

## The Lord's Trial Before Pilate, the Roman Governor of Judea and Samaria

### Matthew 27:11-26

Matthew 27:11-26 - *"Now Jesus stood before the governor. And the governor asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" Jesus said to him, "It is as you say." <sup>12</sup> And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He answered nothing. <sup>13</sup> Then Pilate said to Him, "Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?" <sup>14</sup> But He answered him not one word, so that the governor marveled greatly.*

*<sup>15</sup> Now at the feast the governor was accustomed to releasing to the multitude one prisoner whom they wished. <sup>16</sup> And at that time they had a notorious prisoner called Barabbas. <sup>17</sup> Therefore, when they had gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" <sup>18</sup> For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy.*

*<sup>19</sup> And 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."*

*<sup>20</sup> But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus. <sup>21</sup> The governor answered and said to them, "Which of the two do you want me to release to you?" They said, "Barabbas!"*

*<sup>22</sup> Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?" They all said to him, "Let Him be crucified!"*

*<sup>23</sup> Then the governor said, "Why, what evil has He done?" But they cried out all the more, saying, "Let Him be crucified!"*

*<sup>24</sup> When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it."*

*<sup>25</sup> And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children."*

*<sup>26</sup> Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified."*

### Background Notes

After our Lord's religious trial before the Jewish leaders, the Jewish authorities delivered Jesus to Pontius Pilate for His civil trial. Their purpose was to get the Lord crucified by the Roman authorities, because the Roman government did not allow the Sanhedrin, the highest tribunal of the Jews, to carry out the death penalty.

The Sanhedrin had decided on the death penalty because Jesus had claimed to be the Messiah. As far as the unbelieving Jewish leaders were concerned, this was a claim to deity, and therefore it was blasphemy.

However, a charge of "blasphemy" would carry no weight with the Roman authorities! As far as Rome was concerned, making that claim didn't justify the death penalty. So the Jewish leaders came up with trumped-up charges that would grab Pilate's attention. Putting all the gospel accounts together, we find that they engineered three political charges against the Lord:

1. Jesus was a revolutionary and thus a problem for Rome.
2. Jesus was against paying taxes to Rome.
3. Jesus claimed to be a king and was, therefore, a threat to Rome.

Of course all these charges were false. Pilate knew that, and he declared the Lord to be innocent.

Pontius Pilate was the Roman authority. For many years, critics of the Bible questioned Pilate's very existence. However, in 1961 a stone inscription, written in Latin, was uncovered in the excavations at Caesarea in Israel. The inscription contained Pilate's Roman name, "*Pontius Pilatus.*" (So once again we see that archaeology supports the historical accuracy of the Bible!) Pontius Pilate is well documented in historical records as the governor or procurator of Judea and Samaria, under Tiberius, the Roman emperor. Pontius was his family name.

Herod Antipas was ruling Galilee at this time, under the Roman Empire. Pilate and Herod were not on the best of terms until the trial of Jesus, but since Jesus was from Galilee, Pilate sent Jesus to Herod for examination. Luke's Gospel gives details: "*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, 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*" (Luke 23:6-12).

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The Roman governor had Jesus crucified for political purposes.

The headquarters for the Roman government was Caesarea, which is located along the coast of the Mediterranean Sea, northwest of Jerusalem. Spectacular ruins dating from Roman times can be seen at Caesarea today, so if you ever get the chance to go to Israel, be sure to go to Caesarea! During Jewish feast days, when many Jews from all over the Roman Empire would come to Jerusalem, the Roman governor would generally travel from Caesarea up to stay in Jerusalem. Why? The Jews were known to be a rebellious people, and they were always causing unrest and trouble for the Roman authorities. So it was wise for Rome to have a show of force in Jerusalem when the crowds were there for the major religious feasts, to quell any possible riot or disruption of the peace. So Pilate was in Jerusalem at the time of the Passover feast. This is why our Lord's civil trial was in Jerusalem and not in Caesarea, where it normally would have been held (as was the apostle Paul's trial about thirty years later).

A Roman governor who was able to keep the peace in Judea won favor with the higher powers in Rome, so Pilate was willing to do whatever it took to appease the Jewish mob and keep the peace in Jerusalem - even if it meant corrupting justice. The Jewish leaders knew this, and they played this political card to the maximum. John 19:12: *“From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, “If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar’s friend. Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar.”* Pilate knew that our Lord was innocent, and he knew that the Jewish leaders had condemned Jesus because they were jealous of His popularity – not because He had done anything wrong! *“For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy” (v18).*

God arranged for Pilate’s wife to have a dream, testifying to the Lord’s innocence and righteousness. But, to avoid a possible riot that would reflect unfavorably on his political career, Pilate chose to appease the Jews and corrupt justice. He released Barabbas, a notorious criminal, and ordered Jesus, who was completely innocent, to be crucified. What a terrible miscarriage of justice! Pilate, the Roman governor, had Jesus crucified for political purposes.

## **2. The Jews had Jesus crucified for religious purposes.**

Although the Jews said they wanted Jesus to be crucified for treason and rebellion against the Roman Empire, their real reason was religious. The Jewish leaders refused to recognize Jesus as the One He claimed to be - the Son of God, the Messiah. They were envious of Him: *“For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy.”* The Jewish leaders could not stand the fact that Jesus was popular among the people! They were envious of Him, because they wanted to retain the religious power for themselves.

The religious leaders did everything they could to turn the common people against Jesus. They even persuaded the people to call out for His crucifixion. Many of these people may have been part of the fickle crowd that welcomed the Lord at His entry into Jerusalem just a few days earlier. Then they had cried out, “Hosanna to the Son of David!” Now they were calling out, “Crucify Him!”

Many of these people had expected the Lord to overthrow the Roman authority in Judea and set up His own earthly kingdom. But that didn’t happen, and so the leaders easily persuaded the crowd that Jesus was not the Messiah. They were easily persuaded to call out for His crucifixion. Verse 20: *“But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitudes that they should ask for Barabbas and destroy Jesus” (v20).*

Barabbas was a notorious felon. John’s Gospel tells us that he was a thief, and Mark’s Gospel says that he was an insurrectionist and a murderer. Pilate’s gesture of goodwill toward the Jewish people was to release one prisoner each year at Passover. The Jews requested Barabbas rather than Jesus! The name Barabbas means “son of a father.” Think of it! The Jews chose Barabbas – and rejected Jesus, the **true “Son of the Father.”**

Pilate said that he was *“innocent of the blood of this just Person.”* This was a clear statement of our Lord’s innocence. Verse 24: *“When Pilate saw that he could not prevail at all, but rather that a tumult was rising, he took water and washed his hands before the multitude, saying, “I am innocent of the blood of this just Person. You see to it” (v24). The crowd answered back, “His blood be on us and on our children” (v25).*

This self-incriminating prophecy has certainly been fulfilled over the years, hasn’t it? Think of all the troubles and persecution of the Jewish people down through history, and even to this present time. And there will be more to come during the future Tribulation Period. The Jews had Jesus crucified for religious reasons.

## Practical Application

### What will you do with Jesus?

When the people asked for Barabbas, Pilate said *“What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?”* They all said to him, *“Let Him be crucified!”* And that’s the response of many people today when they’re asked, “What will you do with Jesus?” People today, of course, wouldn’t say “Crucify Him!” However, when people choose philosophies and worldviews other than what Jesus said was the truth, and when they use the name of Jesus to curse, and when they refuse to acknowledge Jesus Christ as God and put their trust in Him as Savior, in essence they are saying that they would rather have Jesus dead and out of their lives, rather than having Him tell them what to do and what to believe. Isn’t that true?

What about you? What will **you** do with Jesus? Have you trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, or are you still putting off making that vital decision? What will you do with Jesus?