

The Gospel of Jesus

Underground Institute – Feb. 8, 2017
Lesson 3: Palestine in the Time of Jesus

1. Roman Rule: Secure Tribute through Persuasion & Terror

- a. *Tribute*: About 100 years before Christ, Rome was the sole superpower across the Mediterranean world.
 - i. Roman generals sought to secure greater control over the flow of grain and other goods for consumption in Rome.
 - ii. In 63 BCE Roman General Pompey took control of the cities of Palestine from the Hasmoneans, the powerful Jewish family that ruled for 100 years. The Romans left the High Priest (Hyrcanus II) in place as a puppet-ruler. Tribute was required of the people to humiliate and to collect revenue.
- b. *Roman Imperial Theology (Persuasion)*: The glue that held Roman civilization together was an imperial theology centered on the divinity of the emperor.
 - i. *Founding Myth*: In Virgil's *Aeneid*, the Greek hero Aeneas is the mythic ancestor of Rome. First Emperor Augustus claims direct lineage to Aeneas, thereby asserting Rome's manifest destiny to civilize the nations. This founding myth includes a heavenly promise of an "empire without end."
 - ii. *Imperial Theology*: Titles of Caesar Augustus (Roman emperor from 27 BCE-14 CE) included: Divine, Son of God, God, God from God, and First Man; Lord (*kyrios*), Redeemer, Liberator, and Savior of the World. Caesar brought the "good news" (*euangelion*) to the nations (*ta ethne*).
 - iii. *Narrative theology*: The emperor's claim to be "God" was reinforced using multimedia to a largely illiterate population in images and structures, such as coins and statues.
- c. *Conquest & Crucifixion (Terror)*: Still, there was regular resistance to Roman rule due to the crushing tax burden. Roman Legions conquered and reconquered Palestine several times.
 - i. The legions would destroy villages, slaughter or enslave large numbers, and hang insurgents on crosses along the road for "demonstration" effect to terrorize the population into submission..
- d. **What's the Point?** Jesus is not just involved in an internal religious fight. The Roman Empire is not a neutral bystander or a hapless victim of petty arguments among Jewish groups. Rome is the bad guy.

2. Palestinian Puppet-Rulers: The Herodians & their Roman Patrons

- a. *Roman Patron-Client Relations*: Kinship and politics drove religious and economic institutions. One survived not by "merits," but by personal connections of family, friends, brokers and patrons.
 - i. *Patrons*: Elites who provide favors because of their power, influence, reputation, position and wealth. In return, they receive honor, strategic information and political support.
 - ii. *Clients*: Persons obliged to a patron in return for a variety of services such as physical protection, food, money, work, citizenship, legal support, appointments to official posts, tax exemption, etc.
- b. *The Herodians*: A powerful family that had a patron-client relationship with the Roman emperors.
 - i. *Herod the Great*: Emperor Augustus's favorite military dictator kept tight control over the people with an extensive security apparatus of fortresses, garrisons & informants. He also loved to build.
 - ii. After Herod the Great's death (4 BCE), his kingdom was divided into 3 native regions (tetrarchies).
- c. **What's the point?** The local rulers engaged in massive building projects to curry favor with Roman rulers. This could only be funded thru oppressive taxation that caused their own Jewish people endless misery.

3. The Temple Economy: Purity & Debt System

- a. *Jerusalem Temple-State*: Continued from Hasmonean rule as a key instrument of Roman imperial control.
 - i. *Herod's Temple*: Along with sacrifices to the God of Israel, the priests also offered sacrifices on behalf of Rome and Caesar.
 - ii. *High Priestly Aristocracy*: Ten years after Herod the Great's death, Rome appointed a priestly aristocracy composed of four high priestly families to rule Judea, supervised by a Roman governor. They maintained order, collected taxes and tithes, sent tribute to Rome, and lived luxuriously.
- b. *Roman Palestinian Economy*: Around 90% of the Palestinian population were peasant farmers, and lived on the edge of destitution. The top 10% lived off the labors of others. Of this top 10%, about 3-5% of the ruling class such as governors & high priests lived extremely well, while the 5-7%% of the retainer group like soldiers, scribes & administrators lived securely.

- i. *Peasant families*: Had to (1) grow food to feed themselves and livestock; (2) generate a surplus for village reciprocity and redistribution; and (3) create even more surplus for taxes, tithes and tributes. The total amount of annual income going to tax and tribute averaged 40%-80%.
 - ii. *"Tax farming"*: Potential tax-collectors bid high to secure the lucrative tax-collection contract from Rome. They then extorted, with the military's help, the highest possible amounts from the people.
- c. *"The Law"*: The original purpose of the law was to create an equitable village economy. The emphasis on "holiness" was about being distinct from the Canaanite city-states (centralization) they had left.
 - i. *Abuse of the Law*: As time went on, the law became a legalistic system of dos and don'ts with payment required to atone for each offense. Those who couldn't pay were considered "unclean" and "sinners." Creating more categories of "sin" meant more wealth for the temple elites. Not paying meant not only sinful status before God, but being cut off from community because "unclean."
 - ii. *Role of the Scribes*: The scribes served the ruling elites as their intellectual, legal, and clerical servants. They could interpret the law so as to favor the taxation schemes of the elite.
 - 1. *Sadducees*: A faction of aristocratic scribes that gained power during Hasmonean rule. They represented the interests of the Jerusalem priestly elite. Theologically conservative, they rejected the oral tradition, the resurrection, and the possibility of social transformation.
 - 2. *Pharisees*: A faction of scribes who gained prominence in the temple-state with the rise of the high priestly aristocracy (6 CE). They relied more on oral tradition and translating regulations of the temple tradition to the people. More apocalyptic in belief, including resurrection and dream revelations, they would occasionally resist the priestly class.
- d. **What's the point? The Temple system benefited the Roman elites and the Jewish aristocracy, even as the people were being crushed. One role of the scribes was to expand and refine "sin" as a scheme to keep the revenue flowing into the Temple and into the coffers of elites.**

4. Village Life in Galilee: Trauma, Impoverishment, Hunger, Debt

- a. *Takeover by Jerusalem*: The Maccabees conquered Galilee in 104 BCE and subjected them to the "laws of the Judeans" (polity of the Judean temple-state). Most Galileans were descendants of northern Israelites left behind in Assyrian conquest and had their own traditions centered on village life and reciprocity.
- b. *Role of Synagogues*: Vast majority of people lived and worked in hundreds of semi self-governing villages scattered around the countryside, with the local assembly (*synagoge*) at the center. Socio-economic relations were conducted according to the Law of Moses, including sabbatical cancellation of debts. Goal was to keep families economically viable.
- c. *Collective Trauma*: In Galilee, multiple massacres under Roman rule caused mass trauma. Rome had four legions of soldiers stationed in Syria ready to move south if problems arose in Palestine. They had to pass through Galilee, so this region often bore the brunt of their brutality.
- d. *Herod Antipas*: Herod the Great's son, Herod Antipas, raised and educated at the imperial court in Rome, is now in charge of the Galilee and Perea tetrarchy from 4 BCE–39 CE.
 - i. Over the course of his rule, the building of imperial cities such as Sepphoris and Tiberias facilitates highly efficient tax collecting, which then funds other building programs.
 - ii. During the Herodian period, the Jerusalem high priesthood sent scribes and Pharisees to Galilee to collect tithes and offerings for the Temple.
- e. *Poverty, illness & broken communities*: After tithes & offerings to priests & Temple, and taxes to Herodian rulers and tribute to Rome, many had to borrow from officers of the state at high interest rates to survive. Many lost their ancestral land, became tenant farmers, and were then pushed into the brutally competitive day-laborer market, causing malnutrition, begging, disease, an early death. Community life was torn apart.
- f. **What's the point? Through the synagogues of rural Galilee, Jesus was nurtured in the little tradition of Sabbath and Jubilee. Imperial brutality and heavy taxation broke apart communities when community was the only means of survival.**

5. Paths of Resistance & Response

- a. *Messianic Movements*: Peasants lift up one of their own as "king" to liberate them from foreign rule. They often succeeded in gaining the people's independence from Roman rule for a period of 1-3 years.
- b. *Scribal Movements*: Scribes served the temple-state and the high priestly rulers, but were also immersed in the prophetic texts of the tradition. Occasionally some defected to join the people in solidarity.

- c. *Popular Nonviolent Protest*: On at least two occasions, the people of the countryside demonstrated their ability to organize and resist at great risk. One example is a mass strike in refusing to plant their fields.
- d. ***What's the point?*** Jesus lived in a time of popular unrest and many forms of resistance to the Roman-Temple state. Jesus was not a "lone ranger" but emerged from a strong and storied tradition of resistance.

The Gospel of Jesus

Class 3:

Palestine in the Time of Jesus

Underground Institute

Palestine in the Time of Jesus

63 BCE – 70 CE

- What it's like to be ruled by the Roman Empire
- Who the actual rulers are
- What's happening with the Temple
- Village life in Galilee (where Jesus is from)
- Different ways people resisted Roman rule

ROMAN RULE

SECURE TRIBUTE THROUGH PERSUASION & TERROR

Roman Empire

27BCE - 14AD (Reign of Emperor Augustus)





Roman Empire

Conquered Palestine in 63 BCE



Tribute



Roman Theology: Founding Myth of *Aeneid*



Roman Theology: Titles of Emperor Caesar Augustus



- Divine
- Son of God
- God
- God from God
- First Man
- Lord
- Redeemer
- Liberator
- Savior of the World

Roman Theology: Key propaganda



- Good news (euangelion)
- Nations (ta ethne)
- Justice (dikaiosyne)
- Faithfulness/loyalty (pistis)

Roman Theology: Communication



Conquest & Crucifixion



Conquest & Crucifixion



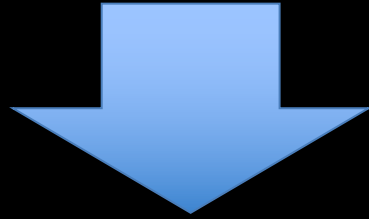
What's the Point?

Jesus is not just involved in an internal religious fight. The Roman Empire is not a neutral bystander, or a hapless victim of petty arguments among Jewish groups. Rome is the bad guy.

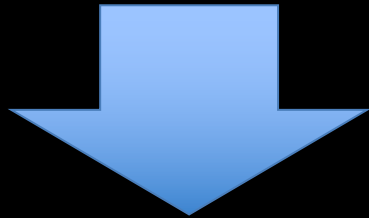
PALESTINIAN PUPPET-RULERS

THE HERODIANS & THEIR ROMAN PATRONS

Roman Emperor



Local Ruler



High Priest

Roman Patron-Client Relationships

Patron

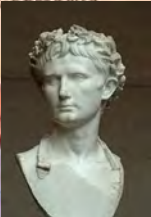


Honor
Information
Political support

Money
Roman citizenship
Work
Physical protection
Food
Legal support
**Appointments to
official positions**
Freedom from taxes

Client

Herodians



Roman Emperor:
Caesar Augustus



Local Ruler:
Herod the Great



Herod the Great's Rule

37BCE-4BCE



- Heavily taxed the people in order to pay for building projects that would honor Emperor Augustus
- Tried to Hellenize the people by imposing Roman activities and institutions



Palestine after Herod the Great's Death



Judea:
Archelaus (later Pontius Pilate)

Galilee & Perea:
Herod Antipas

Northern Territories:
Herod Philip

What's the Point?

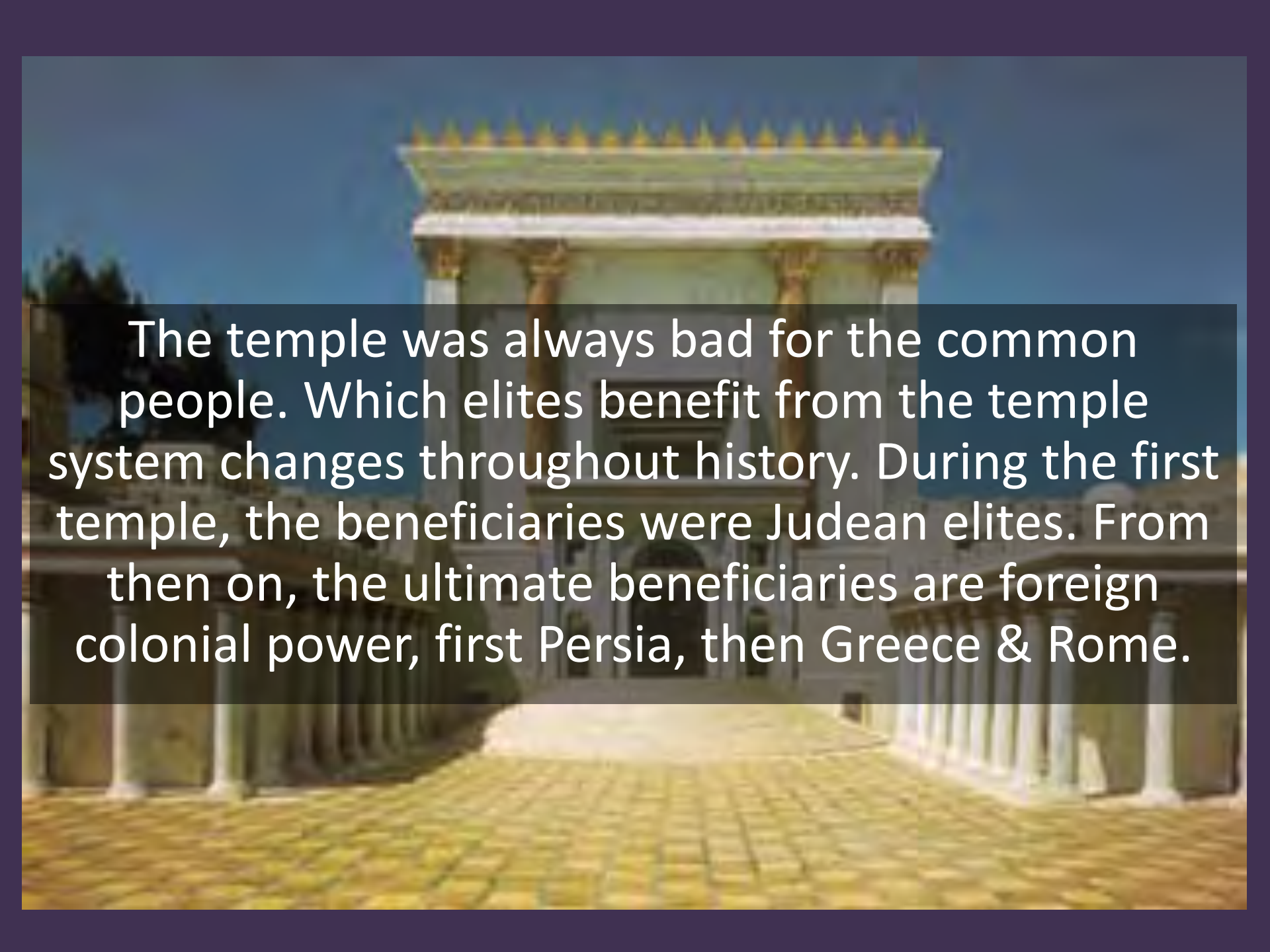
The local rulers engaged in massive building projects to curry favor with Roman rulers. This could only be funded through oppressive taxation that caused their own Jewish people endless misery.

THE TEMPLE ECONOMY

PURITY & DEBT SYSTEM

Review of Temple History

- Tribal religion (no centralized religion)
- Temple under Solomon (1st Temple)
- Destruction by Babylonians
- Persia funds Temple reconstruction by returning exiles (2nd Temple)
- Abomination of Desolation by Greeks
- Herod's improved temple



The temple was always bad for the common people. Which elites benefit from the temple system changes throughout history. During the first temple, the beneficiaries were Judean elites. From then on, the ultimate beneficiaries are foreign colonial power, first Persia, then Greece & Rome.

Herod's Temple



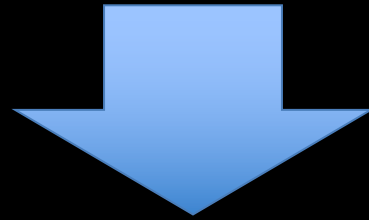
High Priestly Aristocracy

- The face of Roman rule
- Responsible for maintaining order
- Collected the tribute for Rome and taxes & tithes for temple
- Used their position to live luxuriously



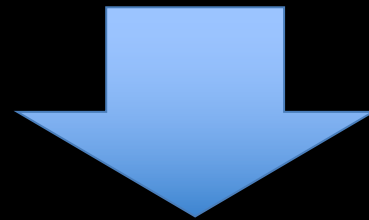
Roman Emperor

(e.g. Caesar August, Tiberius)



Local Ruler

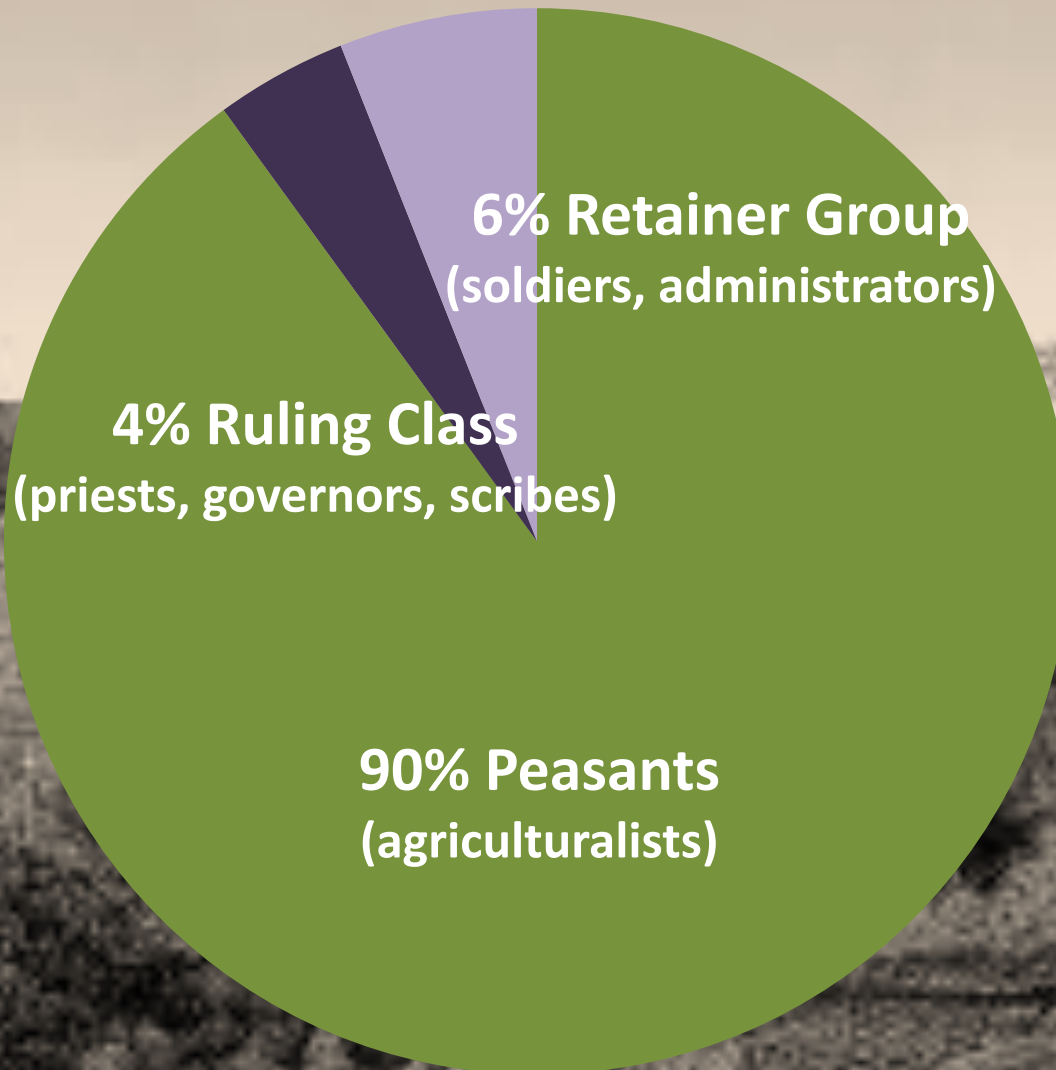
(e.g. Herod the Great, Pontius Pilate)



High Priest

(e.g. Caiaphas)

Roman Palestinian Economy



Peasant Families



Needed enough food for:

- Their own family and livestock
- For village reciprocity
- Taxes, tributes & tithes

Tax Rates

- To Rome:
 - 25% of every second harvest
- To the Temple:
 - Annual temple tax
 - Tithes & offerings
 - “First fruits”
 - Taxes for special projects (e.g. rebuilding the temple)
- Totaled 40%-80% of annual income



Tax Collectors



The Law

- The original purpose was to serve as guidelines for creating an equitable village economy. The emphasis on “holiness” was about being distinct from the Canaanite city-states they had left.
- During the course of Jewish history, the law was codified into a legalistic system of dos and don'ts with payment required to atone for each offense. Those who couldn't afford the payments were considered “unclean” and “sinners.”
- The more offenses requiring atonement, the more wealthy the temple elites became. Ostracizing those who couldn't pay (sinners) motivated the people to prioritize payment.

Example

- Touch something “unclean” like a dead animal, pay a sack of wheat
- Work on the Sabbath, pay two jars of oil and a goat



Scribes

Sadducees: fundamentally aristocratic, represent interests of elites in Jerusalem, reject oral tradition, reject resurrection, reject possibility of social transformation

Pharisees: rely more on oral tradition, translate regulations of the temple tradition to the people, apocalyptic, would occasionally resist the priestly class



What's the Point?

The Temple system benefited the Roman elites and the Jewish aristocracy, even as the people were being crushed. One role of the scribes was to expand and refine “sin” as a scheme to keep the revenue flowing into the Temple and into the coffers of elites.

VILLAGE LIFE IN GALILEE

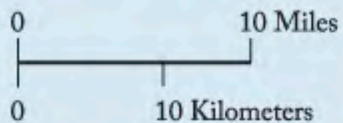
TRAUMA, IMPOVERISHMENT, HUNGER, DEBT

Galilee

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First-Century Galilee



Mediterranean Sea



Caesarea

SAMARIA

SYRIA

GALILEE

Ptolemais

Chorazin

Capernaum

Bethsaida

Gennesaret

Gergesa

Sepphoris

Cana

Tiberius

Sea of Galilee

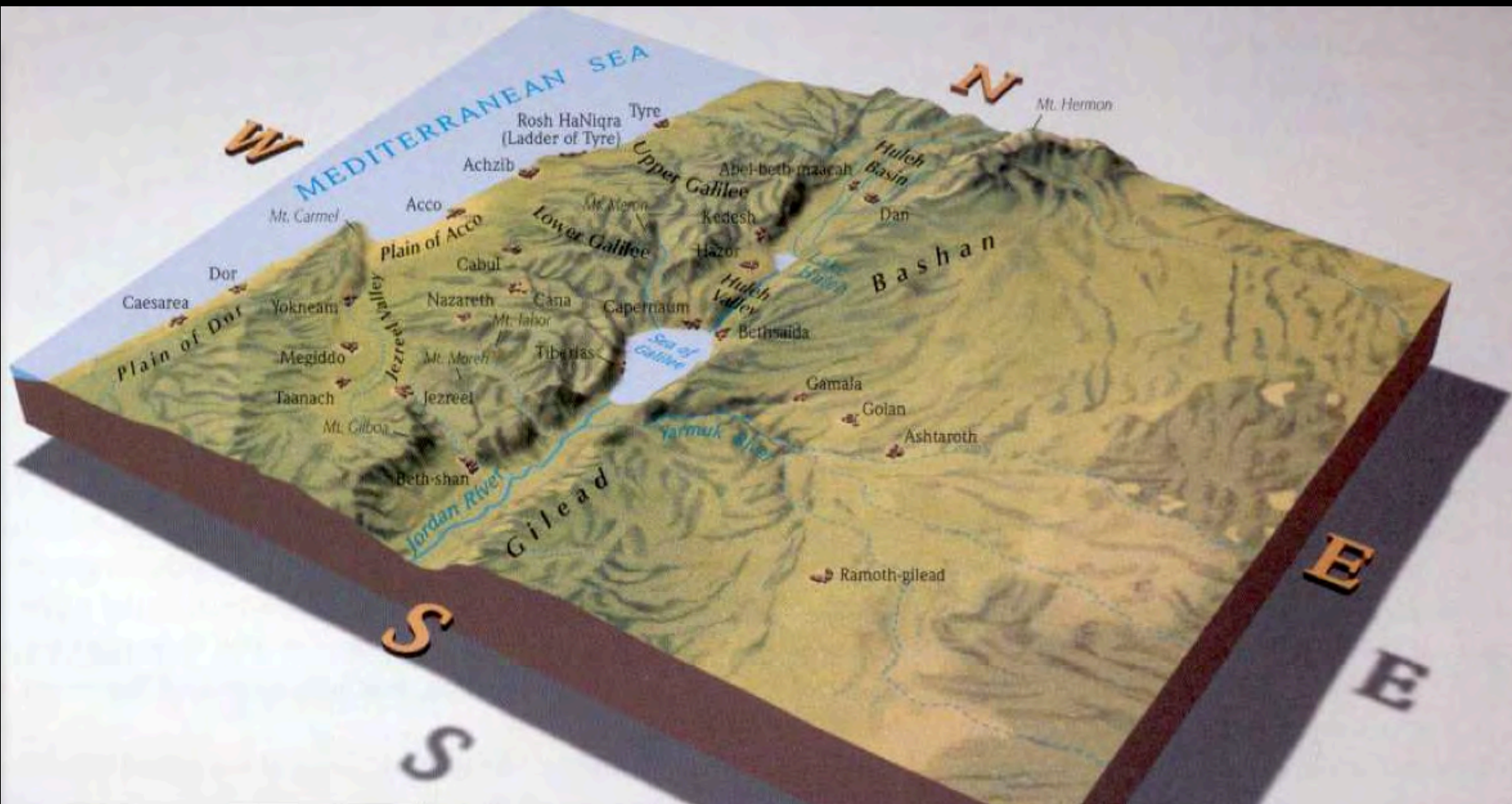
Nazareth

Nain

Gadara

River Jordan

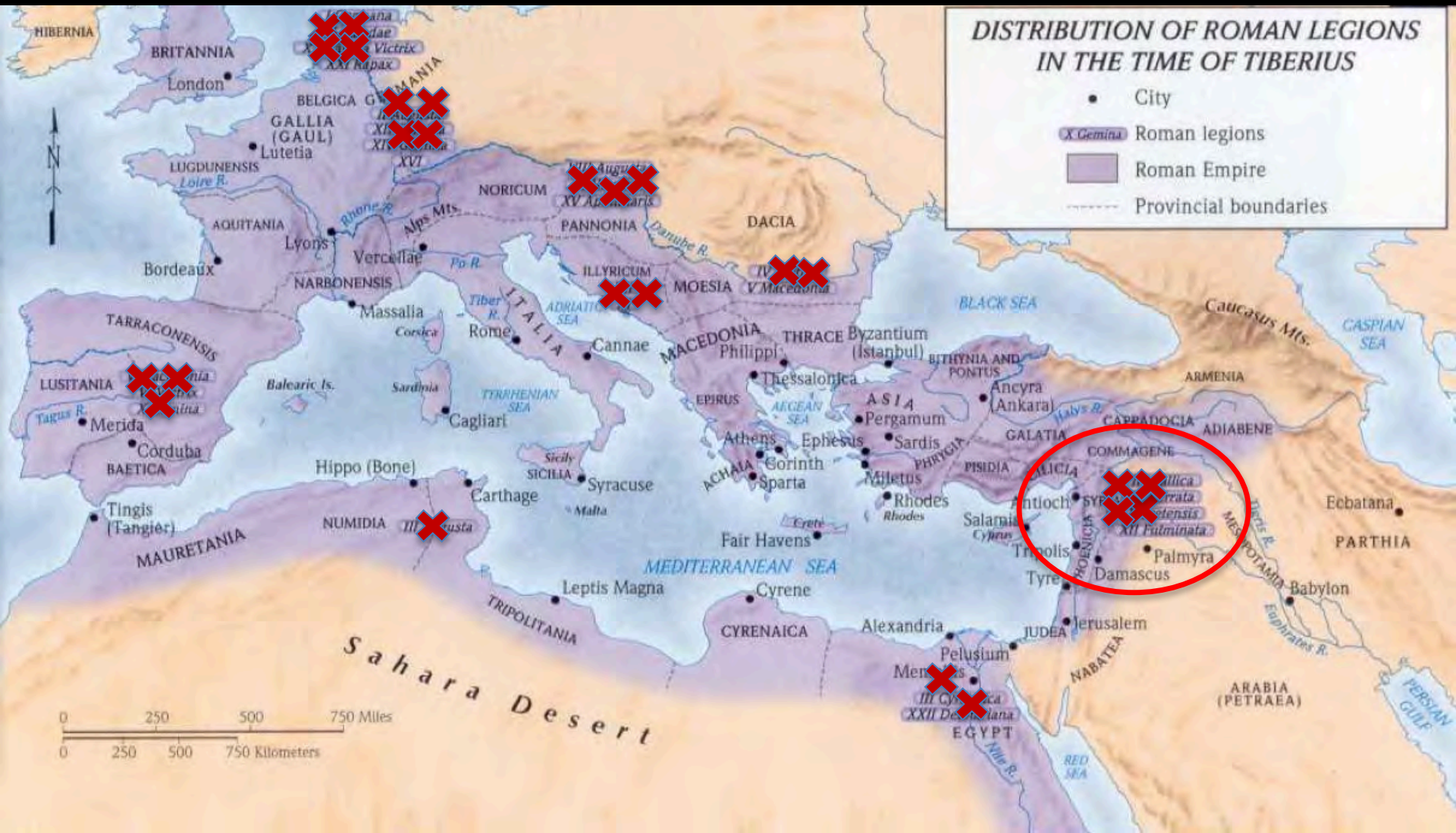
DECAPOLIS



Role of Synagogues



Location of Roman Legions



Collective Trauma



Collective Trauma



Rule of Herod Antipas in Galilee



Galilee & Perea:
Herod Antipas

Judea:
Archelaus (later Pontius Pilate)

Northern Territories:
Herod Philip

Poverty, Illness & Broken Communities



Land holder



Tenant farmer



Day laborer

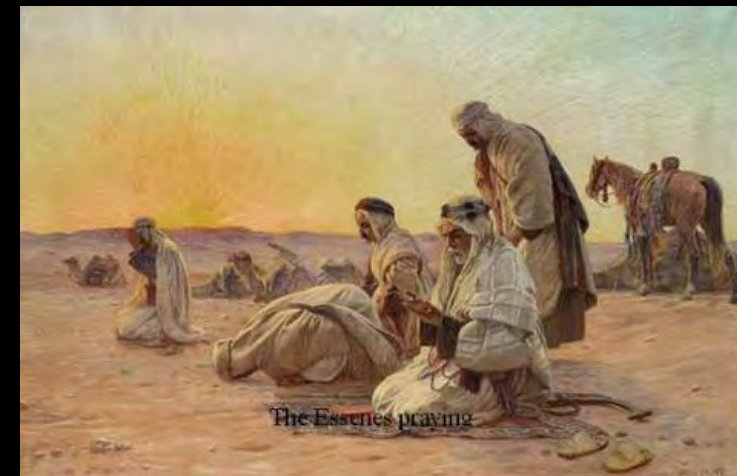
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Through the synagogues of rural Galilee, Jesus was nurtured in the little tradition of Sabbath and Jubilee. Imperial brutality and heavy taxation broke apart communities when community was the only means of survival.

PATHS OF RESISTANCE & RESPONSE

Paths of Resistance

- Messianic Movements: peasants would appoint their own king to lead a revolt
- Scribal Movements: some defected to join the people in solidarity
- Popular Nonviolent Protest: the people of the countryside would organize at great personal risk



What's the Point?

Jesus lived in a time of popular unrest and many forms of resistance to the Roman-Temple state. Jesus was not a “lone ranger” but emerged from a strong and storied tradition of resistance.