

**MATTHEW 26-27 – JESUS BEFORE PONTIUS PILATE**



After Jesus told the High Priest He indeed was the promised Messiah, the High Priest tore his garments in outrage and accused Him of blasphemy. Yet Jesus had just told the truth, but the Jewish leaders, following a distorted Judaism and with envy, denied He was the Messiah, despite the incredible miracles and His truthful teachings.

Meanwhile, Peter was outside the house, listening in, and, just as Jesus had predicted, he betrayed Him three times, even though Peter had brashly said, "Even if all are made to stumble because of You, I will never be made to stumble" (Mt. 26:33). He added, "Lord, I am ready to go with You, both to prison and to death" (Luke 22:33).

It says, "Now Peter sat outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came to him, saying, 'You also were with Jesus of Galilee.' But he denied it before them all, saying, 'I do not know what you are saying.' And when he had gone out to the gateway, another girl saw him and said to those who were there, 'This fellow also was with Jesus of Nazareth.' But again he denied with an oath, 'I do not know the Man!' And a little later those who stood by came up and said to Peter, 'Surely you also are one of them, for your speech betrays you [being from Galilee].' Then he began to curse and swear, saying, 'I do not know the Man!' Immediately a rooster crowed. And Peter remembered the word of Jesus who had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.' So he went out and wept bitterly (Mt. 26:69-75).

Luke adds a little known detail—that Jesus had actually seen and heard Peter betray Him--another heartbreaking experience for Him. We read, "But Peter said, 'Man, I do not know what you are saying!' Immediately, while he was still speaking, the rooster crowed. *And the Lord turned and looked at Peter.* Then Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said to him, 'Before the rooster crows, you will deny Me three times.' So Peter went out and wept bitterly (Lk. 22:60-62).

So Peter, out of fear, had first lied, then cursed and finally swore he didn't know Jesus. Yet, probably the worst part was when he saw Christ's sad gaze at him, and then Peter realized he wasn't as strong or courageous as he had thought. He

complete broke down and left the place, feeling rotten and miserable, yet he would bounce back.

Now comes the third and final stage of the religious trial—in front of the Sanhedrin, the body of religious leaders of Judaism consisting of 71 Jewish leaders, most were Pharisees, Sadducees (mostly priests) and scribes. Matthew records, "When morning came, *all* the chief priests and elders of the people plotted against Jesus to put Him to death. And when they had bound Him, they led Him away and delivered Him to Pontius Pilate the governor" (Mt. 27:1-2).

There was a time when Bible skeptics doubted Pontius Pilate actually existed, but as *The Archaeological Commentary of the Bible* explains, "In the 1961 excavations in the ruins of the Roman theater at Caesarea, a slab was found with a badly damaged inscription...From the traces left by the marred letters, it seems that the complete inscription was: 'Pontius Pilate, the Prefect of Judea, has dedicated to the people of Caesarea a temple in honor of Tiberius'" (1984, p. 208).

Regarding Pontius Pilate, *The Archaeological Study Bible* says: "The trial of Jesus was probably carried out at Herod's palace, the Praetorium (Mt. 27:27; Mk. 15:16; Jn. 18:28, 33; 19:9), portions of which have been excavated. The only mention of Pilate in the New Testament, apart from the trial, is Luke 13:1. There Jesus was told about 'the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices,' evidently a reference to an incident in which a number of Galileans were killed while offering sacrifices at the temple. This accords well with what we read about Pilate in the works of the ancient Jewish writers Josephus and Philo, who portrayed him as cruel and corrupt. Pilate was recalled to Rome after having massacred a group of Samaritans" (2005, p. 1714).

With respect to Judas, who betrayed Jesus, Matthew says, "Then Judas, His betrayer, seeing that He had been condemned, was remorseful and brought back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders, saying, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' And they said, 'What is that to us? You see to it!' Then he threw down the pieces of silver in the temple and departed, and went and hanged himself. But the chief priests took

the silver pieces and said, 'It is not lawful to put them into the treasury, because they are the price of blood.' And they consulted together and bought with them the potter's field, to bury strangers in. Therefore that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet, saying, 'And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the value of him who was priced, whom they of the children of Israel priced, and gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord directed me'" (Mt. 27:4-10).

In Jeremiah 32:6-9, we do see that Jeremiah did buy a field with silver pieces, but it was the prophet Zechariah who mentions the specific amount of a sale for 30 pieces of silver, the price of a slave (Zechariah 11:12-13). Notice that Matthew mentions this was *said* by Jeremiah, but not that it was written *by* him.

As *Nelson's Bible Commentary* mentions, "The best solution to the problem seems to be that the prophecy was *spoken by Jeremiah* and recorded by Zechariah. A second option is that the name Jeremiah stands for the collection of prophetic writings in which Zechariah is found. It may also be that in the days of Christ, the Book of Jeremiah headed the books of the prophets. The quotation is then identified with the name of the first book in the section and not the name of the specific book within the group" (notes on Mt. 27:10).

So now Jesus is brought before the Romans, and John writes, "Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover" (John 18:28).

What was the Praetorium? It was the Roman governor's official residence. One was in Caesarea (see Acts 23:35) and the other in Jerusalem, believed be the Antonia Fortress, next to the Temple. The terms *early morning* refer to the fourth watch of the night, from 3 to 6 A.M. So the Roman court would open shortly after sunrise. During Passover, if a Jew entered a Gentile's house, he thought he was ceremonially unclean and would not be able to partake of the Passover.

Regarding when Passover began, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* points out, "Several Jewish groups had different calendars and did not celebrate Passover on the same day. A dispute about when the

month had begun (based on the appearance of the new moon) would also affect when the feast would be eaten. Some scholars have suggested that Jesus' disciples celebrated it a day early, thus without a lamb slaughtered in the temple" (notes on John 18:28). Our paper, *The New Testament Passover* covers more on the subject.

John continues, "Pilate then went out to them and said, 'What accusation do you bring against this Man?' They answered and said to him, 'If He were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you.' Then Pilate said to them, 'You take Him and judge Him according to your law.' Therefore the Jews said to him, 'It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death,' that the saying of Jesus might be fulfilled which He spoke, signifying by what death He would die. Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, 'Are You the King of the Jews?' Jesus answered him, 'Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?' Pilate answered, 'Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?' Jesus answered, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.' Pilate therefore said to Him, 'Are You a king then?' Jesus answered, 'You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.' Pilate said to Him, 'What is truth?' And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, 'I find no fault in Him at all'" (John 18:29-38).

Jesus knew He had at His disposal legions of angels to rescue Him if He chose to (Mt. 26:52), but then how could His mission be fulfilled? So He told Pilate that His kingdom was not of this world. It was still the "times of the gentiles" on this earth, until the four kingdoms described in Daniel 2 would be replaced by the fifth kingdom under Christ. Everything has its time—as God, and not man—had programmed it. Also as Christ mentioned, this was not the time for Christians to fight wars, until He returned in glory and majesty. In fact, Christians did not go to war for the first three centuries, until Constantine established the first supposed "Christian" army, and then Augustine, the Catholic

Church's influential theologian, justified Christians fighting wars by twisting several scriptures out of context.

This compromise has done enormous spiritual damage to traditional Christianity up to the present time. Remember the two world wars were fought primarily by Christians of opposing bands—and the last world war is also prophesied to arise primarily from a traditional European Christianity, with a beast power and false prophet.

Jesus trial continues, "And they began to accuse Him, saying, 'We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.' Then Pilate asked Him, saying, 'Are You the King of the Jews?' He answered him and said, 'It is as you say.'

So Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowd, 'I find no fault in this Man.' But they were the more fierce, saying, 'He stirs up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, beginning from Galilee to this place.' When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked if the Man were a Galilean. And as soon as he knew that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod [Antipas], who was also in Jerusalem at that time. Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him. Then he questioned Him with many words, but He answered him nothing. And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused Him. Then Herod, with his men of war, treated Him with contempt and mocked Him, arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him back to Pilate. That very day Pilate and Herod became friends with each other, for previously they had been at enmity with each other. Then Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests, the rulers, and the people, said to them, 'You have brought this Man to me, as one who misleads the people. And indeed, having examined Him in your presence, I have found no fault in this Man concerning those things of which you accuse Him; no, neither did Herod, for I sent you back to him; and indeed nothing deserving of death has been done by Him. I will therefore chastise Him and release Him' (for it was necessary for him to release one to them at the feast). And they all cried out at once, saying, 'Away with this Man, and release to us Barabbas' who had been thrown into prison for a

certain rebellion made in the city, and for murder. Pilate, therefore, wishing to release Jesus, again called out to them. But they shouted, saying, 'Crucify Him, crucify Him!' Then he said to them the third time, 'Why, what evil has He done? I have found no reason for death in Him. I will therefore chastise Him and let Him go'" (Luke 23:2-22).

Jesus refused to speak to Herod Antipas, one of the sons of Herod the Great, who killed the infants in Bethlehem. It was Antipas who murdered John the Baptist for condemning his illicit relationship with his brother's wife. This was the Herod whom Jesus had called 'that fox' in Luke 13:32.

So Pilate had two reasons to release Jesus: (1) He saw the religious leaders were doing this out of envy, and (2) even more serious was that his wife had warned him about a nightmare she had about Jesus. Notice what it says, "For he knew that they had handed Him over because of *envy*. While he was sitting on the judgment seat, *his wife* sent to him, saying, 'Have *nothing* to do with that just Man, for I have *suffered many things today in a dream* because of Him'" (Mt. 27:18-19).

Later history says after giving the order to crucify Christ, Pilate's life gradually did become a living nightmare. As Eusebius, a fourth century Catholic historian, relates, he was demoted, exiled in infamy, and, like Judas, committed suicide out of remorse. How many demons must have followed this man around for what he allowed to be done!

Pilate tried to cleanse the guilt of his decision, but he *was* responsible and could have freed him if he had not yielded to the pressure of the crowd. As *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* brings out, "He therefore took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd, symbolizing his desire to absolve himself from being involved in putting an innocent man to death (Deut. 21:6-9). But his words, I am innocent of this Man's blood, did not make him innocent (Acts 4:27). Such an act did not remove Pilate's guilt from this travesty of justice.

"When Pilate turned the responsibility over to the Jews, however, they readily accepted it. They said, 'Let His blood be on us and on our children!' Their words sadly came to pass as the judgment of God came on many of them and their children in A.D. 70, when the Romans destroyed the nation and the temple" (notes on Mt. 27:24-26).