

Notes on Pilate, Pt 1 — for Bulletin

John 18:28-40 (NIV) Jesus Before Pilate

²⁸ Then the Jewish leaders took Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness they did not enter the palace, because they wanted to be able to eat the Passover. ²⁹ So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?"

³⁰ "If He were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed Him over to you."

³¹ Pilate said, "Take Him yourselves and judge Him by your own law."

"But we have no right to execute anyone," they objected. ³² This took place to fulfill what Jesus had said about the kind of death He was going to die.

³³ Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked Him, "Are you the king of the Jews?"

³⁴ "Is that your own idea," Jesus asked, "or did others talk to you about me?"

³⁵ "Am I a Jew?" Pilate replied. "Your own people and chief priests handed you over to me. What is it you have done?"

³⁶ Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."

³⁷ "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."

³⁸ "What is truth?" retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against Him. ³⁹ But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover. Do you want me to release 'the king of the Jews'?"

⁴⁰ They shouted back, "No, not him! Give us Barabbas!" Barabbas had taken part in an uprising.

Sermon Outline

I. Pontius Pilate: Background and Life

- A. Role and Position:
 - Roman governor (prefect) of Judea and surrounding areas, AD26–36.
 - Responsibilities
 - Appears as a historical figure in the Bible, in Roman records, and on archaeological artifacts.
- B. Origin:
 - Native of hilly region of Samnium, in south-central Italy, 130 miles east of Rome.
- C. Personality and Character:
 - Inflexible disposition, merciless and obstinate, with ferocious passions, corrupt, acts of insolence, habit of insulting his charges, a haughty disposition, loved his authority, cold and without compassion, a contemptuous man, understood justice, passionate for Roman law, cruel, irritating, morally weak, hid his flaws under shows of stubbornness and brutality.
 - Hated by Jewish people. When groups violently protested, they were put down with savage ferocity.
 - Stole money from Jewish treasury to build aqueduct in Jerusalem.
 - Only fear he had was losing favor with Emperor Tiberius (Jewish leaders would use his fear later)
 - Pilate's patron in Rome was Sejanus, Tiberius's chief lieutenant, who opposed the Jews.
 - When Sejanus was executed in 31_{AD} on a charge of treason, Pilate's position was threatened by doubts of his allegiance.
- D. Downfall:
 - Pilate cared nothing for his subjects.
 - The event that broke the straw though, ending Pilate's career, did not occur in Judea but in Samaria, where, after Jesus' crucifixion, Pilate massacred Samaritans to stop a rebellion there, causing so much strife that the Romans deposed him.
 - Samaria was a portion of his territory with a sizeable Gentile base (centered in the cities of Caesarea and Sebaste), home to the Samaritans, a schismatic people group once close to Judaism who clung to the tradition that Moses had intended Mount Gerizim to be the holy mountain of Israel.
 - When a crowd gathered on Mount Gerizim, Pilate sent the army to meet them near Mt. Gerizim to prevent their ascent up the mountain; some were killed, others fled; many were taken prisoner.
 - Pilate was eventually summoned to Rome to answer for his actions in Samaria.

II. Background to Pilate's Time in Judea

- A. Roman Control:
 - After Pompey crushed Jerusalem and destroyed the Temple in 63_{BC}, Rome tried to maintain control with the cooperation of the disposed Hasmoneans, principally Hyrcanus II who was high priest and a legitimate claimant to the Jewish throne.

- Hyrcanus proved to be ineffective (the Jews, his subjects, despised collaborators like him).
 - In summer of 40_{BC} Rome appointed Herod the Great (of Jewish and Idumean descent), as puppet-king to rule over Judea, Idumea, Perea, Samaria, Galilee, Gaulanitis, Trachonitis, Auranitis, and much of the coast. After Herod's death, the region was further integrated into Rome's direct and exclusive control.
 - Pilate's appointment was an on-going effort to increase Roman control over the region.
- B. Political Climate:
- Judea longed for redemption and freedom from political overlords.
 - Jesus of Nazareth, Son of David and Son of God by birth but a resident of insurrection-prone Galilee by up-bringing, consistently avoided political entanglements and discussions
 - God and people were Jesus' focus; Pilate was just a detail of time and place. Few others could dismiss the prefect that easily.
 - Throughout the life of Jesus, the temple was the center of nationalist demonstrations and the Roman authorities feared a large-scale uprising led by a messianic figure.
 - During the time leading up to Jesus' final arrival in Jerusalem, there were instances of Roman interference and heightened Jewish nationalist sentiments of tension and the longing for redemption.
 - Pontius Pilate's actions that provoked Jewish protests.
 - Pilate kills hundreds of Jewish zealots protesting at the temple a year or so before Jesus enters Jerusalem for the last time.
 - In this urgent atmosphere of conflict and tension, it is understandable how Jesus worried the Jewish leaders.
 - Pilate worried what would happen if another riot occurred during the Passover celebrations. (Jesus was attracting thousands more people into Jerusalem already crowded with the usual amount of Jews coming for the sacred festival.)
 - Another riot with another massacre to stop it, could have serious political implications and problems for Pilate with the Roman Emperor.
 - In the middle of all this, Jesus made His final pilgrimage to Jerusalem.
 - When He entered the Mount of Olives before Passover weekend, the crowds waved palm branches, shouting "Hosanna (Save, now!)" and "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the LORD!"
 - The city not only pulsed with the excitement of the moment but with the anticipation that each new year might be the year the Messiah would finally come.
 - Rome had a long history of dealing with such matters.
 - Pilate sent extra troops to Jerusalem to offset any threats to Rome.
 - With Sejanus dead Pilate no longer had a buffer to help absorb Caesar's blows should trouble arise.
 - John's gospel detects the hand of God Himself.
 - The political realities guaranteed that when sentence was finally passed, Jesus would be executed by crucifixion, not by stoning.
- C. Jewish Factions:
- Various groups existed, most notable of which were the "well-heeled" Sadducees, wealthy traditionalists comfortable with the status quo, and the respected but highly legalistic Pharisees and their scribes.
- E. End of Governorship and Death (Legends):
- Another riot broke out a few years after Jesus' crucifixion in Samaria, not Judeo.
 - Pilate retaliated with a brutal attack on the protesting Samaritan crowd.
 - After which Pilate was ordered to report to the emperor for judgment. There the legends begin.

Notice the way God maneuvers events and history to lead in a direction for His purposes?

- Pilate's temperament leads to the climax of trial and crucifixion to ultimately provide God's means of saving grace.
- The temperament, too, of the Jewish leaders, leads to Jesus' arrest, trial, conviction and crucifixion.
- The flux of events, including the brute fact that the Romans had to sanction capital punishment, brought about the fulfilment of Jesus' words indicating the kind of death He was going to die, his being 'lifted up from the earth' (Jn. 12:32-33). Jesus' words and Scripture are fulfilled.
- The movement of historical events shape the outcome for God's glory!
- From a quick glance, Jesus had been caught between competing egos, dragged down by conflicting agendas, and paying the highest price — execution of Jesus.
- In reality, the Creator of the World had orchestrated events so that the Savior of the World could make the ultimate sacrifice to forgive human sin.