

Lessons from Hanukkah – What REALLY Happened?

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Welcome to Founded in Truth

Shabbat Shalom, everybody. Welcome to Founded in Truth. If this is your first time visiting today, I hope that you felt welcome. If it's your first time tuning in today, guys, we are a messianic church here in Rock Hill, South Carolina that loves the Torah. We love the Sabbath. We love the Word of God. But our main pursuit, our main trajectory and goal, is to build a community that orbits the person and the teachings of Yeshua. So welcome to Founded in Truth Fellowship.

Today, I hope it's edifying. We're going to talk about a little bit of history today, and we're going to talk about the background. What happened after Hanukkah? We know the story of Hanukkah. We talked about it a little bit last week. We know that there were revolutionaries, this insurgency that rose up and pushed the occupiers out of their nation, and freedom, and it was great. The Maccabees. And the history that we don't normally review is still filled in the pages of 1 and 2 Maccabees, two books that have historical implications. But we never really go through and read how messed up things got so quickly after this victory. And I find it to be extremely valuable information, but not only that, extremely important.

Because many of us, we come to the end of the Old Testament in the Christian Bible, Malachi, all these prophecies where God says, hey, I'm going to bring forth this new creation. There will be peace. It's going to be great. The messianic king is coming. And then we turn the page and conveniently there's Matthew. And it's like, awesome, Matthew chapter 1, Jesus' birth, this is great. A lot of stuff happened between this time period, roughly 400 years, between the end of the Old Testament, if you will, and the New Testament when Yeshua was born, if you will, in that area. And all those events only emphasize the weight of what this child king was going to

do and the impact he was going to have in the pages of Matthew and Luke. And so we're just going to jump in.

The 400 Years of Silence

So the time period we're talking about, as I said, at the end of the Old Testament, we just kind of drop off there. And in the Jewish canon, it ends in Chronicles. And of course, in the Christian canon, we put the prophets, the exilic prophets, at the end there. So we have all of these awesome prophecies about the coming Messiah and the new creation coming, and then we slide into the New Testament. And this period of roughly 400 years is traditionally also known as the 400 years of silence. I think I have a graphic. It's called the intertestamental period, because it's between the two testaments, right? Intertestamental period. And it's about 400 years of silence because no prophets arose during that time, nothing divine, not like it was before, okay? But all this other stuff happened.

You have the Persian Empire rising up. You have the age of Alexander the Great, the expansion of the Greek Empire. You have Egyptian rule over Judea. You have Greek-Syrian rule over Judea. Then you have the Maccabean Revolt, which was a really big deal. Then you have the Romans coming in and ruling over Judea. You have Julius Caesar. Then you have Herod the Great. And here we are, going to the pages of the New Testament.

I hope reviewing the history today, and I'm going to try to go through it rather quickly, will give you an appreciation for this period of time that most of us have never heard of or read about or understood, what was going on in the land of Israel. And I was going to make slides for every single event that took place, but there were so many. So I'm just going to run through them. And my purpose, just so you know, is not for you to remember every single thing that happened, and then this happened, and then this happened. That's not really my goal. My goal is for you to be so overwhelmed at how messed up things got, and continued to get, that there was just no time of peace. And my hope is that once we arrive at the opening pages of Matthew, you will understand the weight of what this meant for the people of Israel, the Jewish people of Israel in the first century, and what their expectations had become over this period of time. So we will dive in. I invite you to hop on this roller coaster with me.

Rebuilding After Babylon

As the Jewish people began settling back into the land of Israel, after they were conquered and deported for an entire generation by the Babylonians, they came back, and what was the first

thing they did? Under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah, they rebuilt the temple that the Babylonians had completely destroyed, and they slowly began to reorganize the priesthood. They were trying to get back to before Babylon. Let's try to get everything set back up so we can continue to operate like we did before. But during this time, they were still being ruled by imperial kings of other lands, here the Persians. The Persians allowed them to go back to their land, rebuild their temple, and get settled back in. And so that's what they did.

And as they were setting up the priesthood, they started back with Joshua the high priest. Yeshua, the high priest, right? During this time, and he was of the line of Aaron. That's the rightful step, right? In order to be a high priest, you have to be of the line of Aaron. You can't be a regular priest, you can't be from other tribes. Line of Aaron, it's hereditary, if you will, and it's preserved, and it's important. And if you are not a son of Aaron, you weren't allowed to officiate the temple of God as the high priest. It just did not work that way.

Corruption Enters the Priesthood

Which brings us to Onias II. Several, several, several high priests down from Joshua the high priest, every generation, Israel's moving forward, Onias II. During his seat as high priest, when the Hellenistic Greek king named Antiochus IV ascended the throne, that's the bad guy in the Hanukkah story, he was the high priest that was on duty. And Onias had a brother named Jason who told the king that he would give him a bunch of money if he made him high priest instead. Some things never change.

Now, Jason was very pro-Greek, pro-Hellenization. He was very pro the idea of coming up in modern times and saying, let's just take on these Greek attributes, and Greek language, and, you know, our traditions are cool, but the Greeks have so much more to offer. So he was very pro-Hellenistic. He told the king, give him a bunch of money if he made him high priest. Some things never change. So the king did so. And this marked a major change in Judaism, because this was the first time a high priest was a direct appointee from a foreign overlord rather than simply hereditary election. Corruption is now starting, around 170, 165, somewhere in there, B.C., before Yeshua, 175 years before Yeshua was born.

Jason, once he was in power as high priest, began implementing and setting up and swaying people in the direction of Hellenization, the Greek culture, and diminishing and minimizing the Jewish aspects of life and religion. Jason played the chess game of empire, a grasp of power. And when we begin to play the chess game of empire, of power, that's the thing, you're never able to hold it for long, are you? You find a way to get above everyone else, get in a powerful position,

maybe gain wealth, you know how to cheat strategically, dog eat dog, right? We're all familiar with that. That's our motto in corporate America, right? It's what you do. That's the thing. Whenever you play by those rules, you play that game, you never really hold it for long, do you?

Jason, Menelaus, and the Selling of the Priesthood

So we had Jason, thought he was good, he's now high priest, he got elected, gave the king some money, we're good to go. And Jason sent one of his men, Menelaus, to go make a payment to the king, a tribute to him. So Menelaus, servant of the high priest, goes to the king, the Greek king, the Syrian Greek king, and he says, hey, how about I give you more money and you make me high priest? I mean, he had it coming, right? Guess what the king did? Cool, you're the high priest now. And now Menelaus became high priest.

Then the Greek king Antiochus went to war with Ptolemy over in Egypt, the king over the dynasty that controlled Egypt on the other side of Israel, and he won. And he was the guy who then said, you know what, everyone needs to be Greek in my entire empire. All these nations, all these different cultures, all these different people groups, we will be echad, right? That's a Hebrew word, but we will be united. So everybody throws away their old traditions, their culture, their religion, and everyone just does the Greek thing.

And on his way back, he decided to visit Jerusalem. He went into the temple, saw everything shiny, put it in a cart, took it back home with him. That's the bridge version, right? Took it all. And he started enforcing his vision of purging these minority cultures in his empire of their identity. Many Israelites at the time were willing to do it. I mean, how could you possibly do that? Let's look at the modern world today. It's too easy, it's too easy, it's too easy. Let's just become Greek. While others certainly did not.

During this time, the temple of God, the Greeks came in and dedicated it to Zeus. The Greek ambassadors were using violence and intimidation to force Jews to worship like the Greeks did, sacrificing to idols, eating unclean meats.

The Hasmoneans Rise Up

It was just awful, bad stuff. During this time, a priestly family came about, the family of Hasmoneans. Hasmoneans rose up, this little dynasty, priestly family, and they declared they're not going to take it anymore. Not anymore. Not anymore. And this is where we come to the story of Hanukkah that we know. The family called together this grassroots militia. They said, guys, we've got to fight. We're going to fight these Greek forces. We can take them. So they

started fighting and winning, pushing them out all the way past Jerusalem and taking control of the temple again. I'll review. I know. It was a big deal. They had the temple back. They held an eight-day festival, rededicating the temple. And they petitioned that everybody repeat this every single year from now on to remind us that no matter how dark it gets, light will always pierce through the darkness. God is always with us. And they lived happily ever after. And that is the wonderful story of Hanukkah and the Maccabees, right? No, no.

The Game of Empire

What game are we playing in this story? The game of empire, the game of grasping for power. Always. Always. The fruit is just too tempting not to eat when you play this game. And empires play it and we play it in our individual lives. And our economy is based around getting ahead and eating other people so that you can become more wealthy and get in the lead, push those down so you can get up. It is just too tempting to continue feasting on that fruit. Greek forces came in, used manipulation, power, and violence to control a people group. It's nothing new. It's the same thing Cain did. It's the same thing Lamech did. It's the same thing Sarah, Abraham, Jacob, Judah, Pharaoh, Simeon and Levi, the King, King Solomon, all of them did it. It's the same thing the world has always done. This is how you control things. This is how you control people, right or wrong. You show force, whether it be through financial power or violence. This is how you control. That's the game of empire, the game of the beast. And here we have the situation where the inhabitants of Judea—the Jewish people—are tired of being controlled in this way. Don't blame them. As Americans, we can appreciate this, right? Okay.

Fighting Back

So they stood up and they said, we're not going to take it. We're not going to take it anymore. We've got the right to choose, and there ain't no way we're going to lose. They began killing the Greeks that were killing them. They began practicing guerrilla warfare in a way that gave them the upper hand. We can play this game too. And they won. And they were playing the game and they were winning. There's nothing more exciting when you're finally on top. Wow, I'm winning. Priests, priests. And now Israel finds itself declaring a little bit of independence here. Not a lot, as the story would lead you to believe. That happens a little bit later. A little bit of independence for the first time in hundreds of years. Yes, liberty, independence.

A Century and a Half

And all this has taken place around 165 years before Yeshua was born. We're a century and a half later, right? We're almost there in the timeline. This is a big deal. So we have Menelaus and he is still the high priest after this revolt initially takes place. But as you can see, power is beginning to shift in all of these thrones that are coming up. Shifting from him having influence over Israel because that's where the high priest was. The empires wanted to manipulate the high priest because the high priest was the central leading authority in Israel at the time. So we have influence from the high priest who was pro-Hellenization, but now we have this group of priests that are leading this revolution against Hellenization called the Hasmoneans coming up. And now they have power and arms. You have a group of rebels who have high influence to fight against Greek influence. And now you have this other group that represents empire. Think the colonists versus England, if you will.

Three Powers in Conflict

But wait, there's more. We have a third player that's beginning to grow in relevance to the land of Judea, Rome. Rome, this power that just keeps slowly emerging. They've been in wars with the Greeks for hundreds of years at this point. And so we have three parties in this political conflict, each trying to get the upper hand on one another. How is this going to work? How are we going to navigate this? We have the Syrian Greek Seleucid Empire, Greeks, the Romans and this Hasmonean revolutionary party, which has become a political party at this point. They became a political party known as the Maccabees, the Maccabean political party. After Antiochus IV, bad guy, after he died, there was support for his nephew, Demetrius I, to become king. But Rome decided to capture him and imprison him, right? Instead, they appointed the nine-year-old son of Antiochus king over Syria. Why would Rome do that when they were controlling this power at this point? Because they didn't want a twenty-something-year-old being king over Syria, a place they hadn't managed well. They'll stick a nine-year-old over there so it'll remain weak and they can still control it if they need to. It's a great strategy in the game. So they stuck a nine-year-old over this Syrian-Greek empire territory over Judea, right? And it remained weak and in control. And what do you think this nine-year-old did? He executed the high priest Menelaus for indirectly being responsible for the Hasmonean rebellion. That escalated quickly. Hold on to your seats.

The Succession Turns

But Demetrius I, the one that was imprisoned, who felt like he was the rightful heir to be king, he escapes Rome, goes back to Syria, and now is appointed king there. And he kills the boy king

Antiochus puts into play. And then he appoints a high priest over Judea named Alchem us. A high priest is now once again appointed by a foreign power and was also opposed to the Maccabean party. This is after the Maccabees rose up, pushed them out, and regained the temple. This is after. This is the aftermath. It's still happening. So what do you think the Maccabees do at this point? They're going to play the game. We're going to continue playing. They go to the Roman Senate, which is ticked that Demetrius has regained power in the area. And the Maccabees go to Rome and they say, hey, let's become allies, military allies. We'll fight with you, you fight with us, right? And then we can gang up on the Greeks if we need to. Deal. These are the priests that stood and said, all who are zealous for the Torah and the covenant with God, follow us. These were the rescuers of Israel. These were the leaders that we had been waiting on to redeem Israel once and for all. And now they're in the hammock with the Romans. Can you feel the tension building for the people, the Jewish people in Judea? Constant chaos and turnover and everything's affecting and what's going to happen tomorrow and anxiety and everyone's just dying. Everyone's killing each other. We don't know who the high priest is anymore. I don't know. But now we have an alliance with Rome. It's crazy.

Our Own Anxieties

As Americans, we think it's the end of the world when Trump or Biden gets elected, right? We're like, "Oh my God, this is it. Jesus is returning any moment, which he could." Gas prices are high. He's coming back. He could. But we tend to only say that because it's the only thing we have to compare to persecution or oppression. But this was legitimate. No one knew what was going to happen.

164 B.C., Judah. Judah Maccabeus, the leader of the Maccabean party, Hasmonean dynasty, he dies in battle against the Seleucid army. And then Alchemus, the high priest, dies a year later. Again, from the perspective of a citizen of Judea: Can we not just have continuity? Can someone just stay alive? Can we have some stability? Even if it's bad, stability. Then there is a seven-year vacancy of the high priesthood. No one is filling the role. But eight years later, the king needs military support, so he asked Jonathan Maccabees—Jonathan Maccabee, Judas' younger brother—for support.

Jonathan's Ascension

At the same time, a man by the name of Alexander Ballas, a man trying to usurp the king, writes to Jonathan, and he says, "Hey, today you're now the high priest." And in the seventh month, he put on the vestments of the high priest at the festival of tabernacles, and he recruited

troops, and he armed them. "I'm the high priest now, and here's why. Army with weapons." But 1 Maccabee actually says the people loved him. He was very popular among the people. And whether this is propaganda on 1 Maccabee's part—well, it's not in the canon, so I can say whatever I want about it. Whether it's propaganda or not, it's just very convenient. All the people loved him and they elected him to be the high priest and now the commander of the army. Is that an oxymoron? Not in today's time. Not in this time period. Not at all. Which is awful. Key shift in the game. A member of the Hasmonean family has now shifted from being a leader in a political party to standing as the most powerful position over Israel and is now the high priest.

You still with me at least a little bit? If you're lost, chaos. Just remember chaos. Then Alexander kills King Demetrius and becomes king over the Seleucid Empire. Now, Jonathan held the high priest position purely as a political grasp of power. There's nothing said of him actually doing anything in the temple, but he was really good at going to battle and killing people and winning wars and getting honors. The high priest. So on the same page. Yeah. Very successful in battle.

Three Jewish Sects

It is during this time period that Josephus—as we discussed last week, the first-century Jewish historian—says that there were three main splinters of ideologies, groups of people within Judaism and Judea. There was a group called the Pharisees, the common people. There was a group called the Sadducees, a little bit wilder. And then you had the Essenes. So think Democrats, Republicans, and Libertarians.

And also Libertarians that also had extreme sectarian factions underneath them, like the group that went out to Qumran and said we're just going out there to boondock. Then a usurper named Trefo tricks Jonathan the high priest, kidnaps him, and executes him. But that's okay. Jonathan's older brother, Simon, is now gonna fill the vacuum of high priest and commander of the army like his brother. Anyone worn out yet? Under Simon's command, finally, peace was made with the Seleucid Greek empire. The ones that started all this, he finally made peace with them and got them to yield and say what, guys? You can build up your offenses, your fortresses, build up your defenses, build up your military structure, infrastructure, and you can manage your own taxes now. That's a big deal. Big, big deal. This was the liberation at this point. This is what they were seeking the whole time. Finally, you're out of our backyard. And in 142 BC is when this happened.

The Yoke Removed

It was proclaimed that the yoke of the Gentiles was removed from Israel by Simon the great high priest and commander and leader of the Jews. And he proclaimed, after expelling the last of the Seleucid soldiers from Jerusalem, that this event should be celebrated every year moving forward. And then they said, in 1 Maccabees 14, starting in verse 41 and 45, it says, For what? Forever. This guy accomplished something. That 1 Maccabees attests, this is how the people responded. We know who that's going to be, right? Verse 45 says, Big deal. This was the golden age of Judea that they had not experienced from even before the exile. This was just, they were ecstatic about this. This has been sought after for hundreds and hundreds of years. Now the people have freedom. They have independence. They're ruling themselves for the most part. They finally did it. Finally. 20, 30 years is what it took. They finally did it. They played the game and they finally won. And they lived happily ever after.

Until Simon and his two sons were assassinated by his son-in-law when they went to a banquet. This is like Jumanji. Once you start playing, you can't quit because the game will continue playing you. This is the result of this type of grasp and how you take it.

A New Vacuum, A New King

Simon's third son, John Hyrcanus, but his brother-in-law captured John's mother and tortured her at the top of his defensive castle, his citadel, and then later killed her and her two sons. At this time, King Antiochus over in the Greek Empire, King Antiochus VII rose up and invades Jerusalem again, tore down its walls and took all the wealth. And after his death in 129 BC, John Hyrcanus filled the vacuum of power again over Judea. And he started conquering the other lands like Moab and Samaria, where the Samaritans are. He destroyed the Samaritan temple and forced everyone to follow Jewish laws. You're going to follow our Torah now. I don't care what you believe. Follow it like we. Then he forced people from other nations that he conquered, including the Adumians, the Edomites, and he forced all them to get circumcised and follow the Jewish customs and faith and laws.

Yeah, because that's what you do. The leader of the Hasmonean dynasty and the high priest of Israel used the power he received from his party fighting the Greeks who were forcing their religion onto them to go out and force his religion onto everyone else.

The Title of King

Aristobulus I became high priest after him, but he died a year later. Another turnover. He was the first to officially take the title of king in Judea. So king had kind of been made synonymous

with high priest, but this is the first time where it actually became, I am king and high priest. And he's credited with starving his own mother to death and putting his siblings into prison for their lives. After he died, his widow appointed a man by the name of Alexander Jeneas in 103 BC. We got enough turnover to fill the Old Testament, right? And this is only 50 years. This is like 60 years. So she, his widow, appoints Alexander Jeneas in 103 BC and coincidentally marries him right after that.

Alexander was so ruthless to his own people that his own people wrote to the king of the Greek Seleucid Empire, the ones who initially came in and was torturing, killing people and making them eat unclean meat and making the temple into it. The people under him of Judea wrote the king and said, please come back and rule over us. Please come back and rule over us and kill this man. Take him out. It's better to live under you. We're serious. Come on.

Crucifixion and Vengeance

And a battle did take place. There was a back and forth. And as a response to that, Alexander Janius took 800 Pharisees inside the walls of Jerusalem, crucified them while bringing their families before them while they're crucified and killing them in front of them. The high priest, grasp of power, ruthless. When he died, his wife became the queen over Judea. The high priest position, they were getting liberal with the high priest position, but nope, you're not eligible. But they gave it to her oldest son. She was the Hasmonean princess. Her name was Salome Alexandra, Hasmonean princess. And she gave power back to the Pharisees as a political move. And then the Pharisees used this power to go back out and find every single person that the king, her last husband used to kill those 800 Pharisees. And they executed everybody who had fingerprints on that incident.

Are we overwhelmed yet? Okay. This is, it's a lot. It's a lot. This made her son mad. And then him and his brother started fighting. The high priest lost his position. And then it was now taken over by Eustrable II who filled the spot of king as well. These are the people that they went and forcibly converted, right? So the wealthy Udamean. So, Hyrcanus II went forth and laid siege to the temple.

Pompey and Rome

Now that wealthy Udamean named Anniper is very significant because he would later become known as the father of King Herod the Great. Everyone, oh, I know that name. We're getting close to the story that we're familiar with now. We're getting closer. There was a Roman general

by the name of Pompey that enters into Judea. He storms the temple, takes it over, walks into the holiest of holy, literally says, meh, what's the big deal? Walks back out and then gives the priesthood back over to Hyrcanus II. But he was disqualified when both of his ears were cut off by his nephew. I know some of you are chuckling and then I hear you stop because that's not appropriate to laugh at, but it's almost comical in the darkest way. It's just, what in the world? This is too much. Imagine what it's like for the people that are just trying to live their lives.

Annapur, the Edomaeum, gained favor with Julius Caesar and was then made governor over Judea. His son, Herod, was installed over Galilee. And after helping Mark Antony and Octavian in a military sense, he was named king of Judea in 40 BC. That's the King Herod, that guy, bad guy. He then found the last Hasmonean heir to the throne, executed him. And then he married the sister to Aristobulus III to legitimize his claim to the throne. And then later he killed her. He also had the former high priest, Hyrcanus, his dad's buddy as well. He went on to renovate the temple in Jerusalem, made it real pretty, built a lot of amazing structures in Judea.

The Iron-Fisted King

Herod was the iron-fisted king that the Romans appointed so that the Jews in Judea would not revolt again and get out of hand. Kind of kept him in the pressure cooker, just kept him contained. He was a great asset to the Romans. They didn't have to deal with him because nothing bad was going to happen as long as he was over them and squashing anything that rose up. Meanwhile, the people were suffering greatly. They had been suffering generation after generation after generation, suffering. Their heritage had become one of an identity of oppression and slavery and war and violence and uncertainty and complete, complete absence of shalom. King Herod had created a secure life out of oppression and violence and manipulation and grasp of power. This Edomean who finds himself sitting as king over the Jewish people, backed by the Romans. It's a very secure position to be.

But then one night, one night, visitors came as he's basking in his authoritarian rule over this people. Nobles from the east, the direction of Babylon, right? And they said that they were looking for the king. And he said, I am the king. And they said, no, where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?

King Herod ended up dying in 4 BC alone without family by his side in agonizing pain because that's the grand prize of playing the game. Herod was an Edomean. The irony in this, the people that the Hasmoneans forced to convert and get circumcised and follow their religion became the

ones that ended up ruling over them. There's a lesson in that. There's a lesson in that. When we play the game, the game will always end up playing you.

The People Rise

The iron-fisted puppet that the Romans installed to keep Judea from getting out of control was dead. Another vacuum had been created. The people are getting restless now. This king is dead. Now we can have some, maybe we can rise up. I don't know. Let's do this. What are we going to do? But they're also tired. They're mad. The Jewish people of this time, they want revenge for their heritage becoming one of oppression and slavery and abuse and trauma and uncertainty. They want revenge. And you have the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes, and the radical Essenes. And you also have a prominent group that's arising up called the Zealots. The Zealots. This is a group that just hoarded weapons and food and saw themselves as the new Maccabees coming up. They would get into squirmishes with the Romans. They would also, really good little Assassin's Creed tactics. They would walk into crowded marketplaces with knives and come up to a Roman soldier and blend back into the crowds.

These were the people that were going to bring forth the kingdom of God on earth by playing the game because it's worked so well by everybody who's played it before them, right? It's a time of uncertainty, of anticipation, of hope, maybe. Will Israel, who started out enslaved in Egypt only to become the oppressors in their own land, to becoming slaves again in Babylon, to rising up to becoming the oppressors again through the Hasmoneans, to becoming enslaved again and conquered now, will they restart the cycle again? Will they try to play the game again? Maybe it will have different results. Maybe just one more dollar bill will pull the lever and maybe I'll hit the jackpot. Will peace ever come?

This is what was at the forefront of the minds of the Jewish people in the first century. When will a just king arise? When will the nightmare stop? How long do we have to wait? And this is when the boys in the field looked up and saw the wall between heaven and earth being pierced and ripped open and the army of God coming forth singing, saying, it's happening now. And your king is lying in a manger with some fresh straw. Yeshua, Yeshua.

A King in a Manger

What a beautiful and appropriate time to be born, right? Yeshua, sleeping in a feeding trough, likely in a poor house in Bethlehem. Yeshua, strange nobles from the east. The east, that's the direction that Adam and Eve went out of the garden. That's the direction the people were going

when they stopped and built the tower. That's the direction away from the temple of God. But here, the nobles from the east are returning to the land of Israel, which in scripture is made synonymous with God's rest. Those who went eastward in Genesis have now returned to God's rest and they kneel before this child and they offer forth gold and frankincense and myrrh and long live this.

This king will not be a Herod. He will not be a Jeneas, a Hyrcanus. He won't be a Judah Maccabee. He won't be a King Solomon. He won't even be a King David. This king will be the good shepherd of Ezekiel. This king will be the prince that breathes peace. This king will be God with us. This king is going to teach us how to break the cycle of playing the game. He's going to teach us what following Torah actually looks like. He's going to teach us to have a dependence on God that is so uncomfortable and scary because of the lie that says the only way you will have peace is when you control everything. The only way you can have peace is through power. And this king is going to show you that that's a lie, and it always has been.

This king has come to save you, and it says that he proclaimed the gospel. He says the reign of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news, is what Mark chapter 1, 14 and 15 says.

The Weight of History

Now I'd like to think, running through the whirlwind of violence and the grasp of power and greed and lusts of the 150 years leading up to this point where Yeshua was born, does it reframe things a little bit differently for you? If you were the people there and this is what you were living in and have lived through and your parents had lived through, an expectation. Will the king come that will bring peace? Maybe it'll be the king that plays the game and wins or maybe something else.

The good news though that Yeshua proclaimed is that God is breaking through now. And that heaven and earth are going to collide. Gosh, we were singing worship earlier and that song came on. And I just love it because we love the idea of heaven and earth kind of like being two pieces of jello and just snuggling up to each other. Oh, this is nice. This is good. Peace. This is good. But I kind of think it's as if the moon collided with the earth. Just end of the world as we know it. End of the world as we know it.

Heaven and Earth Colliding

The reign of God is manifesting over and against the kingdoms of the world and the games that they tell us we have to play. The reign of God is a phrase that Yeshua constantly uses to portray

a new type of living, a new standard that when implemented flips the chess table over completely. This king has come to break chains. This king has come to break powers. He's come to break strongholds. He's come to break lies. He's come to break vain grasping of greed and power. And he says, sit at my table and experience peace and experience joy and experience living a life where you can rightly call the devil a liar and opt out of playing his stupid games.

All four gospel accounts mention the character of John the Baptist—a man who protested the establishment of religion and government in the first century. I mean, he's the son of a priest, but he's not in the temple. He's over by the river. He's not going to wear those nice clothes, camel skin instead. I bet that stank. I don't know. Camels, I don't know. Won't eat your bread. Big crickets and honey.

The Prophet by the River

This son of a priest does not stand at the temple and connect people to God through a structured portal of forgiveness of sins. No, he stands at the Jordan River, the river that the Israelites crossed on their exodus journey from slavery into a new life with God. And he says, be baptized.

In [Matthew 3](#), 5, it says, Where were people supposed to be going? Where does the pilgrimage lead people? To Jerusalem. But here they're leaving Jerusalem to come down to the river. They're coming out to see John by the river, the place where sins are supposed to be forgiven in Jerusalem. That had become a place of such corruption and power and exploitations in all of the generations leading up to this. Now you understand the protest. Now you understand Yeshua flipping the tables, the accusations. It had been riddled with corruption. It had been made a symbol of the game. Sadly, tragically.

And John says, 'Repent, the kingdom of heaven is near.' You don't need to go and stand in line under this structured mediation of that system that has overtaken the pure and wonderful house of God. No, the system that has become powerful and now decided who's worthy and who's not. Who is a sinner and who's not so much? Who can come in and have their sins forgiven and who is just too much of an outcast? No, John says you can come here and have your sins forgiven right here in this Exodus water because the reign of God flows out just like the living river that we are in does.

The Baptism

That is this bold proclamation. And that just seems, man, you radical, crazy. That's not how it's supposed to be. But what else do you do when the temple has been made into something awful, run by people that are corrupt and awful? And all the religious leaders come out to see John because they're like, whoa, what are you doing? What are you? This is not okay. He looks up. Who told you about the wrath to come? Go away. Who told you? You're going to get yours. No, go. Gosh.

Then Yeshua comes down to the river to be baptized by John. Of course, John says no. And Yeshua says, yes, let's start this thing now, John. Let's start it now. And he goes into the water and he comes up and the heavens break open and the spirit of God comes down like a dove upon him and a voice from heaven. This is my son whom I'm well pleased. What happens here? What happens? Heaven is breaking open and it's reuniting with earth. It's connecting through that dove, through that spirit. And it's going to be connecting through Yeshua.

The Second Day

The reign of God is near. It's come. [Genesis 1](#) is such a beautiful piece. I was just reading some commentaries in it the other day. It's a beautiful, beautiful piece of literature and how it was intentionally crafted in the Hebrew language. And every day when God is done working, he calls the day—not a trick question—good. It was good. All except one day, the second day of the week. God never calls it good.

Coincidentally, that would also be Monday. It was a joke, even God had a case of the Monday, right? So, Monday, Monday. But I heard one Hebrew professor say that it wasn't called good because that was the day when heaven was separated from earth. Because that's when the sky is split and the sky is made and whatnot. Sure, maybe, whatever. I love it. Sure. Yeah. I'll take it. I'll take it.

But that is Yeshua's message, that something new is here. Repent and be ready and be willing. Repent. Such a neat word in Greek and Hebrew, to repent. We've come so accustomed to that word, right? Use it a lot. Repent.

Repent: Turn Around

And many times, I've never done this, but I'm sure you guys have weaponized the word, right? So if someone offends you, you justify any action that you had in this conflict, you need to repent and come to Jesus. Silence. No one's going to be like, yeah, I've done, okay. We tend to weaponize the word. We tend to, right? And of course, repentance has absolutely to do with

acknowledging your sins, your downfalls. Acknowledge them. Acknowledge them. And it goes beyond just an apology. I'm sorry. It's acknowledging that that was wrong. That was wrong. That was wrong. I'm sorry I did that. I was wrong.

And of course, in Hebrew, teshuvah. Teshuvah means to turn around. It means to change. Change. Turn around. Stop doing things, or stop going, or stop having that mindset, or stop having that understanding, or stop having that justification. Stop and change it. Change it. Change your heart. Change your mind. Change your direction. Change your understanding. Repent. Repent. Change. Because the reign of God is near. And if you're not ready to stop playing this game, you will miss it. Or even worse, you will make it a part of the game.

Repent. Repent. Grasp of power will never bring peace in the way that the world demonstrates it and says it will. Show of force never brings true peace. It never brings long-lasting peace. Wealth never brings peace. Manipulation, exploitation, lust never satisfies. Yeshua says you've got to let that go. It's time. Repent and change. It's near. Why? Because you cannot put new wine in old wineskins. He speaks about this. Yeshua starts his ministry off, right? Here we go. Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst. The wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins that both are preserved.

Repent, change, because if you don't, you will be worse off. You will be worse off than you were. It'll just make things worse. New wine has to be poured into something new. Something changed or it does not work. And you will never find true peace despite having the new wine if you're unwilling to repent.

Yeshua starts his ministry off here at the baptism. And he heads out into the wilderness. That's where the devil is waiting on him. And he's tempted three different things in [Matthew 4](#), verses 1-10. And I believe it's the same things that we are tempted with because it's actually the same things that the Israelites were tempted with in the wilderness.

Three Temptations in the Wilderness

And the first one, you could say, is temptation of relying on yourself and your own actions. Why is that not a favorable thing to depend on and make your orbit? Because you begin to base your value on the things that you feel are relevant and you produce. What's wrong with that? Well, then you're forced to control everyone and everything in that sphere in order to hold that value system in place.

We all want to be relevant in actions, but no, no. Yeshua says it's not going to bring you peace. The devil asked him to turn these rocks into bread. He says, no, I'm only gonna rely on the word. I'm gonna rely on my father, not on me, not on the things that I do. No, I don't need to. I don't need to. And Yeshua says no to that pursuit. God's reign cannot be built on our pillars.

Number two is the exploitation of God for the sake of being right. It's your ego. That's the second temptation the devil tempts Yeshua with by taking him high onto the temple. And he says, jump off. Because you know the angels are going to come like God's not going to let you die. Like see the spectacle. Come on, do it. Your ego. You know they will catch you. Show everyone your value through the exploitation of God's power. Do it. The devil's up there with them.

And this is actually the only time in Scripture that the devil quotes Scripture. By the way, I'd like to think that Matthew's trying to show us another lesson in that. You can use religion for diabolical purposes. You can use the word for diabolical purposes. And we do.

And how does Yeshua respond? God does not play your games. You better watch out. You shall not tempt. And then the third is, of course, the temptation for power, the grasp of power.

The devil shows Yeshua all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. Look at all the collection of empires, the current winners of the game, and I will give them all to you. You just have to yield to me. Just yield. And Yeshua says, no, get away from me. Get away from me. Get away. Scripture says to worship God alone.

Each response Yeshua gives is a quote from, of course, the Exodus account in the wilderness. And each of these temptations were ones that the Israelites failed in the wilderness. And they are the temptations that I feel like we all face as well.

Temptation to be relevant in a worldly way that only benefits us so that we rely on it. Our ego and our temptation of always being right about everything, specifically in exploiting God's reputation and, of course, grasp of power. These had to be defeated today. These had to be overcome. These had to be made powerless before Yeshua could go into the city and proclaim the good news because that's the very next thing he did.

And I dare say, until we're ready to face them as well and defeat the devil, we will never truly be able to proclaim the good news in an authentic way. We will only proclaim ourselves and whatever religious paraphernalia we think is God.

Teachings on the Mount

Right after this, Yeshua makes his way to the mount where he gives his sermon. And he teaches the Torah and what Torah looks like when it actualizes from a heart that has not fallen prey to the prior things.

Don't exploit people. Don't lower someone else's status, another image bearer. Do not lower it to subhuman, to a place where you can objectify someone in your mind lustfully. No. Do not hold bitterness in your heart and rage and anger, envy, jealousy.

Do not hold these things in your heart. Because all they do is, again, lower someone else beneath what you think they should be. And this is murder. You are sinning. Those things cannot exist with new wine in them. Don't use violence to get someone who hits you. Don't repay evil with evil. Instead, don't play the game. Don't play the game. And show the other person somehow, in some way, however you can, that they don't have to play the game either. You can be free of the game too.

Do not resist an evildoer. Why? Because that's part of the game. Resisting and pushing and fighting and conquering and reconquering and going back and forth. Don't swear on God's name or the temple. Just say yes or no. Why? Because in the reign of God, no one needs to put collateral on their honesty. Your enemies, you find a way to not just love them, but love them in a way that they can feel it. Why? Because that is how you act like God, according to Yeshua. This is how, according to Yeshua, God actually destroys his enemies in his reign. He makes them not be enemies anymore.

Yeshua went on to break the walls that the religious and the powerful had put up to control others. And with every healing, he strips them of their power. With every teaching, he shows how weak their attempts are to rule. And this, this is what gets them killed.

Standing Before the High Priest

In John's account, he's asked a question by the high priest. And in [John 18](#), he doesn't answer satisfactory. And someone punches him in the face. Don't talk to the high priest that way. And Yeshua responds. He's like, why'd you hit me, man? What did I say that was disrespect? What did I say? What did I say that you felt justified in punching me in the face? Can you tell me of the great evil that I just did?

In Matthew's account, Caiaphas says that he heard someone say, you were going to destroy the temple in three days and rebuild it, or destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days. Accusation against Yeshua. And Yeshua does not answer.

The high priest, last 150 years, you can now understand the gravity of why he chose to say this, what he was trying to do. He says, I call. I call. I charge you under oath by the living God. You see the second temptation, right? Ego and manipulation through exploiting God. I am the high priest and I now summon the power of God's name and reputation against you and command you to answer in light of that.

Where did he learn to act like that? Last 150 years—yes, of God, not God working, devil working through the game. And Yeshua answers. He says, you've said so.

A big nuclear bomb of power. You will do as I say. I'm the high priest. Answer me. You've said so.

No, you're supposed to be scared or you're supposed to like act out of anger, rebellious. Like you don't just give this mute, apathetic. I mean, it's like a teenager. Like what do you know? No, you've said so.

At which point the priest tore his clothes. If he had been wearing sacred vestments, he broke a commandment [Leviticus 24](#) for priests that should never rip their clothing. We know what took place. Yeshua was punched, he was whipped, he was stripped naked, following all of his own teachings at the mount.

Nails were driven through his hands and feet, and he did not assault one person by force or by word. The only thing he did was—in the midst of being tormented by his enemies, he found peace telling God and asking God to forgive them. They are just playing the game. And that's all they know. Forgive them. They'll get it. Forgive them.

Living in Two Kingdoms

God has called us to live out his reign now. And it's hard because out there, out there, we have a different reign. We have a culture of power. And our job as believers, as followers of this radical, radical king is to somehow live in both worlds at the same time, enabling one to slowly overtake the other.

We live out the kingdom of God here and now, even though it is not yet fully. So we allow our faithfulness to Yeshua to be the substance of things hoped for. And we allow our faithfulness to the king to be the evidence of things not yet seen. And so that's the calling. This is what the 150 years before Yeshua built up through. After the Hanukkah events, this is what took place to emphasize the weight and the appropriateness of Yeshua being born right then. And that's incredible.

And so we're called to show the world the evidence of the reality that God does not play these games. Yeshua does not play these games. And neither do we as his followers. And even though that reality has not yet fully overtaken the world, that is no excuse for our being not following the way of the master. It's no excuse.

And so guys, I hope that you learned some neat stuff about history. But most of all, I hope that the impact of what Yeshua taught hit deeper than it ever has before.

The Radical Calling

I hope it scared you a little bit. I hope it seemed that radical because that's the calling. Following the words of Yeshua, he makes an analogy that says, pick up your cross. That's what he relates it to. And it's not because his teachings are hard and abrasive and harmful. It's because when you walk out there, living out the reign of God, the world hates it because they don't know what to do with you, nor do they know how to control you.

Time of Reflection

So I'll call the worship team up as we conclude services. And during this time, guys, if you need prayer for anything, or if you have something you might want to leave here today, we have a prayer team on either side of the stage. You're welcome to use that. You're welcome to sing. You're welcome to worship God. You're welcome to meditate. You're welcome to pray. It's just a time of reflection as we conclude services.

Prayer of Thanksgiving

Alvino Mocciano, our father, our king, we thank you for your word. We thank you that we're able to learn through history and the writings that you allowed to be passed down from the moment the hearts of the Maccabees were stirred to the moment the temptation took over Israel. That we would further understand just how radical your reign on earth is. And that we would become devout followers and loyal to one king and one king only. And that is King Yeshua. That your Holy Spirit that you say is within us would continue to be life-giving. And that others would see your grace and mercy and forgiveness poured out through us. We thank you in Yeshua's name we pray. Amen.

Shema and Blessings

Please stand and worship with us. Sing the Shema with us. Shema. Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is one. Blessed is the name of his glorious kingdom for all eternity. Now may the God of patience and encouragement grant you to be like-minded with one another in the manner of Messiah so that together with one voice you glorify the God and Father of our Lord Yeshua the Messiah. And may the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance toward you and give you peace. Shabbat shalom. Shalom.

Partnering in Mission

We pray this message has blessed and encouraged you and your relationship with God. And we hope that it has made the Bible more beautiful and more powerful in its impact in your life. Founded in Truth Fellowship exists to build a community that bears the image of God and lives the redeemed life only Yeshua gives. If this message has blessed you, or if you see God working in and through this ministry, we invite you to prayerfully consider partnering with us so that the message of Yeshua and the truth of God's word continues to reach all nations. If you would like to take part in this mission, then you can do so at foundinthetruth.com/give, or you can scan the QR code on the screen. These offerings go toward providing resources for both our local fellowship as well as our online ministry, but also our many outreach ministries, including our foster care and adoption ministry, local charity outreach ministry, our international online children's ministry, and any future ministries that the Lord would allow us to walk through and walk in to impact the world around us with His love and the love of God. The bold proclamation of the gospel of King Yeshua. We thank you for your continued support and we look forward to seeing you next time. Shalom. For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at Foundedintruth.com EMAIL: Info@foundedintuth.com FACEBOOK: facebook.com/foundedintruth WEBSITE: [Google](https://www.google.com):

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