

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 κῆνσου/epideixate moi to nomisma tou kēnsou). Jesus requests they produce the coin used for paying Roman poll tax (κῆνσος/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 (εἰκὼν/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	κῆνσου	οἱ	δὲ
Shew	me	G3588	money	G3588	the tribute	G3588	And
G1925	G3427		G3546		G2778		G1161
προσήνεγκαν	αὐτῷ	δηνάριον					
they brought	unto him	a penny					
G4374	G846	G1220					

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org