

Pilate's Problems

Introduction

1) He was the 5th governor (procurator) of Judea, the only province of the Roman Empire in Palestine overseen by a Roman rather than a Jew. He had a military force of 3,000 soldiers under him. His judicial authority was supreme, except in cases of Roman citizens, when appeal to the emperor was possible. Rome tried to give a large amount of self-government. In some provinces, including Judea, local bodies of government (like the Sanhedrin) were allowed to retain as many judicial functions as possible. Death sentences, however, required the governor's confirmation and were executed by him. Most governors badly abused their authority. Judea was constantly in tumult, mostly over religious division. Christ stood before Pilate in such volatile conditions.

2) Pilate was appointed procurator in 26 AD and served a long term of 10 yrs. There were many spats between Pilate and the Jews during that time. According to Luke 13:1, Pilate had even resorted to slaughtering the Jews on at least one occasion. The Jews, on the other hand, had successfully appealed to Caesar at least once to overrule Pilate's decision to hang shields in Herod's palace (where Pilate likely lived whenever in Jerusalem). He apparently feared the emperor's ability and inclination to punish or even depose him. Philo calls Pilate "inflexible, merciless, and obstinate." One thing is sure, there was no love lost between Pilate and the Jews. He offended them even in the title over the cross and irritated them by refusing to remove it (John 19:22). He seems like a typical worldly man, whose goodness wasn't strong enough to overcome his personal considerations.

3) Pilate made at least four moral and spiritual mistakes.

I. He tried to shift responsibility to others.

- A. Perhaps Pilate did not want to get involved in this matter.
 - 1. Luke 23:5-7 reveals that Pilate sent Jesus to Herod "as soon as he [Pilate] knew that he [Jesus] belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction."
 - 2. As soon as Pilate found a convenient way out, he quickly took it.
- B. So often, people try to resist taking personal responsibility for Christ. From Pilate's mistake, we learn that we cannot leave our decisions on the doorsteps of others. **Others cannot accept or reject Jesus for us!**

II. He sought to compromise with evil.

- A. Pilate rightly reasoned that Jesus was innocent (Luke 23:13-16). Pilate's reasoning is exemplary, but the result was evil!
 - 1. Pilate knew what was right and wrong.
 - 2. Pilate found Jesus innocent after an examination of the evidence, and when the Jews did not accept his ruling, he changed his ruling (Mark. 15:15).
- B. Christians are tempted to compromise with evil (Galatians 5:9; 2 Corinthians 6:15).

III. He thought he could wash his hands of the situation.

- A. Pilate planned to declare himself innocent (Matthew 27:24). He was already involved (see John 19:11). It was too late to claim that he had no part in the death of Jesus.
- B. *Washing one's hands* doesn't excuse the guilt of the guilty! The gossipers cannot

wash their hands of their gossip neither can the complainers *wash their hands* of this discord.

IV. He gave up.

- A. Pilate released Barabbas (a true criminal) and delivered Jesus (Matthew 27:26).
- B. Christ is given up in many ways.
 - 1. Some, like Demas, love the world too much (2 Timothy 4:10).
 - 2. Many are overcome with hardships (compare James 1:12).
 - 3. Many find the Master's Way too difficult (John 6:66).
- C. Pilate gave up Christ. What will you do?

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Illegalities In Jesus' Trial

- ✓ There is evidence to indicate that the arrest of Jesus was entirely unwarranted. First of all, there was no valid indictment upon which to base an arrest. Christ was seized and bound without any formal charge being made (cf. Mt. 26:47-56; Mk. 14:43-52; Lk. 22:47-53; Jn. 18:1-12). In fact, no accusation was lodged against the Savior until after he was brought before Caiaphas, the high priest.
- ✓ At the house of Caiaphas, the Sanhedrin (consisting of the scribes, elders, and the chief priests - "the whole council," cf. Mt. 26:59) was assembled to hear the case against Christ. But this "trial" meeting was illegal. First, there are numerous indications that this assembly was at night (cf. Jn. 18:3; Mt. 27:1; Jn. 19:14). According to Jewish law, however, a trial involving a capital offence could not be conducted at night (Westcott, 263). Goldin notes that in capital cases, a conviction "must be reached in the daytime" (111).
- ✓ When witnesses testified in a capital case, it was required that an "investigation and examination of [the] witnesses be conducted" (Goldin, 106). No such procedure was employed in this case. In addition, witnesses were strictly and separately questioned, and it was imperative that their testimony be consistent (Westcott, 263). Goldin, the Jewish authority, also affirms that: "... If the witnesses contradict one another, whether during the inquiries or the cross-examination, their testimony becomes invalid" (125).
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- ✓ There is another matter of importance. First, according to Jewish law, in a capital case the accused could not be tried and convicted on the same day (Goldin, 111). The judges needed adequate time for research and reflection. Yet, Christ was tried and convicted in a matter of hours.

-sources

Goldin, Hyman E. (1952), **Hebrew Criminal Law and Procedure** (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc.).

Westcott, B.F. (1981 Reprint), "St. John's Gospel," **The Bible Commentary**, F.C. Cook, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker).