

Paul – The Revolution

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MAIN VERSES

[Acts 17:1-9](#) • [Mark 12:13-17](#) • [Romans 1:3-4](#) • [Romans 10:9](#) • [1 Corinthians 15:23-25](#) • [Philippians 3:17-21](#) • [1 Thessalonians 2:11-12](#)

The Sword of Scripture

And it's called the Bible, right? Oh, he's going to talk about the Bible and the analogy of it as a sword and as a weapon. I am, because it's true. How many of you guys know that? How many of you guys brought your Bibles with you today? A little bit of guilt, I love it. How many of you guys dig into the word and read your Bible frequently?

Sometimes in the Hebrew roots and Messianic movement, we love to go to YouTube as our Bible, and we love to go to books and commentaries as our Bible, and we love to go to other teachers to tell us or visually show us our Bible. They're not replacements for the Scriptures. Going on YouTube, even coming here and listening to a teaching is not going to replace your Bible. My hope is when we talk about history and context, you take it home to your scriptures and adapt your study based on what we discuss, but it's not supposed to be a replacement.

See, sometimes we forget when we go into battle that our scriptures are our sword. That's what we have. Scripture actually speaks of this. And the sword is what you need to win wars, to win battles, to make sure you have that support, that encouragement in battle, to make sure you know who your God is, who your king is—because you have your sword.

And sometimes we have a sheath, a scabbard—is that what it's called? YouTube videos and even teachings that we do here and books that you might buy or commentaries, these are the sheath. This is an accessory that the sword is supposed to go into, and it's supposed to complement the sword, not replace the sword. To put it in a bigger contrast: can you imagine running into battle without your sword and only having the sheath on your side? You might hit some people, but it's not going to defeat the enemy in battle.

Guys, right now you are faced with a huge opposition in this world, whether you know it or not. Are you carrying your sword with you every single day, or are you just flapping the sheath around? Maybe some of you guys have no idea what I'm talking about right now. That's fine. Your sword is your main weapon in battle. Your sword is the scriptures. Every single day you guys should be opening the word and reading something. You can do one of those read the Bible in a year programs. Those are fantastic. Sometimes you get kind of bored when you're running through numbers. I understand.

Read something in the scriptures because that's the navigation system that the Father has given you. Father, I need a word of hope. I need a word of encouragement. I am so scared in my life right now. I'm so stressed. I have so much anxiety. I don't know what the next step is. Bible over here, dust of it. Give me a word, Father. Dust just piling up on it. It already has. Right here.

History and Context

And so I love talking about history. The reason I just said that is because I could have spent two hours just on Roman history because that's what I studied the last couple of weeks. Roman culture was incredibly complicated. Roman culture was kind of fascinating, I admit. I found it very fascinating. I'm reading all this junk—consuls, dictators, then emperors come along, senators, the corruption in the Roman Empire—but the patriotism, if you will, to be a Roman citizen, and all of these dynamics.

And then I realized: this is not a history class. If people want a history class, they need to go to school to learn history. They need to get the books that are about history. I need to share with you guys something that is a sheath for your sword so that you can actually apply it when you get home, not educate you on all the details of history because history is there. History doesn't always complement the Bible. It's not always necessary. That's something that you guys need to study.

So I am going to talk about history today. But it's not all going to be history. Does that make sense about the sword, at least? Okay, good. Three people. Good.

Paul the Revolutionary

When we speak about Paul, Shaul, what do we think of? We think of maybe a rabbi. Some of us, right? Maybe a rabbi. Rab, Shaul, rabbi. Do what? Jail? We think of a guy who was in jail. Yeah, you know why he was in jail? We think of how difficult he makes it to talk to Christians. I know

believers in Yeshua who don't believe in Paul. Like they don't even read his books. Yeah, they've canceled the books out of the Bible because there's so much misunderstanding behind them.

And when we think of Paul, we think of a very smart guy. He studied under Gamaliel, a great rabbi, very educated man. He was a Pharisee. He was also a Roman citizen, which made it illegal to crucify him. We'll talk about that next week. But we never think of Paul as a revolutionary, right? We never think of Paul as recruiting a resistance against something bigger and worse than anyone could ever imagine. Anyone ever seen one of those movies like Terminator? That's right. Yeah. Yeah, I've seen a Terminator movie. Okay. I know. Right.

So remember what the big deal was. They had these machines that were trying to take out humanity, and then they had a group of humans that fought the machines. Does anyone remember what that group was called? The Resistance. Join the Resistance. John Connor. Can you imagine Paul like John Connor? You ever pictured him like that?

Paul and Roman Empire

We're going to start with history today about the Roman Empire because I'm going to build up something that we've never even looked for because we never need to look at it, and all of the resources are readily available. This is the spearhead of Pauline academia, if you will: Paul was actually writing to all of these Roman cities about overthrowing the Roman Empire, turning their back to it, and joining another empire in its place. An empire that's more powerful than the Romans, with a king that's more powerful than Caesar, with a king that is more just than Caesar. And I found this angle very fascinating because there's a lot of evidence to back it up.

I wanted to give you guys a few resources. If you do want to study this topic in more detail, you can use these books. Okay? I know this is the boring part of the message. Paul and Empire, Religion and Power in Rome, and Imperial Society by Richard Horsley. It's a book that takes about 10 different authors and gives them each a chapter to describe exactly what we're going to be talking about today. Christ and Caesar, Paul's Gospel and Caesar's Empire, and In the Shadow of the Temple.

Also, Ryan White over at RootedinTorah.com did an extended version of this message that's like four parts long. I got permission to borrow some of his slides because it saved me a little bit of time and I think the slides are very well done. I have about three of his slides in here. He did a fantastic job formulating this message. So if you want to take a peek at the historical account and how much the Roman Empire was in the context of Paul's writings, check out RudinandTorah.com for less than like 80 cents a month. You can have access to weekly

teachings from Rudin and Tor. So I definitely want to encourage you guys to do that. Check out these resources.

The Roman Timeline

So remember, last week we left off on a timeline. I wanted to revisit it real quick. Here's a quote from Augustus Caesar: "I found Rome built on sun-dried bricks, and I left her clothed in marble." Augustus Caesar was a very powerful man in history—more powerful than I ever imagined before I started studying him. He did a lot for Rome.

So will you hang out with me for like five or ten minutes as we kind of review a little bit of a timeline of Roman history? Can we do that? Okay.

508 BCE: we know that Rome overthrows the monarchy that ruled it. The kings that were in it, they overthrow the monarchy and set up a republic, if you will. They set up senators over the people. And the senators are elected by the people. Okay, so the person doesn't necessarily have a direct say in government, but he can elect a leader that does. And so the Senate meets and then they discuss the power of the government and so on and so forth—and it seemed like a great idea at the time. But, fast forward a couple hundred years to 100 BCE—about 100 years before Yeshua was born—Gaius Julius Caesar is born.

Caesar becomes a successful political citizen in Rome. He's born into the patrician noble families, very high class family that he comes from. And he basically plays the political chess game throughout his entire career to build himself up into the politics of Rome, to be a leader, to have the power, and so on and so forth. A very intelligent man.

Just to give you a little bit of background: when he was 25 years old, in 75 BCE, he was kidnapped by Cilician pirates. Okay, now piracy wasn't really a priority. The Roman Empire didn't really go after pirates because that's where they bought a lot of their slaves from. It's kind of like a mutual agreement, you know, a black market. But Julius Caesar is kidnapped by the pirates.

Now let me tell you something about Julius Caesar: he was a genius, but like an evil genius. Like one of those guys that's just truly intelligent, but I've trapped you, Mr. Bond. Like that's Julius Caesar. That guy, you know, if you were making a show about Rome, that's what he would look like, and that's really what he did look like.

Just this insidious, very intelligent, evil, yet complicated man. When he was kidnapped by pirates, they ransomed him and sent Rome a letter saying, "Listen, we have this Julius guy and

we want 20 talents of silver, which is somewhere around six or seven hundred thousand dollars today." Julius is sitting there on the ship and he's like, "No, I object. What are you doing? Death, swords, spears. I'm worth at least 50. Make sure you ask for 50 because I'm worth at least 50." I wouldn't be worried about what I'm worth at that point in time, but he was. He continued to have a very good relationship with the pirates, a very humorous relationship with them. He joked around with them, was friends with them. They finally paid the ransom and let him go. Right before they let him go, he was like, "You know what, guys? I'm going to find you and I'm going to crucify every one of you. Have a good life, Caesar. Goodbye." Caesar did just that. He took an envoy out, found those exact pirates, and crucified every last one of them, grinning. He was merciful though—he slit their throats so they wouldn't suffer very long because they were so nice to him when they captured him. Can you imagine this personality?

Caesar's Political Ascent

In 72 BCE, Caesar was elected as a military tribune. His name was well known in the Senate. He was an up-and-coming guy. "Man, we're going to get there. He's going to be a leader one day, maybe a senator, maybe even a consul one day." The consuls in Rome elected a consul, which was kind of like a president, if you will, and they had—get this—a term of one year. That's epic. All senators get together, elect one guy, one year, every single year.

Caesar lived his life maneuvering the political chess game with opponents in the empire. Things started to get really, really, really complicated when he was moving up. He had alliances with other up-and-coming political leaders that ended up failing, went round and round and round, and caused a lot of distress in the kingdom. When Caesar was ruling over Spain, his competitor was Pompey the Great. Pompey was trying to essentially ruin his reputation in the Roman Empire. Caesar's like, "You know what? I think they're going to take my position of governor away from Spain. So let's just go take over Rome."

As a governor of Spain, he crosses the river that separates, if you will, Italy from Spain and walks into Rome with an army with little resistance because they weren't expecting it. He walks up there and basically says, "Listen, guys, I know we're supposed to have a republic here where senators manage everything, but I'm kind of holding the sword. So I'm temporarily destroying the idea of the structure of the Senate." He then goes north, takes out the army of his opponent, goes south, chases his opponent to Egypt. Because of an alliance he has with Pharaoh, Pharaoh beheads his opponent. Then Caesar becomes the dictator of Rome, Julius Caesar. This all happened like right before Yeshua was born, right?

Caesar's Rule and Mercy

Julius Caesar was loved by the people though. He played it off very well. He made sure that the people were fed. He made sure that even in battle, he was very merciful. He wanted soldiers to join his army. "All right, I won't kill you. Come on." If you had an offense in the public eye, he would make sure to be very merciful, show mercy in the public eye. The people loved him. He ended up giving a great deal back to the people. When he died, in his will, he gave hundreds of thousands of bronze shekels to every citizen of Rome. Can you imagine? President dying one day and you getting like 50 grand?

He ordered property to be sold at the same value it was prior to the civil war that he instigated. When he crossed over to Rome, there was a huge civil war. The whole empire was very scared. Property stopped being sold. The economy was fluctuating just like it does here in wartime. He also canceled all interest payments due since the beginning of 49 BC when he started the war, if you will. He also allowed tenants to live one year without rent. You can see that a man who had totally shaken the entire empire ran back in and made sure everyone saw him restabilize it.

Another couple of things he did. He created a food assistance program—food stamps, in Rome—for people who had lost their jobs because of all the wars that were going on recently that he was involved in. Food assistance to the people. New government buildings all throughout Rome. When he went to Alexandria, he became jealous. "I want Rome to look beautiful. We want Rome to look beautiful. We want it to be something to take pride in to live in Rome." Jobs for anyone who was affected by war. If you couldn't find a job locally, he instituted a program where he would pay for you to travel to another province to work. Pretty cool guy, right? Not sure.

The Assassination

When he returned to the Senate in 44 BCE, his big opponent—the man he'd had beheaded—had many sympathizers in the Senate. When he walked in, right across from the theater that was actually named after Pompey, his own senators pulled out knives and stabbed him 23 times and killed him. Assassinated. In the Senate. All the guys with togas snuck in knives. Incredible.

Caesar's Deification

Not long after that, because of the love and support that he had with the people of Rome, he was deified. Now, let me tell you about deification in Rome. People saw the gods as deities, and they're all powerful. But when the Romans were talking about gods, they pictured a person.

They pictured a person with extreme power. They didn't have this idea of a God that didn't have an image, or this almighty God that was everywhere at once, this thing that we have. They were like people. And people, if you were great enough, you could join the gods and be deified. Well, this was Julius Caesar. He became a god to the people of Rome.

Julius had a nephew named Gaius Octavius, and he was a mentor to this little boy. This boy grew into a man very quickly, ran a lot of military campaigns, and was personally mentored by Julius. Eventually, Octavian rose to power. He ruled all of the Roman Empire in a tri-dictorial state. In other words, he had two other allies. Still with me? We're fixing to get over this hump of history. He had two other allies at a time when Rome was split into three divisions, and they each ruled one.

The First Emperor

So you went from an empire that was ruled by senators to, in less than one generation, an empire ruled by a dictator who totally destroyed the Senate platform, even though the Senate is still there. And now you have three different dictators over three different areas of the empire. This is very unstable. It's happening very quickly. The empire is still growing, and there's not a lot of confidence in the economy. Of course, what happens with all allies? You begin to hate each other. Then Octavian goes and basically defeats his other allies. So now he's the sole military victor, dictator of Rome.

He went before the Senate. He had unified Rome through the defeat of his allies, and Rome was once again stabilized. It's amazing the politics in Rome. Essentially, he came before the Senate, put in a big ploy, and got them to elect him as emperor of Rome. Octavian, Gaius Octavian, was the very first emperor of Rome. Before that, you had consuls and then sometimes dictators who dictated the empire outside of the Senate during times of chaos, but they had to step down when the chaos subsided. He was the very first emperor of Rome. This is huge. This happened like 27 BC.

Son of God, Savior of Rome

Remember how his dad—right, his adopted father, if you will—Julius Caesar, who left everything to him in his will, was deified? When Octavius became emperor, people started shouting, "He is the son of God, Octavius!" He became known as Augustus Caesar because Caesar was a deified leader of Rome. Every single emperor after him took on that name and thus became partially deified. Right? You see how this works? I'm just going to take your name,

right? He changed his name to Augustus, which means the revered, the honorable, the venerable Caesar. Augustus Caesar is now who Octavius becomes as he goes into the first century. And he was viewed as the savior of Rome. Soter of Rome. He brought peace on earth. A phrase called Pax Romana. If you ever read that in history books. The peace of all the earth. The peace of all the empire. Peace on earth. He became called Master and Lord Caesar, Kyrios.

The day of his birth, September 23rd, was known as Euglian, the Gospel of Rome, and every single member of the Roman Empire was told that they were required to have faith, pistas, in Caesar, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, who brings peace on earth. Understand what we have?

The Parallel

I've given you a little bit of history here for about five or ten minutes. Why do these phrases look familiar? Because these are all phrases that Paul uses to describe someone else, right? Now, all of these phrases are also found in the Tanakh, in the prophecies there, but there are also a whole lot more phrases and terms to describe the future king of Israel, the future son of God, the future Messiah that Paul chooses not to use. Why does he choose only these terms? Because only these terms are contrasted with the terms that Caesar has been chosen to take. This is the Roman Empire of the first century. When Peter's talking to the Gentiles in all these cities in the Roman Empire, he's talking to all these guys, everything in orange.

The Imperial Cult

It's a lot of space, guys. Now, with the Roman Empire, you got Rome right there. It's an itty-bitty city. How does Rome control a single empire that has grown very recently and very rapidly to this measure? Any ideas? Something called the cult of the Emperor or the Imperial cult or the worship of the Emperor. Remember how I said that Augustus Caesar now became known as the son of God and therefore deified in a sense, and he began to be worshipped as a God. And so if you toss out a leader to the public eye and say he is God but he is also central in controlling the prosperity of the land that you're a part of, now worship of this God is a level of prosperity in your kingdom.

We have a quote here from Catherine Crawford: "Roman emperors were worshiped in conjunction with the Roman state because they controlled Rome's continued prosperity. In worshipping the emperor, you therefore worshiped Rome and you therefore understood that your

allegiance to Rome and the emperor made Rome great and therefore you were blessed as a result."

Hymns began to include Octavian among the gods—singing to Jupiter, or what? And Octavian's in there. Octavian! Right? Libation offerings were poured out at every single banquet. Have a party. A little bit of wine for Caesar! Augustus would never accept any official honors unless the term Roma was attached to it, thus making all honor he received to be for the betterment of Rome. In other words, you would never accuse Augustus Caesar as being this arrogant man, this leader, because he would only accept honors that had to do with Rome. Therefore, if you honored Rome, you were honoring Caesar. And if you were honoring Caesar, you were honoring Rome. You could not defy a leader without being seen as a tyrant in your own nation. In America, we can not like the president. Not in Rome. Because they're one and the same with the nation.

Caesar Worship and Imperial Power

All of Rome were made to declare Caesar as God. Josephus states, "...sacrifices were made daily on behalf of Caesar in the temple in Jerusalem." So you have the Roman Empire coming in. Everybody must declare Caesar as God. You go to Judea, everybody must declare, no, we're not doing that. Even the Sadducees, right? Sadducees were corrupt guys. Even they were like, listen, we can't sit here and say Caesar is God. We got our own God, and this is his temple.

Now Romans were very—they hated the Jews. They didn't really like the Jews that much. They were slaves, essentially. But they respected their faith. Romans were all about faith and religion, faith, religion, and politics. And so they let that slide, but they said, listen guys, you've got to give us something. And so the Sadducees agreed to offer two sacrifices a day and say prayers on behalf of Caesar in the temple of God in Jerusalem. Seems like that's okay to do. The only issue is, Caesar is now God. He's up there with Zeus. So essentially what the Sadducees are now doing is going into the temple twice a day and making a sacrifice on behalf of Zeus to Yahweh. Thou shalt have no other gods.

Jewish Resistance and Compromise

You wonder why the Essenes moved out, got out of town, went out to the desert and lived. You wonder why there's so much animosity between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. It goes further back. We're going to talk about the Pharisaic Massacre at the hands of the Sadducees next week.

Gee, you guys know this was going on in the temple in the first century? Caesar—Augustus Caesar—ended up building a temple to Mars. Got a war right here in Rome. It's a huge, huge, huge big deal. And he built a little statue of Venus right here, the mother goddess, right? And got a little Cupid down here handing her a sword. And so we have Mars and Venus, and he's attaching this type of—he's trying to build a family tree for Rome to see. And so what's he do with a statue of his dad, Julius Caesar? He puts a statue of his dad who is what? He's a god just like them, right? He puts his dad right there next to Mars and Venus, right?

The Deification of Caesar

And to polish it up just a little bit more, you see how his dad's dressed? Look at this. Got this little toga. You can kind of see his abs a little bit. He's sporting his muscles, goes to CrossFit or something. Look at the way that toga is made. Who's the god of the sea? Poseidon? Here's a statue of Poseidon. He dressed his dad up the way that people were used to seeing other deities in Rome. Whoa, this is your dad? You're the son of God. Divine status.

Fastest growing religion in history throughout all of Rome. Then a generation it overtook the entire empire. Hail Caesar.

The Reach of Imperial Worship

We have Rome over here. Did you realize every single city—I know it's blurry to see—Corinth, Galatia, Thessalonica, every single city that Paul wrote to was a center of imperial cult, worship of emperor. Pull out your Bibles. Mark chapter 12, starting in verse 12.

So Yeshua is standing there, our King, and he says—the Jewish leaders wanted to arrest him for using the illustration because they realized that he was pointing at them. They were the wicked farmers in his story. Remember, he just told a parable. But they were afraid to touch him because of the crowd, so they left him and went away.

Now, the leaders sent some Pharisees and supporters of Herod to try to trap Jesus. What are they going to try to do to Yeshua? Trap him. Trap Yeshua into saying something for which he could get arrested. So they're trying to get Yeshua arrested by making him say something. What's their intention? Get him arrested, right? So what do they do to do this?

"Teacher," they ask. "We know how honest you are. You are impartial and don't play favorites. You sincerely teach the ways of God. Now tell us, is it right to pay taxes to the Roman government or not?"

Ooh, something that Judea was required to do to show honor to the Roman empire. If you didn't pay taxes... Right? This is something that was agreed upon. Now, if Yeshua says, no, you're not supposed to honor Caesar. You're not supposed to honor Rome. You're not supposed to support Rome. You're not supposed to pay allegiance to Rome. Then he's a traitor to Rome. Get him killed. What's he say?

"Should we pay them or should we not?"

So Yeshua saw through their hypocrisy and said, "Whom of you, who are you trying to fool with your trick questions?" He's a smart guy. I like this. Our King, show me a Roman coin and I'll tell you. So of course one of the guys pulls out a Roman coin and flips it to him. You guys know this story, right? He's read it a couple times. So they bring out a Roman coin and they show Yeshua this Roman coin. And when they handed it to him, he asked whose picture and title is stamped on it. And they say Caesar's.

The Coin and the Trap

"Well then," Yeshua said, "give to Caesar what belongs to him. But everything that belongs to God must be given to God." And this reply completely amazed them.

See, when Augustus became God, he started minting coins to circulate throughout all the empire. You want to see one of the coins? Caesar Augustus, right? And on the back, Deves Phileas, son of God. You, give me a coin that you're talking about here. Whose face is on it? Caesar's. And what's stamped on the back? Son of God. I guess give to the son of God what you're going to give to your son of God. Oh, crap. Uh-oh.

Evidence Across the Empire

Out of about... a hundred inscriptions that we found in Ephesus, right, from the first to third century, 20 of them, 20% pertain either to worshiping or honoring the emperor in a private or public setting or some direct or indirect contact with the emperor, imperial cult, or its functions. In Ephesus, there were temples built to Julius and Roma, patron deity, statues found of Augustus, space for the cult of Augustus and Artemis were also made near the chambers of the city council to make sure they knew who ran the country. And there were a total of three temples built for the purpose of imperial cult found in Ephesus.

Corinth bore mini coins specifically with the emperors, most emperors printed on them. Statues of Augustus were set up in Corinth. Temples specifically used for imperial worship were found

there. And these aren't little itty-bitty temples. These are big columns, whatnot, specifically for worship. Imperial worship. And the name Corinth actually comes from the name Colony of Corinth in honor of Julius. It was reestablished in 44 BC. The entire town was named in honor of Julius Caesar. Their patron god now, right?

Thessalonica. Highly affected by the late civil wars. They almost fell apart. Were almost completely destroyed by the civil wars that were going on. They paid great gratitude to Rome for the benefits that they received because they honored Rome throughout the Civil War. Imperial temples were found, priests, coins, festival days, and imperial idols were greatly celebrated as a sign of thanksgiving to the entire empire in Thessalonica. All seven cities in [Romans 7](#) had altars to imperial worship in them.

A Tale of Two Systems

Now you understand why I kind of built up a little bit of the history of this, because this was the life that Paul lived. This was the life that Yeshua lived, overtaken by this empire of peace, of security, of trust, of death.

A little bit of economics. I know I got a lot of slides. I want to get through this. In America today, who has the most money? What percentage of Americans have the greatest amount of money? The 1%, right? We've heard about the 1%, right? People have all been out of shape about the 1%, right? So 1% of America take up about 36% of America's total wealth. They got it, 1%. I appreciate Ron for putting this slide together. The 95 to 99% ratio of Americans makes up about 28% of the total wealth. The 80 to 95% take up about 24% of the wealth.

And the bottom 90%—everyone who makes \$90,000 and below—takes up 13% of America's total wealth. We share it. Interesting, right?

So you see all these protests and everything. This needs to be more equal, right?

Well, let's go back to Rome. Rome didn't have all these little levels. There was the top percent and there was the bottom, right? The top 3% of Roman citizens carried 95% of the Roman wealth. Can you imagine that?

The bottom 97% shared 5% of the wealth total. In other words, folks were poor in the Roman Empire. Folks were poor.

You wonder why Yeshua was always talking to the poor and he always has these thousands of poor following him? Because that's all there were. That's what his gospel was geared toward.

You're oppressed, I know, and I'm here for you. It's incredible. His gospel, the message of Yeshua, was specifically geared toward those who were oppressed.

The Roman Social Pyramid

Let me go through this real quick. Most people were at the bottom of the Roman social order, and they were slaves. They couldn't own property. They were workers, even doctors, right? Doctors are rich. Even doctors were slaves. Couldn't own property, indentured servants. This is what you're going to do, right?

Now, if you were able to buy yourself out of your slavery, you would become a freeman, right, Russell? Right? You would become a freeman, but you're still essentially doing the exact same work as a slave; now you can own land if you want to. Still just as poor.

Now above that, you have the plebeians. Now these are the artisans, the shopkeepers, people who owned land and were making a decent living. They're still poor. Very poor. But you know, that little ratty shack, the guy who sells bread, he could be considered plebeian. Right? Right?

Then you go up to the patricians, and this was the priests. These were the ruling class, the senators, all the high-ups on the economic scale. This was these guys. This is where the Caesars came from. And then you got Caesar at the top, up there with God.

Yeshua's Gospel to the Oppressed

Judeans, Jews, slaves, indentured servants to the Roman empires. Most of them were slaves, beggars on the street, most—especially outside of Judea, in Rome, Alexandria, Thessalonica, and beyond.

When you're reading the Gospels, right, and you see who Yeshua is talking to, and you see how he treats the poor, now you can kind of understand what they're living through, right?

"May I be privileged to build firm and lasty foundations for the government of Rome. May I also achieve the reward to which I aspire, that of being known as the author of the best possible constitution, and of carrying with me when I die the hope that these foundations will abide secure." This is a mandate of the king, Augustus Caesar.

Is there any reason why Paul is writing to Corinth? "For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Yeshua Messiah."

The Savior of Rome, right? Right? He has put an end to war and has set up things in order. He brought order from chaos in Rome. This is a quote from basically Roman provinces, Turkey.

Caesar Worship in the Empire

The emperor was repeatedly called the savior of the world and the savior of the inhabited earth. When he, the emperor, came in person to pay the state visit to a colony or province, the word for his royal presence was *parousia*, *parousia*. Interesting—in all of Paul's letters, that's the same word that's used for when Yeshua's coming back.

[1 Corinthians 15](#), 23 through 25: "But every man in his own order, Messiah the firstfruits, afterward they that are Messiahs at his coming, Persia, when he comes. Then cometh up the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father, when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and all powers. For he must reign forever. Once again, till he has put all the enemies under his feet."

So we always talk about Yeshua coming back as a conquering king, but we never understand. Conquer what?

[Philippians 3](#). Notice the beginning of this chapter. Paul's messages to all of these cities, to the believers, encouraging them to defy Caesar, to defy Rome, and to be citizens in the kingdom of heaven. Guys, this would get you killed. Got a lot of people killed, right?

The Underground Church and Imperial Persecution

You know, when the Romans first saw the Judeans and how they were with their deity that they worshiped, they gave them grace—a little bit of grace, if you will—to not have to declare Caesar as God. And so the very first believers in Messiah were lumped in. The Romans didn't see a distinction between them and the Jews because they were worshiping the same God, right? It was all about Yeshua and that.

But soon after that, it didn't take very long for Romans to legally see a distinction between the Christians, if you will—that's not the correct term that was used at the time, though. The believers in Yeshua and the Judeans. So the Judeans had a legal right not to declare Caesar as Rome. The believers in Yeshua, who ended up being seen as a separate faction of the Judeans, did not. You don't have that right. You have to declare Caesar as God. I will not. Then we're gonna throw you in an arena with some lions. We're gonna burn you alive, we're gonna skin you alive because you don't have the legal right to defy Caesar.

Christian persecution that went on before Constantine, right? That's what caused it. It was refusing to yield to the imperial cult, the worship of the emperor.

Paul's Subversive Letters

So in the beginning of Philippians, you'll notice, in the first chapter, Paul's talking and he's like, "Listen guys, it's not a big deal for me to keep repeating all these little things I'm saying, but it's for your safety." As if it's a coded message that if it's read, it could just be passed back on to the Philippians.

And so he writes in chapter 3: "But our citizenship," right? You're a citizen of Rome, right?

We didn't have time to read every single letter of Paul, so I picked out a few verses. I want you guys to go back and study this for yourself. Is this interesting at least? Peek your interest a little bit?

Romans. Oh, got to be careful, Paul. Be careful what you write in that letter. In the very first chapter, "regarding his son, who was at his human nature, was a descendant of David, and who through the spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the son of God. By his resurrection from the dead, Yeshua Messiah, our Kyrios, our Lord."

This is why in [Romans 10](#), Roman road, right? [Romans 10](#): "What we see about being saved, if you confess with your mouth that Yeshua is master, right? Yeshua is Kyrios. If you confess that he is your king, he is your Caesar, if you will, and that God gave him power and that he died and God rose him from the dead, then you will be saved."

It's a big deal. Defying the peace and security that the Roman Empire brought—that Caesar brought you, your king—that you were told to believe in for all things in your life, that you were told to put faith in for every necessity in your life, that you were told you need to give total allegiance to Caesar if you want blessing in this world. No, no. Turn your back on the world and follow Yeshua. That's what that central message is all about.

The Scattered Jews of the Diaspora

One more. [Acts 17](#). This is important.

Can you imagine trying to understand Paul—trying to understand why he says something about the law here, or the law there, or this here—and not understanding what his agenda was in writing to the cities that he chose to write to? You guys realize that in all these cities outside of Judea?

Turn to Acts chapter 17. Outside of Judea. Hold on. We're going back. This little area right here is Judea. Itty bitty bitty area. Okay, little area.

Galilee was not in Judea. Okay, where Yeshua started his ministry was not in Judea. Jews were scattered all throughout the Roman Empire—in Rome, Alexandria, Babylon, we're off the map here. You know, in Greece, Asia Minor, all through there.

Did you know that Pharisees did not exist outside of Judea? For all the Jews that were in the diaspora, we have no writings, no books, no historical accounts of anyone arguing over halakha or how the Torah should be kept or purity laws outside the temple. You know, all the things Yeshua argued with the Pharisees about? We have no record of any of that ever occurring outside of little Judea, even in the Galilee, which was a central intersection for Gentile business.

Hmm. People were just Jews. They were Judeans, and their central was Jerusalem. Jews didn't travel to Jerusalem—hopefully, they would go once in their lifetime because they were so far away. You couldn't go to the temple every single time you messed up because it takes a week just to go from Galilee to Jerusalem. Try going from Corinth or Rome. Months.

Who Is Your Caesar?

Acts chapter 17. The question is, guys: Who is your king? Who is your Caesar in your life right now?

I want every one of you to think: What is the Caesar in your life?

Now, some of you may think, oh, this is kind of stupid, Matt. But I guarantee every single one of you just thought of something. The complete kurios, the master in your life, the leader, the one you look to for peace and security.

Peace and security were stamped on all the Roman coins. Securitas and pax et, pax of liberty, pax of security, pax et Roma. Peace and security were stamped on pretty much every single Roman coin. That was the idea. You depend on Caesar and you get peace and security, right? You get trust, you get faithfulness, you get blessing.

What is the Caesar in your life? Is it Yeshua or is it something else?

See, when we focus on Yeshua, we have the guarantee of blessing in our life, and we have the guarantee of comfort in our life, and we have the guarantee of encouragement and support from our Heavenly Father. But when we put our faith in something else, like a boat with Peter, we don't have that guarantee. And we wonder sometimes why our marriages have problems, why

we have trouble with our kids, why we have trouble with our finances, why we have trouble with our health, why we have trouble with all of these aspects in our life. Are we following Caesar, or are we following our curious Yeshua? That's something that everybody should be asking themselves. What are you a citizen to? Rome? Nice looking empire. Or heaven?

Paul in Thessalonica

So Acts chapter 17, starting in verse 1. Now Paul and Silas traveled through the towns of Amphipolis and Apollonia and came to Thessalonica where there was a Jewish synagogue. Thessalonica had a lot of background with imperial cult. As was Paul's custom, he went into the synagogue service, and for three Sabbaths in a row, he interpreted the scriptures to the people. He was explaining and proving the prophecies about the suffering of the Messiah and his rising from the dead, and he said, "This Yeshua I'm telling you about is the Messiah." Now some who listened were persuaded and became converts, including a large number of godly Greek men and also many important women in the city.

But the Jewish leaders were jealous, so they gathered some worthless fellows from the streets to form a mob to start a riot. They attacked the home of Jason, searching for Paul and Silas, so they could drag them out to the crowd. Not finding them there, they dragged out Jason and some of the other believers instead and took them before the city council.

"Paul and Silas have turned the rest of the world upside down, and now they are here disturbing our city," they shouted. Why were these people so upset at Paul and his ministry within Thessalonica? They turned the world upside down? Not, "We're jealous and we want them gone." Not, "We don't like their theology." Not, "Oh, there's a different calendar in place here." No, none of that.

Verse 7: "And Jason has let them into his home. They are all guilty of treason against Caesar, for they profess allegiance to another king, Yeshua." They tried to get them charged with treason for something they were actually guilty of. It's incredible.

"The people of the city as well as city officials were thrown into turmoil over these reports." What do you mean they're saying don't worship Caesar? Worship Yeshua?

Citizenship and Allegiance

First [Thessalonians 2:12](#): "We pleaded with you, encouraged you, and urged you to live your lives in a way that God would consider worthy, for he called you into his kingdom to share with

his glory, not Rome. For you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While all the other people are crying out peace and safety, peace and security, destruction will come on them suddenly as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. For at the right time, Messiah will be revealed from heaven by the blessed and only Almighty God, the King of kings, the Lord of lords."

This is what I wanted to introduce to you guys—this concept that is academically backed by most scholars—before we move on with anything else having to do with Paul. Because we have to understand that Paul's first mission was to write to people who had no idea that there was a better kingdom out there, who had no idea that there was a better God out there. Better yet, the Son of God. People who were far from hope, who were far from the one true God, he writes to them saying, "Listen, there is a guy who died for you, a man who was faithful to God's command to come to earth, not reach out to grab that apple, but to stay straight in line with God's commandments. And God raised him from the dead."

Bodily Resurrection and a New Body

Remember in the afterlife series, we were speaking about how Greeks don't believe—they didn't believe your body was ever resurrected. Once you die, you just go on to heaven or hell pretty much. Bodily resurrection? Yeah, your body is going to be resurrected to a new body. Yeshua is going to give you a spirit within you that will conquer everything within this world, but you have to proclaim him king and not Caesar. You have to proclaim that he gets his power from God, not from Caesar, right? And you have to proclaim that your citizenship is with Israel and is of heaven and not with this empire of Rome that is corrupt and taking over everything that does not support the poor and so on and so forth.

Who Is Your Caesar?

So I ask you guys, who's your Caesar? It's easy to say Yeshua, but you live a life according to who you follow. If you follow Caesar, then guess what? You're going to proclaim Caesar. If you follow the things of the world, then that is your Caesar, right? It could be TV. It could be something in your life, your business, right? It could be a search for knowledge, right? It could be all kinds of things. It could be something worse. Pornography, alcohol, drugs. These are Caesars. What is your Caesar? What is the one thing that you are proclaiming ruler of your life right now that you need to turn your back on? Treason for the sake of the true curious, the true king, the true master Yeshua.

A Thought to Leave You With

That is a thought I would like to leave you guys with based on the history and the context of what Paul was writing about. I encourage you guys, read Paul. Don't be scared of him. Try to find this theme in his writings. Whenever he mentions Savior, Son of God, what is his emphasis there? And who is he talking to? It's very interesting that Paul never wrote a letter to Jerusalem. He didn't have that problem there.

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