

IN-DEPTH SUMMARY

Paying Tribute to Caesar

The in-depth summary of each bible study differs from the small group bible study laid out before the leader and the students. The in-depth overview is designed to help the leader with comprehensive information, much more than in the text notes at the bottom of every bible page. The small group studies are intended to be interactive, provide a learning atmosphere for students, and have open discussions allowing for interpretations of what the gospels' witnessed. An exhaustive search was completed on each verse to help the leader answer questions that may come up during the study.

After conducting some research, we have discovered that the three Synoptic Gospels refer to the act of Paying Tribute to Caesar. Specifically, these Gospels are Matthew 22:15-22, Mark 12:13-17, and Luke 20:20-26. Upon examining the verses, it is evident that Matthew, Mark, and Luke have all included a retelling of the same event. There are numerous similarities between their accounts, suggesting that they recount the same historical occurrence.

- 1) The plot. (Read the verse outlined in blue: Matthew 22:15, Mark 12:13, and Luke 20:20) **Based on the three similar verses, who were the spies mentioned in Luke's verse?** The Herodians.
- 2) **Based on these three verses what is the plot the Pharisees are trying to trap Jesus with?** After analyzing the three verses, the Pharisees had a strong motive to trap Jesus in his own words. Evidently that they were envious of Jesus' growing popularity and were threatened by the fact that he was drawing people away from them. The Pharisees devised a cunning plan to trap Jesus by asking him a tricky question regarding the support of Jews in a potential revolt against the Romans. They hoped that Jesus would provide a response that would incriminate him and give them a reason to turn him over to the Roman authorities for execution. Moreover, the Pharisees had a backup plan in case their first attempt failed. They intended to get Jesus to say something disloyal to the Jewish people, which they could use to denounce him publicly. The ultimate goal of the Pharisees was to use Jesus' words against him and discredit him in the eyes of the people. The Pharisees were willing to go to great lengths to achieve their desired outcome, even if it meant using deceitful tactics to trap Jesus. They prepared a plot to try and trick Jesus in a question, that no matter what his answer would be, he would be wrong.
- 3) **Who were the Herodians?** During the first century, a sect of Jews known as the Herodians became recognized for their favorable view of the Herod dynasty. This group believed that Roman rule, with its Greek influence, would bring benefits to

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their way of living. Despite not being considered a political party or religious sect, the Herodians shared common beliefs that often put them at odds with other groups and individuals in Jewish society. The Herodians and Pharisees, for instance, had opposing political beliefs, but they found a common stance in their mutual dislike of Jesus.

Due to their alignment with Roman culture, the Pharisees frequently referred to the Herodians as the "lost sheep of Israel." The Herodians hoped to trick Jesus into uttering something that would indicate his rebelliousness against Roman rule, so they could deliver him to the governor for trial. As a complex group in Jewish society, the Herodians often found themselves in opposition to others. Their views and beliefs were a product of their unique social, political, and cultural circumstances, which distinguished them from other Jewish sects at the time.

- 4) **Who was the governor or Tetrarch at the time of Jesus in Galilee?** Herod Antipas.
- 5) The set up. (Read the verse outlined in red: Matthew 22:16, Mark 12:14a, and Luke 20:21) **Before they ask Jesus their question, what are the Pharisees and Herodians attempting to do in these verses?** The Pharisees and Herodians, both groups with different beliefs and interests, teamed up to try and trap Jesus in his own words. They sent their disciples to him with a common purpose and began by flatteringly complimenting Jesus on his intelligence and his knowledge of God's word. They pretended to be genuinely interested in his teachings, but their true goal was to deceive him. However, Jesus, being wise and insightful, saw right through their false intentions and responded in a manner that was both insightful and shrewd.
- 6) The trap. (Read the verse outlined in black: Matthew 22:17, Mark 12:14b-15a, and Luke 20:22) **Why is this question a trap?** Jesus showed remarkable wisdom when he was approached by the Pharisees and Herodians, who were trying to deceive him. They were hoping to trap him by asking him a question about whether it was lawful to pay Caesar taxes. If he said yes, the Pharisees would leverage this against Jesus, and say he is a traitor to the Jews, and if he said no, the Herodians would say Jesus would be seen as a revolutionary. But Jesus was too clever for their plot, and he responded in a way that was both insightful and shrewd. He did not fall into their trap, and instead, he showed them that he was a wise and thoughtful teacher. The Pharisees despised paying taxes to the Romans.
- 7) Jesus calls them out! (Read the verse outlined in green: Matthew 22:18-19, Mark 12:15b-16a, and Luke 20:23-24a) Jesus was aware of their malicious intent. **Why does Jesus ask, "Why do you test Me?"** Jesus does this to expose their true, envious motives. Read Matthew 27:17-18. Pilate understood Jesus was being handed over to him by the Jews out of envy. Similarly, the Pharisees were motivated by jealousy towards Jesus' widespread acceptance and popularity. They craved power and

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wanted to be the ones dictating what was right and wrong according to their interpretation of the Laws of Moses.

- 8) Jesus calls them hypocrites. **Why are they hypocrites?** The Pharisees and Herodians posed a question to Jesus, not with a genuine desire to gain knowledge or seek wisdom from him, but with the sinister motive of trapping him in his own words and causing him to falter. Their intent was to manipulate Jesus into making a statement that would undermine his authority and give them leverage over him. This was a common tactic used by those who opposed Jesus and sought to discredit his teachings. However, Jesus was able to navigate their trap with grace and wisdom, demonstrating his mastery over both his adversaries and the situation at hand.
- 9) Jesus sets up his contradiction. Jesus asks for a denarius. **What is a denarius?** A denarius is approximately the amount of one day's wage for a common working man.
- 10) Jesus uses the Roman coin (Read the verse outlined in purple: Matthew 22:20-21a, Mark 12:16b, and Luke 20:24b). **Whose image is on the coin?** The image on the denarius coin during the time of Jesus' ministry was Tiberius Julius Caesar Augustus, the Roman emperor who reigned from 14 AD to 37 AD? And that the coin was made of approximately 3.4 grams of silver? It's fascinating to learn about the history of money and how it has evolved over time.
- 11) **What does the inscription "TI CAESAR DIVI AVG F AVGVSTVS," on the coin say?** It is worth noting that in the gospels, the answer given to the question of whether or not to pay taxes was simply "Caesar," with no mention of the inscription on the coin itself. However, the denarius in question bears an inscription that reads "TI CAESAR DIVI AVG F AVGVSTVS." Which means, "Tiberius Caesar, Son of the Divine Augustus. This essentially claims divinity for Tiberius Caesar's stepfather, Augustus, who is referred to as the "Divine Augustus." This attribution of godhood is then passed down to Tiberius Caesar, who is referred to as "Son of the Divine Augustus" and "Augustus," or "majestic." Thus, this coin essentially confers Augustus' authority as a god to Tiberius Caesar. Moreover, the other side of the coin states "PONTIF MAXIM," which means "highest priest" and implies imperial authority over worship. It is truly fascinating to observe how much meaning and symbolism can be packed into the design of something as seemingly small and insignificant as a coin.
- 12) Jesus' avoids entrapment and does not entangle his words. (Read the verse outlined in grey: Matthew 22:21b, Mark 12:17a, and Luke 20:25). **Why is Jesus' response not a trap?** Whether taxes should be paid to Caesar has been debated throughout history. Many have wondered whether Jesus's response to the question was a trap. However, Jesus was incredibly astute in answering the question, ensuring that neither the Pharisees nor the Herodians could use his words against him. By

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responding, "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's" and "Render to God the things that are God's," Jesus made it abundantly clear that he believed in the importance of both following earthly laws and recognizing the ultimate authority of God. This demonstrates Jesus's incredible wisdom and His ability to navigate complex situations with grace and intelligence. It shows that even in the most challenging circumstances, one can use careful thought and consideration to arrive at a wise and thoughtful response.

- 13) Open ended questions. **What are the things that are Caesar's?** While Jesus never gave a clear-cut answer to this question, many scholars believe that Caesar's things refer to the authority that governments or individuals hold over others. For instance, coins bearing Caesar's image were created by the government and therefore belong to them. However, in John 19:11, Jesus reminds Pilate that his authority is only given to him by God, which implies that God's authority is higher than that of man. Even Paul instructs the church to submit to governing authorities in Romans 13:1, but the submission to man is limited. Therefore, it appears that while Jesus acknowledges the legitimacy of human government, he also reminds us that ultimately, God's authority reigns supreme. It is a powerful message that calls for a deeper understanding of the nature of authority and the role of individuals and governments in our lives.
- 14) **What are the things that are God's?** It is widely accepted that everything in existence belongs to Him, and this is indeed accurate. According to Genesis 1:27, anything that bears the likeness of God is undeniably His. As His beloved creations, we are entrusted with the responsibility of returning to Him what is rightfully His. This is further emphasized in Acts 5:29 and Ephesians 5:20-24, where we are called to submit to one another as we do to God. It is essential to understand that the level of submission we offer to God is the same level we should extend to each other. Therefore, as we strive to honor Him in all our ways, we must also treat one another with the same measure of deference and submission.
- 15) They marveled at Jesus. (Read the verse outlined in orange: Matthew 22:22, Mark 12:17b, and Luke 20:26) **Why were the Pharisees and Herodians marveled?** The Pharisees and Herodians were left speechless by Jesus' response to their question, causing them to marvel. They had attempted to entangle him in his words by posing a trap question, but Jesus' wise and profound answer impressed them instead. It is important to remember that we should always strive to handle difficult situations with grace and wisdom, just as Jesus did.