



The Christian life is a journey.

*TrailNotes* speaks to forward movement, paying attention to the “landscape” we are passing through in this trail-laced wooded hillside and valley, not to mention the world beyond. *TrailNotes* is an unfolding, ongoing journal of the people who share the trail with us and the things we’re learning and doing.

## ElderTalk: The Time Was Right (Part 2 - The Herodians)

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Welcome to the second installment of a 5-part series I began in September 2023 in which we examine the groups that Jesus encountered so that we can better understand the context of when and where Jesus came to rescue humanity.

The first group we looked at was the Sadducees. We are now going to move on to the Herodians, as we see mentioned in the gospel accounts of Matthew and Mark below.

Matthew 22:15–22 (NIV) “Then the Pharisees went out and laid plans to trap Him in His words. They sent their disciples to Him along with the Herodians. ‘Teacher,’ they said, ‘we know that You are a man of integrity and that You aren’t swayed by others, because You pay no attention to who they are. Tell us then what is your opinion. Is it right to pay the imperial tax to Caesar or not?’

But Jesus, knowing their evil intent, said, ‘*You hypocrites, why are you trying to trap Me? Show Me the coin used for paying the tax.*’ They brought Him a denarius and He asked them, ‘*Whose image is this? And whose inscription?*’

‘Caesar’s’ they replied. Then He said to them, ‘*So give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s, and to God what is God’s.*’ When they heard this, they were amazed. So they left Him and went away.”

Mark 3:6 (NIV) “Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus.”

There had been extended silence in Scripture between the book of Malachi and the events of Matthew’s Gospel account, depicting the earthly ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Four hundred years  
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A Herodian floor mosaic from the first century “Nile House” in Tzipori (צפּוּרִי)/Sepphoris (Σέπφωρις)—located in lower Galilee, on the Jezreel Valley, midway between Haifa and the Sea of Galilee of modern day Israel, and about 3 miles northwest of Nazareth.

## The Herodians *(Continued from page 1.)*

had passed in the Holy Land for which we have no prophetic record. So much took place during this period that to know these things significantly impacts our understanding of the New Testament. It is important to be familiar with at least the major events that occurred in this intertestamental period. The apostle Paul, the Pharisee of pharisees who was converted and called to preach the gospel to the gentiles, wrote to the Galatians concerning the time, from God's perspective.

First, Paul says that a “*fullness of time*” had occurred preceding the birth of Jesus. “Fullness” indicates that the stage and all of its components were assembled together with God's purposes in mind. It was the completion of one age and the start of a new age. This time and all of its components were perfectly aligned to bring forth the God/man, the Savior of the world. He would be born into poverty, under the scrutiny of illegitimacy of birth, a refugee, homeless and born in an animal shelter, oppressed by the government and threatened by a murderous king—all by God's design.

The world in which Jesus was born was an intense place of great conflict, the greatest of which seemed to be based on the onslaught of Hellenism into the Jewish world. Hellenism proposed that man himself was the center of the world and the concept of “god” was as an accessory to mankind.

Protagorus of Abdera (485–415 BC) is most famous for his claim that “*Of all things the measure is Man.*” This idea that the universe revolves around “me” swept across the pagan and Jewish world with the onslaught of Alexander the Great. Hellenism brought an inevitable clash in Israel during the post-exilic period, resulting in a variety of responses and groupings of the Jewish people as they coped with forced Hellenism in their midst.

The contextual understanding of these responses helps us to understand the scope and impact of Jesus' ministry here on earth and also the birth of His Church. It was this scenario that God specifically and purposely chose to incarnate His Son on our behalf.

Let us look at the differing factions and philosophies of the 5 groups that Jesus encountered in His earthly ministry, that we encounter in the Gospels and their context, their origins, and their strengths and weaknesses. By doing so, we can also examine in our own lives where God has us and how we might be made effective in His plan. There are many parallels

to how the first century world reacted to Jesus and how we would react to Him today. Now we will examine the group known as the Herodians.

The Herodians were a sect of Hellenistic Jews mentioned in the New Testament on two occasions: first, in Galilee and later in Jerusalem. They were hostile to Jesus. In each of these cases their name is coupled with that of the Pharisees. Scholars of this period of history suggest that the Herodians were probably a public political party who distinguished themselves from the two great historical parties of post-exilic Judaism (the Pharisees and Sadducees) by the fact that they were and had been sincerely friendly to Herod the Great, the king of the Jews and to his dynasty.

The famous historian of the time, Flavius Josephus, (c. 37AD–c.100 AD) refers to the Herodians. This group embraced Hellenism. They believed in all that Hellenism offered, especially whatever could be the universe around each man and woman. Hellenism was built upon four foundational pillars: gymnasium/university, hospital, athletics, and entertainment. (Sound familiar?) How great is Hellenism to provide education, medical care, sports, and the arts! It provided quite a contrast to the culture, methods, and theology of the chosen people.

What does the world view of the Herodians look like? They were convinced that as a Jew, one *could* have luxury, technology, and the arts. The Herodians were able to accommodate anything they desired while maintaining a relationship with God. One didn't exclude the other. It was a place in which the Herodians could comfortably settle. *It is a place where we tend to settle as well.* In general, as an American Christian, I have come to that place. However, there are some pitfalls to be aware of in that settlement.

The Herodians are “good” with the culture. “I still worship God, but I can appreciate a little Greek mythology. Who doesn't enjoy the culture a little bit? The mythology is just entertainment to me.”



Consider a comparison to American Christianity. How easy would it be to project similar outlooks into our 21st century American Judeo-Christian society?

Are today's luxuries wrong? Is education wrong? Is institutional medicine wrong? Is participation in sports wrong? Is the place of art and entertainment God-rooted or rooted in Hellenism?

Many wrestle with Scripture such as Romans 13:2 (NIV): “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is.”

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# JANUARY 2024

- 2, 9, 16, 23, 30.** Games Reach at Madison H.S. 2:30–4:30 pm.
- 3, 10, 17, 24, 31.** Connect Groups. 6:30 pm. The Adults now are working in Ch. 7 of *Cookies on the Lower Shelf*.
- 4, 11, 18, 25.** Games Reach at Madison Middle School. 2:30–4:30 pm.
- 5, 12, 19, 26.** Games Reach at Madison South Elementary School. 3:30–5:00 pm.
- 6** Games Reach Game Night. 6:30–8:00 pm at GFC.
- 7** Mitch Schwartz preaching. Hebrews 6:9–20.
- 11** Women of Grace Bible study and prayer. 6:30–8:00 pm.
- 13** Wedding of Lori Barker and Brian Judd. 10:30 am followed by a luncheon.
- 14** Elder Jadaé Fox preaching on Hebrews 7:1–10. 
- 21** Pastor Eric Byrom preaching on Hebrews 7:11–22.
- 28** Eric Byrom preaching on Hebrews 7:23–28, 10:00 am.   
Annual Grace Fellowship Church Meeting, 6:30–8:00 pm.



I've been curious about the song, "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen" and the comma that seems to be in the wrong place. Since I was young, I've thought it should be "God Rest Ye, Merry Gentlemen." But it is "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen." I always wondered why you'd have a song where God wanted happy people to sleep. That just didn't work.

This song was written in the 1500's by a nameless peasant. Most of the carols that we sing today *in* church were actually written *outside* the church. The church did not want Christmas music in the church because they wanted songs that were theologically sound. They didn't believe that common, everyday Christians could write theologically correct verses to music. So, they discredited anyone who was not a priest or pastor who wrote a song. By and large, carols were sung by people at home, not in church. "God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen" is one of those.

I wanted to find out what "rest" meant in the old English language. It did not mean "sleep." It meant "make" or "keep."

It wasn't Robin Hood and his "happy guys out in the forest." "Merry" in the 1500's and 1600's meant "mighty" or "great." Think of the song this way:

**"God make you mighty, Gentlemen.  
Let nothing you dismay.  
Remember Christ your Savior  
Was born on Christmas Day..."**

So we need to be saying, **"God, make you mighty, Gentlemen."** That's what the song means. This carol, which we almost discredit in modern English, has a very powerful message which we have lost.



## The Herodians *(Continued from page 2.)*

Are these issues black and white, moral and immoral, ethical and unethical? Is there anything wrong with this? Many would look at the Herodians of this period and judge, yes, they are compromising between the ways of this world and the ways of God.

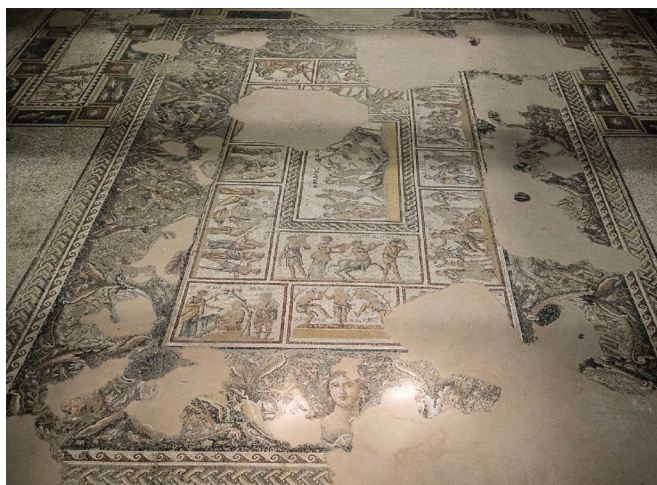
I think that there is an aspect of the Herodian mindset that could be a blessing. They were familiar with the culture of Hellenistic Palestine, just as we are with American popular culture today. What did God want to do through Jesus and His followers in the first century? And what does God want to do with this culture in *our* time?

God is going to change it, save it, redeem it. He *wants* to redeem it. He loved the ancient Greeks and Romans very much. Our Heavenly Father loved them as much as He loved any Jewish person that's ever been a part of the Old Testament, and He wants to redeem their story.

He wants to redeem *our* story. This broken world and its restoration is of great importance to God, for He "so loved the world." The Herodians knew the world as well as anyone else. Do we not know our culture because of our immersion into it? Herodians can be effective agents for God's minions to redeem the world. Who could impact the arts more than a group of artists that have the heart of God, the love of Jesus, actively working in the studio, on the stage, or in the bookstores? You want to redeem sports? Do you want the compassion and love of Christ to reach a hurting world, or a classroom full of questioning young minds that are immersed in disillusionment through social media? Well, who's going to know this starving culture better than the Herodians?

As modern Herodians, our challenge is not to idolize the culture of the world by letting it consume us, and by eventually worshipping it. It's the idolatry. We can't know how many of the first century Herodians loved the Lord their God with all their heart and all their soul and all their might. Through connection to the Holy Spirit in prayer, the Word, and in fellowship, we are able to see the pitfalls of indulging in the comforts of this world at the expense of our relationship with God, and to the exploitation of others.

This is the dilemma of being a modern-day Herodian. We want a little luxury. At church we can present a side of ourselves where we speak of God's place in our lives instead of our place in His Kingdom. Power,



Another Herodian floor mosaic. This one is known to archeologists as the "Mona Lisa of the Galilee" and is in the banquet hall of the "Dionysus Building" in Zippori.

influence, independence, privilege, comfort. I lean toward these things. But more importantly, I am blessed in my relationship with Jesus. I bristle when the things of this world are challenged directly by Jesus. I have become increasingly aware that the way of God constantly challenges my Herodian Christianity. However, it can be a connecting point with those around me who do not know the love of Christ and God's desire to redeem and lovingly embrace them for eternity.

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