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TEACHER LESSON PLAN

Who Ruled Judaea?

Grades 5–8 · Social Studies · Coins as primary sources

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THE 45 MINUTES

5 min
HOOK

13 min
TEACH

20 min
ACTIVITY

7 min
DEBRIEF

BY THE END OF THIS LESSON

You will be able to:

- 1 read a coin as a primary source: who made it, for whom, and what its design reveals
- 2 name the four kinds of ruler in New Testament Judaea, and say who answered to whom
- 3 use the trials of Jesus and Paul to show how power was layered
- 4 **GO DEEPER** corroborate a coin with independent evidence, and judge what coins cannot prove

WHY THIS MATTERS No single person ruled Judaea in Jesus' lifetime. Coins show us who held power, and checking one source against another is how historians decide what to trust.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

What students will understand

Students will use coins as primary sources to describe how power was layered in New Testament Judaea: an **emperor** in Rome, **local rulers from Herod's family**, and **Roman governors**, with an independent **neighboring king** across the border. They will read what a coin's design reveals about its maker and its audience, and practice **corroboration** — checking one source against independent evidence — using the Pilate stone, Josephus and Suetonius.

STANDARDS AND THEMES

- **Historical thinking** — sourcing a primary source; corroborating it with independent evidence; telling what a source can and cannot show
- **Civics and government** — empire, client king, tetrarch, prefect and procurator: who answered to whom
- **Chronology** — BC and AD; dating a coin by the year of an emperor's reign
- **Geography** — Rome, Judaea, Galilee, Nabataea, Caesarea Maritima, Corinth and Damascus

MATERIALS NEEDED

- The *Who ruled when* chart on page 3, projected or printed
- Luke 23:6–12 and Acts 25:10–12, in Bibles or projected; the Gospel Timeline on a screen if you have one
- Differentiated handouts, one per student

HOOK · 5 MINUTES

A face, and no face

Show the Tribute Penny beside Pilate's prutah. Both were in people's hands in Judaea in Jesus' lifetime. *"One shows a man's face. The other shows a ladle and three ears of grain. Who made each one — and why would they choose such different pictures?"* Take guesses, then: *"Coins are messages from the people in charge. Today we use them to find out who was in charge."*

DIRECT INSTRUCTION · 13 MINUTES

Four kinds of power, one small land

Walk through the four kinds of ruler on the chart (page 3), showing each coin.

Then show the layers at work: Pilate sent Jesus to Antipas because Jesus was from Galilee, Antipas's territory (Luke 23:6–12); Paul, a Roman citizen, went over the governor's head — *"I appeal to Caesar!"* (Acts 25:10–12). Ask: *who answered to whom?*

The emperor in Rome

Augustus (27 BC–14 AD) never visited Judaea, yet his census sent Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem. The Tribute Penny carries Tiberius' face and the title PONTIF MAXIM — *High Priest*. Claudius (41–54 AD) expelled Jews from Rome.

Herod's family

Herod the Great was client king of Judaea for Rome, 37–4 BC. His son Antipas was tetrarch of Galilee; his grandson Agrippa I was made king by the emperor Caligula in 41 AD. Herod's coins carry no human image: Jewish law forbade it.

The Roman governors

Pilate was prefect, 26–36 AD; Festus succeeded Felix as procurator in about 59 AD. Pilate's coin is dated by the sixteenth year of Tiberius — the governor counted time by the emperor — and its pagan symbols were deliberately provocative.

Beyond the border

Aretas IV ruled the Nabataean Kingdom east of Judaea, on the caravan routes from Arabia to the Mediterranean. His daughter was Herod Antipas's first wife; when Antipas divorced her, Aretas went to war against him.

ACTIVITY · 20 MINUTES

Students choose a handout. All three levels work from the same rulers and the same coins.

GREEN LEVEL MORE SUPPORT

Sort nine rulers by their coins into emperor, Herod's family, Roman governor or neighboring king; complete a guided timeline; answer *who would you be sent to?*

YELLOW LEVEL GRADE LEVEL

Analyze Herod's and Pilate's prutahs as primary sources. Complete the ruler chart, then explain what the trials of Jesus and Paul show about layered power.

RED LEVEL GO DEEPER

Test three New Testament claims against coins, the Pilate stone, Josephus and Suetonius. Then argue what coins can prove about the past, and what they cannot.

DEBRIEF · 7 MINUTES

Who was really in charge?

Each group places one ruler on the chart and gives its clue. Then ask: *a coin shows who claimed power — how can we check what the Gospels and Acts say about these rulers?* Let Red-level students answer.

Put the objectives back on the screen, asked as questions: *"Can you now...?"* For each one, students show a thumb up, sideways or down. Ask one student to answer each aloud; for the last, ask a Red Level reader.

ANSWER NOTES AND ASSESSMENT

- **Green sort:** emperors — Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius; Herod's family — Herod the Great, Antipas, Agrippa I; governors — Pilate, Festus; neighboring king — Aretas IV. Timeline: Herod the Great (37 BC, 4 BC), Augustus, Pilate, Agrippa I, Festus. Pilate sent Jesus to **Herod Antipas**; Paul appealed to **Caesar**, the emperor.
- **Exit ticket:** *name one ruler, his level of power, and one piece of evidence that he was real.*

SHOW YOUR CLASS

Who ruled when

Project or print this page for the lesson and the debrief. Every ruler here has a coin in the exhibition, listed in the order the exhibition shows them. Dates are as the exhibition gives them; where it gives only the coin's dates, the chart says so.

	RULER	TITLE	WHERE	YEARS	COIN IN THE EXHIBITION	SCRIPTURE
	Augustus	Emperor	Rome	ruled 27 BC–14 AD	Bronze as, 5–4 BC	Luke 2:1 · the census
	Herod the Great	Client king of Rome	Judaea	ruled 37–4 BC	Bronze prutah, 40–4 BC	Matthew 2:13 · the flight into Egypt
	Aretas IV	King	Nabataea, east of Judaea	coin 9 BC–40 AD	Bronze prutah	Mark 6:17–18 · 2 Cor 11:32–33
	Tiberius	Emperor	Rome	coin 14–37 AD	Silver denarius · <i>replica</i>	Matthew 22:21 · the tax question
	Pontius Pilate	Roman prefect	Judaea	26–36 AD	Bronze prutah, 29/30 AD	Matthew 27:24 · the trial
	Herod Antipas	Tetrarch; son of Herod	Galilee	coin 4 BC–39 AD	Bronze prutah · <i>replica</i>	Luke 23:9 · Jesus' silence
	Herod Agrippa I	King; grandson of Herod	Judaea	king from 41 AD; coin 41–44 AD	Bronze prutah	Acts 12:2–3 · James and Peter
	Claudius	Emperor	Rome	reigned 41–54 AD	Bronze as	Acts 18:2 · Jews leave Rome
	Porcius Festus	Roman procurator	Judaea	c. 59–c. 62 AD	Bronze prutah	Acts 25:12 · Paul appeals to Caesar

HISTORICAL FRAMEWORK

Reading a coin as a source

Who made it, and for whom? A coin is an official message in metal. Herod's prutah was made to be acceptable to Jewish users; Pilate's was not. Design is evidence of what a ruler wanted, and of whom he was willing to offend.

Corroboration. A coin shows that a ruler held power and issued money; it grows stronger when independent sources agree. For decades some scholars questioned whether Pilate was a historical figure, until a limestone block bearing his name and title was found at Caesarea Maritima in 1961 (now in the Israel Museum). His coins had been evidence all along. Josephus (*Antiquities* 19.8.2) describes the death of Agrippa I in terms almost identical to Acts 12:23; Suetonius (*Claudius* 25.4) confirms Claudius's expulsion of Jews from Rome, about 49 AD.

Limits. Coins circulate long after they are minted: the widow's lepton, struck under the Hasmonaean king Alexander Jannaeus, was still in use a century later. Three coins here — the Tribute Penny, the Shekel of Tyre and Herod Antipas — are museum-quality replicas, because originals are exceptionally rare.

MINI MUSEUM CONNECTION

Visit the exhibition: the cases run in order — the rulers of the Nativity in Case 6, of the trial in Case 7, of the apostles in Case 8. At each case, have students name each coin's level of power. Online, the Gospel Timeline sets all eleven coins beside their passages.

minimuseumproject.org/exhibitions/in-their-hands