near the time of Herod's death.

Below, we have a coin from the reign of Phraates IV. In it, he is looking at a star and crescent in the east. Coins issued with the star were first issued in the reign of his father Orodes II. Phraates



Phraates IV Coin

was the first Parthian king to issue a coin with the star and crescent together.

Due to trouble at home, the Magi were fielding candidates to take over the throne. This was one of their duties. The star they saw in the East attracted them to pursue the king of the Jews. In ancient history, we learn that the Jewish people were deeply involved in Parthia (a subject to be explained in a future work). In Acts 2:6-8, we learn that Jews from Parthia gathered to worship at the Feast of Pentecost.

Herod's quest for rulership over Judea involved two bloody sieges of Jerusalem in which many people died. As part of this process, he overthrew the Parthian-backed king Antigonus. The son of the Parthian king was also killed in the invasion. Roman forces contributed to these events.

The appearance of the Parthian Magi evoked feelings of worry and concern because of Herod's troubled history with their nation. The memory of these events, which happened a few decades earlier, were still fresh for some inhabitants of Jerusalem and certainly Herod himself. Stories of these sieges were probably passed down to the generations which followed.

These historical details give us a more exact identification for the Magi. In future volumes, we hope to explore more details from Matthew chapter 2.

Chapter 2

Love your Neighbor and Your Enemy

Matthew 5:43-48

“43 You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I tell you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who mistreat you and persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Don’t even the tax collectors do the same? 47 If you only greet your friends, what more do you do than others? Don’t even the tax collectors do the same? 48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect” (Matthew 5:43-48, WEB).

In Matthew chapter 5, Jesus quoted the Old Testament in several places and re-emphasized the deeper spiritual meaning intended by God. In verse 43, He quoted a source which proposed that we should ‘love our neighbors and hate our enemies.’

When one surveys the Torah, there is not a quote which proposes to “love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” The In fact, there are verses that contract this notion.

“If you meet your enemy’s ox or his donkey going astray, you shall surely bring it back to him again. If you see the donkey of him who hates you fallen down under his burden, don’t leave him. You shall surely help him with it” (Exodus 23:4-5, WEB).

“You shall not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. You shall not abhor an Egyptian, because you lived as a foreigner in his land” (Deut. 23:7, WEB).

Unlike some of the previous statements of Jesus in Matthew 5, the second half of the statement “hate your enemies,” is not found in the Torah.

Who did Jesus quote in Matthew 5:43?

The intertestamental period is the time between the events of the Old Testament and the events of the New Testament. One of the writings produced this epoch was called the Community Rule. It was written by a strict group of Jewish people called Essenes. In it, we find the admonition to love some people and hate others (excerpts below).

“He shall admit into the Covenant of Grace all those who have freely devoted themselves to the observance of God’s precepts, that they may be joined to the counsel of God and may live perfectly before Him in accordance with all that has been revealed concerning their appointed times, and that they may love all the sons of light, each according to his lot in God’s design, and hate all the sons of darkness, each according to his guilt in God’s vengeance...” (1 QS 1.7-10).

“He shall judge every man according to his spirit. He shall admit him in accordance with the cleanness of his hands and advance him in accordance with his understanding. And he shall love and hate likewise...” (1 QS 9:16-17)

“Title: These are the rules of conduct for the Master in those times with respect to His loving and hating...Everlasting hatred in a spirit of secrecy for the men of perdition!...” (1 QS 9.21-22)

The Qumran community had specific instructions on who to hate. Jesus broke with this notion and encouraged others to love their enemies and treat them well despite their behavior. He taught us to pray for our enemies. This reinforces what is found in the Torah.

Matthew 5:48

At the end of this section Jesus said “...Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

It is fascinating that one of the goals of the Qumran community was perfection. In one of the quotes above, notice that this was mentioned. It is mentioned over a dozen times in this document and is a repetitive themes (quotes below).

“All those who freely devote themselves to His truth shall bring

all their knowledge, powers and possessions into the Community of God, that they may purify their knowledge in the truth of God's precepts and order their powers according to His ways of perfection..." (1 QS 1.11-13).

"And the priests shall bless all the men of the lot of God who walk perfectly in all His ways..." (1 QS 2.1-2).

"The priests shall enter first, ranked one after another according to the perfection of their spirit..." (1 QS 2.19-20).

"When they have been confirmed for two years in perfection of way in the Foundation of the Community, they shall be set apart as holy..." (1 QS 8.10-11).

"...so that in the midst the men of the community they may walk perfectly together in all that has been revealed to them..." (1 QS 9.18-19)

"... but will have no pity on all who depart from the way. I will offer no comfort to the smitten until their way becomes perfect" (1 QS 10.21).

As you can see, the Qumran Community taught that perfection was found in their teachings, which involved hating those who did not live exactly as them. Jesus flipped this line of reasoning on its head. Instead, he taught that one's perfection or completion involved showing love for our enemies instead of hate. This is example set by the Father.

The Word of God does not instruct us to hate our enemies, but other people certainly will. These quotes help us understand that the concept of hating others and perfection were actual teachings among some of the Jewish people before and during the time of Jesus.

Chapter 3

“I Fast Twice a Week”

Luke 18:12

“I fast twice in the week [Greek: *dis tou sabbatou*]; I give tithes of all that I get” (Luke 18:12, ASV).

In Luke 18, Jesus told a parable about the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. The Pharisee bragged about his own righteousness. He fasted twice a week and gave a tenth of all he earned. This parable contains several historical statements, one of which we will review in this chapter.

By the time of Jesus, the Jewish people had a developed code of oral laws. At the end of the second century, the Jewish people started to codify these rules in a book called the Mishnah. In it, we learn that the Jewish people chose two specific days of the week to fast upon in certain circumstances. Below, we have some quotes from the Mishna concerning this custom.

“Although shops must remained closed most of the time on these days, on Monday they open them a little at nightfall to allow people to purchase food for breaking their fast, and on Thursday they are permitted to open the stores all day in deference to Shabbat, so that people may purchase food for the sacred day” (*Ta’anit*, 1.6).

“If these fasts have passed and they have not been answered the court does not decree additional fasts, but the entire community observes the customs of mourning. They decrease their engagement in business transactions, in building and planting, in betrothals and marriages, and in greetings between each person and his fellow, like people who have been rebuked by God. The individuals, i.e., Torah scholars, resume fasting every Monday and Thursday until the month of Nisan ends” (*ibid*, 1.7).

“The mishna continues: One may not decree a fast on the community starting on a Thursday, so as not to cause an increase in prices...Rather, the first set of three fasts is on a Monday, Thursday,

and the following Monday, and the second set of three is on a Thursday, Monday, and the following Thursday. Rabbi Yosei says: Just as the first three fasts do not begin on Thursday, so too, neither the second set nor the last set starts on a Thursday. Instead, all the series of fasts begin on a Monday” (ibid, 2.9).

The Mishnah explains that the Jewish people chose two days of the week – Monday and Thursday – for certain fasts. This practice was also noticed by early Christian authors.

Another document from around the first/second century is the *Didache*. It was composed by Christians to describe some of their early practices. In it, the Jewish practice of fasting twice a week is also mentioned.

“But let not your fasts be with the hypocrites; for they fast on the second and fifth day of the week...” (idem, 8).

We can see from the Mishnah and the *Didache* that the Jewish people fasted on Monday and Thursday. This material allows us to cross-reference another historically accurate detail from the New Testament.

Chapter 4

Jesus and the Sabbath

**Matt. 12:1-14, 23:4, Mk 2:23-28, 3:1-6,
Lk 6:1-11, 13:10-16, John 5:1-15, 7:22-24, 9:1-7**

Since Jesus was an observant Jew, the New Testament describes Him as obeying the commandments of God. This included observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, which is mentioned in dozens of verses throughout the Old Testament. On the seventh day, Jesus read the Scriptures, taught, healed, and fellowshiped with others.

However, the Pharisees and others at times accused Jesus and His disciples of breaking the Sabbath! In this chapter, we will utilize three New Testament examples and Jewish history to explain why these accusations occurred. The excerpts from these gospel examples are found below.

“1 At that time, Jesus went on the Sabbath day through the grain fields. His disciples were hungry and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. 2 But the Pharisees, when they saw it, said to him, “Behold, your disciples do what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.” 3 But he said to them, “Haven’t you read what David did when he was hungry, and those who were with him: 4 how he entered into God’s house and ate the show bread, which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests? (1 Samuel 21:3-6) 5 Or have you not read in the law that on the Sabbath day the priests in the temple profane the Sabbath and are guiltless? 6 But I tell you that one greater than the temple is here. 7 But if you had known what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice,’ (Hosea 6:6) you wouldn’t have condemned the guiltless. 8 For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath...” (Matthew 12:1-8, WEB).

“...9 He departed from there and went into their synagogue. 10 And behold, there was a man with a withered hand. They asked him, ‘Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?’ so that they might accuse him. 11 He said to them, ‘What man is there among you who has one sheep, and if this one falls into a pit on the Sabbath

day, won't he grab on to it and lift it out? 12 Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day.' 13 Then he told the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out; and it was restored whole, just like the other. 14 But the Pharisees went out and conspired against him, how they might destroy him." (Matthew 12:9-14, WEB).

"5 A certain man was there who had been sick for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he had been sick for a long time, he asked him, 'Do you want to be made well?' 7 The sick man answered him, 'Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I'm coming, another steps down before me.' 8 Jesus said to him, 'Arise, take up your mat, and walk.' 9 Immediately, the man was made well, and took up his mat and walked. Now it was the Sabbath on that day. 10 So the Jews said to him who was cured, 'It is the Sabbath. It is not lawful for you to carry the mat...'" (John 5:5-10, WEB).

Why were Jesus' actions on the Sabbath condemned by certain people? Did he really transgress the fourth commandment?

As discussed in the last chapter, the Jewish leaders had developed a large body of oral laws by the time of Jesus. In the late second century they started to codify these laws into a book called the Mishnah. Many of these rules added extra requirements to something God commanded in the Torah. When it comes to the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders developed 39 categories of actions that were classified as work.

Among them included picking grain (considered reaping), removing the husk from the grain (considered threshing), carrying earth, carrying something in public, and intentional healing. We have excerpts from the Mishnah below pertaining to this subject.

"This fundamental mishna enumerates those who perform the primary categories of labor prohibited on Shabbat, which number forty-less-one. They are grouped in accordance with their function: One who sows, and one who plows, and one who reaps, and one who gathers sheaves into a pile, and one who threshes, removing the kernel from the husk, and one who winnows threshed grain in the wind, and one who selects the inedible waste from the

edible...” (*Mishnah*, Shabbat 7).

“One who carries out a measure of foods fit for human consumption equivalent to a dried fig-bulk into a domain where carrying is prohibited on Shabbat is liable [meaning, guilty of sin]. And all those foods join together with one another to constitute that amount because they are equal in their measures. This amount is calculated without their shells, and their seeds, and their stems, and their bran, the husk that comes off of the wheat kernel when pounded, and their coarse bran that remains in the flour...” (ibid)

“One who carries out an object into the public domain on Shabbat, whether he carried it out in his right hand or in his left hand, whether he carried it in his lap or on his shoulders, he is liable...” (ibid, Shabbat 10)

“One who severs a leaf or a fruit from a plant growing in a perforated flowerpot on Shabbat is liable, as a plant in a flowerpot with holes in it has the legal status of a plant connected to the ground. Picking from it is prohibited due to reaping...” (ibid)

“One may not eat eizoveyon on Shabbat because healthy people do not eat it, and therefore it is clear that anyone eating it is doing so for its medicinal value. However, one may eat a plant called yo’ezer and may drink abuvro’e. Furthermore, all types of food that healthy people eat may be eaten by a person even for medicinal purposes. And one may drink all drinks except for water from palm trees and a kos ikarin because they are known as a remedy for jaundice. Therefore, it is prohibited to drink them on Shabbat for curative purposes...”

“...One who is concerned about pain in his teeth may not sip vinegar through them on Shabbat for medicinal purposes: however, he may dip his food in vinegar in his usual manner and eat it, and if he is healed by the vinegar, he is healed. One who is concerned about pain in his loins may not smear wine and vinegar on them on Shabbat because that is a medical treatment. However, one may smear oil on them. However, one may not use rose oil, which is very expensive and used exclusively as a cure. However, princes may smear with rose oil on their wounds on Shabbat because it is their usual manner to smear rose oil on themselves during the week for pleasure. Rabbi Shimon says: All of the Jewish

people are princes, and it is permitted for them to smear rose oil on themselves on Shabbat..." (ibid, Shabbat 14).

As one can see, the Jewish leaders added man-made rules not discussed in the Torah. Another problem is that these innovations were given equal position with the Law of God! One who violated them was considered guilty of breaking a commandment. Jesus obviously did not agree with these additions.

When Jesus' disciples plucked heads of grain to eat with their hands, they were simply eating. The Jewish leaders claimed that they were reaping with such an action. Yet this action was completely valid according to the Torah. "When you come into your neighbor's standing grain, then you may pluck the ears with your hand; but you shall not use a sickle on your neighbor's standing grain" (Deut. 23:25, WEB). Since they did not use a sickle or other instrument for harvesting grain, then they did not break any mitzvot. The disciples picked heads of grain for food. They violated man-made rules, not God's law.

Among the more cumbersome Sabbath rules in the Mishnah pertained to healing on the Sabbath. Basically, the oral law allowed unintentional healing, but not intentional healing. When Jesus healed people, He broke the man-made rules on this subject because His healings were definitely intentional. As Jesus correctly explained, there is nothing in the Torah that prohibits a person from being made whole on the Sabbath.

In John 5:5-10, Jesus asked the man to stand and carry his mat to receive healing. The man obeyed and was healed! The Jewish leaders were upset because he broke their rules of carrying such an item into a public place. The man was not carrying any kind of load (see Jeremiah 17:19-27); he was just carrying a mat.

In each of these instances, Jesus gave them the correct explanation of Torah. He gave instructions such as the following:

"Of how much more value then is a man than a sheep! Therefore it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath day" (Matthew 12:12, WEB).

"He said to them, 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath day to do good or to

do harm? To save a life or to kill?’ But they were silent” (Mark 3:4, WEB).

“15 Therefore the Lord answered him, ‘You hypocrites! Doesn’t each one of you free his ox or his donkey from the stall on the Sabbath, and lead him away to water? 16 Ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham whom Satan had bound eighteen long years, be freed from this bondage on the Sabbath day?’” (Luke 13:15-16, WEB)

“22 Moses has given you circumcision (not that it is of Moses, but of the fathers), and on the Sabbath you circumcise a boy. 23 If a boy receives circumcision on the Sabbath, that the law of Moses may not be broken, are you angry with me, because I made a man completely healthy on the Sabbath? 24 Don’t judge according to appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:22-24, WEB).

Lastly, two eyewitnesses of Jesus’ life were Peter and John. They both testified that Jesus was lawful, not lawless. “For you were called to this, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving you an example, that you should follow his steps, who didn’t sin, “neither was deceit found in his mouth” (I Peter 2:21-22). “Everyone who sins also commits lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness. You know that he was revealed to take away our sins, and no sin is in him...” (I John 3:4-5).

When Jesus was accused of breaking the Sabbath, we must realize that He did not transgress a single commandment of God. Instead, he violated the Jewish man-made rules that existed at that time. These rules explain Jesus’s words concerning the scribes and Pharisees: “For they bind heavy burdens that are grievous to be borne, and lay them on men’s shoulders; but they themselves will not lift a finger to help them” (Matthew 23:4, WEB).

The Mishnah helps us better understand that the gospel accounts of Jesus and His disciples pertaining to the Sabbath reflects contemporary Jewish issues of the first century AD.

Chapter 5

Paying Taxes to Caesar

Mk 12:12-17, Matt. 22:15-22, Lk. 20:19-26

“12 They tried to seize him, but they feared the multitude; for they perceived that he spoke the parable against them. They left him, and went away. 13 They sent some of the Pharisees and the Herodians to him, that they might trap him with words. 14 When they had come, they asked him, ‘Teacher, we know that you are honest, and don’t defer to anyone; for you aren’t partial to anyone, but truly teach the way of God. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not? 15 Shall we give, or shall we not give?’ But he, knowing their hypocrisy, said to them, ‘Why do you test me? Bring me a denarius, that I may see it.’ 16 They brought it. He said to them, ‘Whose is this image and inscription?’ They said to him, ‘Caesar’s.’ 17 Jesus answered them, ‘Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.’ They marveled greatly at him” (Mark 12:12-17, WEB).

On several occasions, Jesus’ adversaries tried to ensnare Him with a tough question. In this chapter’s passage, some Jewish people asked Jesus if they should pay taxes or not. Why would this be an issue?

The Jewish historian Josephus wrote in the late first century. He attested that there were four main sects of Jewish people who lived at that time: Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, and the followers of Judas. Of these, the followers of Judas were particularly known for teaching people not to pay taxes to Caesar. We have a quote about this group below:

“...Cyrenius also came into Judaea, which was now added to the province of Syria, to take a valuation of their substance [i.e. collect taxes]...But the Jews, although at first they took the report of a taxation very ill, yet left off any further opposition to it, at the persuasion of Joazar, who was high, priest, and the son of Boethus. For they listened to Joazar’s words, and gave an account of their estates without any dispute...”

“...But one Judas, a Gaulanite [Golan], of a city whose name was Gamala, joining himself to Sadduc a Pharisee, was eager to draw them to a revolt. Both said that this taxation was nothing but a direct introduction of slavery, and exhorted the nation to assert their liberty, as if they could procure them happiness and security for what they possessed, and if they failed in the happiness that would result from this, they would acquire honour and glory for magnanimity...”

“...for Judas and Sadduc, who introduced a fourth philosophic sect among us, and had a great many followers therein, filled our state with tumults at the time, and laid the foundations of future miseries by their system of philosophy which we were before unacquainted with, concerning which I shall discourse a little, and that the rather, because the infection which spread thence among our younger men, who were zealous for it, brought our nation to destruction” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.1.1).

“...But Judas the Galilean was the author of the fourth sect of Jewish philosophy. Its pupils agree in all other things with the Pharisaic notions, but they have an inviolable attachment to liberty, and say that God is their only ruler and lord...” (ibid, 18.1.6)

The followers of Judas the Galilean refused to pay taxes because they viewed it as a form of slavery. From their perspective, paying taxes to Caesar would acknowledge another ruler in their lives (*Wars of the Jews*, 2.8.1). They viewed God as their only ruler. Many agreed with their views; Josephus described them as having “a great many followers.”

Jesus refused to throw His support behind such radical views. Judas’ group wanted to overthrow the Roman government and incite violence. This had already happened at least once a few decades earlier.

Notice in Mark 12:12 that the Jewish leaders wanted to have Jesus seized or arrested. Two groups were sent to try and trap Him: the Pharisees and the Herodians. These two groups had different views.

The Herodians supported the Herodian dynasty, which ruled Judea and had the backing of Rome. On the other hand, the Phari-

sees supported Jewish independence. In about 6 BC, the latter group opposed Herod and refused to acknowledge Caesar (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 17.2.4). Herod had many people put to death for this defiance. Recall from Josephus that the followers of Judas the Galilean had a strong connection to the Pharisees.

Had Jesus refused to pay the tax, then the Herodians could accuse Him of treason against Herod and Rome. They might have accused Jesus of being loyal to the followers of Judas. Had Jesus answered yes, then the Pharisees might accuse Him of betrayal to the Jewish people. Instead of being pulled into factional rivalries, Jesus skillfully navigated through their deception to give a wise and discerning answer – as was His custom. Give to Caesar what belongs to him—after all, his face was on the coin.

Below, we have pictures from two denarius' coins used in the first century. The first depicts Caesar Augustus, the first Roman Emperor. The second depicts Tiberius Caesar, who was the emperor during Jesus' ministry.



Denarius Coin of Octavian Augustus (Public Domain)



Denarius Coin of Tiberius Caesar (Public Domain)

Chapter 6

Judas the Galilean

Acts 5:34-37

“34 But one stood up in the council, a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, honored by all the people, and commanded to put the apostles out for a little while. 35 He said to them, ‘You men of Israel, be careful concerning these men, what you are about to do. 36 For before these days Theudas rose up, making himself out to be somebody; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves. He was slain; and all, as many as obeyed him, were dispersed, and came to nothing. 37 After this man, Judas of Galilee rose up in the days of the enrollment, and drew away some people after him. He also perished, and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered abroad’” (Acts 5:34-37, WEB).

In this passage, the Jewish leader Gamaliel persuaded the Sanhedrin to reconsider their opposition to the early disciples of Jesus. He then gave them two examples of revolutionaries whose movements failed. He advised the other Jewish leaders to disregard the disciples because their movement would fall apart if it were not from God. However, if the disciples were sent by God then the Jewish leaders would be opposing God.

Of the two revolutionaries Gamaliel mentioned, one of them is found in Josephus. As discussed in the last chapter, Judas the Galilean was the founder of a radical sect who refused to pay taxes. We have two excerpts about his revolt below (we reviewed some of this material in the last chapter).

“...It was under his administration [Archelaus] that a certain Galilaean, whose name was Judas, induced his countrymen to revolt, and said they were cowards if they would endure paying tribute to the Romans, and after God submit to mortal men as their lords. This man was a founder of a peculiar sect of his own, and was not at all like the other founders of sects...” (*Wars of the Jews*, 2.8.1).

“...They also said that God would not assist them unless they

joined with one another energetically for success, and still further set about great exploits, and did not grow weary in executing the same. And the men heard what they said with pleasure, and so this bold attempt proceeded to a great height. All sorts of misfortunes also sprang from these men, and the nation was infected by them to an incredible degree: one violent war came upon us after another, and we lost our friends who used to alleviate our pains ; there were also very great robberies, and murders of our principal men, under pretext indeed of the public welfare, but in reality from the hopes of private gain...”

“...Hence arose seditions, and owing to them political murders, which sometimes fell on their own people, (from the madness of these men towards one another, and their desire that none of their rivals should be left.) and sometimes on their enemies ; a famine also came upon us, and reduced us to the last degree of despair, as did also the taking and demolishing of cities, nay, faction at last increased so high, that the very temple of God was burnt down by the enemies’ fire...”

“...So greatly did the alteration and change from the customs of our fathers tend to bring all to destruction who thus banded together, for Judas and Sadduc, who introduced a fourth philosophic sect among us, and had a great many followers therein, filled our state with tumults at the time, and laid the foundations of future miseries by their system of philosophy which we were before unacquainted with, concerning which I shall discourse a little, and that the rather, because the infection which spread thence among our younger men, who were zealous for it, brought our nation to destruction...” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 18.1.1)

Judas tried to convince the Jewish people that unless they revolted against Roman taxation that God would not be with them. His initial revolt failed. In the mid-40s AD, two of his sons were crucified for rebellion against Roman authority (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 20.5.2). Josephus thought that his followers laid the foundations for the destruction of the Temple in 70 AD.

The identification of Judas the Galilean and his revolt in Acts 5:34-37 provides another example of material which corroborates with the historical record.

Chapter 7

46 Years

John 2:18-20

“18 The Jews therefore answered and said unto him, What sign showest thou unto us, seeing that thou doest these things? 19 Jesus answered and said unto them, Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up. 20 The Jews therefore said, Forty and six years was this temple in building, and wilt thou raise it up in three days?” (John 2:18-20, ASV)

This statement in John contains a historical reference which could easily be overlooked. In a conversation with Jesus, the Jewish people said that the Temple had been constructed over forty-six years (it was actually still under construction). This statement refers beginning of Herod’s Temple renovations, which are described by Josephus.

“And now Herod, in the eighteenth year of his reign, and after the acts already mentioned, undertook a very great work, that is to build at his own expense the temple of God, and to make it larger in compass, and to raise it to a most magnificent height, esteeming it to be the most glorious of all his actions, as it really was, to bring it to perfection, and thinking this would be sufficient for an everlasting memorial of him...” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 15.11.1).

Herod the Great started additions to the Second Temple in his eighteenth year. This dates to 20 or 19 BC. Forty-six years later was about 27 or 28 AD. The accuracy of this number is extremely important because the main leaders involved with Jesus’ trial and execution were all alive and in office by or in 26 AD (Pilate, Herod Antipas, Annas, and Caiaphas).

The accuracy of John 2:20 is extremely important. If the number of years was wrong, then it could easily place the gospel reckoning of Jesus’ ministry out of alignment with the other leaders who were in office at that time. This one verse provides an incredibly accurate historical reference for the gospels.

*Note that the Temple construction was not completed until the years 62-64 AD (see Josephus, *Antiquities*, 20.7.9).

Chapter 8

Pray Against a Sabbath Flight

Matthew 24:20

“And pray ye that your flight be not in the winter, neither on a sabbath” (Matthew 24:20, ASV).

One interpretation of Matthew 24:20 is that the disciples should not want to flee the city of Jerusalem in the winter or on Sabbath. The connection with the Sabbath is obvious because it is the day of rest. It would not be suitable to have to flee any city on this day. There is also a historical explanation for this verse that often goes unnoticed.

As a major city at the crossroads between continents and Empires, Jerusalem was periodically besieged in ancient times. The Babylonians, Greeks, and Romans were among the first people groups to conquer it. Ancient records and some modern calculations reveal that the Sabbath seemed to be a preferred day for invading armies to make advances upon or attack the city.

The first complete conquest of Jerusalem occurred in the reign of Nebuchadnezzar (597 and 586 BC). In the mid twentieth century, Parker and Dubberstein performed thorough calculations to determine the dates upon which these sieges occurred (*Babylonian Chronology*, pp 25-28). Using careful chronology, they assert that the first siege under Jehoiachin was completed on March 16, 597, which was the Sabbath. While Zedekiah was put on the throne as his replacement, he later rebelled. This resulted in another siege, which he calculates to have occurred on January 15, 588 BC. This was also the Sabbath. The final capture of Jerusalem took place on July 29, 587. This date also turned out to be the Sabbath (also see Alger John’s synopsis in the Bibliography).

Ancient historians reveal that other sieges also took place on the Sabbath. We have listed these events below with the appropriate historical quotes.

Sometime between 320 and 305 BC, Ptolemy Soter, who was the

ruler of the Greco-Egyptian Kingdom, seized Jerusalem on the Sabbath. Josephus recorded this event:

“...insomuch that all Syria, by the means of Ptolemy the son of Lagus, underwent the reverse of that denomination of Saviour, which he then had. He also seized upon Jerusalem: and for that end made use of deceit and treachery. For as he came into the city on a sabbath day, as if he would offer sacrifice, he, without any trouble, gained the city: while the Jews did not oppose him. For they did not suspect him to be their enemy: and he gained it thus, because they were free from suspicion of him; and because on that day they were at rest and quietness: and when he had gained it, he ruled over it in a cruel manner” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 12.1).

While there is no record that the troops of Antiochus Epiphanes captured Jerusalem on the Sabbath, his soldiers attacked the Jewish people on this day (about 168/167 BC). Josephus also described this occurrence.

“...they attacked them on the Sabbath-day, and burnt them as they were in their caves, without their resisting, or even so much as stopping up the entrances of the caves. And they abstained from defending themselves on that day, because they were not willing to break in upon the honour they owed the Sabbath even in such an evil case, for our law requires us to rest upon that day. There were about a thousand, with their wives and children, who were smothered and died in those caves...” (idem, 12.6.2).

In the 60s BC, a civil war erupted in Judea. The Roman general Pompey intervened in this conflict and captured Jerusalem (about 64/63 BC). Josephus recorded that the Romans made major progress on their siege ramps during the Sabbath because Jewish soldiers would not attack on the day (ibid, 14.4.2-3; *Wars of the Jews*, 1.7.3).

Below, we have two quotes from Roman authors that discuss this siege. Note that the Romans called Saturday the ‘day of Kronos’ or ‘day of Saturn.’

“Pompey seized the city, it is said, after watching for the day of fasting, when the Judeans were abstaining from all

work...” (Strabo, *Geography*, 16.2.40).

“Most of the city, to be sure, he took without any trouble, as he was received by the party of Hyrcanus; but the temple itself, which the other party had occupied, he captured only with difficulty. For it was on high ground and was fortified by a wall of its own, and if they had continued defending it on all days alike, he could not have got possession of it. As it was, they made an exception of what are called the days of Saturn, and by doing no work at all on those days afforded the Romans an opportunity in this interval to batter down the wall. The latter, on learning of this superstitious awe of theirs, made no serious attempts the rest of the time, but on those days, when they came round in succession, assaulted most vigorously. Thus the defenders were captured on the day of Saturn, without making any defence, and all the wealth was plundered...” (Cassius Dio, *Roman History*, 37.16.1-4).

As discussed in chapter one, Herod the Great conspired with the Romans to be made king of Judea. As part of this plan, he besieged Jerusalem in about 38/37 BC. One Roman source said that the city was attacked on Sabbath.

“The Jews, indeed, had done much injury to the Romans, for the race is very bitter when aroused to anger, but they suffered far more themselves. The first of them to be captured were those who were fighting for the precinct of their god, and then the rest on the day even then called the day of Saturn...” (ibid, 49.22.4-6).

The ancient writer Plutarch (46-119 AD) described the Jewish people resting while Jerusalem was being besieged (likely referring to either Pompey’s or Herod’s siege). “But the Jews, because it was the Sabbath day (*Sabbaton*), sat in their places immovable, while the enemy were planting ladders against the walls and capturing the defences, and they did not get up, but remained there, fast bound in the toils of superstition as in one great net” (*Superstition*, 8; Plutarch wrote in Greek).

Just 40 years after Jesus’ life and prophetic discussion in Matthew 24, Jerusalem was conquered again by the Romans in 70 AD. Again, the Romans attacked and defeated the people on the Sabbath.

“The deified Vespasian Augustus attacked the Jews on their Sabbath (*Iudaeos Saturni die*), a day on which it is sinful for them to do any business, and so defeated them” (Frontinus, *Strategems*, 2.1.17).

“Thus was Jerusalem destroyed on the very day of Saturn, the day which even now the Jews reverence most...” (Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 65.7.2).

With this historical background, we can better understand Jesus’ warning about a Sabbath flight. It was a day that the Jewish people and Jerusalem were attacked. An invading army might advance their siege of the city on that day of the week.

*There is modern research which proposes that some of these sieges may have broken through the city walls on the Sabbath of Sabbaths, meaning the day of Atonement, rather than the weekly Sabbath (though it is possible for the Day of Atonement to also fall on the weekly sabbath). Because Atonement is considered an annual Sabbath day, the application to Matthew 24:20 remains. For more information on this subject, see Nadav Sharon’s article: “The Conquests of Jerusalem by Pompey and Herod: On Sabbath or ‘Sabbath of Sabbaths’?”

Chapter 9

The Temple Warning Inscription

Acts 21:26-32

“26 Then Paul took the men, and the next day purified himself and went with them into the temple, declaring the fulfillment of the days of purification, until the offering was offered for every one of them. 27 When the seven days were almost completed, the Jews from Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the multitude and laid hands on him, 28 crying out, “Men of Israel, help! This is the man who teaches all men everywhere against the people, and the law, and this place. Moreover, he also brought Greeks into the temple, and has defiled this holy place!” 29 For they had seen Trophimus, the Ephesian, with him in the city, and they supposed that Paul had brought him into the temple. 30 All the city was moved and the people ran together. They seized Paul and dragged him out of the temple. Immediately the doors were shut. 31 As they were trying to kill him, news came up to the commanding officer of the regiment that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. 32 Immediately he took soldiers and centurions and ran down to them. They, when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, stopped beating Paul” (Acts 21:26-32, WEB).

In Acts chapter 21, the Apostle Paul participated in a seven-day vow at the Temple of God in Jerusalem. Just before this period ended, some of Paul’s opponents from Asia happened to see him in the city. They levied false accusations against him, which included bringing a foreigner (i.e. non-Jew) into the Temple courts.

The Temple doors were shut immediately as a precautionary measure. The people tried to kill Paul! Why did the crowd express such a fierce reaction to these accusations?

In three places, Josephus mentioned that there was a stone wall which separated the Temple courtyard from the outside cloisters. On this wall was an inscription which warned foreigners not to go any further or they would be put to death. Josephus was a priest, so he was very familiar with these signs. We have excerpts below:

“Such was the first enclosure, and in the midst, not far from it, was the second, to be ascended to by a few steps ; this was surrounded by a stone wall for a partition, with an inscription forbidding any foreigner to enter under pain of death...” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, 15.11.5).

“When you went through this space to the second temple, there was a partition of stone, whose height was three cubits, of very elegant construction ; upon which stood pillars, at equal distances from one another, declaring the law of purity, some in Greek, others in Roman letters,’ that no foreigner was to enter the holy place ; for the second temple was called the holy place, and had an ascent of fourteen steps from the first temple, and was square, and had its own wall round it...” (*Wars of the Jews*, 5.2.2).

“Now Titus was deeply affected with this state of things, and again reproached John and his party, and said to them, “Did not you, vilest of wretches, put up a wall of partition before your Holy of Holies? Did you not put up pillars in the temple at due distances, and engrave on them in Greek and Roman letters the order that no one should go beyond that wall? And did we not give you leave to kill any that went beyond it, even though he were a Roman? And what do you do now, accursed wretches?” (ibid, 6.2.4).

In these accounts, Josephus provides a consistent explanation for the Temple warning inscription. It was intended to keep foreigners out of the courtyard. In the last reference cited above, Josephus quoted the Roman general Titus. Even he was aware that the Romans had given the Jewish people permission to kill whoever transgressed this rule.

Temple Warning Inscription

In the early 1870s, a stone with an inscription was found about 150 feet from the Temple mount. In the 1930s, a second one was found with a partial inscription. These finds are commonly called the Temple Warning Inscriptions (or Soreg Inscriptions).

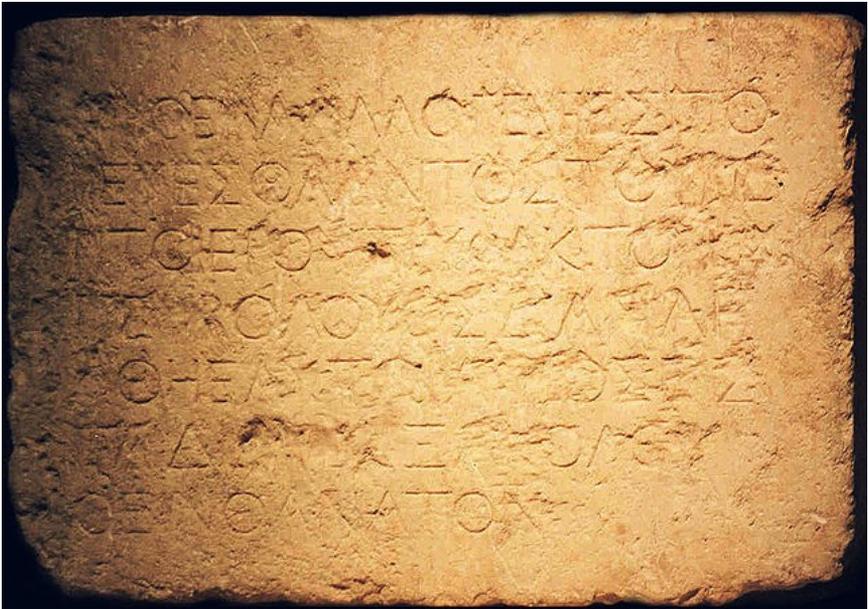
Both inscriptions were engraved in Greek, which matches Josephus’ description of them above. The English translation of the complete inscription is as follows:

“No alien may enter within the balustrade around the sanctuary and the enclosure. Whoever is caught, on himself shall he put the blame for the death which will ensue” (Bickerman, p 388).

(A picture of the complete inscription is found below).

This inscription matches the description provided by Josephus and the book of Acts. Now we can better understand why the Jewish people had such a fierce reaction to the accusation that Paul brought a foreigner into the Temple courtyard. These sources provide us with another historical reference which corroborates with the New Testament.

***It is very possible that the ‘dividing wall of partition’ in Ephesians 2:14 refers to this inscription.**



Temple Warning Inscription (also called the Soreg Inscription)

[Attribution: Tamar Havardeni](#)

Chapter 10

The Gospel of the Kingdom of God

Mark 1:14 and many others

“Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God...” (Mark 1:14, KJV)

The message of Jesus and the early disciples was the gospel of the Kingdom of God. But what does the term gospel mean?

The underlying Greek word translated as gospel is *euangelion* (pronounced yoo-angelion). It comes from two root words – *eu*, meaning good, and *angelos*, meaning messenger (the English word angel derives from *angelos*).

Euangelion is used in about 74 verses in the New Testament. Did you know it was used decades before Jesus’ earthly ministry to refer to another kingdom? To understand this detail further, we will review some history in the years leading up to Jesus’ ministry.

In 48 BC, Julius Caesar was serving as Dictator of Rome. He gradually merged the political and religious systems of Rome into his control. He was very popular and was called “the god made manifest, offspring of Ares and Aphrodite, and common saviour of human life” (Deissmann, p 344). Just a few years later, he was assassinated. His death triggered a long civil war which would determine the future of Rome.

In 30 BC, Caesar’s nephew Octavian became the victor of this war and sole ruler of what would be called the Roman Empire. He took the title Augustus and power was further centralized into his control. Because he ended a time of strife and initiated a time of plenty, he was extolled by many contemporary writers.

The poet Horace called him: “Father, and guardian of our race...” (*Odes*, 1.12). Virgil wrote: “...Augustus Caesar, son of a god, who will again establish a golden age...he will advance his

empire beyond Garamant (modern-day Libya) and India, to a land which lies beyond the stars..." (*Aeneid*, 6.791-793).

Octavian was called the 'son of a god' and later given the title 'god of god' (Deissmann, 344-345). An inscription was made during his reign at the ancient city of Pergamum. It reads: "The Emperor, Caesar, son of a god, the god Augustus, of every land and sea the overseer" (*ibid*, 347).

The idea of the Roman Empire meant the preservation of human life. Peace and plenty were promised for all through Octavian Augustus. During his reign, life improved so much from the years of civil war that even his birth was viewed as an ominous sign for the Roman world.

One archaeological find that illustrates the veneration shown to him is the Priene Calendar Inscription. It was written in Greek about 9 BC. We have a partial picture of it below and an excerpt translated into English on the next page.



Priene Calendar Inscription (9 BC) - Public Domain

“...Since Providence...has set in most perfect order by giving us Augustus...sending him as a saviour, both for us and for our descendants, that he might end war and arrange all things...the birthday of the god Augustus was the beginning of the **good tidings** for the world...” (Deissmann, p 366; Evans).

The underlying Greek word translated as ‘good tidings’ is *euangelion*. Augustus, like his great uncle, was also called savior. This historical connection adds greater depth to the message of Jesus and the early disciples.

When Jesus and the early disciples proclaimed the good news or *euangelion* of the Kingdom of God, it carried political implications! This Good News pointed people away from the Roman kingdom. Instead, they presented the Kingdom of God and a different Savior – Jesus – as the way to bring true peace, prosperity, and order to the whole world. This message challenges humanity not to look not upon earthly kingdoms to meet our needs, but instead to look upward to God Almighty (Matthew 6:25-34).

Conclusion

This work has presented numerous verses from the New Testament that corroborate with the historical and, at times, the archaeological record. Rather than being tales fabricated by the human imagination, the New Testament accurately describes the world of Jesus and His earliest disciples. In future volumes, we hope to deepen the connections between the New Testament and history.

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More Materials (Page 1 of 3)

Below are listed more short books available for FREE download on www.sabbath.blog and www.biblesabbath.org Look at the **Free Resources** page.

A Beginner's Guide to the Sabbath

The Sabbath is a weekly celebration from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. This delight was given to mankind to help us spend more time with God and our family. In this booklet, you will learn answers to basic questions such as “What is the Sabbath?”; “When is the Sabbath?”; and “How Do We Keep the Sabbath?” You will also learn important reasons to keep this holy day and ways to practice it so that you can be in tune with God’s Sacred Rhythm.

A Brief History of the Sabbath in Early Christianity

Many people who attend Church today meet on Sunday. In the New Testament, the early Church met on Sabbath, which is from Friday sunset through Saturday sunset. Did you know that most Christians 400 years after Jesus still honored the Sabbath? In this informative booklet, you will learn the seven major historical factors that affected the Sabbath in the early Church.

Prevalence of the Sabbath in the Early Roman Empire

When the Gentiles heard the early gospel message, how did they respond as it relates to the Sabbath? Were Gentile converts persuaded to keep the Sabbath like their Jewish counterparts? Did they seek to abandon it? In this work, the author reviews two Jewish, two Christian, fifteen Gentile primary sources, and the New Testament to examine the prevalence of the Sabbath in the early Roman Empire. The answer will surprise you!

Sabbath and Sunday Laws in the Roman Empire

In the Roman Empire, a series of laws were passed concerning the Sabbath. Hundreds of years later, Sunday laws were also passed. These laws help us to understand the protection of Sabbath observance in broader Judaism and Christianity as well as the development of Sunday as a day of rest in the Roman Church.

More Materials (Page 2 of 3)

Below are listed more short books available for FREE download on www.sabbath.blog and www.biblesabbath.org Look at the **Free Resources** page.

How Did Sunday Become the First Day of the Week?

How did the first day of the week, which does not have a name in the Bible, come to be called Sunday? How did the other days of the week come to have their names? In this work, you will learn about the history of two seven-day cycles in the early Roman Empire: The Biblical week and the planetary week. This study will also reveal insight into the development of Sunday as a day of gathering among certain groups in early Christianity.

The Life of Polycarp

After the death of the first Apostles, confusion entered the Christian community. Persecution and false teachers threatened the purity of the faith. Amid this chaos stood a man named Polycarp. He was taught and ordained by the first Apostles; he battled false teachings. In this work, you will learn about the events surrounding Polycarp's fight for the faith. He is a true hero for all Christians.

Constantine and the Sabbath

Did Constantine change the Sabbath? Did he pass a law to prohibit people from keeping it? Did he work with the Church of Rome to pressure people to keep Sunday? In this book, we will sort out the confusion and provide clarity on Constantine's reign using primary sources. This research will also unearth new, exciting paradigms for this subject.

How Do We Know Jesus Really Lived?

Imagine for a moment that you did not have a Bible to learn about Jesus. How would you know that He ever lived on earth? Would it be possible to prove His existence? In modern times, there has been skepticism about the historical validity of Jesus' existence and the New Testament account. In this book, we will address the historical, archaeological, and textual evidence to see if Jesus and His earliest followers ever existed.

More Materials (Page 3 of 3)

Below are listed more short books available for FREE download on www.sabbath.blog and www.biblesabbath.org Look at the **Free Resources** page.

The Quartodeciman Controversy

The earliest Christians observed Passover or Pascha on the fourteenth day of the Hebrew month Nisan. Starting in the second century, Christian leaders in Rome tried to change this celebration to a day of their own choosing. Confusion and conflict resulted as Christians in various cities calculated the timing for the new Passover in different ways. Starting in the fourth century, the Roman Church forced their celebration on everyone else. In this book, you will learn about the first three hundred years of the Quartodeciman Controversy.

Heroes of the Faith (Volume 1)

In this work, you will take a journey back in time to relive some of the great stories of courage and perseverance from early Church history. Their lives and sacrifice are inspiring and timeless. They provide invaluable lessons for people throughout time.

In our modern world, there are people who view the New Testament as a compilation of fabricated tales about Jesus and the early disciples. Nothing could be farther from the truth. In this work, we connect the New Testament text with the historical and archaeological record. This work will deepen your understanding and appreciation for the written record of Jesus and His earliest disciples.



Kelly McDonald, Jr. is an ordained Evangelist at Hungry Hearts Ministries in Jackson, TN. He is also President of the Bible Sabbath Association (BSA). He has written dozens of books and booklets on Church History, Theology, and Christian Living. He has been preaching since 2007 and is available to speak at your church.