

**Episode 2: The Romans and Herod’s World**

**Luke 1:1-4; Matthew 2**

**Prologue: Enter the Romans (63-B.C—4th Century A.D.)**

**From the book of I Maccabees (Apocrypha) 8:1-20**

***8*** *Now Judas heard of the fame of the Romans, that they were very strong and were well-disposed toward all who made an alliance with them, that they pledged friendship to those who came to them, 2and that they were very strong. …17So Judas chose Eupolemus son of John son of Accos, and Jason son of Eleazar, and sent them to Rome to establish friendship and alliance, 18and to free themselves from the yoke; for they saw that the kingdom of the Greeks was enslaving Israel completely. 19They went to Rome, a very long journey; and they entered the senate chamber and spoke as follows: 20“Judas, who is also called Maccabeus, and his brothers and the people of the Jews have sent us to you to establish alliance and peace with you, so that we may be enrolled as your allies and friends.”*

1. **The Rise of the Roman Empire** *c. 753 b.c.–a.d. 117*
   1. In 63 b.c. Pompey marched into Jerusalem and entered the temple.
   2. **Roman Emperors (31 b.c.–a.d. 98)**
      1. Augustus (31 B.C.–14 A.D.)
      2. Tiberius (14–37 A.D.)
      3. Caligula (37–41 A.D.)
      4. Claudius (41–54 A.D.)
      5. Nero (54–68 A.D.)
      6. Galba (68–69 A.D.)
      7. Otho (January–April 69 A.D.)
      8. Aulus Vitellius (July–December 69 A.D.)
      9. Vespasian (69–79 A.D.)
      10. Titus (79–81 A.D.) (70. A.D.—Destruction of the Temple)
      11. Domitian (81–96 A.D.)
      12. Nerva (96–98 A.D.)
2. **HEROD THE GREAT (37–4 b.c.)**

***Matthew 2:1-2****Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem,* ***2****saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”* ***3****When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;* ***4****and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.*

* 1. His character
  2. The Herodian Temple
  3. His Cities—Caesarea
  4. Masada: His Fortress of Solitude (and Monument to Paranoia)

1. **The Context of New Christianity**

*In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.* ***2****This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria.[[1]](#footnote-1)(Luke 2:1-2)*

* 1. **Social Structure, Economics, Politics, and Law In Roman Judea**
  2. **Education and Philosophy**
  3. **Philosophical Systems of the First Century a.d.**

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| Sophists | Enamored with the successful execution of rhetorical argumentation (sometimes regardless of the particular position taken in the argument). |
| Cynics | Contended for a more naturalistic way of pious living, often engaging in shocking verbal and physical feats to make their points. |
| Epicureans | Believed that all that exists were miniscule packets of matter (atoms), that humans were entirely composed of aggregate matter (thus ceasing to exist upon death), and that life was consequently about maximizing earthly pleasure through friendships and enjoyment of life. |
| Stoics | Argued that the world was fundamentally the expression of a rational force (the *logos*), and that harmonious good living required an exaltation of reason over spontaneous emotions in all of life.  *From the ESV Study Bible* |

* 1. **Religion and Magic**
     1. Roman pantheon of gods and goddesses: Jupiter, Venus, and Mars (or their Greek counterparts Zeus, Aphrodite, and Ares)
     2. Household gods
     3. Hero worship (Alexander the Great) as a god in his lifetime
     4. Emperor Worship
     5. Mystery religions
     6. Magic
     7. Monotheism
     8. “Atheism”

1. **Jewish Groups at the Time of the New Testament**
   1. **The Sadducees** *(See table below)*
   2. **The Essenes** *(See table below)*
   3. **The Pharisees** *(See table below)*
   4. Scribes
   5. Zealots
2. **Revolt**
   1. The First Jewish Revolt *a.d. 66–73*
   2. The Bar Kochba Revolt *a.d. 132–135*

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|  | **Pharisees** | **Sadducees** | **Essenes** |
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| **General** | In the world but not of the world | In the world and of the world | Neither in the world nor of the world |
| **Law** | Valued oral law, also accepted old written law | Rejected oral law, accepted only old written law | Wrote hidden law, accepted and gave interpretations to old law |
| **Interpretation** | Accurate, precise | Pragmatic, accommodating | Creative, adaptive |
| **God** | Participates in events of world | Removed from the evil of world | Messiah will destroy the evil of world |
| **Fate** | Fate cooperates in human actions | Rejected Fate, emphasized agency | Accepted Fate |
| **Society** | Kind to each other, lenient (Mt 5:46; Acts 5:39) | Rude to each other, boorish, punitive (compare Acts 5:40) | Great attachment to each other |
| **Main locations** | Rural villages and cities | Urban centers | Remote communes, separate quarters |
| **Gentiles** | Partially accepted | Openly accepted | Mostly rejected |
| **Property** | Lived simply | Sought wealth | Despised wealth, held goods in common |
| **Souls** | Imperishable, good souls alone go on to another body, wicked souls suffer eternal punishment, believed in resurrection | No afterlife, no eternal rewards or punishments | Bodies perishable, souls immortal, liberated upon death |

1. [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](https://ref.ly/logosres/esv?ref=BibleESV.Lk2.1&off=26&ctx=rth+of+Jesus+Christ%0a~2%C2%A0%E2%80%A2%E2%80%A2In+those+days+l%EF%BB%BF). (2016). (Lk 2:1–2). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)