

Part 2: The Roman Trials

Roman Trial #1 Before Pilate (The Interrogation)

John 18:28 They led Jesus therefore from Caiaphas into the Praetorium, and it was early; and they themselves did not enter into the Praetorium in order that they might not be defiled, but might eat the Passover.

- After the initial three Jewish trials, via Annas, Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, Matt 27:2 states, *“and they bound Him, and led Him away, and delivered Him up to Pilate the governor.”* Why would they take Jesus before the Roman governor? This is because of the specific Jewish charges that were brought against Him. We must understand the legal quagmire of the Sanhedrin, for Jesus could not have the death penalty imposed on Him as the result of a Jewish conviction, for they were under the rule of Rome and would have to do as the Romans would do.

John 18:29-32 Pilate therefore went out to them, and said, "What accusation do you bring against this Man?" 30 They answered and said to him, "If this Man were not an evildoer, we would not have delivered Him up to you." 31 Pilate therefore said to them, "Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law." The Jews said to him, "We are not permitted to put anyone to death," 32 that the word of Jesus might be fulfilled, which He spoke, signifying by what kind of death He was about to die.

- Pilate said to the Jews in *John 18:29 "What accusation do you bring against this Man?"* There were three new charges brought about against Jesus in *Luke 23:1-2 Then the whole body of them arose and brought Him before Pilate. 2 And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King."*
- The three charges, 1) Insurrection, 2) Tax evasion and 3) Impersonation of a King were empirical offenses and would have to be punished through the empirical system, hence Governor Pilate. The Jews slapped empirical charges on the Christ for they were "not permitted to put anyone to death," (John 18:31) under Hebrew rules.
- No longer could Pilate ignore the allegations and would have to investigate further through an examination of the evidence.

John 18:33-35 Pilate therefore entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" 34 Jesus answered, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" 35 Pilate answered, "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You up to me; what have You done?"

- With these three charges before him, Pilate would have to investigate. The allegation of tax evasion would be an easy charge to dismiss by simply checking the tax records. Jesus taught the people to pay their taxes,

- saying only three days prior, "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's" (Matt 22:21). He took the time to pay the temple tax in Matt 17:24. I am persuaded this was the reason that we did not see that allegation arise again, for it was a matter of record. That leaves the two remaining charges of insurrection and claiming to be a King in opposition to Caesar.
- With that in mind, Pilate began the interrogation of the charge of "Claiming to be King" by asking Jesus outright, "Are You the King of the Jews?" One can appreciate Jesus' response, "Is this your conclusion or did someone teach you this?" Pilate was looking at this carpenter and wondering why the Jews feel so threatened. He refused to buy into the "Jesus/King" allegation.

John 18:36-38 Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm." 37 Pilate therefore said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say {correctly} that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice." 38 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 guilt in Him.

- Jesus made no excuses on this charge for He was a King and had a kingdom. The only problem with this was that His kingdom was not of this realm, but a heavenly.
- Pilate questions Jesus' Kingship by saying, "So you are a king?" Jesus said this was a truth for which He was born into the world. He is a king of truth and His kingdom are those that listens to Him.
- Pilate, probably thinking that Jesus is a bit crazy, asked, "What is truth?" Surely these Jews are up to no good in claiming this charge as worthy of death? Surely they are not justified to put a man to death concerning this claim? Surely Jesus was just a king in His mind? This is why Pilate went back out to the mob and say, "I have not found this man guilty of the charge of being a King."
- With the charge of tax-evasion not established and the claim to be King being temporarily dismissed, that left the charge of insurrection.

Luke 23:4-12 And Pilate said to the chief priests and the multitudes, "I find no guilt in this man." 5 But they kept on insisting, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee, even as far as this place." 6 But when Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. 7 And when he learned that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time. 8 Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him. 9 And he questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing. 10 And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently. 11

And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate. 12 Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been at enmity with each other.

- When Pilate had interrogated Jesus concerning the charge of being a king, he insisted that Jesus was not guilty of that crime. He was not going to play this game with the Jewish leaders.
- Their next move was to bring up the charge of insurrection, saying "He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee, even as far as this place." Pilate realized that this came under the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas, who just happened to be in town for the Passover.
- Herod did not like Pilate because of an incident from *Luke 13:1* *Now on the same occasion there were some present who reported to Him about the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.* Apparently Pilate sent troops into Herod's district and slaughtered a number of people, causing a major problem for Herod. Pilate thought to himself, "I will send this case to Herod as a good gesture and at the same time getting out of this quagmire." By the end of this gesture, their relationship was repaired.
- Herod had heard about Jesus and His great miracles. He actually thought that Jesus was the spirit of John the Baptist, for Herod had John killed a couple of years prior when confronted about his adulterous relationship with his brother's wife. He thought that Jesus would do a few miracles for him for entertainment.
- Not only were there no tricks, but Jesus did not even say a word, keeping complete silence as they taunted, hit and mocked Him. Shortly thereafter Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate to deal with the charge of insurrection. It is necessary to go back to John's more detailed account of the event to properly understand.

John 18:39-40 "But you have a custom, that I should release someone for you at the Passover; do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews?" 40 Therefore they cried out again, saying, "Not this Man, but Barabbas." Now Barabbas was a robber.

- Imagine the terror in Pilate's heart when he saw Jesus being lead back to him to deal with the mob and their allegation of insurrection. Pilate was already on Caesar's bad list and did not need to have a massive riot on his hands.
- He came up with the plan to deal with this charge. There was a custom on Passover of pardoning a prisoner. Perhaps there would be enough support from the crowd to choose Jesus to be turned free. Not so, for they chose a well-known and convicted insurrectionist named Barabbas.
- Are you following the logic here? They say Jesus should be put to death for the accusation of insurrection, yet they have no problem turning loose

a known insurrectionist? What hypocrites! This is why it says of Pilate in *Matt 27:18* states *For he knew that because of envy they had delivered Him up*. This charge was a bogus charge and Jesus should be freed. Instead they cry out all the more to kill Jesus and free Barabbas!

- To appreciate what occurred next in the John account, we must go to an account in *Acts 22:23-25* *And as they were crying out and throwing off their cloaks and tossing dust into the air, 24 the commander ordered him to be brought into the barracks, stating that he should be examined by scourging so that he might find out the reason why they were shouting against him that way. 25 And when they stretched him out with thongs, Paul said to the centurion who was standing by, "Is it lawful for you to scourge a man who is a Roman and uncondemned?"* There were a group of Jewish leaders throwing a fit and demanding that Paul be put to death. It was up to the commander overseeing this to get to the bottom of the Jews aggravation. In the ancient times, there was a method of determining truth called "examination by scourging". If a person was not a free-Roman citizen their testimony could not be accepted into a trial until it was tested. In the above example, Paul could not be tested like this, being a free-Roman citizen.

Under the Roman method the culprit was stripped, stretched with cords or thongs on a frame and beaten with rods. Another form of the scourge consisted of a handle with three lashes or thongs of leather or cord, sometimes with pieces of metal fastened to them. Roman citizens were exempt by their law from scourging. (Scourging: Smith's Bible Dictionary)

- For those whom were not so fortunate, the officials would strap leather grips onto the wrists of the accused and stretch them out against a wall. Whatever that person was testifying to would have to be tested concerning truth. They would begin to question their words by mocking and beating them with long wooden rods. Over and over, lashing after lashing, they were trying to find out if while being tortured would the hold to this testimony. If someone was lying, they would be more apt to break under the pain of the torture. We have a saying in our culture "Beat the truth out of someone." They literally beat the truth out of some people.
- Back to the account of John. With the charge of tax-evasion unproven and the insurrection charge dismissed, the only completely unresolved one was the "claim to be King". Pilate was told by Jesus that He was a King based on truth. Pilate in response said, "What is truth?" Now, being put under pressure to resolve this somehow, he must test Jesus' testimony. This should not be confused with the second, more deadly scourging Jesus would receive later, for this one is for truth. Pilate reasoned that if Jesus went through the "examination by scourging" process, the people will see this and the "Crazy Man" punished and perhaps back off.

John 19:1-4 Then Pilate therefore took Jesus, and scourged Him. 2 And the soldiers wove a crown of thorns and put it on His head, and arrayed Him in a

purple robe; 3 and they {began} to come up to Him, and say, "Hail, King of the Jews!" and to give Him blows {in the face.} 4 And Pilate came out again, and said to them, "Behold, I am bringing Him out to you, that you may know that I find no guilt in Him."

- The problem with Pilate's plan was that Jesus did not deny His testimony that He was King. They beat Him with the rod, over and over again, trying to make Him deny it.
- SMACK...Are you really a King?...SMACK....Are you willing to continue in this nonsense...SMACK...If you deny it, we will stop...SMACK...Deny it....SMACK...So You are a King?...SMACK...Deny it!...SMACK...Deny it!...SMACK...Are You out of your mind?
- They put a woven crown of thorns upon His head and purple robe to further add insult in the scourging. SMACK...."Hail, King of the Jews!" ...SMACK..."Oh great King!...SMACK.
- When the "Examination by Scourging" was complete, Jesus had not changed His position, for He was King and that is the truth. Pilate probably thought He was crazy and the Jews probably thought He was obstinate, but to us He is the Christ, the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

Meditate on this closing verse:

1 Tim 6:12-16

12 Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

13 I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate,

14 that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,

15 which He will bring about at the proper time-- He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords;

16 who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him {be} honor and eternal dominion! Amen.