

## Lesson 54

*Time – 4/2/30 to 4/3/30 AD, 14 Nisan*

*Early Wednesday Morning*

*The Trial before Pilate*

In the last lesson we saw Jesus' examination by Annas, the former officiating High Priest. We then studied the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin in the house of Caiaphas, Annas' son-in-law, who was the current officiating High Priest. After most of the assembly cried out for Jesus' crucifixion, Jesus was taken into the courtyard for the Sanhedrin to decide on their next move. His formal condemnation was a foregone conclusion and those guarding Him had started to beat and abuse Jesus in the vilest ways they could imagine. Besides abusing Him verbally, they punched Him, spat on Him and tore out parts of His beard. It was during this episode that Peter, for the third and last time, denied Jesus within His hearing. After the Sanhedrin came to an agreement on how to proceed, they took Jesus out and sent Him to Pilate. They had no choice. They wanted Jesus dead and only the Roman governor had the legal jurisdiction to execute a prisoner. Besides that, the recent Palm Sunday was ample proof that Jesus was very popular with many of the common people, so they wanted Rome to take the blame for what they wanted to happen to Jesus.

We will begin this lesson with the verse which ended the last lesson,

### ***Remanding to Pilate***

**John 18:28** Then the Jews led Jesus from Caiaphas to the palace *Praetorium*<sup>1</sup> of the Roman governor. By now it was early morning, and to avoid ceremonial uncleanness the Jews did not enter the palace *Praetorium*; they wanted to be able to eat the Passover.

**Matthew 27:2** They bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor.

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<sup>1</sup> The word which the NIV translates as "palace" is the Greek word *πραιτώριον* {prī-tō'-rē-on}. It was from a Latin word. In a Roman camp it referred to the headquarters of the Roman camp. Other translations have it translated thusly: KJV "judgment hall," NRSV and NLT "headquarters," Darby, NAS, and ASV "Praetorium." I believe this can only refer to the Antonia fortress which abutted the north wall of the Temple platform. The action described in the Gospels seems to indicate that, for security reasons, when Pilate came up to Jerusalem for special occasions, both he and his wife stayed there. That was also where the Roman garrison lived and where the Roman prison was located. I will use "Praetorium" in the rest of the account instead of "palace" to improve the translation of the NIV and the understanding of the Gospel account.

**Mark 15:1b They bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate.**

**Luke 23:1 Then the whole assembly rose and led him off to Pilate.**

Beginning here, with the exception of Luke's account of the interview with Herod Antipas, John's Gospel always gave the fullest account. John probably witnessed every step of Jesus' journey from the Garden to the Cross. John was Jesus' first cousin, and the only member of Jesus' family present throughout. Possibly, that was the reason that he was allowed to accompany Jesus to all his trials and even up to the foot of the cross. We know that John was known to the High Priest Annas (John 18:16). Perhaps, it was because the High Priest knew of John's family relationship with Jesus that he allowed him to be present as a witness for Jesus' family. In any case, John was the only disciple who was present during all the trials.

You will also notice the staggering hypocrisy of the Jews. According to John, they were careful not to become ceremonially unclean according to their phony "tradition." This was while they were arranging the murder of the Messiah to which all the real Law had pointed. It should be noted that there is nothing to be found in the Law of Moses which says that entering a Gentile's house or place of business would make someone unclean. This was one of those traditions that the Pharisees had added to the law out of their own imagination, legalism, and arrogance.

Ironically, according to Jesus, if they had entered Pilate's **Praetorium**, it would have been them who would have defiled that place. They would have filled it with spiritual leaven. Jesus had said about the hearts of the Pharisees: "Be on your guard against the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy" (Luke 12:1b).

According to the Mosaic Law, the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan was known as "the Day of Preparation." On that day every Jewish house was to be carefully cleaned to the very corners to make sure there was no leaven in it (Exodus 12:15).

You will notice that in John's account above, he said that the Passover Feast had not yet been eaten. As I pointed out in earlier lessons, the Last Supper, eaten in the upper room the night before, was clearly not the Passover Feast. On the Jewish Calendar, this was still the same day, the 14<sup>th</sup> of Nisan as they had eaten the Last Supper. It was the day on which the Passover Lamb was to be killed at twilight. I have read some commentaries that mistakenly assert that the Last Supper was eaten on the day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread when the Passover Lamb was eaten. That is a serious mistake as regards the chronology of the actual unfolding of events.

### *Jesus' first appearance before Pilate*

Jesus' first appearance before Pilate wasn't really a trial. It was merely a Jewish attempt to get Pilate to ratify the Jewish Sanhedrin's sentence and have Jesus executed by Roman soldiers. This was the first of three times that day that Jesus was brought before Pilate, but it wasn't the first time that Pilate had heard of Jesus. Pilate had become Governor of Judea four years before,

in 26 AD. That was the same year that Jesus had started his public ministry. Jesus had preached to crowds of thousands and tens of thousands and had spent almost a year of His first two years of ministry in Pilate's province of Judea. A number of Pilate's own Roman officers had become Christians. One of Pilate's main responsibilities, as Governor of a notoriously rebellious province, would have been to keep himself well aware of all gatherings of any size. Thus, he would have had regular briefings about Jesus and all He was doing. In this first interview, the Jews were just trying to get Pilate to accept their verdict of guilty. Pilate was fully aware that they were trying to use him against his own interest. He was determined not to be manipulated.

**John 18:29** **So Pilate came out to them and asked, "What charges are you bringing against this man?"**

I have seen interpretations of this scene that seem to imply that Pilate was almost ignorant of who Jesus was. This is ridiculous! Pilate was the Governor of Judea and he was charged with the security of the state. He probably knew as much about Jesus as the Sanhedrin did. Besides that, there is the account of the dream of Pilate's wife (Matthew 27:19) which we will see later. That account indicated a familiarity, of both Pilate and his wife, with who Jesus was.

**John 18:30** **"If he were not a criminal," they replied, "we would not have handed him over to you."**

In effect, the Jews were saying to Pilate hopefully "Why don't you skip the Roman trial, we have already found him guilty. All we want from you is to have Roman soldiers execute him so that we can blame the whole thing on you."

**John 18:31a** **Pilate said, "Take him yourselves and judge him by your own law."**

Pilate wanted nothing to do with this ticking time bomb. Considering that he knew that Jesus' real offense against Sanhedrin was to make them look like fools and hypocrites, he was perfectly willing to let them handle it. He probably expected them to flog Jesus and then imprison him for a short time. He couldn't fathom that they actually wanted to have Jesus put to death.

**John 18:31b** **"But we have no right to execute anyone," the Jews objected.**

It should be remembered that the last two times Jesus had been to Jerusalem, the Feast of Tabernacles the previous October (John 8:59) and the Feast of Dedication the previous December (John 10:31), the Jews had tried to murder Jesus by stoning him without a trial. Evidently, they decided that wasn't workable. They also probably decided, in view of Jesus' tumultuous reception into the city before Passover just three days earlier, that if they murdered Jesus and it resulted in a riot the Romans might hold them responsible. As a result, they had devised a plan whereby they would try to get the Romans to do the Sanhedrin's dirty work.

**John 18:32 This happened so that the words Jesus had spoken indicating the kind of death he was going to die would be fulfilled.**

Jesus had prophesied that He would be crucified (Matthew 20:19, Matthew 26:2). Crucifixion was a Roman form of execution. Crucifixion had been used by the Gentiles in that part of the world since at least the times of the Persians. It was the most severe criminal punishment available. Victims could last for days struggling to breathe. They only managed to do so by heaving their bodies up against the spikes securing their wrists and ankles to the cross. Herodotus described the use of crucifixion by the Persians several times in his histories (circa 440 BC). The Jews used stoning for execution under their law.<sup>2</sup> Jesus had thus prophesied that He would be killed by the Romans.

**Luke 23:2 And they began to accuse him, saying, “We have found this man subverting our nation. He opposes payment of taxes to Caesar and claims to be Christ, a king.”**

This was their opening accusation. The accusation about taxes was a clear lie! The Jews had tried to maneuver Jesus into saying something against Roman taxes, but they failed. He said, “Render unto Caesar, what is Caesar’s.” See Matthew 22:21, Mark 12:17, Luke 20:25. I suspect that Pilate had agents who had already told him exactly what Jesus’ reply had been. Besides that, Pilate probably realized that there was probably not a Jew in Israel who was happy with paying Roman taxes.

**Matthew 27:11 Meanwhile Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?” “Yes, it is as you say,” Jesus replied.**

**Mark 15:2 “Are you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate. “Yes, it is as you say,” Jesus replied.**

**Luke 23:3 So Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the king of the Jews?” “Yes, it is as you say,” Jesus replied.**

Pilate evidently knew enough about the Jewish religion to understand how the Jews thought the Christ (Messiah) would come. They expected the Messiah to begin ruling as King of the Jews. Some in the crowd on Palm Sunday had cried out “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!”<sup>3</sup> Although Jesus was “born King of the Jews” (Matthew 2:2) according to the Magi, he had never proclaimed that His Kingdom was an earthly Kingdom. It was only within the hour, during the trial before the Sanhedrin, that He had admitted in public that He was the

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<sup>2</sup> *Stoning was a relatively quick message of execution. The condemned would be stoned to death by those who had accused them and by those who had tried and condemned them as well as other members of the community. This meant that everyone was very aware of gravity of criminality. Also, the accusers and those who had condemned the victim could not escape the seriousness of their actions.*

<sup>3</sup> *John 19:38*

promised Messiah and Son of God. He had never claimed to have come as political “King of the Jews.” That will wait until His coming again. His present coming was as spiritual “King of the Jews” as He would explain later.

**Matthew 27:12-14** **When he was accused by the chief-priests (*High Priests*) and the elders, he gave no answer. Then Pilate asked him, “Don’t you hear the testimony they are bringing against you?” But Jesus made no reply, not even to a single charge—to the great amazement of the governor.**

**Mark 15:3-5** **The chief-priests (*High Priests*) accused him of many things. So ~~again~~ *repeatedly*<sup>4</sup> Pilate asked him, “Aren’t you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of.” But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.**

This tells us that leading the delegation were Annas and Caiaphas. Annas was the richest man in that part of the world and Caiaphas was the officiating High Priest. Just as when He had been tried before the Sanhedrin, Jesus remained quiet. The accusations were so patently false they needed no repudiation. Furthermore, Jesus wasn’t worried about the outcome. He already knew what that would be. Pilate’s greatest amazement probably stemmed from the fact that Pilate knew all about Jesus and He knew the Pharisees were making completely false accusations. He couldn’t understand why Jesus wouldn’t deny them.

**Luke 23:4** **Then Pilate announced to the chief-priests (*High Priests*) and the crowd, “I find no basis for a charge against this man.”**

This verse is another indication that Pilate had the testimony of his own intelligence reports to dispute the claims of the Sanhedrin. Jesus himself hadn’t disputed those claims, yet Pilate had the charges dismissed out of hand.

**Luke 23:5a** **But they insisted, “He stirs up the people all over Judea by his teaching.**

In desperation the High Priests threw down their last card. Jesus may not have actually broken the Law, but He was a rabble rouser. The Jews had made a number of false charges which Pilate wasn’t swallowing. Pilate wasn’t interested in the religious objections that Jews had raised against Jesus. The Roman state wasn’t interested in interfering with local religions unless they disrupted the orderly governing of the state. They ruled an empire with many religions. They were prepared to tolerate them all, even Judaism,<sup>5</sup> if they didn’t obstruct Roman government.

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<sup>4</sup> *The Greek word translated “again” here is πάλιν {pä'-lĕn}. It comes from the idea of repetition. Unfortunately, the word “again” in English implies the repetition of an action already noted. Matthew’s Gospel notes such a previous accusation, but Mark’s doesn’t. Hence “repeatedly” is a better translation for Mark.*

<sup>5</sup> *Judaism was probably the most contrary to Roman government and Roman religion of all the religions in the Empire.*

**Luke 23:5b-6 He started in Galilee and has come all the way here.” On hearing this, Pilate asked if the man was a Galilean.**

Although this wasn't their intention, the Jews had just given Pilate what he thought might be a way out. He thought he could shift his problem to Herod Antipas, the governor of Galilee.

**Luke 23:7 When he learned that Jesus was under Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who was also in Jerusalem at that time.**

Without missing a beat, he sent the whole crowd away with Jesus to Herod's Palace which was next door to Caiaphas' house, where they had just come from. It was a little over a mile's walk back to there (*see map on page 20*). Just that walk back took about half an hour.

### *Jesus' Trial before Herod Antipas*

When Pilate, heard that Jesus was from Galilee, he thought he saw a way to avoid the situation altogether. He sent Jesus to Herod Antipas the “Jewish King” in Galilee. Herod Antipas was the son of Herod the Great. He had been reigning in Galilee for thirty-three years, ever since the death of Herod and the birth of Jesus. Herod Antipas (who had beheaded John the Baptist) was in Jerusalem for the Passover. Pilate had no wish to be used by the Jews and hoped Herod Antipas would deal with Jesus. Unknown to him, Herod was part of the conspiracy to have Jesus killed by Pilate and the Romans. Jesus refused to take any part in the ensuing charade that Herod Antipas conducted at his palace. Only the Gospel of Luke described this episode.

**Luke 23:8-9 When Herod saw Jesus, he was greatly pleased, because for a long time he had been wanting to see him. From what he had heard about him, he hoped to see him perform some miracle. He plied him with many questions,<sup>6</sup> but Jesus gave him no answer.**

Though Herod had taken no active part in the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin, it had been undertaken with his full agreement and connivance. It is clear he wanted Jesus dead, but he wanted the Romans to do it. The following verses from Mark and Luke make that clear:

Mark 3:6 “Then the Pharisees went out and began to plot with the Herodians how they might kill Jesus” (*about two years earlier*).

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<sup>6</sup> *Herod Antipas was theologically inquisitive. He had evidently questioned John the Baptist at length when he had him in prison: Mark 6:19-20 “So Herodias nursed a grudge against John and wanted to kill him. But she was not able to, because Herod feared John and protected him, knowing him to be a righteous and holy man. When Herod heard John, he was greatly puzzled; yet he liked to listen to him.”*

Luke 13:31 “At that time some Pharisees came to Jesus and said to him, ‘Leave this place and go somewhere else. Herod wants to kill you.’” (*about a month earlier*).

It is also clear from Peter’s testimony in Acts that Herod conspired to have Jesus killed:

Acts 4:27 “Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.”

This passage in Acts 4 also tells us that though Pilate’s part in the outcome was somewhat unwilling, he was still culpable.

It is worth noting that Herod thought Jesus could perform miracles, but he still had no hesitation in wanting Jesus executed. That speaks to how hard and arrogant his heart had become. He believed in miracles, but he didn’t believe in God.

**Luke 23:10 The chief priests (*High Priests*) and the teachers of the law were standing there, vehemently accusing him.**

Annas and Caiaphas had accompanied the party back to Herod. They were unwilling to leave the proceedings until they saw Jesus dead.

**Luke 23:11 Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe,<sup>7</sup> they sent him back to Pilate.**

Jesus was already badly beaten and bloody about the face. Herod Antipas only mocked Jesus. Although Jesus’ response here isn’t explicitly noted, He must have endured this abuse silently as He had the earlier questioning. Herod Antipas paid a price for this in this life. Six years later he was deprived of his wealth and throne and sent into exile in Gaul where he died in poverty and ignominy. Unless he took the occasion of those years to repent, in the next life his fate has been much worse.

**Luke 23:12 That day Herod and Pilate became friends—before this they had been enemies.**

This is the comment of Edersheim on this verse:

The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah, by Alfred Edersheim. THE CROSS AND THE CROWN, CHAPTER XIV “The opportunity now offered was welcome to Herod. It was a mark of reconciliation (or might be viewed as such) between himself and the Roman, and in a manner flattering to himself, since the first step had been taken by the Governor, and that, by an almost

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<sup>7</sup> *This robe was evidently taken off before they left Herod’s palace because the Roman soldiers who scourged Jesus later found it necessary, to complete their mockery of his being a King, to dress him in a purple robe.*

ostentatious acknowledgement of the rights of the Tetrarch, on which possibly their former feud may have turned.”

At that point, Herod sent Jesus back to Pilate. This was also tantamount to Herod saying that he recognized the supremacy of Pilate’s authority in Jerusalem.

### *Jesus’ Second Interview with Pilate*

**John 18:33a Pilate then went back inside the palace Praetorium, summoned Jesus**

This evidently happened after Jesus came back from Herod Antipas with the whole crowd of Jewish high officials. Pilate wanted to speak to Jesus away from the Jews, so he called Him into the Praetorium. As noted before, the rest of the Jews couldn’t come with Jesus to this interview for fear of being defiled for the Passover. This interview is only recorded in John. This seems to suggest that John was allowed by the Romans to accompany Jesus into the Praetorium.

**John 18:33b and asked him, “Are you the king of the Jews?”**

In his earlier interview with Jesus in front of the Jewish leaders, Pilate had asked the same question “Are you the king of the Jews?” Jesus had answered in the affirmative “Yes, it is as you say.” (Matthew 27:11, Mark 15:2, and Luke 23:3). Jesus knew that Pilate was not part of the conspiracy against Him. He decided that Pilate deserved to have his questions answered in depth.

**John 18:34 “Is that your own idea,” Jesus asked, “or did others talk to you about me?”<sup>8</sup>**

The Jews had told Pilate that “*He* claims to be Christ, a king” (Luke 23:2). They had implied that He was trying to overthrow the Roman authority by “stirring up the people” (Luke 23:5). They had also accused Him of telling them not to pay their taxes to the Romans (Luke 23:2).

**John 18:35 “Am I a Jew?” Pilate replied. “It was your people and your chief-priests (*High Priests*) who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?”**

Pilate understood that this was a matter that mainly concerned the Jewish religion. He understood that the Jewish leaders envied Jesus, but as much as he tried, he couldn’t understand how that deserved death. He seemed to be hoping that Jesus would enlighten him.

**John 18:36 Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place.”**

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<sup>8</sup> *This question by Jesus is obviously designed to draw Pilate out and make him think. Jesus already knew the outcome to this trial. What he has said here is for Pilate’s benefit, not his own.*

By this Jesus assured Pilate that the Roman government had nothing to fear from Him. Pilate must have seen reports about Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and the hundreds of thousands who had welcomed Him into the city. If Jesus had been about temporal power, He surely could have had the city engulfed in rioting by now. The Sanhedrin had been terrified at that very possibility.<sup>9</sup> Yet there wasn't a ripple in the serenity of Jerusalem on that morning before the Passover. The pilgrims in the city were busy gathering with their lambs in the Temple right next door to the Praetorium.

**John 18:37a** **“You are a king, then!” said Pilate.**

At first Pilate didn't understand and seemed to think he had found his excuse to comply with the Jews.

**John 18:37b** **Jesus answered, “You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.”**

Jesus explained further that His Kingdom wasn't a material Kingdom, but a Kingdom based on truth.

**John 18:38a** **“What is truth?” Pilate asked.**

We are forced to consider several questions here. Why did Pilate say this? What did he mean by it? Why did the Holy Spirit see fit to record this for us in Scripture? Was Pilate's answer a world-weary reply implying “There is no truth,” or “Truth is beyond knowing?” Or was he admitting that he wanted to know the truth, but it was beyond him? The history of the remaining six year of Pilate's governorship shows that he restrained the Jews from using Roman power to persecute the growing Christian Church in Jerusalem. There is also an ancient tradition that Pilate and his wife eventually became Christians. Because of this, I am inclined toward the view that Pilate really wanted to know the truth. It is a question like this addressed in prayer to God that has led many souls toward saving faith.

From this time on Pilate seemed to have resolved to find some way to free Jesus. However, he wasn't willing to stake his career and even his life to achieve it.

### ***Jesus' Trial before the Crowd at the Back of the Praetorium***

**Luke 23:13-14** **Pilate called together the chief priests (*High Priests*), the rulers and the people, and said to them, “You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I**

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<sup>9</sup> *Matthew 21:46, Matthew 26:3-5, Mark 12:12, and Mark 14:1-2.*

**have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him.**

**John 18:38b With this he went out again to the Jews and said, “I find no basis for a charge against him.**

Pilate reaffirmed his previous verdict that he had announced when he had questioned Jesus in front of the Jews (Luke 23:4).

**Luke 23:15-16 Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. Therefore, I will punish him and then release him.”**

Pilate tried to make Herod’s sending Jesus back to him as saying that Herod didn’t consider Jesus guilty of anything either. Pilate seemed to have envisioned giving Jesus a minor flogging and then releasing Him, chastened but relatively unharmed.

**Matthew 27:19 While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat, his wife sent him this message: “Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.”**

This message by Pilate’s wife seems to indicate that they were both familiar with Jesus and had discussed Him before. We must ask the question: Why did God send this dream to Pilate’s wife? It didn’t stop the execution of Jesus Christ. We know that it wasn’t intended to stop it! However, it probably helped confirm Pilate in his later policy toward the Christians. He prevented their official persecution in Judea during the remainder of his Governorship which only ended six years later in 36 AD. It seems clear that this dream was of a supernatural origin. It wouldn’t have been from Satan, as Satan was doing all he could to get Jesus crucified. It could only have come from God. Why would God have sent such a dream to Pilate’s wife? God was not trying to prevent the crucifixion. It could only have been for the benefit of Pilate and his wife. It undoubtedly had a great impact on Pilate’s attitude toward Christ and His Church after the Resurrection. Remember, besides the dream, Pilate, along with the rest of Jerusalem, also witnessed the supernatural darkness and the great earthquake that accompanied the crucifixion of Christ.

**Luke 23:17 Now he must needs release unto them at the feast one prisoner.<sup>10</sup> KJV**

**John 18:39a But it is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of the Passover.**

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<sup>10</sup> *The NIV omits Luke 23:17 because the faulty Codex Sinaiticus does. I have included the KJV translation from the Textus Receptus which is correct.*

**Matthew 27:15** Now it was the governor's custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd.

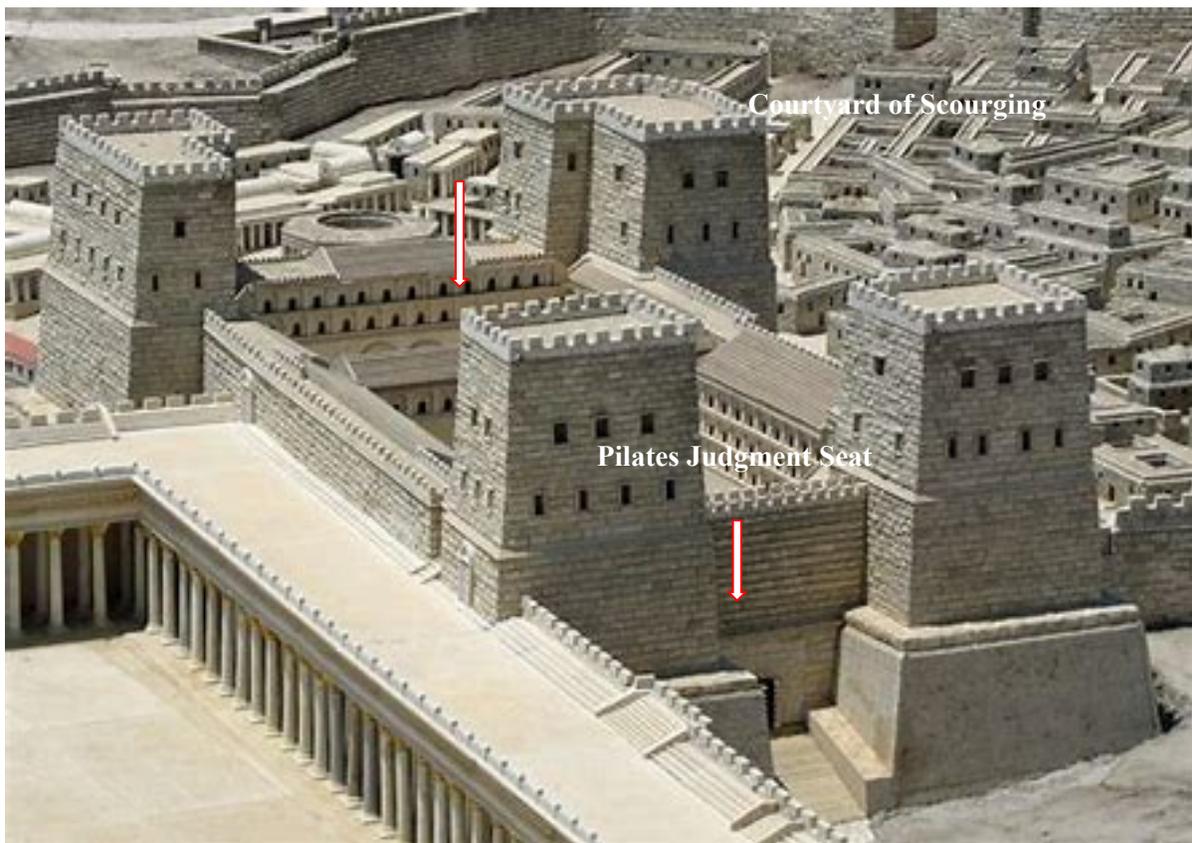
**Mark 15:6** Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested.

There was a custom of previous Roman Governors whereby they would release a prisoner on Passover. This was to commemorate the release of the Jews from bondage in Egypt at the time of the first Passover.

**Mark 15:8** The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did.

**Matthew 27:17a** So when the crowd had gathered,

This brings up the question: Who would have been gathered in the courtyard? Almost all the pilgrims coming into the city that day would have been making for the Temple to have their lambs slaughtered starting at noon. Jesus' arrest and trial had been kept secret, so most of the supporters of Jesus would not have even known that Jesus was a prisoner. Most of those who would have ordinarily gathered for the customary granting of this request would have been those who had relatives or loved ones in jail. They would have been "the crowd" who approached Pilate here.



*The Antonia Fortress*

However, those who made up that “crowd” in the court in front of Pilate’s judgment seat were those who had come to petition for particular prisoners held by the Romans. They were probably relatively small in number. In any case, they were overwhelmed by the numbers and force of the arresting party there who had come to make sure that Jesus was executed. The last thing the arresting party would have brought up at this time was the performance of this custom. However, Pilate grasped at it as an opportunity to release Jesus without punishing Him at all.

It should be noted that this scene took place in the relatively small outside courtyard of the Antonia Fortress (see picture above).

**Matthew 27:16** **At that time they had a notorious prisoner, called Barabbas.<sup>11</sup>**

**Luke 23:19** **(Barabbas had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.)**

**Mark 15:7** **A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising.**

**John 18:40b** **Now Barabbas had taken part in a rebellion.**

There aren’t any details in the Bible or in Josephus as to the time or nature of the uprising in which Barabbas took part. However, we can make an informed guess. Barabbas was probably a Zealot. The Zealots often seized the occasion of something like the Feast of Purim to revolt against the authority of the Sanhedrin. The Feast of Purim celebrated the deliverance of the Jews from their enemies and had often been the occasion of such uprisings. The Feast of Purim was one month before Passover. The Zealots were a sect that had its roots some 50 or 60 years before in the early part of the reign of Herod the Great. They were zealous in their hatred of the Roman rule. They were not much less intense in their hatred of the Sadducees and the Pharisees. The zealots felt that the religious leaders had sold out Israel to the Romans. In the later rebellion of 70 AD, the Zealots killed many of the Pharisees and Sadducees before the city fell. It is in this context you can see why Pilate’s choice of Barabbas as the alternate candidate of release to Jesus was very canny. He must have believed that the leaders of the Jews would consider Barabbas far more dangerous to them than Jesus. He was thus doing everything he could to release Jesus with not much cost to himself.

**Matthew 27:17b-18** **Pilate asked them, “Which one do you want me to release to you: Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?” For he knew it was out of envy that they had handed Jesus over to him.**

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<sup>11</sup> *Barabbas was an Aramaic name. It consisted of two parts. First was בַּר {bar} which means “son.” Next was אָב {äv} which means “father.” Together it means “son of a father.”*

Mark 15:9-10 **“Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate, knowing it was out of envy that the chief-priests (*High Priests*) had handed Jesus over to him.**

John 18:39b **Do you want me to release ‘the king of the Jews?’”**

In his mind Pilate must have thought that the Jews only envied Jesus, but feared Barabbas. He was sure that given a choice between the two enemies, the Sanhedrin would release Jesus. Pilate had chosen the one prisoner (Barabbas) that he had in custody that was most odious to the Sanhedrin. The usual procedure probably wouldn't have involved giving the choice to the crowd assembled. The governor just would have chosen the least offensive prisoner. However, this day, Pilate, hoping to get Jesus's release, said the crowd could choose between two men. He said, “I will release Barabbas or Jesus.” He felt that the Sanhedrin could not hate Jesus so much as to allow him to release Barabbas. It must be remembered that Barabbas had committed murder in the uprising. Against whom would he have been raising an insurrection? The visible authority in Jerusalem in most things was in the hands of the High Priests who were appointed at the direction of the Romans. Pilate's permanent headquarters were in the mostly Gentile city of Caesarea on the coast. The Sanhedrin and High Priests were widely regarded as people who had sold out to the Romans to gain their position. The rebellion and the murder Barabbas committed most likely struck at persons who served the High Priests and the Sanhedrin. Pilate selected Barabbas as one man who he thought the High Priests would never sanction releasing.

Pilate also must have felt that there would be many people in the regular crowd who must have respected Jesus.

Matthew 27:20-21 **But the chief-priests (*High Priests*) and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed. “Which of the two do you want me to release to you?” asked the governor. “Barabbas,” they answered.**

Mark 15:11-14 **But the chief-priests (*High Priests*) stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. “What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?”<sup>12</sup> Pilate asked them. “Crucify him!” they shouted. “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”<sup>13</sup>**

John 18:40a **They shouted back, “No, not him! Give us Barabbas!”**

Luke 23:18 **With one voice they cried out, “Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!”**

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<sup>12</sup> Notice that here Pilate called Jesus “the one you call the King of the Jews.” Pilate was trying to remind them of the reception many of them had given Jesus four days before. This also confirms that Pilate was not ignorant of Jesus' doings.

<sup>13</sup> See Isaiah 49:4 for what the Lord's thought must have been about this time. “But I said, ‘I have labored to no purpose; I have spent my strength in vain and for nothing. Yet what is due me is in the LORD's hand, and my reward is with my God.’”

Those who had gathered there to petition for some relative or friend would have been disappointed and perhaps resentful against Pilate who clearly wanted to release Jesus instead of the ones they had come for. As a result, when the call came, they were probably indifferent or against the Governor. In the meantime, the arresting party undoubtedly used the influence of the High Priests and members of the Sanhedrin and possibly threats from the Temple guards to manipulate this almost universal call (one voice) for Barabbas.

It is not unlikely that by this time John had been joined by the three women who also followed John to the foot of the Cross, His mother Mary, Mary Magdalene, and John's mother.<sup>14</sup>

**Luke 23:20-21** **Wanting to release Jesus, Pilate appealed to them again. But they kept shouting, “Crucify him! Crucify him!”**

Pilate couldn't believe his ears and had called for another vote.

**Luke 23:22** **For the third time he spoke to them: “Why? What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty. Therefore I will have him punished and then release him.”**

**Matthew 27:22-23** **“What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called Christ?” Pilate asked. They all answered, “Crucify him!” “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!”**

Pilate had miscalculated how much the Jewish leaders hated Jesus. The crowd in front of him was undoubtedly dominated by the people who had arrested and tried Jesus and had escorted him to Pilate. Besides the few who would have been there to lobby for the release of a particular prisoner,<sup>15</sup> who else among the Jews would have been in the Roman court on the day of Preparation? At that moment, tens of thousands of them were lining up next door on the Temple Mount to have their Passover lambs slain by the hundreds of the priests who had been called for that duty that day. Many of the rest were out at their campsites involved in preparing the rest of their Passover Feast. The last thing most of the Jews would be interested in doing on such a day would be to hang around the judgment pavement of the Roman Governor. Also, Jesus' arrest and trial were done in secret, so the tens of thousands who had welcomed Him tumultuously into Jerusalem three days before were ignorant of what was going on at the Fortress Antonia.

**John 19:1-3** **Then Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged. The soldiers twisted together a crown of thorns and put it on his head. They clothed him in a purple robe<sup>16</sup> and went up to him**

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<sup>14</sup> John's mother was also Mary's sister and Jesus' aunt.

<sup>15</sup> No one would have been there for Barabbas. To have acknowledged a connection to him would have labelled you as an insurrectionist.

<sup>16</sup> The fact that John and Mark say the robe was purple and Matthew says it was scarlet is another argument that Matthew was originally in Aramaic and this difference came as a result

again and again, saying, “Hail, king of the Jews!” And they struck him in the face.

**Matthew 27:27-31** Then the governor’s soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him <sup>17</sup> and put a scarlet <sup>18</sup> robe on him,<sup>19</sup> and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff <sup>20</sup> in his right hand and knelt in front of him and mocked him. “Hail, king of the Jews!” they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head <sup>21</sup> again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe <sup>22</sup> and put his own clothes on him. <sup>23</sup>

**Mark 15:15-20** “Wanting to satisfy (*placate*) the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace courtyard <sup>24</sup> (that is *in*, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. They put a purple robe <sup>25</sup> on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. And they began to call out to him, ‘Hail, king of the Jews!’ Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. Falling on their knees, they paid homage to him. And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him.” Then they led him out to crucify him.

Pilate released Barabbas, but Pilate figured if he had Jesus flogged in the brutal Roman fashion, so that he had all the flesh on His back ripped to shreds, the Jews would relent and allow Pilate to spare Jesus. This was Jesus’ second beating.<sup>26</sup>

To picture the scene, look at the representation of the Antonia Fortress on page 11. It was also called the Praetorium. Jesus would have been beaten in the open courtyard in the middle. Most

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*of a translation. The word used here is πορφυροῦς {por-fü-rü's} which is from a fish used to make purple dye.*

<sup>17</sup> *This was the first occasion of this humiliation. Later it would be repeated when He was nailed to the Cross in front of the mocking crowd.*

<sup>18</sup> *See previous footnote on John 19:1-3.*

<sup>19</sup> *Just as Herod’s men had put an elegant robe on Him.*

<sup>20</sup> *The staff represented, mockingly, a Kingly scepter.*

<sup>21</sup> *This fulfilled the prophecy of Micah 5:1 “Marshal your troops, O city of troops, for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel’s ruler on the cheek with a rod.”*

<sup>22</sup> *According to John’s account, the purple robe wasn’t removed until after Jesus’ final interview with Pilate (John 19:5). They evidently didn’t take off the robe until just before they put the Cross on His back to carry.*

<sup>23</sup> *If this included Jesus’ seamless robe, that meant it would have been soaked with blood.*

<sup>24</sup> *The Greek word here is ἀυλή {au-lā}. It means “an uncovered courtyard”. In this case it referred to the courtyard in the center of the Antonia Fortress. See picture above.*

<sup>25</sup> *See previous footnote on John 19:1-3.*

<sup>26</sup> *It is worth noting that this was a Roman scourging, not a Jewish lashing. According to the Mosaic Law in Deuteronomy 25:2, thirty-nine lashes were the maximum in a Jewish lashing.*

of the five to six hundred Roman soldiers garrisoned in Jerusalem would have been gathered on the overlooking porches and towers above. The scene would have been almost like a stadium with Jesus below and the soldiers jeering from above.

The Gentile Roman soldiers in Jerusalem, were mostly recruited from the Roman province of Syria. They had hated the Jews for a fifteen centuries. Besides that, Jerusalem was considered hard duty for Roman soldiers. They were surrounded by a nearly completely Jewish population who considered them unclean. They would naturally have come to nurse a great resentment for the Jews. You will notice that the Roman soldiers seemed to have picked up on the fact that Jesus was the one who the Jewish crowds had celebrated on Palm Sunday by calling out: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” “Blessed is the King of Israel!”<sup>27</sup> They had probably been put on the alert when that whole Palm Sunday procession had happened and had been in an ideal position to have seen the whole thing. They took out their hatred of the Jews on the one the Jews had celebrated. However, they didn’t understand that Jesus was also there to be “the light for the Gentiles.”<sup>28</sup>

Although they didn’t understand what they were doing, the Roman soldiers gave Jesus His “Crown of Thorns.” It was probably one of the most potent symbols of the meaning of His death.

### *Pilate’s renewed attempts to have Jesus freed.*

**John 19:4-5** **Once more Pilate came out and said to the Jews, “Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no basis for a charge against him.” When Jesus came out wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe, Pilate said to them, “~~Here is the man~~ Behold the man!”**

Pilate brought Jesus back, and showed him to the Jews, badly beaten and bloody, with the comment “Behold the man!” It was as if he was saying: You see the terrible punishment He has already undergone. Surely that is enough for you?

The Greek word here, which the NIV translated “here is,” is ἴδε {ē'-de} It is the second person singular imperative active of εἶδω {ā'-dō} which means “to know.” The Greek ἴδε {ē'-de} is a command to more than just to see. It is a command to comprehend. I have translated it as the KJV does, as “behold.” On his part, Pilate was just asking the Jews to truly take in the depth of the suffering that Jesus had already undergone. However, in a much deeper sense he was speaking for the ages by asking the Jewish leaders to comprehend that their Messiah had come as He had promised and was fulfilling prophecy.

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<sup>27</sup> *John 12:13b.*

<sup>28</sup> *Isaiah 42:6*

Pilate was trying to release Jesus without crucifying him. He had scourged Him. In addition to this recent flogging, Jesus had been beaten by His Jewish guards, and then was beaten by the Romans soldiers after He was flogged. As a result, the prophecies of Isaiah had been fulfilled. Isaiah 52:14 “Just as there were many who were appalled at him -- his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness--”; Isaiah 50:6 “I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard; I did not hide my face from mocking and spitting.”

What Pilate was implying was “look at this wreck of a human face and body, He has had punishment enough. You don’t need to crucify him.”

**John 19:6 As soon as the chief priests (*High Priests*) and their officials saw him, they shouted, “Crucify! Crucify!” But Pilate answered, “You take him and crucify him. As for me, I find no basis for a charge against him.”**

They still wanted to crucify Jesus. Then Pilate gave the Jews sanction to crucify Jesus themselves. Pilate didn’t want anything to do with it. The Jews wouldn’t have it. From the beginning it had been their plan to blame Jesus’ death on the Romans.

**John 19:7 The Jews insisted, “We have a law, and according to that law he must die, because he claimed to be the Son of God.”**

Then the Jews mentioned to Pilate that Jesus said He was the son of God, which was a claim Jesus had never made publicly until the trial before the Sanhedrin.

**John 19:8-9 When Pilate heard this, he was even more afraid, and he went back inside the palace Praetorium. “Where do you come from?” he asked Jesus, but Jesus gave him no answer.**

It says that Pilate was already afraid. His fear evidently began with his wife’s cryptic warning about her dream. Jesus didn’t confirm or deny that He was the Son of God. However, Pilate would certainly have been aware of all the miracles that Jesus was reported to have done.

**John 19:10-11a “Do you refuse to speak to me?” Pilate said. “Don’t you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?”**

Pilate’s conviction probably increased every time he spoke to Jesus. Here was Jesus shattered, bloody, and covered with spittle. Yet He wasn’t humiliated. He was unbowed.

**19:11 Jesus answered, “You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.**

Jesus replied that even though he was Governor, Pilate only thought that he had power over this situation. Pilate was only a small cog in God's eternal plan. Pilate hadn't sought this situation; the Father had put him in it.

**John 19:11b Therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin."**

Jesus was telling Pilate that before the Father there were two types of sin in view. There was the sin of Pilate and there was the sin of the Jewish leaders. Pilate was only guilty of the personal sin into which every human being is born. Jesus was about to die for those sins. The Jewish leaders were guilty of the unforgivable sin, which was the absolute rejection of the LORD's Messiah. There was no remedy for that sin.

**John 19:12a From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free,**

Pilate tried even harder to let Him go. During the remaining six years of Pilate's governorship what persecution there was of the Christians in Judea was without Roman participation. The first Christian martyrdoms of Stephen and of James did not take place until Caligula had replaced Pilate with Agrippa. It is also worth remembering that besides witnessing the miracles of the darkness and the earthquake, Pilate certainly must have seen through the later lies of the guards at Jesus' tomb who were bribed to lie. The only action taken against the Apostles during Pilate's remaining six years of governorship was recorded in Acts 5:18 where Peter and John were arrested by the Temple guards and thrown in the Temple jail, not the Roman prison.

**John 19:12b but the Jews kept shouting, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar."**

However, the Jews started threatening Pilate. They threatened, indirectly, to accuse Pilate himself of being an enemy of the state if he let Jesus go. At this Pilate began to lose his nerve. The Jews were threatening to complain to Caesar. The reigning Caesar at this time was the aging Tiberius. By 30 A.D. Tiberius Caesar had withdrawn to Capri and left the running of Roman affairs to his deputy Sejanus. Sejanus was notorious for imprisoning and killing prominent Romans and their families. He would then seize their wealth. This had the effect of terrorizing the Roman nobility. The last thing Pilate wanted was to have Sejanus' attention drawn to him and his family. He began to lose his nerve.

**John 19:13 When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha).**

Pilate brought Jesus back out to the crowd on the pavement in front of the judgment seat. The place was called Gabbatha which was from an Aramaic word for "back." This was probably because it was at the back of the Fortress Antonia (see picture on page 11).

**John 19:14a It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour.**

This is the first of three times that John makes it clear that Jesus was crucified on the day of Preparation, the 14<sup>th</sup> day of the Jewish month Nisan. The Last Supper had also been on the same Jewish day. Remember, Jewish days started just after twilight (about 6 PM). However, here John was referring to the hours since daylight which occurred at 6 AM that time of year. The sixth hour would have been the hour from 11 AM to 12 AM. Given what we know this was certainly very early in the sixth hour. He had been crucified by the end of the sixth hour.

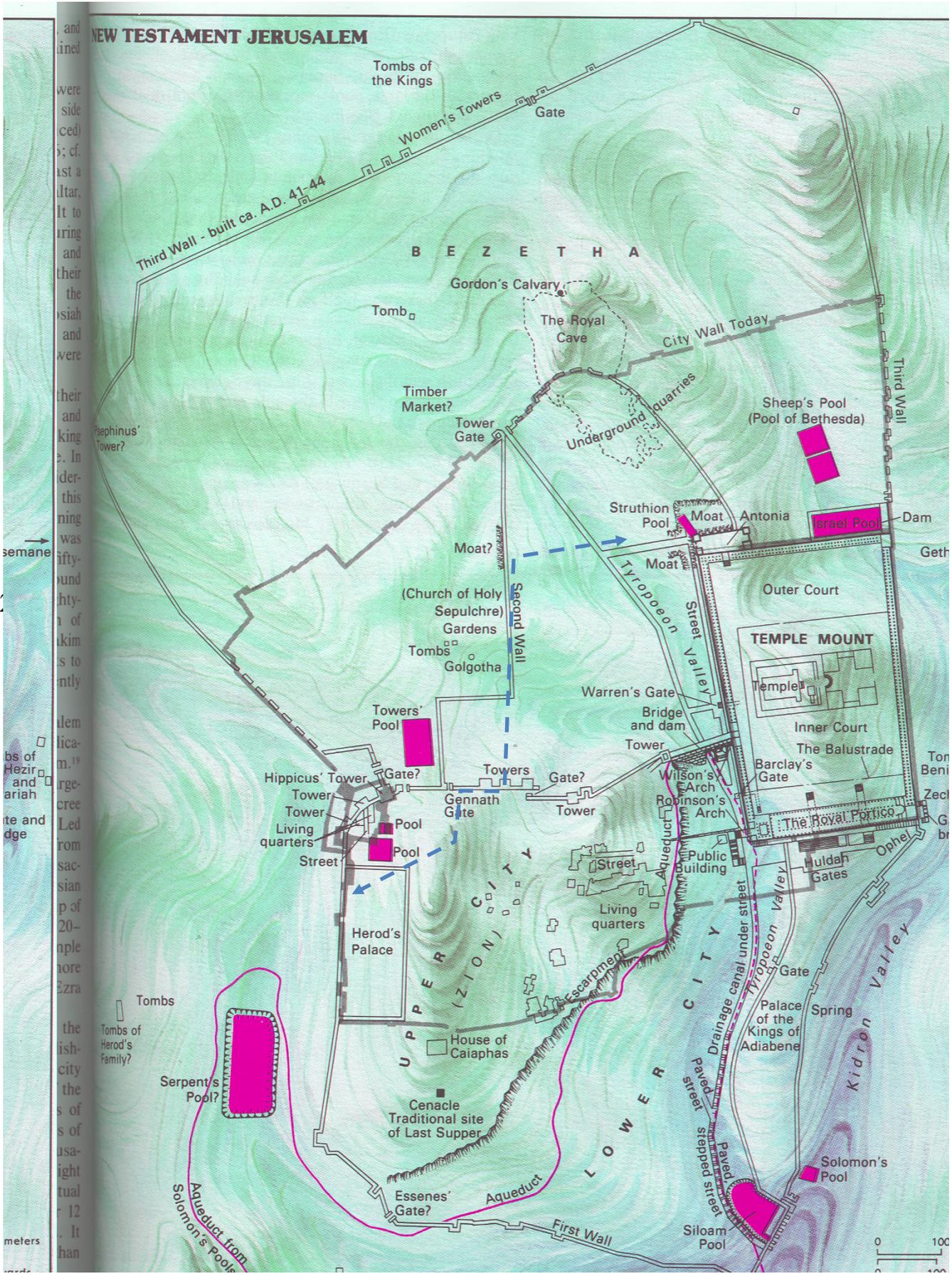
**John 19:14b-15** “**Here is your king,**”<sup>29</sup> **Pilate said to the Jews. But they shouted, “Take him away! Take him away! Crucify him!” “Shall I crucify your king?” Pilate asked. “We have no king but Caesar,” the chief-priests (*High Priests*) answered.**

The Gospels don’t detail what other efforts Pilate made which were encompassed in John’s statement “From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free.” However, finally He had brought Jesus out before the crowd again.

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<sup>29</sup> *It must have been about this time that Pilate dictated the sign to put above Jesus’ cross.*

**NEW TESTAMENT JERUSALEM**



**Route from Fortress Antonia to Herod's Palace and Back**