

# A Study of the Christ Text

	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
First Roman Phase of the trial	27:2, 11-14	15:1-5	23:1-5	18:28-38
Herod questions Jesus			23:6-12	
Second Roman Phase of the trial	27:15-30	15:6-20	23:13-25	18:39-19:16

## Overriding Principles

- Political expediency is a powerful thing, joined with career insecurity, fear, and superstition; several powerful human motivations become prominent features of Jesus' Roman trial.
- "Passing the buck" is a tactic with longstanding tradition.
- Good intentions are never enough.

## Commentary

### First Roman Phase of Trial (Matt. 27:2, 11-14; Mk. 15:1-5; Lk. 23:1-5; Jn. 18:28-38)

- Pilate was a "procurator," a title that applied to a financial officer of a province, or, as in Pilate's case, the governor of a third class province.
- Judea was a particularly difficult province to govern so Tiberius had merged the added authority of a "prefect" to Pilate, giving more power to Pilate to exercise control over almost all the civil and military activities of the province.
- Pilate's question to Jesus about whether He considered Himself "king of the Jews," demonstrated that the Jews brought Jesus to Pilate on civil rather than religious charges. Rome had no interest in local religious concerns (cf. Acts 18:14-17; 23:29).
- The Roman administrative work day began at daybreak and ended shortly before or after noon. This would account, in part, for the haste used by the Jews in getting Jesus to Pilate.
- In a trial involving non-Romans, Pilate had the authority to make up his own rules.
- The charges Luke records, misleading the nation, and opposing taxation were completely false (cf. Lk. 20:20-26).
- Regarding the religious charges, Jesus admitted His guilt. He was, after all, the Messiah, the anticipated Jewish King.
- His claiming to be a king would later be used a leverage to force Pilate to crucify Him (Jn. 19:12).

### Herod Questions Jesus (Lk. 23:6-12)

- Pilate thought he could escape responsibility by claiming a jurisdictional technicality to shift Jesus to Herod.
- Herod Antipas was tetrarch over Galilee and Perea from A. D. 4 until A. D. 39.
- Herod Antipas executed John the Baptist (cf. Lk. 3:19-20).
- Herod also took a special interest in keeping up with Jesus' ministry (cf. 9:7-9; 13:31-32).
- Jesus' silence before Herod recalls Isaiah 53:7).
- Jesus failure to put on a show for Herod leads to more mocking and abuse.
- Herod Antipas and his three brothers had, previous to this encounter, sued Pilate before Tiberius over offensive symbols Pilot placed in the Herodian palace in Jerusalem. The Herods won the suit!

**Second Roman Phase of the Trial (Matt. 27:15-26; Mk. 15:6-15; Lk. 23:13-25; Jn. 18:39-19:16)**

- The governor's custom of releasing a prisoner during Passover week reflected common Roman customs throughout the empire.
- Ironically, Barabbas was actually guilty of sedition, a charge the Jews brought against Jesus.
- Jesus, who had no political aspirations, was crucified under a charge implying He wanted to overthrow the government; Barabbas, a terrorist and insurrectionist, was released at the insistence of those very Jews who charged Jesus!
- There is manuscript and historical evidence to suggest Jesus and Barabbas shared the same first name, "Jesus." One manuscript reads, "Which Jesus do you want; the son of Abba, or the one called "Messiah?"
- At the death of Herod's son Archelaus, the Romans took over the Herod's Jerusalem palace as quarters for the governor. This is the likely location of the trial before Pilate, though other locations have been suggested.
- The Romans were very superstitious, dreams were considered to be omens. Pilate's wife's dream, under the stressful circumstances of the moment, would have been very disturbing.
- A common Roman custom was to publicly wash one's hands as a declaration of innocence.
- Matthew switches from the term "crowd" to "people." The latter term was a common way of referring to the nation of Israel. The nation had turned against their Messiah!
- The nation bears guilt for the crucifixion of Jesus, this does not at all warrant any level of anti-Semitism, but it is a sad fact—Israel has rejected their Messiah.

- Barabbas would now be released, but Jesus would be scourged.
- Scourging was a lashing performed with the *fustigatio*, a more symbolic, relatively mild punishment for lesser crimes (probably Pilate's intent), the *flagellatio*, severe, but not the most brutal, or the *verbera*, the most brutal of all, usually preceding execution. The descriptions indicate that after an initial relatively light lashing, the more severe *verbera* was actually used, consisting of three to nine leather straps imbedded with glass and bone. Following the beating, the flesh would have hung down in strips with bone and muscle exposed.
- Pilate, when all was said and done, was a pragmatist. Looking out for his own interests ruled.
- The thorns of Jesus' "crown" would have been several inches long, inflicting many lacerations and causing much bleeding.
- Additional mocking and beatings continued the horrific treatment received by Jesus. The purple robe mocked Jesus' association with being a king.
- Pilate's political fears and his superstitions would both have brought him considerable anxiety dealing with a man who claimed to be a king and the Son of God.
- Jesus would not entertain Pilate's desperate questions.
- Finally, when Pilate asserted his power over Jesus to punish or release, Jesus spoke. God, not Pilate, had the power.
- Pilate tried hard to set Jesus free, but not hard enough. Politics did him in.
- The fact that Jesus did not answer Pilate's question regarding the nature of truth confirms that Pilate did not really intend to follow the truth.
- John's expression, "day of preparation of Passover Week," does not mean a *Thursday* and is not, therefore, a contradiction with the Synoptics where *Friday* was the day of the crucifixion. John's expression "day of preparation" meant "preparation for the Sabbath," in this case, preparation for the Sabbath that fell during Passover Week. Still Friday!
- The deed was set, crucifixion was to be Jesus' form of execution (cf. Deut. 21:22-23).

### **Who is Jesus?**

- He is the one who will not waver from the course given by His Father, no matter what!
- He gave everything up for our salvation!