

Notes for “The Chosen” series (Season 1) small groups Pastor Barry Foster

The following notes offer some background information, brief explanations related to Scriptural content and context, and suggestions for things to look for when viewing the episode. One practical note: you may find that it is easier to understand what is being said if the captions are turned on when viewing the show.

Episode 2 “Shabbat”

Episode 2 continues the stories of Simon (and Andrew), Matthew, Mary, and Nicodemus, while centering around the weekly celebration of “Shabbat,” or “Sabbath.”

The Jewish traditions concerning observance of Sabbath have a long history, some of which might certainly extend to the period of Jesus’ life, or even earlier. In this episode, we see things like: (a) The start of the Sabbath was reckoned by the sighting of the first star, indicating that evening had begun. (The Jewish day begins in the evening, rather than at dawn.) Candles were lit to signal that the Sabbath had begun and to give light for the meal. (b) All preparations for the Sabbath must be completed before it begins, for work was forbidden on the Sabbath. Those who were observant were careful to finish cooking, cleaning, setting the table, and all of their ordinary labor. (c) There were set readings and prayers that were said to consecrate the celebration and the meal. (d) The main event of Sabbath was the evening meal, held in the home, with family and visitors present. (e) “Shabbat shalom” (“Sabbath peace”) is the traditional greeting, a prayer that asks God to bring peace to the person you are greeting.

We also are introduced to more of the world of the Pharisees. The “Sanhedrin,” which is mentioned several times, is the council that governed the Jewish people in accordance with the Mosaic Law. The Roman magistrates were only concerned with anything that caused public disorder, hindered the collection of taxes, or violated Roman law (which was supreme). Jews were allowed to govern their own religious behavior and matters that came under the jurisdiction of the Mosaic Law (provided that it didn’t conflict with Roman Law). The Sanhedrin were thus the highest court/legislative body for the Jewish people in matters pertaining to the Mosaic Law. In the time of Jesus, the Sanhedrin consisted of both Pharisees and Sadducees, in approximately equal numbers.

Some things to look for:

1. Note again how the Romans regard the Jews. Note also how the Jews feel about themselves and about those who collaborate with the Romans or betray Jews to the Romans.
2. Note the attitudes of the Pharisees toward the common people. One of the distinguishing marks of the Pharisees was their commitment to separating themselves from associating with sinful people or with anything that might be considered sinful by affiliation or could render them ceremonially unclean.
3. Note the historical reference to the Maccabean revolt (167-160 BCE), and the subsequent Hasmonean kingdom, which lasted until 66 BCE). During this brief time, Israel regained its independence from the Seleucid kingdom (Syrian Greeks, who ruled over a portion of what had been Alexander the Great’s empire). The Romans captured Jerusalem in 66 BCE and Israel was once more a conquered and occupied people.