

PROPER 24 [29]

Trouble for Jesus

BASED ON MATTHEW 22:15-22



The people of Israel had to give money to the Roman emperor. He was like a very powerful king. He sent his soldiers to Israel. The soldiers said, "The emperor is your ruler now. You have to do what the emperor tells you. You have to give him money. If you don't, we will hurt you."

The people of Israel didn't like this. "Only God should tell us what to do. And God doesn't want us to give money to the Roman soldiers," they said. "That's a bad thing to do."

One day, some of the leaders of Israel wanted to make trouble for Jesus. "How can we make him say something that will get him into trouble?" they said.

"Let's ask him about giving money to the Roman emperor," said another.

"That's a good idea. We can trick Jesus. If he says we should give money to the emperor, then the people of Israel will be angry at him. If he says, no, we should not give money to the emperor, we should only give money to God, then the Roman soldiers will be angry. They'll grab him and they'll put him in jail."

So they went to find Jesus.

"Jesus," they said, "we know that you are a good person. We know that you live God's way, and that you want all of us to live God's way. So tell us, please, should we pay money to the Roman soldiers? Or should we give our money to God? What is the right thing to do?"

Jesus looked at the leaders of Israel and smiled. He knew they were trying to play a mean trick on him.

"When people pay money to the Roman emperor, how do they do that?" Jesus asked.

"They give some coins to his soldiers."

"Show me one of those coins," said Jesus.

One of the leaders of Israel dug down into his pocket. He found a coin and gave it to Jesus.

"Look at this. There's a picture on this coin," said Jesus. "Whose picture is it?"

"The emperor's!" said the leaders of Israel.

"Does that mean that the coin belongs to the emperor?"

"I suppose so," said one of the leaders.

"Well, then," said Jesus, "if it belongs to the emperor, give it to him. Do you belong to the emperor?" Jesus asked.

"No! No! We belong to God," replied the leaders.

"Then give yourselves to God," said Jesus. "Give God all your love and learn to live God's way."

The leaders of Israel didn't know what to say. They walked away very slowly. Then one of them whispered, "We tried to trick Jesus. But it didn't work. Let's go away and think of some other way to make trouble for him."

