

Matthew 22:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Shew me the tribute money. And they brought unto him a penny.

Analysis

Shew me the tribute money (ἐπιδείξατέ μοι τὸ νόμισμα τοῦ κήνσου/epideixate moi to nomisma tou kēnsou). Jesus requests they produce the coin used for paying Roman poll tax (κήνσος/kēnsos, Latin census). A **penny** (δηνάριον/dēnarion) was a Roman denarius, silver coin worth a day's wage for common laborers (Matthew 20:2). The coin bore Caesar's image (εἰκών/eikōn) and inscription claiming divinity: "Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus."

Jesus's request is strategically brilliant. By having them produce the coin, He exposes their hypocrisy—they claim religious scruples about Roman taxation yet possess and use Roman currency. The denarius in their pockets reveals their practical accommodation to Roman rule despite public posturing. Additionally, possession of the idolatrous coin in the temple precincts shows religious inconsistency. The subsequent question about the image (verse 20) sets up Jesus's devastating response about rendering to Caesar and to God.

Historical Context

The Roman denarius was standard currency throughout the empire, minted with the emperor's portrait and propagandistic inscriptions. Under Tiberius Caesar (14-37 CE), the denarius depicted his profile with the legend "TI CAESAR DIVI AVG F AVGVSTVS" (Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus) on one side, and his mother Livia as Pax (goddess of peace) on the reverse. For Jews committed to monotheism and prohibitions against graven images (Exodus 20:4), handling such

coins created religious discomfort. Yet economic reality required their use. The poll tax (tributum capitis) was particularly offensive—one denarius per person annually, paid directly to Rome's treasury, symbolizing subjugation.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. What modern compromises do Christians make while maintaining outward religious appearances?
2. How does Jesus's request to 'show me' the coin expose the Pharisees' practical hypocrisy?
3. In what ways do believers possess 'Caesar's coin' while claiming exclusive loyalty to God's kingdom?

Interlinear Text

ἐπιδείξατέ μοι τὸ νόμισμα τοῦ κήνσου οἱ δὲ
Shew me money the tribute And
G1925 G3427 G3546 G3588 G2778 G3588 G1161

προσήνεγκαν αὐτῷ δηνάριον
they brought unto him a penny
G4374 G846 G1220

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