



See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God;...

Hebrews 12:15a



# TRAILNOTES



SEPTEMBER 2023

The Christian life is a journey.

*TrailNotes* speaks to forward movement, paying attention to the “landscape” we are passing through in this trail-laced wooded hillside and valley, not to mention the world beyond. *TrailNotes* is an unfolding, ongoing journal of the people who share the trail with us and the things we’re learning and doing.

## ElderTalk: The Time Was Right (Part 1 - The Sadducees)

MATT GODSIL

This is the first of a 5-part series which examines the groups that Jesus encountered in the Gospel accounts. This study will help us better understand the context of when and where Jesus came to rescue humanity.

### Galatians 4:4-5

*“But when the fullness of time had come“ (4:4)—at the end of one age and the beginning of another, at the time God deemed just right—“God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.” (4:4-5).*

There was an extended silence in Scripture between the book of Malachi and the events of Matthew’s Gospel account, which depicts the earthly ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Four hundred years passed in the Holy Land for which we have no prophetic record. So much took place during this period that affects our understanding of the New Testament, that it is important to be familiar with at least the major events that occurred in this intertestamental period.

The apostle Paul, the *“Pharisee of pharisees,”* who was converted and called to preach the gospel to the gentiles, wrote to the Galatians concerning this time, from God’s perspective. First, Paul says that a *“fulness of time”* had occurred preceding the birth of Jesus. Fullness indicates that the stage and all of its components were assembled together with God’s purposes in mind. It was the completion of one age, and the start of a new age. This time and all of its components were perfectly aligned to bring forth the God/man, the Savior of the world. He would be born into poverty, under the scrutiny of illegitimacy of birth, a refugee, homeless and born into an animal shelter, oppressed by the government, and threatened by a murderous king. The timing seems perfect to me.

The world in which Jesus was born was an intense place of great conflict, the greatest of which seemed to be based on the incursion of Hellenism into the Jewish world. Hellenism proposed that man himself was the center of the world, and the concept of “god” was as an accessory to mankind.



A Saducei (sic.), as illustrated in the 15th century in the Nuremberg Chronicle.

Protagoras of Abdera (485-415 BC) is most famous for his claim that *“Of all things the measure is Man.”* This idea that the universe revolves around *“me”* swept across the pagan and Jewish world with the onslaught of Alexander the Great.

## Sadducees *(continued from p. 1)*

Hellenism brought an inevitable clash in Israel during the post-exilic period, resulting in a variety of responses and groupings of the Jewish people as they coped with forced Hellenism in their midst. The contextual understanding of these responses helps us to comprehend the scope and imput of Jesus' ministry here on earth and the birth of His Church. It was this scenario that God specifically and purposely chose to bring His Son into the world on our behalf.

Let us look at the differing factions and philosophies of the five groups that Jesus encountered in His earthly ministry that we encounter in the four Gospels. We will look at their context, origins, strengths and weaknesses. By doing so, we can also examine in our own lives where God has us and how we might be made effective in God's plan for our time and place. There are many parallels to how the first century world reacted to the person of Jesus and how we react to Him today. In Part 1, we will look at the group known as the Sadducees.

## The Sadducees

The Sadducees come from the line of priestly families that date all the way back to the time of David and Solomon. After the chaos of the time of the Judges, there was a call to re-establish the priesthood that had been diminished. The choice for the priestly duties fell between Abiathaar and Zadok. As was often tradition, lots were cast, resulting in the selection of Zadok. The family line of Zadok would be the High Priest's family, passing those duties from generation to generation. In the Hebrew of Aramaic, the descendants of Zadok would be referred to as Zadakim, Zadokites, Zadokim in English. These would be known as Sadducees.

The Sadducees are the descendants of Zadok, the re-established high priests of David and Solomon. This descendancy evolves into a powerful political force. The Sadducees could be thought of as the Party of Priesthood.

The story of Hanukkah commemorates the recovery of Jerusalem and subsequent rededication of the Second Temple at the beginning of the Maccabean Revolt against the Seleucid Empire in the second century BC. Hellenism, placing man at the center of everything, literally had invaded Israel through the conquest of Alexander the Great (356-323 BC). Hellenism had been around through Alexander's general and close companion, Ptolemy I Soter (367-282 BC), until his rival, Seleucus I Nicator (d. 281 BC) from

Macedonia, conquered the area and the Seleucid Empire was established. The Seleucid Empire was less tolerant of Judaism than its predecessors. Now, you have to be Greek or you die. Antiochus IV Epiphanes was a Greek Hellenistic king who ruled the Seleucid Empire from 175 BC until his death in 164 BC. Upon his questionable rise as king, he conquered Jerusalem, and he sacrificed pigs on the altar. A great revolt, led by Judah Maccabee and zealous rebels, revolted and in the miraculous story of Hanukkah, they defeated the Seleucids and drove out the Greeks.

The Jews retained their land and temple, and self rule was restored. The Jewish rebel leaders looked to the priests to rule, as they did in accordance with mosaic law found in Leviticus. The descendants of Zadok were given the leadership of the temple—but also the leadership over all the people. This period of history is labeled the “Hasmonean Dynasty,” translated as the “Wealthy Ones.”

The Sadducees led and created a ruling dynasty of priesthood over the Jewish people. However, in the process, the Sadducees fully adopted Hellenistic principles, and they embraced the opportunity to self-sustain and enhance their positions from generation to generation. The power, prestige, wealth, and influence shaped a leadership that inevitably became corrupt.

The seven families that ruled in the role of “*Chief Priests*” are the ones referred to in the Gospel accounts. They formed a powerful leadership that resembled organized crime families, as we see in the accounts of Annas in the Gospels who was known to collect tithes, adding to their own coffers, while denying the payment of other non-Sadducean priests. The monopoly on the temple system is what Jesus railed against when He overturned the money tables in the temple during Holy Week.

Then Rome showed up a century later and conquered Judea in order to protect the system which served them so well. The Sadducees came up with a plan to sustain their position in Jewish society. The solution was found in the person referred to as Herod the Great (72-4 BC), the son of the Idumaeon-Nabataean king who owned the entire spice trade. Herod was arguably the wealthiest man that the history of the world has ever seen. Herod controlled the spice trade, consisting of frankincense and myrrh and provided such wealth that he was called upon by Julius Caesar to bankroll the Roman Empire.

The Sadducean priests did something incredibly shrewd. They went to Herod the Great and said, “*We want you to come be our king. If you'll marry one of the daughters of the Hasmoneans...*” (There was a Hasmonean princess.) “*If you will marry her, we will call you Jewish, and if you are Jewish, you can be our Jewish king.*”

*(continued on page 5)*

## Timothy Keller (1950-2023) *Walking in the Shadow of Death*

FRANCIS S. COLLINS, MD

*Tim Keller sought to glorify God in his devotional life, his marriage, and his ministry. How he did so in his illness is no different.*

It was June 3, 2020. THE SUBJECT LINE OF THE EMAIL FROM Kathy Keller made my heart sink: “Tim’s got pancreatic cancer.” The diagnosis was stage IV. With current therapy, life expectancy is less a year. There is no stage V. Thus began a three-year journey that explored the cutting edge of experimental cancer therapeutics—but more significantly, the courageous approach to terminal illness by a man of deep faith.

Tim had been my friend for a decade. In the early years of BioLogos, he agreed to cohost intensely interesting and productive meetings in New York, where deep discussions about science and Christian faith took place. Though we didn’t completely agree on everything, Tim became my most significant spiritual mentor.

But now I was in a different role. As a physician-scientist and the director of the National Institutes of Health (NIH), I reached out to help him and Kathy sort through the options for interventions. Chemotherapy can sometimes help pancreatic cancer, but only for a time. On the horizon, however, are new approaches called “precision oncology”—characterizing the unique DNA mutations in the patient’s cancer in exquisite detail and then teaching the body’s immune system to



recognize the masked intruders. Tim and Kathy weighed the pros and cons and elected to sign up for a clinical trial that had shown some initial promise for advanced breast and gallbladder

cancers but for which there was so far very limited experience with pancreatic cancer.

Tim was clear-eyed about the likelihood of benefit, but he wanted assurance that whatever happened, the medical team would learn from it and be able to advance the protocol for the next time and the time after that. Those assurances having been provided, he came to NIH for an operation to capture some of the cancer tissue so its specific and unique DNA mutations could be identified. A few of these misspelled proteins might make good targets for an activated immune system should traditional therapy fail—as it almost certainly would.

Meanwhile, high-dose chemotherapy was started—one week on, one week off. The recovery week saw him intensely engaged in all his activities. He wrote a powerful article in *The Atlantic*: “*Growing My Faith in the Face of Death*.” Summing it up, Tim wrote, “...I’ve never been happier in my life. But it is equally true that I’ve never had so many days of grief. ...”

As he began to heal, he wanted to talk less about cancer and more about faith,

*(continued on page 4)*

love, truth, and beauty—and about the deep ache he felt for the state of the Christian church in America...Six weeks later the scans showed a response to the immunotherapy that was much better than any of us thought possible. Could this be a cure?

A sweet period of several months ensued. Tim was in full productivity mode. But the beast re-emerged. A few rogue cancer cells had escaped. Tim and Kathy returned to NIH for another month. But this time there was no dramatic response. Tim was growing weaker.

It was a Saturday in April near the end of Tim's NIH hospital stay. I knew this might be the last time I would see him. I suggested an impromptu service in the atrium of the NIH Clinical Center on Saturday afternoon and asked if he had any favorite hymns to suggest. "Yes," he said. *"Let's sing six hymns in a particular order, because they tell the whole story of Christian faith and God's care for us."* I rounded up some others to join us. We had one of the most memorable services of my life. Tim explained the choice of hymns: "Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise - A tremendous depiction of God's attributes." "And Can It Be That I Should Gain - A reflection on how we connect to God and have a personal relationship with Him." "How Firm a Foundation - God's Word in good times and bad." "Jesus Lives and So Shall I - Hope for the future." "Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken - Zion is founded on the Rock of Ages." "For all the Saints - We will all be gathered at the end."



Kathy and Tim said this was the first time they had been able to worship with others in three years. Kathy decided those hymns would be sung at Tim's memorial service....

Tim, you are standing in glory now. You are seeing Jesus' face and serving Him, as you did here on earth. Someday, God willing, we shall see you again in that Holy Place.

***Francis Collins, MD, is the former director of the National Institute of Health.***

***The Tim Keller Issue is published by ChristianityToday, Fall 2023. Used by permission.***

## Sadducees (continued from p. 2)

Herod took that opportunity and because of his financial position with Rome, the position of the chief priests was made secure. The importance of the spice trade, and its subsequent wealth, made Judea a very important place in the scope of the known civilized world, especially in the minds of Romans.

An alliance between Caesar, Herod, and the Sadducees was established, and this formed the structure in which God decided to send His only Son, Jesus. Herod in his arranged kingship, returned the favor, and went back to the Hasmoneans, the Chief Priests, and essentially looked at those seven families and held the high priesthood up to the highest bidder.



Annas is the one that essentially just bought the priesthood from Herod the Great. Herod arranged that the priesthood would be sustained, and the descendants of Annas would be in power until the temple was destroyed in AD 70. For the next hundred years after the Hasmonean Dynasty, the corrupt priesthood would remain in the house of Annas because Herod the Great sold it to them. This is Annas of the Gospels. Caiaphas would be a descendant of his, and so you have Annas and Caiaphas. Then there is the Temple Guard. They were the muscle of the Sadducees, the hit squad for this corrupt religious leadership.

This is the same Temple Guard that comes to arrest Jesus. The Sadducees had decided that Jesus of Nazareth needed to be removed, and issued the Temple Guard to take care of business. It should be noted that this was not the work of the Pharisees. The role of the priesthood, the Sadducees, was to offer up the sacrifice for the people before God. This is evident when Caiaphas, the high priest, said: *“You do not realize that it is better for you that one man die for the people than*

*that the whole nation perish. He did not say this on his own, but as high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the Jewish nation, and not only for that nation but also for the scattered children of God, to bring them together and make them one.”* John 11:50-52 (NIV)

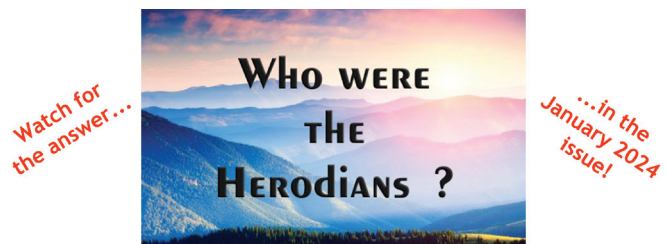
What becomes evident is the corruption of the priesthood. The Sadducees embraced the corruption of Hellenism, that they were the center of the universe and committed to their own advancement at the expense of those they were called to serve. But there was a positive aspect to their role. In lieu of the corruption of the priestly roles, we are all called into priestly roles.

In 1 Peter 2:9 (NIV) Peter tells us, *“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”* The challenge is that what we saw in the Sadducees was a corrupt expression of the priestly role. But as believers we are called into an uncorrupted God-ordained role of priesthood. Priests are those who bring sacrifice on behalf of the people. The book of Leviticus calls us to priesthood—God does need priests. To be a priest was a good thing, but to be a corrupt priest was horrible, and it goes against everything that the priesthood is supposed to represent and stand for. That’s the positive and the negative of the Sadducees.

Jesus encountered the Chief Priests, the Sadducees. Even in their corruptness, they did fulfill their priestly duties. They took hold of the Lamb of God and offered Him up as a sacrifice for the sins of the people. They may not have understood their role in the midst of their corruption, but their priestly roles were fulfilled regardless. Jesus knew those who would play this role, and submitted to their authority, becoming the perfect sacrifice, the atonement which would redeem all those who would believe in Him.

Note: Credit for significant portions of the content is attributed to Marty Solomon, creator of the Bema Podcast.

In Part II of the groups Jesus encountered here on earth, we will look at the group known as the Herodians.



## Discipleship Training School: Teens

ANGEL VEGA

In July, we held the fourth year of the DTS reboot, and as always, God did not disappoint us. It always amazes me that when I start planning for the week and start looking at themes and lining up speakers, that God has a bigger plan than any of us knew, and we are truly just there to be His hands and feet. This year's theme was "Masterpiece in the Mirror," where we explored ourselves and others as God sees us, not necessarily the world's view. A dozen students attended and were deeply blessed by some returning speakers and some new ones.

The highlights included a tubing river trip, impromptu worship jams, meeting new friends, limited technology, affirmative circle, and seeing God move as students prayed for each other. We look forward to what God has in store for the year, leading up to next year's week.





## Kids' Discipleship Training School

KATIE RUTHERFORD

It was a week of worship for the 17 kids attending Kids' Discipleship Training School this past July. The theme for the week was "Practicing the Way of Jesus," and the focus on worship included both dance and singing. The kids and staff worshipped every morning and evening and heard testimonies and received prayer at the evening campfires.

In addition, they had daily swimming, art, wilderness skills and fun evening games such as The Amazing Race and Brown Bag Skits. A special thanks to our church family for all the prayers, volunteers and donations. The camp would not have been a success without you!

## SEPTEMBER 2023

- 1 OWLs meet at 8:30 am. Bring a sack breakfast.
- 3 Pastor Eric Byrom preaching: Heb. 1:5-14.
- 6 Connect groups begin for fall, 6:30 to 8 pm.
- 9 Fall workday: starting at 9 am.
- 10 Eric Byrom preaching: Heb. 2:1-4.   
Buildings & Grounds Team meeting, 12:30 pm.
- 15 OWLs meet at 8:30 am. Bring a sack breakfast.
- 16 Kingdom Men's prayer breakfast, 9 am.
- 17 Elder Matt Godsil preaching: Heb. 2:5-9.
- 21 Women of Grace Bible study and prayer, 6:30-8 pm.
- 23 Fall Harvest Party, 6 to 8 pm.
- 24 Eric Byrom preaching: Heb. 2:10-18. 
- 30 Women of Grace: "Dealing With Our Fears" with Linda Kelso. 10:30 am at church.

\*\*\*\*\*

Our new theme for the year:  
*Grace on Mission!*

## Grace Fellowship Church

365 Straub Rd East • Mansfield Oh 44903  
419-526-4699 • gracefellowship01@gmail.com



Eric Byrom	Presiding Elder/ Pastor
Jadaé Fox	Elder
Matt Godsil	Elder
Jerry Mathias	Elder
Cameron Karger	Treasurer
Kay Berry & Karen Gates	Women
Lori Barker	Missions
Andy Heininger	Worship
Judy Nichols	Prayer Chain
Kay Berry & Jadaé Fox	Office
Andy Anschutz	Sound/Power Point
John & Donna Kurtz	TrailNotes