

Part 2

Greco-Roman Background of the New Testament

Judea as a Roman Province, AD 6–66

Michael R. Trotter

Shortly after Jesus's triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, a group of ill-intentioned Pharisees sought to discredit the Savior by publicly asking him a question they believed could not be answered without either causing him serious trouble with Roman authorities or offending a significant portion of his followers: "What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?" (Matthew 22:17; see Mark 12:14; Luke 20:22).¹ Although the question may seem innocent, the installment of a Roman official as governor of Judea had caused a deep political divide between Jews who supported Roman administrative oversight and Jews who viewed Roman leaders as their oppressors. Jesus avoided the political repercussions of the question by pointing to the image of Caesar imprinted on a coin (denarius) and saying, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and unto God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21; see Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25). Without understanding the political tension caused by Rome's intervention in Judea at this time, we cannot fully appreciate the nefarious nature of this question and the wisdom of Jesus's answer.

This exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees illustrates how understanding Rome's involvement in Judean politics can enhance our comprehension of the New Testament. This chapter will discuss the Roman political activities in Judea from AD 6 to 66 and how the Jews responded to Rome's intervention. Chronologically describing how Roman authority in Judea grew and transformed during this period, while giving special consideration to the significant Roman officials portrayed in the New Testament, will illuminate Rome's influence on first-century Christians.

Herod “the Great” as a Client King of Rome

When the Savior was born in the village of Bethlehem (Matthew 2:1–10; Luke 2:1–7), he was born into a kingdom ruled by Herod the Great. Although Herod was the reigning king of the Jews, his position as monarch depended entirely on the will of the Roman emperor and the Roman senate. Herod began his political career as a *procurator* of Galilee serving under Hyrcanus II, the Jewish high priest who ruled as *ethnarch* (literally “ruler of the nation”). When Hyrcanus II was captured during a Parthian invasion in 40 BC, however, Herod was forced to flee to Rome to beg for assistance. With the help of powerful friends, such as Mark Antony, Herod was proclaimed king of Judea by the Roman senate and given sufficient military support to reclaim his new kingdom from the Parthians.² By 37 BC, Herod had successfully expelled the Parthians from Jerusalem and established his authority over the territories of Judea, Galilee, Perea, and Idumea.³ Herod’s kingship was later confirmed by the emperor Augustus in 30 BC, and his territory was expanded to include Gadara, Hippos, Samaria, Gaza, Anthedon, Joppa, and Strato’s Tower.⁴

Because Herod was the ruler of an independent kingdom, his territory was not considered part of the Roman Empire. However, this technicality did not prevent Roman officials from regulating Herod’s rule; if Herod did anything to displease the Roman senate, the senate could inflict disciplinary actions against him. Consequently, Herod was considered a client king of Rome, that is, an independent monarch accountable to Rome for the administration of his kingdom. Client kings were permitted to rule as they saw fit provided they maintained peace in their territories, did not attempt to interfere in foreign affairs without prior Roman approval, and rendered service to the Roman Empire when called upon. In return for complying with these requirements, the client king’s position as ruler would be secured indefinitely.

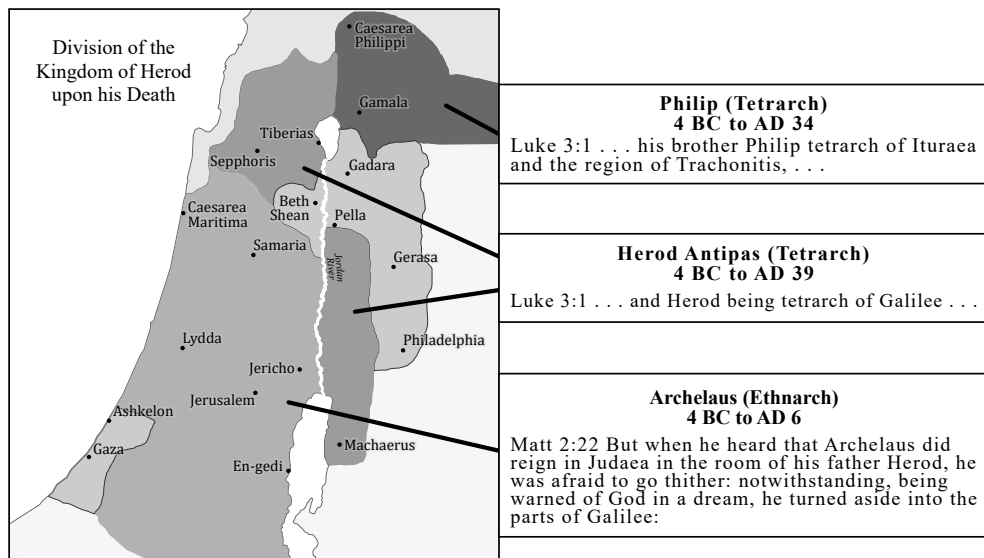
Client kings were not required to collect and pay taxes to Rome, although they often gave Roman officials extravagant gifts to earn their favor.⁵ This policy of not collecting taxes from client kingdoms poses some problems for understanding the Gospel of Luke’s account of the birth of Jesus. Luke 2:1–3 states: “And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus, that all the world should be taxed. . . . And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.”⁶ According to the author of the Third Gospel, Joseph brought Mary to Bethlehem in order to register to pay a tax. If the Gospel of Matthew is correct in placing the birth of Jesus toward the end of Herod’s reign, however, the emperor Augustus would have had no authority to collect taxes from Herod’s territory. Some scholars have attempted to clarify this inconsistency by identifying the census mentioned in Luke 2 with the Roman census of AD 6/7, which was conducted long after the death of Herod when a portion of his original kingdom had been incorporated into the Roman Empire.⁷ Consequently, Luke’s reference to a Roman taxation in Judea and Galilee around the time of Jesus’s birth cannot be readily reconciled with the known governmental structure of the time. Unless new historical evidence that reconciles this inconsistency emerges, the exact circumstances surrounding Joseph and Mary’s journey to Bethlehem must remain obscure.

As a client king of Rome, Herod was forced to maintain a delicate balance between pleasing his Roman patrons and pleasing his Jewish subjects, many of whom considered Roman culture an affront to traditional Jewish life. Herod, however, maintained this political balance by portraying himself as a Roman to the Romans and a Jew to the Jews. In his predominantly gentile territories, Herod commissioned numerous building projects to honor the Romans and their culture. For example, on the site of Strato's Tower he built a massive coastal city that he named Caesarea in honor of the emperor, and he erected multiple temples to honor Augustus across his kingdom, including the extravagant temple in the heart of Sebaste.⁸ Additionally, he rebuilt the Pythian Temple of Apollo at Rhodes at his own expense after the original temple was destroyed by a fire.⁹ By embracing Roman culture and flattering his Roman patrons in these ways, Herod was able to secure his throne.

Although he promoted Roman culture in the pagan cities of his kingdom, Herod also sought to respect the customs of the Jewish cities in his territory to some extent. For instance, in these cities he ensured that all coinage was devoid of images in keeping with the law of Moses.¹⁰ His most significant attempt to please the Jewish people, however, was the extravagant renovation and expansion of the Jerusalem temple, which he accomplished using only priestly builders.¹¹ The construction of this costly endeavor, which began in ca. 20 BC and took decades to complete, was still ongoing during the ministry of Jesus (John 2:20). Herod's renovation of the temple was so exquisite that rabbis would later say, "Whoever has not seen Herod's building, has never seen anything beautiful."¹²

Despite Herod's efforts to appease his Jewish subjects, he often aroused their animosity by attempting to impose Roman culture on them. When he built a theater and a hippodrome in Jerusalem, many Jews were upset because these Roman institutions were considered distinctly un-Jewish and directly "in opposition to Jewish customs."¹³ On another occasion Herod installed a large golden eagle, a symbol closely associated with the Roman Empire, over the gate of the temple, causing many devout Jews of the city to recoil in horror.¹⁴

The hostility with which some of Herod's Jewish subjects regarded him on account of his pro-Roman policies made him paranoid of any potential Jewish uprising that might threaten his throne. This paranoia motivated him to use extreme and often brutal means of securing his position, as can be seen in the Gospel of Matthew's account of his ordering the murders of Bethlehem's infants shortly after the birth of Jesus (2:1–16). Some scholars have questioned the validity of this event because it cannot be corroborated by any evidence outside the Gospel of Matthew.¹⁵ While it must be conceded that Matthew 2 is the only known account of this tragic event, the paranoia and brutality that Matthew attributed to Herod can also be seen in Josephus's descriptions of him. For example, according to Josephus, when the Hasmonean high priest Aristobulus began to be celebrated and revered among the Jews, Herod had him murdered because he feared the Jews would want to make him king.¹⁶ He also executed his own sons Alexander, Aristobulus, and Antipater because he believed they were plotting to take his throne.¹⁷ Additionally, Josephus reports that on his deathbed Herod ordered all the prominent men of Judea be imprisoned in the hippodrome and executed as soon as he passed away, so that all the Jews would weep when he died (although this com-



Division of the Kingdom of Herod upon His Death. Map by ThinkSpacial.

mand was not obeyed).¹⁸ While the account of Herod in Matthew 2:1–16 cannot be corroborated by evidence outside the New Testament, the description of his character in this passage fits well with the portrait offered by Josephus.

By the end of Herod's life, the attitudes of his subjects toward the Romans were varied and often polarized; in gentile cities, such as Caesarea Maritima, Roman culture was embraced and celebrated, while in predominantly Jewish cities, such as Jerusalem, Roman influence was commonly regarded with suspicion or open disdain.

The Division of Herod the Great's Kingdom

Upon the death of Herod in the spring of 4 BC, his final testament divided the kingdom into three territories with the stipulation that three of his sons, Archelaus, Antipas, and Philip, each be given one of these territories to rule over. Because Herod was a client king of Rome, however, only the Roman emperor had the authority to confer the kingdom on another, regardless of what Herod's will stipulated. Consequently, shortly after Herod's death each of his remaining three sons went before Emperor Augustus to request that his father's will be disregarded since both Archelaus and Antipas claimed to be the sole heir of Herod's kingdom.

Ultimately, Augustus decided to respect the essentials of Herod's will and divided the kingdom among all three sons: Archelaus was awarded the territories of Judea, Samaria, and Idumea with the title ethnarch (a rank lower than king although with similar administrative functions); Antipas was given the territories of Galilee and Perea, with the rank of tetrarch (a rank lower than ethnarch but with similar administrative responsibilities);¹⁹ and Philip was

made tetrarch over Batanea, Trachonitis, and Auranitis, while the cities of Gaza, Gadara, and Hippos were incorporated into the Roman province of Syria.²⁰

The Ethnarchy of Archelaus and the Beginning of Roman Rule

When Joseph, the adoptive father of the Lord, learned of Herod's death and that "Archelaus did reign in Judea in the room of his father Herod, he was afraid to go thither" (Matthew 2:22), that is, from Egypt back to Bethlehem. Joseph thus decided to settle in the village of Nazareth, which was under the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas in the territory of Galilee.

Although little is known regarding Archelaus's reign, Joseph's fear of living under his rule appears to have been well-founded. Josephus reports that Archelaus's rule was so oppressive that the Jews and Samaritans could not bear "his cruelty and tyranny." Consequently, both groups sent delegations to the Roman emperor to accuse the ethnarch of violating the imperial command "that he conduct himself fairly with respect to the affairs pertaining to [his people]."²¹ When Augustus heard the accusations against Archelaus, he immediately summoned the Judean ethnarch to Rome. Archelaus's defense before the emperor was insufficient, however, and after stripping Archelaus of his title and territories, the Roman emperor exiled him to Vienna to live out the remainder of his life in disgrace.²²

Instead of dividing Archelaus's kingdom between Antipas and Philip, in AD 6 Augustus made Judea, Samaria, and Idumea an official province of Rome.²³ The Romans first instituted the provincial system of government in 241 BC when they acquired Sicily in the First Punic War. Finding it impractical to govern a nation outside Italy from Rome, they appointed one man invested with *imperium*, or administrative and military authority, to govern Sicily as a representative of Rome. Each Roman governor was given command of the military forces stationed in the province and was charged with maintaining peace and collecting taxes throughout his assigned territory. Because governors were given limited administrative resources, they typically did not impose a new administrative system upon their subjects; rather, they tended to act as supervisors over the indigenous governing systems operating in their respective territories.²⁴ By the time Judea was made a province in AD 6, governors, known as prefects (Latin *praefectus*), were appointed by the emperor and given *imperium*, which among other things granted them jurisdiction over criminal proceedings of Roman citizens in their territories and the right to assume jurisdiction over local criminal proceedings as needed.²⁵ In the case of the province of Judea, this *imperium* also gave the prefect the right to appoint and dismiss the Jewish high priest as he saw fit.

With Judea now being directly governed by a Roman prefect, the collection of taxes became a point of tension among the Jews of the province. While tetrarchs and ethnarchs collected taxes from their subjects, these taxes were not technically given to the Romans; rather, taxes were paid to the tetrarch or ethnarch, and he would then give the Roman emperor a "gift" from his own treasury funds. However, with Judea now a province of Rome, the collected taxes were officially paid to the emperor for the glory of the empire.²⁶ There were two main taxes levied on provinces in the Roman Empire: an income tax known as the *tributum*

soli and a head tax called the *tributum capitis*, or poll tax.²⁷ Unlike the taxes required by traditional Jewish custom, such as the temple tax,²⁸ the *tributum soli* and the *tributum capitis* were deeply resented by many Jews who regarded them as nothing more than compulsory ransom payments to their oppressors. By the time of Jesus's ministry, there was a deep divide between Jews who willingly paid Roman taxes and those who saw these taxes as an affront to God and the covenant people. As a result, the former were commonly seen as traitors to traditional Judaism, while the latter were regarded as unfaithful subjects of Rome; to support one was to betray the other. It was with this political context in mind that a cunning Pharisee deviously asked Jesus, "What thinkest thou? Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar, or not?" (Matthew 22:17; see Mark 12:14; Luke 20:22).

In addition to the increased tension caused by the Roman taxation of Judea, Jewish-Roman relations were considerably strained by the actions of Roman governors who were ignorant of Jewish religious practices. Unlike previous rulers of Judea, the Roman prefects often did not grasp how seriously the Jews took their religious laws and had difficulty understanding how seemingly routine actions, such as displaying the image of the emperor, could kindle the ire of their Jewish subjects.

Roman Prefects (*praefecti*) of Judea ca. AD 6–41

ca. AD 6–9	Coponius
ca. AD 9–12	Marcus Ambilibus
ca. AD 12–15	Annius Rufus
ca. AD 15–26	Valerius Gratus
ca. AD 26–36	Pontius Pilate
ca. AD 36–37	Marcellus
ca. AD 37–41	Marullus

Despite this lack of an in-depth comprehension of Jewish customs, the Roman administrators who ruled Judea from AD 6 to 41 generally went to great lengths to preserve the indigenous laws of their Jewish cities. Unlike much of the Roman Empire, the province of Judea was not required to worship the emperor; instead the emperor asked only that the Jews make burnt offerings to God on his behalf.²⁹ Likewise, with the exception of Pontius Pilate,³⁰ the Romans seem to have made a sincere effort to respect the Jewish law forbidding images. For example, when the Syrian legate Vitellius was bringing an army to Nabatea, he agreed to lead his soldiers around Judea so that the banners bearing the image of the emperor would not pass through Jewish cities.³¹

In addition to generally respecting Jewish customs, Roman prefects of Judea allowed Jewish cities to have a certain degree of autonomy in enforcing local Jewish laws. Although the Roman governor was ultimately responsible for the military, financial, and judicial administration of the province, in general the Sanhedrin (the governing body of the Jews led

by the high priest) had authority to enforce Jewish law and arbitrate legal disputes in Jewish cities, provided the crime in question was not political in nature, since such crimes were seen as attempts to interfere with Roman interests and were therefore under the jurisdiction of the Roman governor. Because one could become a Roman citizen only by performing a notable service to the Roman Empire or by being the child of a Roman citizen, most Jews living in Judea fell under the jurisdiction of the Sanhedrin and its subsidiary tribunals.³² However, the Sanhedrin's authority among the Jews was not absolute. For example, although the Sanhedrin was legally empowered to enforce the observance of Jewish customs, as will be discussed below, it could not legally carry out capital punishment.

Despite the privileges extended to the Jews by their Roman governors, some saw Roman rule as “an insult to the rights of God's chosen people who instead of paying tribute to the emperor in Rome should themselves have been called to rule over the pagan world.”³³ Consequently, tension arose between the Jews and their Roman administrators, and organized Jewish resistance groups began to form. Shortly after Coponius was made the first governor of Judea in AD 6, Judas of Gamala, also called “Judas the Galilean,” and a Pharisee named Zadduk began to teach that the tribute levied on Judea by Rome was nothing other than the Roman enslavement of the Jewish people. Accordingly, they made it their mission to incite the Jews to revolt against Rome. While neither Judas nor Zadduk succeeded in mounting a significant revolt, Josephus states that the Jewish people “would receive the message which they would speak with pleasure . . . and the nation was further infected with [their] preaching.”³⁴ The antiestablishment message of Judas and Zadduk eventually became so popular that some Jews formed a widespread anti-Roman political party known as the Zealots.³⁵ Famous for their radical ideas and passionate calls for political change, the Zealots prized liberty above all else and recognized God alone as the legitimate ruler of the Jews.³⁶

This political tension between the Jews and their Roman overlords during the early decades of the first century serves as the narrative context for many events described in the Gospels. One representative example is the trial of Jesus, to which we now turn.

The Political Dynamics of the Trial of Jesus

As the popularity of Jesus grew, the chief priests and scribes “feared him, because all the people was astonished at his doctrine” (Mark 11:18). The Gospel of John, however, clarifies that the Jewish leaders feared Jesus's increasing popularity not simply because they rejected his teachings, but because they viewed him as a serious political threat as well. Shortly after Lazarus was raised from the dead, the chief priests and Pharisees convened to decide how Jesus should be handled. During this meeting the Jewish leaders discussed the political danger the Savior posed to the Jewish people, saying, “If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation” (John 11:48). Before the Savior's earthly ministry, the Roman Empire had established an administrative system in Judea that granted the high priest power to generally oversee religious and political affairs among the Jews. However, as noted earlier, the Roman governor possessed

the authority to appoint and dismiss the high priest as he pleased; if the high priest failed to maintain peace or refused to support Roman interests, he was replaced with someone more conformable to the Roman agenda. Jewish leaders apparently feared that Jesus was going to upset the status quo. Unlike the high priest and his associates, the Savior was not constrained by any need to support Roman interests. If Jesus became influential enough to challenge the high priest's authority, then the Roman governor might deem the high priest incapable of maintaining peace and supporting Roman interests in the region, a situation that would result in the dismissal of the established Jewish leadership. In order to secure their positions and, as they perceived it, the political stability of their nation, the Jewish leaders decided Jesus had to die (John 11:49–53).

The political situation between the Jews and the Romans also influenced the manner in which the Jewish leaders brought about the death of the Savior. The Gospels report that Jesus was forced to appear before at least one Jewish judiciary council that declared him worthy of death but did not officially sentence him to death. The exact nature of this council is unclear because each Gospel account describes it somewhat differently.³⁷ Matthew relates that Jesus was brought before a “council” (Sanhedrin) of the chief priests and elders who sought false witnesses to justify putting him to death (Matthew 26:59). After many witnesses were produced who could not corroborate each other's false accusations, Jesus was accused of threatening to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days (26:60–61; compare John 2:19). Although this false accusation served as the initial charge against Jesus, as his interrogation progressed the charge against him became blasphemy. When the high priest asked Jesus if he claimed to be the Son of God, he answered: “Thou has said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven” (26:64). Considering Jesus's response blasphemous, the council proclaimed him worthy of death and beat him violently before sending him to be examined by Pilate (26:65–68).

The account of this council in the Gospel of Mark generally corroborates the account given in the Gospel of Matthew. Both agree that Jesus was brought before a judiciary council composed of the chief priests and elders of the Jews and that they sought false witnesses to accuse him (Matthew 26:59; Mark 14:55–56), both agree that Jesus was eventually accused of threatening to destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days (Matthew 26:60–61; Mark 14:57–59), and both agree that Jesus was judged worthy of death because he declared that they would see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power (i.e., God) and coming in heavenly clouds (Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:62).

The Gospel of Luke recounts the event slightly differently, however. Luke states that instead of being taken directly to the judiciary council, Jesus was first taken to the house of the high priest, where he was mocked and beaten (Luke 22:54, 63–65). The Savior then remained at the high priest's residence until the following morning when the chief priests, elders, and scribes convened a council to decide his fate (22:66). Unlike the accounts given in Matthew and Mark, Luke omits any mention of false witnesses or beatings during the council. Instead the council first asked if Jesus was the Messiah (22:67). When the Savior refused to answer

the question, the council asked if he claimed to be the Son of God (22:67–70). Although Jesus did not explicitly confirm or deny being God’s Son, his lack of a denial and his general unwillingness to cooperate were used by the council to justify his execution (22:70–71).

The account in the Gospel of John differs significantly from those in the Synoptic Gospels. According to John, after Jesus was arrested he was led to the house of Annas, a man who had served as high priest from AD 6 to 15 and was the father-in-law of the current high priest, Caiaphas (John 18:13).³⁸ While it is not clear who attended this meeting, it does not appear to have been a formal judiciary council but rather an informal inquiry, since the current high priest was not present and no chief priests or elders are mentioned.³⁹ However, it does not appear to have been a private conversation since others, including Peter and an unnamed disciple of Christ, were allowed to enter Annas’s court while Jesus was being questioned (18:15–16). The interrogation appears to have been brief; Annas asked Jesus about his disciples and his teachings, and Jesus responded by suggesting Annas ask his disciples about his teachings since he always taught them publicly (18:20–21). Jesus was then bound and sent to Caiaphas, who sent him to stand trial before Pilate (18:24, 28). Although the Gospel of John does not describe a formal trial of Jesus on this night, it must be remembered the author of this Gospel had described a prior council held by the chief priests and Pharisees in John 11:47–54, where it was decided that Jesus was worthy of death.

While scholars have variously explained the differing accounts of the Savior’s appearance before the Jewish authorities,⁴⁰ it suffices here to show that the Gospels agree the Savior was compelled to appear before Jewish authorities who believed he was guilty of a crime (perhaps blasphemy) and worthy of death but who stopped short of passing a formal death sentence against him. Rather than impose the death sentence themselves, the Jewish leaders delivered Jesus to Pilate for trial, hoping the Roman governor would execute the punishment they had already determined he deserved.

It is commonly assumed that the Jewish leaders were forced to deliver Jesus to Pilate for trial because only the Roman governor had the authority to inflict capital punishment. For example, James E. Talmage wrote, “In strict accuracy we cannot say that the Sanhedrists sentenced Christ to death, inasmuch as the power to authoritatively pronounce capital sentences had been taken from the council by Roman decree.”⁴¹ The assertion that the Jewish authorities could not legally execute Jesus primarily relies on two pieces of evidence. The first is a statement made by Josephus indicating that Coponius became the first Roman governor of Judea “after he received authority to govern from Caesar, including the infliction of capital punishment.”⁴² The second piece of evidence is a statement attributed to the Jewish leaders in John 18:31, which states, “It is not lawful for us to put any man to death.” Taken together, these statements imply that only the Roman governor possessed the authority to sentence Jesus to death.

Other events also imply the Jews lacked legal authority to inflict capital punishment. For example, Josephus records that in AD 62 when the sitting governor of Judea, Festus, died and his replacement was en route to the province, the Jewish high priest, Annas II, convened the Sanhedrin and decreed that a group of Christians, including James the half brother of

Jesus, be stoned to death “as violators of the law.”⁴³ A group of outraged citizens complained to Albinus, the newly appointed governor of Judea, about Annas II’s behavior “because it was not lawful for Annas to convene the Sanhedrin without his knowledge.”⁴⁴ If, as Josephus says, the Sanhedrin could not be convened legally without Roman approval, it would not have been able to legally pass a death sentence without similar authorization.⁴⁵

The Jewish authorities may have had political reasons for wanting Pilate to give the official death sentence, however. The Gospels of Mark and Luke record multiple occasions when the chief priests and scribes sought to lay hands on Jesus but restrained themselves because “they feared the people” (Mark 12:12; Luke 20:19; 22:2). Since Jesus had a large group of followers who might have come to his defense, the Jewish leaders could not move against him openly without risking a public protest or riot. If such a tumult were to arise, the Jewish leaders would lose the support of many Jews and the favor of Pilate for failing to maintain peace in the region. By having Pilate pass the death sentence against Jesus, the Jewish leaders could deflect his disciples’ blame onto Pilate while simultaneously forcing the prefect to take responsibility for any ensuing tumult.

The political situation of the time also heavily influenced the Savior’s trial before Pilate. While each of the Gospel writers depicts the trial somewhat differently, they all depict Pilate as ordering Jesus’s crucifixion largely as a result of the cries of the angry mob. While the Gospels of Mark and Luke subtly reference Pilate’s interest in appeasing the mob by stating that the “loud voices” of the crowd “prevailed” and that the Roman governor was “willing to content the people” (Luke 23:23; Mark 15:15), the Gospel of Matthew unambiguously states that Pilate capitulated to the mob’s demands because “a tumult was made” by them (Matthew 27:24). As stated previously, Roman prefects were responsible for maintaining peace within their provinces. Pilate may have feared that if this tumult were to escalate into a full-scale riot, the emperor might deem him incapable of keeping the peace in his Jewish territories and recall him, especially since he already had a poor track record of successfully de-escalating Jewish tumults.⁴⁶

The Gospel of John also describes the Jewish mob accusing Pilate of disloyalty to Rome: “The Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar’s friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar” (John 19:12). Although no threat was made to report this accused disloyalty to Caesar, it may reasonably be assumed that such a threat was implied, since after hearing this response Pilate immediately agreed to the crowd’s demand. Furthermore, Pilate seems to have been prudent to take even the implication of such a threat seriously, since when a Samaritan delegation formally complained to Vitellius, the Syrian legate, about Pilate’s conduct in AD 36, Pilate was removed from his post and recalled to Rome.⁴⁷

As can be seen from the preceding analysis of the arrest and trial of Jesus, the political situation between the Jews and Romans significantly influenced the manner in which Jesus’s death was brought about. While the politics of first-century Judea may explain *how* the Savior was killed, it should not be assumed that this political situation explains *why* he was killed. The Savior himself gave the reason for his death: “My Father sent me that I might be lifted up upon the cross; and after that I had been lifted up upon the cross, that I might draw

all men unto me . . . to stand before me, to be judged of their works, whether they be good or whether they be evil—and for this cause have I been lifted up” (3 Nephi 27:14–15). Christ suffered death in order to fulfill his divine purpose; the political situation in Judea merely influenced the way this purpose was accomplished.

Herod Agrippa I and the Reestablished Kingdom of Judea

The political situation generally continued in this way until the advent of Herod Agrippa I, who began changing the political landscape of the region in AD 37. A grandson of Herod the Great, Agrippa spent much of his early life chasing after the political success enjoyed by his grandfather. Although he failed to win the favor of the emperor Tiberius, he managed to become friends with the future emperor, Gaius Caligula (AD 37–41). Agrippa made a grievous political misstep, however, by publicly proclaiming that he wished the aged Tiberius would die soon so that his friend Caligula might ascend the imperial throne. When Agrippa’s statement was reported to the emperor, Tiberius had him imprisoned for disloyalty.⁴⁸ Agrippa remained in prison until Tiberius’s death in March of AD 37, when Caligula became emperor of the Roman Empire. Remembering the loyalty of his unfortunate friend, Caligula released Agrippa from prison and conferred upon him the territory of the late Herod Philip along with the title of king.⁴⁹

Agrippa’s appointment as king did not sit well with Herod Antipas, who continued to rule the client kingdom of Galilee and Perea as tetrarch, a lesser rank than that of a king. Having governed his tetrarchy successfully for decades, Antipas decided the time was right to petition the emperor for a promotion to the rank of king. When Agrippa heard of Antipas’s ambition, he sent an envoy to the emperor formally accusing Antipas of disloyalty to Rome. Upon hearing from both Antipas and Agrippa, Caligula sided with his longtime friend and permanently exiled Antipas to Gaul. Caligula also added Galilee and Perea to Agrippa’s kingdom in ca. AD 40 as a reward for his loyalty.⁵⁰

When Caligula was assassinated in January of AD 41, Agrippa once again saw the opportunity to extend his political influence. In the chaos that followed the emperor’s murder, Claudius and the Roman senate both possessed formidable armies, and both initially claimed the right to rule the empire. As tensions mounted between the two parties, Agrippa was selected to help resolve the situation, and he exerted all of his influence to ensure that Claudius would become the next emperor.⁵¹ When Claudius was ultimately accepted as emperor by the senate thanks in part to Agrippa’s efforts, the new emperor expressed his gratitude by confirming Agrippa’s kingdom and expanding his territory to include Judea and Samaria.⁵² With these additions to Agrippa’s kingdom, the Roman province of Judea was officially dissolved and the former kingdom of Herod the Great was essentially restored to his grandson.

Agrippa enjoyed the support of Rome throughout his reign and appears to have been popular among his Jewish subjects as well. Although he embraced Roman culture when he

was among Romans, he devoutly observed Jewish law when he was in Judea. Josephus states that “dwelling continuously in Jerusalem was pleasant for him and he preserved the practices of his country in purity. Through everything he kept himself pure and no day passed by him which was lacking the lawful sacrifices.”⁵³ Agrippa was also praised for defending Jewish culture against Roman influence. When Caligula commanded that a statue of himself be erected inside the Jerusalem temple, the predictable Jewish outrage immediately followed. Upon hearing of the situation in Judea, Agrippa intervened with Caligula on behalf of the Jews. Two different accounts exist that describe Agrippa’s intervention: Philo of Alexandria states that Agrippa sent a letter to the emperor convincing him to follow the precedent set by past Roman emperors and revoke his command to install the statue, while Josephus states that Agrippa won Caligula’s favor by throwing an extravagant banquet for the emperor, who then agreed to revoke his command as a token of gratitude for Agrippa’s generosity.⁵⁴ Although Philo and Josephus give very different descriptions of Agrippa’s intervention, both credit him with protecting the sanctity of the Jerusalem temple from Roman defilement.

Agrippa also attempted to win the favor of his Jewish subjects by trying to suppress the nascent Christian movement. As Christianity began to spread throughout the Mediterranean world, “Herod [Agrippa] the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church . . . because he saw it pleased the Jews” (Acts 12:1, 3). In his quest for greater approval, Agrippa beheaded the apostle James (the brother of John) and sentenced Peter to death, although the latter miraculously escaped from custody before the sentence could be carried out (Acts 12:2–19). While his persecution of Christians brought Agrippa the support of the Jews, some later Christian writers contend that he suffered an excruciating death as divine retribution for his actions against the apostles.⁵⁵ According to Acts 12, shortly after Peter’s escape Agrippa was addressing a crowd from Tyre and Sidon when the crowd proclaimed that he spoke with the voice of a god rather than the voice of a mortal man (12:20–22). “And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost” (12:23).⁵⁶

The End of the Jewish Kingdom and the Return of Roman Rule

The sudden death of Agrippa had significant political consequences for the inhabitants of his kingdom. Because Agrippa’s son, Herod Agrippa II, was too young to assume his father’s throne, Claudius decreed that Agrippa’s territory become an imperial province governed directly by Roman procurators. Unlike the Roman prefects who governed Judea and Samaria before Agrippa, however, the procurators failed to understand the critical role that Jewish religious practices played in maintaining peace in the predominately Jewish province.

Cuspius Fadus, who served as the first procurator of the new Judean province from ca. AD 44 to 46, quickly ran afoul of Jewish custom when he attempted to take possession of the high priest’s vestments, a tactic that had previously been employed by Roman prefects. Many Jews saw this as a violation of their religious rights and sent a delegation to Claudius to protest Fadus’s actions. After consulting with Agrippa II, Claudius determined that Fadus should not

take possession of the vestments.⁵⁷ Although Fadus accepted the emperor's decision, the incident did little to diffuse the tension between the Jews and their Roman administrators.

Roman Procurators (*procuratores*) of Judea ca. AD 44–66

ca. AD 44–46	Cuspius Fadus
ca. AD 46–48	Tiberius Alexander
ca. AD 48–52	Ventidius Cumanus
ca. AD 52–60	Antonius Felix
ca. AD 60–62	Porcius Festus
ca. AD 62–64	Albinus
ca. AD 64–66	Gessius Florus

Relations between the Jews and Romans continued to decline when Ventidius Cumanus became procurator of the Judean province in ca. AD 48. Resentment turned into open hostility when a Passover celebration at the Jerusalem temple was interrupted by a Roman soldier who exposed himself and made indecent gestures during the sacred proceedings.⁵⁸ An angry crowd of Jews immediately went to Cumanus and demanded that the offending soldier be punished. When members of the crowd began throwing stones at the Roman soldiers, Cumanus called for reinforcements. The arrival of additional soldiers caused the crowd to panic, however, and thousands⁵⁹ of Jews were purportedly trampled to death as the crowd frantically fled.⁶⁰

The Jews and Romans clashed over Jewish custom again when Cumanus plundered a handful of Jewish villages that had been accused of aiding robbers. During the enforcement of the punishment, however, a Roman soldier publicly destroyed a Torah scroll.⁶¹ Enraged by the contempt shown to their most sacred writings, the Jews immediately complained to Cumanus, who executed the offending soldier when he saw a revolt was about to break out.⁶²

Although Cumanus was able to pacify the Jews in this instance, the relationship between the Jews and the Romans continued to deteriorate because of the procurator's corrupt practices. The most serious instance of administrative corruption came at the end of Cumanus's administration when some Galilean Jews were murdered in a Samaritan village. Since Cumanus had accepted a bribe from the Samaritans, he refused to punish the offending village.⁶³ Unwilling to allow the Samaritans to go unpunished, a large group of armed Jews invaded Samaria and destroyed several villages. Cumanus then rushed to Samaria with an army and defeated the Jewish vigilantes.⁶⁴ After the Jews and Samaritans both complained to the legate of Syria, the case was referred to the emperor, who sided with the Jews and exiled Cumanus for his actions.⁶⁵

Any hopes that affairs between the Jews and Romans might improve with the removal of Cumanus proved vain when Antonius Felix was appointed as his replacement in ca. AD 52.⁶⁶ The Roman historian Tacitus states that instead of learning from the mistakes of his

predecessor, Felix governed the Judean province like a man who “believed he could commit any evil deed with impunity.”⁶⁷ Felix earned the ire of the Jews by his scandalous marriage to Drusilla, a Jewish noblewoman who had left her husband to marry Felix. In addition, the new procurator’s administration inspired the formation of numerous anti-Roman factions. During this time a particularly violent faction known as the *sicarii* began to spread throughout the province, assassinating anyone they believed supported the Roman administration, including the high priest Jonathan, whom they murdered as he officiated in the temple.⁶⁸ Besides the *sicarii*, false prophets attempted to incite a revolt against the Romans by leading large groups of Jews into the desert, where they claimed God would reveal to them the signs of their freedom. Felix regarded such religious groups as insurrectionists and sent Roman soldiers to forcibly disperse their gatherings and execute the so-called prophets.⁶⁹

The imprisonment of the apostle Paul in Caesarea Maritima, described in Acts 23–24, took place toward the end of Felix’s administration. Perhaps because of Felix’s scandalous personal life and corrupt administration, Paul found it prudent to teach the unjust procurator of “righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come” (Acts 24:25). Despite Paul’s powerful message, Felix desired a bribe in exchange for the apostle’s release; because Paul refused to bribe the Roman governor, he remained in prison for the remainder of Felix’s rule (24:26–27). When Felix’s replacement, Porcius Festus, arrived in ca. AD 60, the new procurator deemed it wise to review Paul’s case himself. Herod Agrippa II, who had risen to some prominence in the years since his father’s passing,⁷⁰ requested permission to participate in the investigation as well, although it is unclear if he was involved in an official capacity or simply to satisfy his own curiosity (25:22). After Festus and Agrippa II had thoroughly questioned Paul, both declared that the apostle had done “nothing worthy of death or of bonds” (26:31). But Festus was not able to acquit Paul of any wrongdoing because by this time the apostle had exercised his right as a Roman citizen to plead his case before the emperor, effectively removing the case from Festus’s jurisdiction.

After only two years in office, Festus died suddenly and was replaced by Albinus in ca. AD 62, and according to Josephus “there was no form of wickedness which he omitted.”⁷¹ Allegedly more concerned with making a profit than governing the province, Albinus instituted a policy that allowed imprisoned criminals to be set free provided an appropriate ransom was paid to the procurator.⁷² Because of Albinus’s refusal to punish those who violated the law, Josephus states that bandits and *sicarii* wreaked havoc throughout the province.⁷³

The situation only grew worse when Gessius Florus became procurator of Judea in AD 64; Josephus observed that Florus’s administration was so corrupt that Albinus seemed “a most excellent man by comparison.”⁷⁴ According to the Jewish historian, Florus made no effort to conceal his corruption, going so far as offering the plunderers and robbers of the province protection provided they gave him a portion of the spoils.⁷⁵ Consequently, Florus’s tenure proved to be the straw that broke the camel’s back. Unwilling to tolerate these abuses any longer, the Jewish people revolted against Rome in AD 66, “thinking it was better to be destroyed quickly [by revolting] than be destroyed little by little [under Roman governors].”⁷⁶

Conclusion

The writings of the New Testament cannot be fully grasped without understanding the political tension that existed between the Jews and the Romans during the first half of the first century. Rather than being founded in a vacuum, the Christian movement emerged from a preexisting political climate that the Savior and his apostles had to navigate as they established his church. The dynamic and often chaotic political atmosphere of first-century Judea contextualizes the New Testament and sheds light on the motivations of those portrayed in it. Whether clarifying how the Savior's original audience understood his words "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's" (Matthew 22:21; see Mark 12:17; Luke 20:25) or explaining how he could be condemned to die by a governor who believed he had done nothing worthy of death, the New Testament narrative cannot be separated from the political climate of the time without losing important background information. The political turmoil of Roman-ruled Judea was the nutrient-rich soil in which the church of Christ took root. As cultures clashed and the future of Judea became increasingly uncertain, the gospel of Jesus Christ became a beacon of hope for thousands of faithful Christians who, even in these trying circumstances, felt "peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come" (Revelation 1:4).



Michael R. Trotter is a doctoral student of Christianity in antiquity at the Department of Theological Studies at Saint Louis University.

Further Reading

- Huntsman, Eric D. "The Roman World Outside Judea." In *The Life and Teachings of the New Testament Apostles: From the Day of Pentecost Through the Apocalypse*, edited by Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment, 97–116. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010. This article gives a useful overview of provinces in the Roman Empire. In addition to discussing the Roman administrative system of first-century Judea, Huntsman illustrates how the Roman provincial system influenced the ministry of the apostle Paul as Christianity spread beyond the borders of Judea.
- Pike, Dana M. "Before the Jewish Authorities." In *From the Last Supper Through the Resurrection*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment, 210–68. Vol. 3 of *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003. Pike provides an in-depth analysis of Jesus's appearance before the Jewish authorities on the night of his arrest as described in the Gospels. The relationship between the Jewish authorities and the Roman governor of Judea is discussed at length, and relevant scholarly approaches to the topic are included.
- Richardson, Peter. *Herod: King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999. As a biography of Herod the Great, this book discusses the career and personal life of the Judean king in detail. Although Herod is the primary subject of the book, Richardson also provides a useful overview of client kingdoms in the Roman Empire as well as an in-depth discussion of the New Testament portrayals of Herod and his sons.
- Schürer, Emil. *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Christ (175 B.C.–A.D. 135)*. Revised and edited by Geza Vermes, Fergus Millar, and Matthew Black. 4 vols. Edinburgh, Scotland: Bloomsbury, 1973. This work provides an in-depth discussion of religious and political affairs in Judea from the rise of the Hasmonean dynasty in the second century BC to the Bar Kokhba revolt in the second century AD. Although this work goes far

beyond the time frame of the New Testament, it includes a detailed summary of the interactions between the Jews and Romans before the Jewish Revolt in ca. AD 70 that is helpful in reconstructing the political context of the New Testament.

Notes

1. Although the KJV translates the word κῆνσον as “tribute,” the term is better translated as “taxes.” See Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed., ed. and trans. Frederick William Danker (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 542.
2. See Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 14.14.4–5 (381–389); and *Jewish War* 1.14.4 (282–285).
3. Some ancient historians disagree on the specific territories Herod initially received from Rome; for a brief discussion of these disagreements, see Peter Richardson, *Herod: King of the Jews and Friend of the Romans* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 131.
4. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 15.6.7 (195), 15.7.3 (217); and *Jewish War* 1.20.3 (396).
5. For a more detailed discussion of client kings, see David C. Braund, “Client Kings,” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd ed., ed. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 348–49.
6. The KJV translates the word ἀπογράφεσθαι as “to be taxed”; however, the word literally means “to be registered [for a tax]” (Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 108). Thus, Luke seems to be describing a census that was taken in preparation for collecting taxes.
7. See Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Christ (175 B.C.–A.D. 135)*, rev. and ed. Geza Vermes and Fergus Millar (Edinburgh, Scotland: Bloomsbury, 1973), 1:399–427. All attempts to connect this census with the birth of Jesus have failed because Joseph and Mary lived in Galilee and “there was no moment in the lifetime of Jesus when Roman tribute was raised in Galilee, which was part of the tetrarchy [i.e., client kingdom] of Herodes Antipas” and therefore not part of the Roman Empire. See Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East 31 B.C.–A.D. 337* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 46.
8. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 15.8.5 (292–298), 15.9.6 (331–341); and *Jewish War* 1.21.2 (403), 1.21.5–8 (408–415); compare Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 5.14.
9. See Josephus, *Jewish War* 1.21.11 (424).
10. See Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 1:312.
11. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 15.11.1–7 (380–424); and *Jewish War* 1.21.1 (401); compare Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 1:311–13.
12. Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 1:308; compare Babylonian Talmud Sukkah, 51b; and Baba Batra, 4a.
13. Josephus, *Antiquities* 15.8.1 (268).
14. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.6.2 (151).
15. See, for example, Richardson, *King of the Jews*, 295–98; Jan Willem van Henten, “Matthew 2:16 and Josephus’ Portrayals of Herod,” in *Jesus, Paul, and Early Christianity: Studies in Honour of Henk Jan de Jonge*, ed. Rieuwerd Buitenwerf, Harm W. Hollander, and Johannes Tromp (Leiden, Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2008), 101–21; and Geza Vermes, *The True Herod* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 42.
16. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 15.3.3 (51–55); and *Jewish War* 1.22.2 (437).
17. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 16.11.2–7 (361–394), 17.7.1 (184–187); and *Jewish War* 1.27.2–6 (538–551), 1.32.1–5 (622–640), 1.33.7 (663–664).
18. Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.6.5 (174–179); and *Jewish War* 33.6 (659–660).
19. For more on the distinctions between ethnarchs and tetrarchs in the Roman Empire, see Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 1:333–34.
20. Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.11.4 (317–320); and *Jewish War* 2.6.3 (94–97).
21. Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.13.2 (342); compare *Jewish War* 2.7.3 (111).
22. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.13.2 (343–344); and *Jewish War* 2.7.3 (111).

23. There was some confusion among ancient authors about whether Judea was a distinct province or whether it was part of the province of Syria. For example, Josephus, in *Antiquities* 18.1.1, states that Judea was added to the province of Syria. Schürer has shown this statement to be inaccurate, however, by pointing out that Judea was governed by its own prefect and that the Syrian legate could interfere with Judean affairs only in times of extreme difficulty (*History of the Jewish People*, 1:357–61).
24. See H. F. Jolowicz and Barry Nicholas, *Historical Introduction to the Study of Roman Law*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), 67.
25. See Peter Garnsey, “The Criminal Jurisdiction of Governors,” in *Journal of Roman Studies* 58 (1968): 51–59.
26. The taxes imposed on Judea by the Romans should not be confused with the customs that were exacted by collection agents known as publicans. In client kingdoms and provinces alike, customs were collected at every territorial border by publicans who leased the right to collect them from the client king or governor in exchange for an agreed-upon amount of money. Should a publican’s revenue exceed the amount of the payment stipulated in the lease, he was entitled to keep the excess; however, if a publican collected less than the agreed-upon amount, he was responsible to pay the difference. Because publicans’ livelihoods depended on the amount of money they collected from travelers, they were commonly considered corrupt and were notorious for their unethical practices. It was for this reason that Jesus was criticized for eating with “publicans and sinners” (Mark 2:16). By the time Judea became a Roman province in AD 6, taxes were collected by Roman officials while customs continued to be collected by publicans (see Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 1:375). Although many Jews despised paying customs because of the corrupt tactics associated with publicans, the payment of customs did not seem to inspire the same anti-Roman sentiment that the payment of taxes did. For more on the differences between tax and customs collections in Judea, see Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 1:373–76.
27. See Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 1:401–2.
28. The temple tax was an annual half-shekel payment required of every male Israelite over the age of twenty. The tax was first revealed to Moses during the children of Israel’s forty-year sojourn in the wilderness for the intended purpose of maintaining the tabernacle and later the Jerusalem temple (Exodus 30:11–16). Because it was commanded in the law of Moses, the payment of the temple tax was considered a sacred duty and was required of all Jewish males who were of age regardless of their geographical proximity to Jerusalem and the temple. Josephus recounts how the Jewish men of the city of Nisibis in Mesopotamia collected the temple tax locally before sending it to Jerusalem under the care of armed guards (*Antiquities* 18.9.1 [312–313]). For more on the temple tax, see Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 2:271–72.
29. See Josephus, *Against Apion* 2.77; and Philo of Alexandria, *On the Embassy to Gaius* 23 (157), 40 (317).
30. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.3.1 (55–59); and *Jewish War* 2.9.2–3 (169–174).
31. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.5.3 (120–122).
32. For more on the judicial practices of Judea from AD 6 to 41, see Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 1:376–78.
33. Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 1:378.
34. Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.1.1 (6); compare *Jewish War* 2.8.2 (118).
35. While the Zealots would later play a critical role in inciting the Jewish Revolt against Rome in AD 66, it is unknown how active the party was in Judea and Galilee during the ministry of Jesus. Luke 6:15 identifies one of Jesus’s apostles as “Simon called Zelotes,” which might be better translated as “Simon who is called a Zealot.” It is not clear whether this means Simon was a member of the Zealot political party, however, because Matthew 10:4 and Mark 3:18 call Simon a “Canaanite,” which is the Greek transliteration of the Aramaic word *qanānā*, meaning “enthusiast.” Although it is possible that Luke 6:15 is referring to the Zealot political party, it is also possible that the verse is describing the zeal or enthusiasm with which Simon lived. See Eric D. Huntsman, “Galilee and the Call of the Twelve Apostles,” in *The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ*, ed. Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Thomas A. Wayment, vol. 1, *From Bethlehem Through the Sermon on the Mount* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2005), 227.
36. Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.1.6 (23).

37. For a detailed discussion of the differences between the Gospel accounts of Jesus's appearance before the Jewish authorities, see Dana M. Pike, "Before the Jewish authorities," in Holzapfel and Wayment, *Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ*, vol. 3, *From the Last Supper Through the Resurrection* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2003), 214–26.
38. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.2.1 (26), 18.2.2 (34).
39. In connection with John 18:19 ("The high priest then asked Jesus of his disciples, and of his doctrine") some confusion exists as to whether Jesus was interrogated by Annas, the former high priest, or by Caiaphas, the high priest at the time. See, for example, James E. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ: A Study of the Messiah and His Mission according to Holy Scriptures both Ancient and Modern* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 622, 643–44. John 18:24, however, states, "Now Annas had sent him bound unto Caiaphas the high priest." The Greek particle *oun*, which the KJV translates as "Now," denotes the continuation of a narrative and is better translated here as "Then" (Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 736), making it clear that Annas was the one speaking to Jesus.
40. For a brief overview of the theories scholars have employed to reconcile the differences in the Gospel accounts of Jesus's appearance before the Jewish authorities, see Pike, "Before the Jewish authorities," 224–25.
41. Talmage, *Jesus the Christ*, 627.
42. Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.8.1 (117).
43. Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.9.1 (200).
44. Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.9.1 (202).
45. It is unclear, however, how closely Jewish leaders followed this law. Some evidence in the New Testament suggests they sometimes carried out death sentences without seeking Roman approval. For example, John 8:1–11 recounts how Jesus saved the life of an adulterous woman whom the scribes and Pharisees were about to stone to death. Although many scholars believe this story is almost certainly a later interpolation (e.g., Bruce M. Metzger and Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*, 4th ed. [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005], 319–21), it nevertheless seems to preserve an earlier tradition that Jewish leaders at least occasionally attempted to carry out capital punishment. Additionally, Stephen was tried before a judiciary council presided over by the high priest and was stoned to death by those present (Acts 6:11–7:60). Since there is no evidence in the text or otherwise suggesting that Stephen's execution had received prior Roman approval, it is reasonable to assume that those who carried out the sentence did not obtain Roman permission first. Although some scholars have explained these inflictions of capital punishment by Jewish leaders as lynchings or actions that were not officially sanctioned by law (see Raymond Brown, *The Death of the Messiah: From Gethsemane to the Grave* [New York: Doubleday, 1994], 1:369–71), it is evident that Jewish leaders possessed means of inflicting the death penalty without Roman approval, even if those means were not technically legal.
46. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.3.1–2 (55–62); *Jewish War* 2.9.2–4 (169–177); and Philo, *On the Embassy to Gaius* 38 (299–305).
47. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.4.1–2 (85–89).
48. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.6.6–7 (179–204); and *Jewish War* 2.9.5 (178–180).
49. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.6.10 (237); and *Jewish War* 2.9.6 (181).
50. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.7.1–2 (240–252); and *Jewish War* 2.9.6 (181–183).
51. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 19.4.1–6 (236–273); and *Jewish War* 2.11.2–5 (206–214).
52. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 19.5.1 (274–275); *Jewish War* 2.11.5 (215–216); and Dio Cassius, *Roman History* 60.8.2–3.
53. Josephus, *Antiquities* 19.7.3 (331).
54. See Philo, *On the Embassy to Gaius* 36–42 (276–333); and Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.8.7–8 (289–302).
55. See Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 2.10.
56. Josephus gives an account of Agrippa's death that differs from the description given in Acts in some key details. In Josephus's account the crowd mistook Agrippa for a god because his royal robe illuminated in the sunlight. An owl then appeared above him as a divine omen that God was displeased with him for not

correcting the crowd's erroneous proclamation. Herod then became violently ill and died in agony five days later (*Antiquities* 19.8.2 [343–350]). Although Josephus's account disagrees with Acts 12:20–23 on the details of Agrippa's death, both agree on a general narrative: Agrippa addresses the crowd and is mistaken for a god, a divine manifestation appears when he does not correct the crowd, and he is immediately struck down with a divinely inspired illness that results in his death.

57. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.1.1–2 (6–14).
58. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.5.3 (108); and *Jewish War* 2.12.1 (224).
59. The number of Jews who perished is unknown; in *Jewish War* 2.12.1 (227) Josephus states that more than thirty thousand Jews died, while in *Antiquities* 20.5.3 (112) he puts the number at twenty thousand.
60. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.5.3 (109–112); and *Jewish War* 2.12.1 (224–227).
61. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.5.4 (115), and *Jewish War* 2.12.2 (229).
62. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.5.4 (116–117); and *Jewish War* 2.12.2 (230–231).
63. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.6.1 (119).
64. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.6.1 (120–122); and *Jewish War* 2.12.3–5 (232–236).
65. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.6.2–3 (125–136); and *Jewish War* 2.12.5–7 (238–246).
66. While Josephus states that Felix was Cumanus's successor, Tacitus, in *Annals* 12.54, suggests that Cumanus served as procurator of Galilee at the same time Felix was procurator over Samaria and Judea. For a detailed discussion of the differing accounts, see Schürer, *History of the Jewish People*, 1:459–60.
67. Tacitus, *Annals* 12.54.
68. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.8.5 (162–165); and *Jewish War* 2.13.3 (254–257).
69. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.8.6 (167–168); and *Jewish War* 2.13.4 (258–260). Paul was mistakenly accused of being one of these false prophets in Acts 21:38.
70. Although Agrippa II had been deemed too young to inherit Agrippa I's kingdom at the time of his father's death, he went on to enjoy a relatively prosperous career in the decades that followed. Having successfully ingratiated himself with several powerful figures in Rome, Agrippa II was initially awarded some smaller territories in his father's former kingdom. When Herod of Chalcis died in ca. AD 50, his territory and administrative powers were given to Agrippa II by the emperor Claudius, including the authority to appoint the high priest of Jerusalem, which had previously been given to Herod of Chalcis after Fadus was deemed unfit to retain possession of the high priest's vestments (see Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.1.3 [15], 20.5.2 [104]). In AD 53 Agrippa II gave up the territory of Chalcis in exchange for being put over the larger territories of Batanaea, Trachonitis, Gaulanitis, and Abila (see Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.7.1 [138]; and *Jewish War* 2.12.1 [223]). Following the death of Claudius in AD 54, the emperor Nero augmented Agrippa II's territory further by awarding him a portion of Galilee containing the important cities of Tiberius and Tarichea, as well as a portion of Perea containing the city of Julias and its fourteen surrounding villages (see Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.8.4 [158–159]; and *Jewish War* 2.13.2 [252]).
71. Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.14.1 (272).
72. See Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.14.1 (273).
73. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.9.3 (208–210); and *Jewish War* 2.14.1 (274–276).
74. See Josephus, *Jewish War* 2.14.2 (277).
75. See Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.11.1 (255); and *Jewish War* 2.14.2 (278).
76. Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.11.1 (257).