

THRU THE BIBLE EXPOSITION

Matthew: Jesus As Israel's Messiah And His Kingdom

L. Christ As Israel's Messiah Seen In His Teaching On Paying Taxes To Caesar (Matthew 22:15-22)

I. Introduction

- A. One question Matthew's Gospel answers is: "If Jesus was the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament, and His kingdom has been postponed, what is God's purpose meantime?!" (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, p. 1337)
- B. This question is very applicable in the believer's relationship to his godless civil government today, for though he is a "citizen of heaven" (Phil. 3:20 NIV, ESV) he finds he must often relate to a godless government.
- C. Jesus revealed by His answer to the question of paying taxes to Caesar what such a believer's relationship to the civil government should be, revealing Himself to be the truly righteous Messiah of a postponed kingdom:

II. Christ As Israel's Messiah Seen In His Teaching On Paying Taxes To Caesar, Matthew 22:15-22.

- A. To try ridding themselves of Jesus either by discrediting Him as an ungodly Jew or getting Him to take a stand that would anger the Roman rulers, the Pharisees joined their usual political foes, the Herodians, to ask Jesus a question about relating to the civil government in hope of entrapping Him to His harm, Matthew 22:15-16a:
 1. The Pharisees strongly held to Hebrew language and culture while the Herodians "supported the rule of Herod the Great and favored making changes with the times as dictated by Rome," B. K. C., N. T., p. 71.
 2. Thus, these foes joined forces to ask Jesus a question where He would have to answer in a way that entrapped Him between loyalty to Judaism and Israel's God or to Rome and its god, Caesar, *Ibid.*
- B. As they approached Him, they sought to "soften" Jesus' defenses by flattering Him so as to lead Him to make a careless remark and thus become entrapped by that remark to His harm, Matthew 22:16b-17a.
- C. Their question dealt with a tax imposed by Rome on every Jew, Matt; 22:17b; *Ibid.*, Ryrie, ftn. to Matt. 22:17. Many Jews of the day struggled over this issue, wondering: "If God gave the land of Israel to the Hebrews, and if God meant them to live there, and if He received their sacrifices and offerings in acknowledgment of His relationship to them, how could they pay tribute to any other power, king, god or person? If Christ said that they should pay, they could then charge Him with disloyalty to Judaism; if He said no, they could denounce Him to the Romans," putting Jesus at risk of death by the government, *Ibid.*; Matthew 22:17.
- D. Jesus saw through their hypocrisy, and denounced it in Matthew 22:18. Then, He wisely asked **them** to show Him a denarius that **they** possessed, a coin used to pay the tax, and that had an image of Caesar on it with an inscription declaring Caesar to be divine, both the image and the inscription being idolatrous, *Ibid.*, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 72. The coin belonged to one of them, so Jesus avoided being immediately charged with loyalty to Rome over loyalty to God simply because the coin had belonged to Him! (Matthew 22:19)
- E. Next, Jesus asked them whose image and inscription was on their coin, and they replied it was Caesar's, so He told them to give to Caesar what belonged to Caesar and to God what belonged to God, Matthew 22:20-21.
- F. Jesus' question and response to its answer from the Herodians supplies several key applications for us today:
 1. Though the denarius coin bore the image of Caesar and its inscription lauded him as a god, Jesus taught God does not hold people guilty of sin if they must pay a godless government its godless coins in taxes.
 2. One thing the government did with tax revenues was mint more idolatrous coins, so Jesus taught God does not hold those who pay taxes guilty for what the government does with the money they must pay in taxes.
 3. In summary, Jesus held God requires His people in this era of Christ's postponed Kingdom to **try** to heed **both** godless civil rule **and** God's rule. Acts 5:29 reveals if a conflict occurs between one's obedience of civil authorities and his obedience of God, he must obey God over men. However, if no such conflict exists, Jesus taught that one must heed **both** parties, all the while giving God his highest loyalty!
- G. Jesus' teaching caused the Pharisees and the Herodians to marvel, so they left Him, Matthew 22:22.

Lesson: Christ's answer on the question of paying taxes to Caesar shows God expects believers today in Christ's postponed Kingdom era to try to heed both secular and divine rulers, with our ultimate obedience going to God.

Application: (1) May we trust in Christ as the true Messiah for eternal life (John 20:31), and (2) try to heed both the civil government and God, with our ultimate loyalty going to God. (3) Jesus' statement about the coin's idolatrous image and inscription indicates God does not hold us responsible for the sins of the government that our money supports as we pay our taxes, but that we are liable to pay the taxes we owe! How the government uses what money we legally owe it is the government's responsibility before God, but we are responsible to obey the tax laws for the sake of our personal testimonies, 1 Peter 2:13-17.