Daily Life In The Time Of Jesus

# The Time of Jesus[[1]](#footnote-1)

## The Date of Christ’s Birth

Before the calendar was changed to its current numbering according to the year of our Lord (A.D.) it was based on the founding of Rome as its starting point. So January 1, 754 (AVC [*anno urbis conditae*]) would be the equivalent of our 1 A.D.

To determine the exact date of the birth of Christ we have to consider several things.

1. Caesar Augustus was emperor from 44 B.C. to 14 A.D.
2. Herod the Great died between March 29 and April 11, 4 B.C. We know this because Josephus tells us there was an eclipse just before he died (March 12, 13), and there was a Passover just after his death (April 11). The point is that Jesus was born before this, because the wise men came to Herod to ask about the birth.
3. Quirinius was the governor of Syria from 3-2 B.C. and from 6-7 A.D. We are told in the account in Luke 2 that an order went out from Caesar to enroll the people in their hometowns for the purpose of taxation. This probably meant that the people would go regularly to be taxed in their home towns. Joseph and Mary being from Judah had to go to Bethlehem. This occurred before the death of Herod, before his empire was split up among his sons.
Josephus mentions a census in 6-7 A.D. But that is not this one--that was the one referred to in Acts 5:37. Luke is a historian and knows full well that is not this decree. Quirinius was governor twice, and there is some uncertainty about when his first tenure occurred. It was probably from 3-2 B.C. according to all the evidence. That seems to contradict the fact that Jesus was born before 4 B.C. But in the text the word translated “while” is *prote* (prwth), which should be translated “before” (see John 15:18 where it has that meaning: “they hated me before you”).
The census was ordered probably in 8/7 B.C. It would not have gotten organized for a couple of years in Palestine. It was a good time for the census to be taken, though, because Herod was old and dying, his kingdom was in turmoil with a power struggle for the throne, and Rome needed to k now what they had in Palestine. The census was probably underway between 6 and 4 B.C., “before” Quirinius was governor of Syria.
4. Matthew 2:16 records that Herod ordered the children under two years old to be slaughtered. Some have concluded that this meant Jesus was two when the Magi came to see him. But that would mean Jesus was born about 6 B.C., probably too early in view of other considerations. Herod was just playing it safe. After all, the Magi had traveled a long way, and had seen the star. Herod did not know when the child was born.
The sequence then would have been that Jesus was born in Bethlehem in 5 or 4 B.C. Almost immediately the Magi show up to worship him. When they return home without reporting to Herod, Herod orders the slaughter of the innocents. Joseph, being warned in a dream, got the family out of there and safely into Egypt. Almost immediately Herod died. Then, when news reached them in Egypt that Herod was dead, but Archelaus was king, they went to Nazareth.
5. Luke 3:23 tells us that Jesus was “about thirty” when he began his ministry. As we shall see, Luke tells us that was in the 15th year of the new emperor Tiberius, or, 29 A.D. From 4 B.C. to 29 A.D. is 33 years. But Luke said “about” thirty years, which allows some room.
6. The birth took place in midwinter. This is the old tradition, sealed with the selection of December 25. That may not be far off. Shepherds have their animals out in the fields all year round, so the presence of shepherds does not mean it was spring or summer. What shepherds do, though, is bring the sheep in closer in winter rather than out in the wild. Here the shepherds were in the fields near Bethlehem (within a mile).
So the evidence adds up to a date of December, 5 B.C., or January, 4 B.C. for the birth of Christ. At the age of 12 when he was lost in the temple precincts, that would have been Passover, 8 A.D.

## The Commencement of Jesus’ Ministry

1. Luke tells us (in 3:1-3) several things about the beginning of Jesus’ ministry: Pilate was the procurator (26-37), Herod Antipas was ruler in Galilee (deposed in 39), Philip was tetrarch up north (he died in 34), and Caiaphas was the High Priest (18-37). We know nothing about Lysanias. But all these things fix the time of Jesus’ ministry between 26 and 36 A.D.
Now Luke tells us that John began his ministry in the 15th year of the emperor Tiberius. But how do we calculate what that was. If Luke was using Jewish reckoning, this would correspond to somewhere between 26 and 28. But it is unlikely Luke did that--he is a Gentile writing to Theophilus. He would have used the Julian calendar’s reckoning. The 15th Roman regnal year of Tiberius would have been between August, 28 A.D., and August 29 A.D.
We can say then that John the Baptist began his ministry in the fall of 29 A.D., and Jesus came to be baptized by John a few months after that.
2. The temple edifice was built 46 years before (John 2:13--3:21). The temple complex was started in 23/22 B.C., or perhaps even closer to 20. But Herod first had to build the massive retaining wall around the crown of the hill to make the platform (which was 34 acres). The reference here is most likely to the temple proper, the edifice, as the terms indicate. The sanctuary was done in 18/17 B.C. So, 46 years = 17 years + 29 years. 29 A.D. So, if Jesus went up to Passover in 30 A.D. and cleansed the temple the first time (the second time was during the passion week), they could say the temple took 46 years to build.
Again, this indicates that Jesus was baptized in the fall of 29, A.D., and in the spring of 30 A.D. was at the Passover when he spoke of the raising up the temple.

## The Duration of Christ’s Ministry

From a study of the ministry of Christ, especially the different festivals that he appears to have attended in the Gospels, we would conclude that he had a ministry of three and a half years. The Gospels mention three Passovers in his public ministry, 30 A.D. (John 2:13), then another in John 6:4, and another in John 11:55, which would turn out to be his Last Supper. But most chronologists believe there was another Passover that the Gospels do not mention, one that would have come second, or in 31 A.D. Then the John 6:4 was 32, and John 11:55 was 33 A.D. This allows them to fit all the events into the chronology, especially with the references to the times of the year. He could not possibly have died in 30 A.D., because that would have meant a public ministry of less than a year--there is just too much to fit in.

The ministry of Jesus began in the fall of 29 A.D.; and it lasted three and a half years until his crucifixion in 33 A.D.

## The Day of the Crucifixion

There are three general views proposed: Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday of the Passion week.

1. The Wednesday view is an attempt to do justice (literal justice) to the statement in Matthew 12:40, “three days and three nights.” By our exact reckoning, that would be 72 hours. But if Jesus died on Wednesday, that would mean the resurrection was on Saturday, when the Gospels are unanimous that it was the first day of the week.
2. So some suggest a Thursday crucifixion. That would not be 72 hours. And, it would have a problem with the witness of the Gospels that Jesus died when it was the preparation for the Sabbath (John 19:31), the day before the Sabbath day (Mark 15:42). This view then assumes that it was a high Sabbath, and not the weekly Sabbath, that was meant (each festival was called “Sabbath of Sabbaths” in Leviticus 23).
3. The Friday crucifixion fits the details of the Gospels the best. This would mean that “three days and three nights” was idiomatic. And usage supports this. In the Old Testament the kings designated a part of a year as a year for their reign. Esther used the expression in her vow, but broke the vow off on the third day (5:1). And in the New Testament, even though Jesus said “three days and three nights” in the tomb, he predicted he would rise on the third day (Matthew 16:21; Mark 8:31; Luke 9:22, *passim*). And. The Pharisees asked for a guard at the tomb “until” the third day. Moreover, according to Luke 24:13 the two men were on their way to Emmaus when they were joined by Jesus; they said, “it is now the third day.”
So we can say that any part of a day and a night would mean a day and a night. Jesus died at 3 p.m. on Friday and his body was laid in the tomb on the eve of the preparation for the Sabbath (Friday). The disciples and the women rested on the Sabbath (Saturday). The women returned to the tomb for the final treatment of the body early Sunday morning--and he was alive.
This harmonizes well with the biblical typology. The people would present their unblemished animals in the temple on the 10th of Nisan--Monday of Passion week, probably the day of the triumphal entry (and part of its purpose). On Nisan 14th the lamb was sacrificed; Paul declares that Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us (1 Cor. 5:7). On Nisan 16th, Sunday, he arose from the grave. Leviticus 23 says that the First fruit offering was to be offered “on the morning after the Sabbath after the Passover.” That is Sunday morning. So Paul declared that “Christ is risen from the dead, the first fruit of them that sleep” (1 Cor. 15:21). And then Paul draws out the analogy from agriculture--you bury the seed in the ground, but in time a more glorious body comes to life, and the first shoots are offered to God in gratitude, and those first shoots indicate a harvest is yet to come--a harvest of resurrected saint.
There is one further difficulty that must be mentioned. The synoptic Gospels indicate clearly that the Last Supper was a Passover meal. But John makes it clear that Jesus had to be removed from the cross because Passover was beginning (John 18:28 and 19:14). That has led some to conclude that the Last Supper was not a Passover meal, but a love feast. But all the evidence argues against this conclusion. The solution may be found in the calculation of the days. There is some evidence that some people counted the days from morning to evening, whereas the Judean Jews counted the day’s beginning at sundown. There is no strong evidence for this, but there are hints. Mishnah *Pesahim* 10:9 and *Zebahim* 5:8 instruct that the Passover meal had to be eaten by midnight. The Law said it had to be eaten on that day, Nisan 14th. And this would make excellent sense out of the passage. If Jesus and his disciples counted the day from the morning, then Thursday, Nisan 14th, began at dawn. The Law said the animal had to be sacrificed between 3 and 5 p.m. on Nisan 14th, so that would be Thursday afternoon. Then, they had to eat the meal that evening. But if the Jewish leaders counted the day from sundown, then Nisan 14th began Thursday at sundown. They had to wait till Friday at 3:00 p.m. to kill their animal. That day would also be the preparation for the Sabbath. So Jesus ate the Passover meal with his disciples; and then he became the Passover victim at 3:00 p.m. on Friday when he died.

## The Year of Christ’s Death

Enough has been said already to conclude that the year was 33 A.D. We know that Passover fell on a Friday in the years 27 (too early), 30 (too early), 33, and 36 (probably too late). Jesus died at 3:00 p.m., April 3, 33 A.D.

 This date fits the time of Passover on a Friday, it fits all the dates of Pilate, Herod, and Caiaphas; it harmonies with the date for the temple, and it allows for the three and a half years of ministry.

## Addendum

This date finds some remarkable corroboration with secular history. Pilate, we know, was a terribly ruthless and cruel person (see Josephus). When Tiberius moved to Capri, he left the empire in the hands of Sejanus, who was terribly anti-Semitic. Pilate implemented Sejanus’ anti-Jewish policies in 26 A.D. with a vengeance.We read how he massacred Jews and established pagan emblems and rituals in the temple. But, Tiberius heard of this and the ambition of Sejanus (probably through Caligula), and so he returned to Rome. Sejanus was executed October 18, 31 A.D. In 32 Tiberius ordered the governors not to offend the Jews. Pilate was now forced to ingratiate himself to the emperor--he feared an uprising of the Jews, and so to placate the leaders he asked what he should do with Jesus. Two years earlier he would have never done that. Pilate could not afford to get into trouble with Tiberius--he would not be a “friend of Caesar.” And finally, his enemy Herod Antipas now became his friend. Rome wanted peace in the territories; and the client kings and governors had to comply.

# Life in the Time of Jesus Resources

For this section I have provided a general outline of the book *Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus* by Joachim Jeremias (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1969). An outline is of course too brief to include all the helpful information in the book, but it will lay out the main ideas.

 There are many other books that are equally helpful in different ways. One is the book *Living in the Time of Jesus of Nazareth* by Peter Connolly (Jerusalem: Steimatsky, 1983 [first published by Oxford University Press]). At first glance this looks like a child’s picture book, but it is very precise in its detailed drawings and diagrams as well as its narrative. The book is not always easy to get, but well worth any effort to get it. It will be tremendously helpful in teaching the Bible.

 Another good resource is the book *Labor, Crafts, and Commerce in Ancient Israel* by Moshe Aberbach (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1994). This book surveys all the occupations that were prominent in the land of Israel during the rabbinic period, whether they were considered noble crafts or less than honorable ones. The focus is on the kinds of labor and crafts with which the rabbis were occupied, showing that they were not just interested in studying Torah and Talmud, but in being productive on their farms and in their shops.

 There is also a work by Richard A. Horsley, *Archaeology, History, and Society in Galilee* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1996). This is a good resource for study of life in the region of Galilee, clarifying a good deal of general assumptions about the region. While there were a lot of Gentiles in the region, both living there and passing through, it was still very Jewish, and very concerned about following the traditions of the Jews.

# Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus

I. Chapter One: Industries

A. Industries of Jerusalem

Typical industry: the craft (like Paul’s, tentmaker)

1. Domestic: woollens, weaving, fullers, leather works, and smiths

2. Foods: oil, oil presses, bakers and butchers, water seller, fishing

3. Luxuries: ointments, rose perfumes, arts and crafts (esp. due to the influence of Herod), “golden Jerusalem” a woman’s crown, scrivener (rolling up a book)

4. Building: heavy building under Herodians (enumerated) and the demands on workers of various trades, such as pavers, stone masons, stone cutters, miners, craftsmen in tapestry, sculpturing, and the like. Most builders used stone, so “carpenter” (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3) for Joseph should be read as “builder” (the word is tektwn).

5. Maintenance: road sweepers, tomb guardians, and the like

6. Other trades: doctors were laborers, artists, leeches, bath attendants, circumcisers, and money changers

B. Organization

1. The layout of the city: upper and lower city (divided by the Tyropaean Valley) and two main market streets (*cardo* and *dekamano*)

 2. Individual shops were distributed near the gates and along the main road, the *cardo* (related to Latin “heart”; we at times use “artery” for a road); each quarter of the city had its own bazaar.

3. Trades were organized so that the craftsmen settled together in sectors to apply pressure to buyers and keep their trade’s secrets.

4. Temple trades were organized so that craftsmen were central; the main edifice was 46 years in building (from 17 B.C. till 30 A.D.), and the whole complex never was finished. The temple *cultus* continued (until the temple was destroyed) with the service of bakers, temple doctors (sick priests from the cold floors) and the like.

C. Individuality of Jerusalem

Jerusalem was not on the major trade routes, and in fact was in a very poor location (no distinct trade put them on the map). It was known for political and religious values, with great revenues coming from pilgrimages and temple revenues. Multitudes were drawn to the city from all over the known world.

II. Chapter Two: Commerce

A. Survey of Commerce

1. Generally the merchants were respected (the High Priest was involved). The camel caravans were protected (as much as possible) with safeguards on their way. Taxes and duty were charged at the roads; market inspectors checked price fixing that occurred at the bazaars.

2. Foreign trade: There was heavy trade with Greece (seen in many Greek words) and other places--constant connections: wood from Lebanon, glass from Sidon, fish and slaves from Tyre, costly materials from Babylon, fabrics from India, spices from Arabia, and grain from Egypt were the major imports.

3. Local trade: grain from around Jerusalem (but the texts may refer to orchards) supplied only a small portion of the need, and so much of it came from Transjordan. Fruit and vegetables (olives, figs, dates, etc) were abundant in and around Jerusalem. Livestock was a flourishing trade, as well as raw materials from the land--stone and some wood.

B. Influence of Jerusalem on Commerce

Jerusalem was the center of the country, yet it was remote, upland, and more work to move things in and out. It was the center of commerce for southern Palestine. The temple was its most important factor; and also the demands of the king brought additional trade since the city was the political center. But the pilgrimages brought the most.

III. Chapter Three: Foreign Visitors

A. General Description of Travel to Jerusalem

1. The roads were bad, and most people traveled on foot, in caravans.

2. Accommodations were rare, and lodgings were scarce, so people brought their own tents. To keep the law (of being in Jerusalem at Passover) the city limits were extended.

3. Visitors came from almost every country (enumerated in this section with various countries discussed and documented).

4. Visitors came from the major regions of Palestine, and especially at the festivals (the number of pilgrims rose in the times of national agitation).

B. The Unique Character of Jerusalem

1. It was the old capital city, a spectacular place drawing people.

2. It was the location of the highest authority, the Sanhedrin, linking it to all the world of Jewry.

3. It was the place of origin of many religious groups, notably Christianity.

*Excursus*: The Number of Pilgrims
The book estimates about 125,000 pilgrims to the festivals. This study is based on the number of animals killed at a Passover (18,000), how many could eat of each animal (ca. 10), the number of people killed at wars during the festivals, and the number in the courts. The population of Jerusalem was about 50,000 (so the number rose to 125,000 in the festivals. This number is too high, probably; most would say a population of about 30,000 in Jerusalem, swelling to 80,000 or even more at the festivals.

IV. The Rich

A. Court: The splendor of the royal court dominated public life. Cousins (not relatives) and other friends were favored (usually staying in royal apartments). It was basically oriental (as seen by the harem, and the fact that the teaching in tractate Sanhedrin allowed eighteen wives). It was paid for by taxing, revenues, and mining mainly.

B. Wealthy Class: The wealthy segment of society were extravagant. This can be readily seen from their excessive wagers. There was a good deal of polygamy in the wealthy families, and the aristocratic women were very pampered.

Representative of this were the members of the Sanhedrin, the priestly aristocracy belonging to the wealthy class, people like Caiaphas and Annas.[[2]](#footnote-2) One priest carpeted the way from his door to the temple so his wife could walk on it to the services. One man, Eleazer b. Harsum had 1000 villages and ships.

V. Chapter Five: The Middle Class

A. These people were mostly the merchants, the retail traders, the innkeepers and tavern traders. They did their best business with the temple trade and with pilgrims (the Law said that another tenth of one’s income had to be spent in Jerusalem at the festivals).

B. The priests were mostly middle class, their income prescribed by the animal victims, first fruits and tithes. Due to the spiritual malady of the nation, many priests were poverty stricken.

VI. Chapter Six: The Poor

A. Day workers and slaves: there were more day workers than slaves, but there was slavery in Palestine too.

B. Subsidized work included scribes (but some of them had other sources of income). Begging was done in the Holy places. Towards the end there was rioting.

VII. Chapter Seven:

Factors Determining Economic Circumstances

A. Cost of living was higher in Jerusalem than in the rest of the country. In emergencies (famines, droughts) the prices rose, and there was much profiteering.

B. Political Factors: These were mainly war and taxation. The major support for the economics of the city came from the religious festivals and temple services.

VIII. Chapter Eight: The Clergy

A. The High Priest: Israel was really a pure theocracy, the priest being the most eminent.

1. Privileges: They could enter the Holy of Holies, take part in the cult any time (even as a mourner), and had the first choice of the holy things brought.

2. Responsibilities: These were mainly ceremonial for the festivals and the cult. Most important, though, was the fact that the High Priest had to carry out the seven-day regulations to assure purity before Yom Kipper, as well as watch our for the purity of his line of descent: he was only to marry a pure virgin, usually of the priestly families. Any instance of breaking marriage laws brought an outcry from the people.

3. The retired High Priest was still influential; he was listed on the records.

4. The historical circumstances surely changed with Herod who made the office dependant on political authority. There was much simony and nepotism--but still it was elevated above the people.

B. Chief Priests and Levites: There were several orders of priests after the anointed High Priest, the high priest, the priest anointed for war, etc.

1. The Captain of the Temple worked closely with the High Priest and watched him for purity. He was the deputy on the Day of Atonement, usually responsible for worship in the Temple.

2. Director of the weekly course, director of the daily course: the priests were divided into 24 courses by David so that each group only had to be in temple service one week out of 24, or roughly two weeks a year. Some were there all the time. The director of the weekly course was mostly in charge of rites for the purification of lepers and women and other physical difficulties. The director of the daily course was responsible for the times they were there to serve the people. At the other times of the year the priests lived in the priestly cities.

3. Temple overseer and temple treasurer: the overseers (seven of them) had the seven keys to the court in their hands and were in charge of external arrangements for the times they were there. The treasurers (at least 3) were over financial matters, the sale of birds, lambs, and goats. Many lists of the men in these offices document the material.

4. Common priests and Levites usually worked in other jobs to support themselves.

*Excursus:* The use of the label “high priest” is used 64 times in the Gospels and Acts. But it is often in the plural. It is properly used of the “chief priests” who were the men of the court, mostly the council.

C. Priestly Aristocracy

While there was a real aristocracy of the priesthood, there also was a social gulf in the priesthood. The study the aristocracy, Jeremias divides the time into three periods: first period was the Zadokites, second period the Hasmoneans, and the third period the Herodians.

Jeremias’ survey starts with the exodus and ends with 70 A.D. when the temple was destroyed. There were 83 high priests for the 1500 years. It is more interested in the period of Jesus the Christ, of course (as the title would indicate), where it discovers that only one, as well as perhaps the last one, were legitimate high priests (Ananel the first, and Pinhas the last). There were **25 illegitimate priests** under the Herodians from four families (Boethus, Hannas, Phiabi, and Kamith). Boethus was the most powerful family. But all this means that three or four families held the power. In the Gospel Hannas (Annas), his five sons, and his son-in-law Caiaphas, are examples of this power.

Jeremias discusses Acts 4:5-6 on this issue of power--the council and their controlling power. In spite of their riches, their power, their nepotism, they were still illegitimate priests.

D. The Priesthood: There were the 24 courses of priests doing their tour of duty in the temple. But how many priests were there?

1. Number of Priests: The Talmud says 85,000 priests in one course--but that is obviously too high (24 times 85,000 to make a twelfth of the population?). Pseudo Aristeas said there were 750 priests in a course (750 times 24 times = 18,000). We may also study the public services to discover how many were involved: 50 for a daily course, so 300 per weekly course. Also, 300 priests were needed to immerse the temple curtain in water (300 times 24 = 7,200 priests, plus 9,600 Levites--which matches the proportion of priests and Levites in 1 Chronicles).

So then, one-tenth of the population were priests and Levites and their families--roughly 50,000, giving a population of 500,000 to 600,000 for Israel. This is the calculation of Jeremias; it may be a little low.

2. Work for the Priests: There was no work in Jerusalem, so the priests often did manual labor at home for ten or eleven months of the year (leaving the time of their course, plus the festivals). Some priests served in court, and some were scribes. But not all of them were that educated. There were many contrasts between the common priests and the aristocracy.

E. The Levites: The Levites were descendants of the priests deposed in Deuteronomy. They were involved in the temple in music and various forms of service, sometimes inferior jobs as humble servants, temple police, doorkeepers, and the like.

F. The Hereditary Character of the Priests

1. Laws: It was stipulated that the priests (a) should take great care in tracing their genealogies to ensure purity of the line, and (b) watch the rigid rules of marriage (examining the wife’s genealogy too).

2. Practice: The priests married priests’ daughters, otherwise the marriages would have been illegitimate and really only a concubinage.

IX. Chapter Nine: Lay Nobility

The Sanhedrin was made up of chief priests, scribes, and elders. This is the old hereditary nobility--priests and elders.

The elders are the heads of the ancient ruling families. It was a small, close circle (Vespasian carted them off in three boats). They were **landowners** who could supply the temple, they were men of means. They and the chief priests were largely Sadducees, holding to a literal interpretation of the Torah, and a sever penal code. They had an elaborate tradition of doctrine, conservatively close to Scripture.

The decline of the priests brought down the lay nobility too. Scribes became important.

X. Chapter Ten: The Scribes, the New Upper Class

A. Scribes in Jerusalem: The origin is varied, but the scribes probably existed as a class until 70 A.D. Many priests had the role of scribes. Scribes were often of obscure birth, poverty, and petty town folk.

B. Knowledge gave the scribes power. After years of study at the feet of some great teacher, the scribe would master the traditional material and the *halakic* material and method so that he was competent in decisions. He then became a non-ordained scholar, or wise scholar (*talmid hakam*). At the age of 40 he was ordained (*hakam*), and then really a judge, and could be called Rabbi. (The title “rabbi” was changing to this in the New Testament).

The Pharisaic party was filled with scribes; as they looked for justice the determination of Scripture was critical, and so scribes were often chosen for the posts.

C. Esoteric Writings: The apocalyptic writings of Judaism were not divulged to the masses. The *halakah,* the secret of God, was given from teacher to pupil. To combat the New Testament, it was finally written down (and so lost its secrecy). Even the Old Testament was in the sacred Hebrew; there was opposition to writing it in the commonplace Aramaic.

Socially the scribes were considered the heirs and successors of the prophets, because they had the knowledge of God. They may have been of doubtful origin, they may have been impoverished, but they were held in high esteem. Their tombs were surrounded with legend, venerated and guarded with superstitious awe.

XI. Chapter Eleven: The Pharisees

 The expression “scribes and Pharisees” makes this chapter necessary. Since the Pharisees were “separated ones,” men of the people, they were held in high esteem also, upper class in practice--even though they had no education. But they were connected to the scribes.

A. *Haburot*: Early Pharisees were members of relative associations, since the second century B.C. small communities known as *haburot.* There were about 6000 Pharisees at the time of Herod the Great. The writer then studies the Essenes to see their communities and administrations.

B. Relationship to Scribes: Pharisees were attacked by Jesus for their hypocrisy, not their theological education. The **leaders** and **influential members** of the Pharisees and their small communities were the **scribes**. But not all scribes were Pharisees.

C. Pharisees were strong or powerful, with the people’s support. Sadducees were weak by comparison. The Pharisees had grown up in opposition to the Sadducees, and never backed away from confronting them.

XII. Chapter Twelve: The Structure of the National Community

In this brief chapter Jeremias offers a list in three versions of the classes of the people. The first part (priests, Levites, and pure Israelites) are unanimous on the lists--the rest not so. So the rest of the book looked at the rest of them, the Israelites who were illegitimate or blemished.

XIII. Chapter Thirteen: Pure Ancestry

A. Genealogies: The people had to prove pure ancestry for civil rights. Many claimed a Davidic or Benjamite line, because the Messianic line was the most common and the best preserved. They would seldom claim one of the “ten lost tribes” in their line. Often the lay genealogies would include priests.

B. Historicity of Lay Genealogies: Genealogies of the priests and leaders were probably authentic (at least for the most recent couple of centuries). But the lay genealogies may have been pure invention.

1. They used worthless plays on words and interpretations.

2. In critical evaluation, there was some falsification of history (with good purpose).

3. Historical value of the genealogy of Jesus: Jeremias observes that after the name David, Matthew and Luke differ, coming together on Shealtiel, and differing again. Matthew, he thinks, used material from another Davidic list. Luke and 1 Chronicles differ a bit, but they are authentic for the few generations before Jesus. The idea is that people would keep up the record of legitimate ancestry and sooner or later tie into an earlier list that was standardized. With so many descendants, family lines could be traced in a number of ways.

C. Civil Rights: A family (pure) could marry priestly women, hold public trusts and posts, participate in religious ceremonies, participate in the **merits of the patriarchs** and so were assured a share in the Messianic salvation (claimed to be the children of Abraham, John 8).

XIV. Chapter Fourteen: Despised Trades and Slaves

A. Despised Trades: A great number of trades on several lists give the same information. Any trades notorious for leading to dishonesty (physicians, shop keepers, etc) were on the lists. Other trades on the lists are those that brought no special sign of blessing (small cattle breeders, sellers of purple, cutters of trees, etc). Repugnant trades are those that dealt with smells or those that involved women (seen too much as an occasion for immorality).

B. Jewish Slaves:

 The kinds of “slavery” or better “servitude” in Israel were:

1. *Ex furto:* could not pay for stolen goods

2. *Ex concessu:* sold himself voluntarily

3. *Patria potestas:* young Israelite girls contracted for marriage

Usually service carried a six year limit (unless one chose to stay on willingly). Legally, they were slaves to their masters, but it was more like privileged servants or hired servants until the debts were paid off--but the laws were abused.

XV. Chapter Fifteen: Illegitimate Israelites

A. Slight Blemishes

1. Children of priests and proselytes and freed slaves (deprived of ties with the priestly families and with the seats of honor). The first group refers to the illegitimate children of a priest, from an impure marriage (no lineage)--the child was profane.

2. Proselytes: They used the phrase “heathen has no father” to view the proselyte as limited. He could not marry into priestly circles (that would bring profanation), could not serve on the Sanhedrin, and had problems with inheritances.

3. Freed Slaves: Slaves were freed, but the chances of this were rather slim. They were the lowest of the group that still could be called pure.

B. Grave Blemishes

1. Bastards: The offspring of any forbidden marriage (opinions divided here on definition) were placed in this group. It was a large group of those conceived in adultery (as they defined it). The only right they had was to judge in decisions of civil law in a court of three.

2. Temple slaves, orphans, foundlings, and eunuchs--these were castes outside the Law.

XVI. Chapter Sixteen: Gentile Slaves

These were definitely not part of the community. They were bought or born as slaves, and were quite valuable possessions (price: 20 minas, or 2000 times the daily wage).

Their social position was absolute property of the master. They could be made to accept circumcision or baptism. In such cases he would no longer be a heathen--but he was not a Jew either.

They were to observe the religious duties in Israel if they were converts to the faith--keeping sabbath days, passover, and the like; and they could not be sold back to Gentiles.

XVII. Chapter Seventeen: Samaritans

They were looked on as Gentiles, so no marriage with them was possible (although there was some relaxation of the restrictions in the time of Herod, who married a Samaritan, and when the Samaritans were in the temple. But then there was hostility again and bitterness. They were seen as impure and causing impurity.

XVIII. Chapter Eighteen: Women’s Social Position

A. Position Socially: In the orient they had almost no part in public life and were to remain unobserved (preferably not to go out at all). But Queen Alexandra, Salome, and others broke these ideas and took leadership places. So one could not keep stern seclusion (especially for economic reasons, since many women worked with their husbands).

B. Betrothal: The woman really was receiving a new master, but one who might treat her better. The father could marry off the daughter when she was very young. In marriage the duties of the wife were primarily household and family duties. Polygamy was permissible in Israel (so a woman had to prepare to share). Divorce was largely the man’s right, although a woman could get it arranged. In marriage, it was meritorious to marry a niece, because protection by blood was more secure.

C. Religious Practices: The woman was restricted to certain courts of the temple, although there were exceptions. Women were not separated from men in the synagogues.

Many disdainful opinions of women were voiced by the teachers--but many glowing opinions were also expressed. On rare occasion a woman could rise to the level of a teacher, a rabbi.

On the whole the position of a woman was as a low class person, depending on the status of her husband. Jesus brought in a much higher estimation of women, and events connected with Jesus’ life show dramatic changes. For example, God used women to catechize the disciples about the resurrection of Jesus.

1. For more details of and complete evidence for all the chronologies, see Harold Hoehner, *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Herodian Villas in the Jewish Quarter of the old city is a good window into thewealth of the priestly families. These remains, discovered in the rebuilding of a section of thecity, preserve a lifestyle that ranked with the best of classical Rome and Greece--mosaic floors, ritual baths, ordinary bathtubs, reception halls, frescoes, imported Italian pottery and the like. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)