

Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study [www.intothyword.org](http://www.intothyword.org)

**General Idea:** Jesus now comes before Pontius Pilate the Roman governor. It was early morning before the Passover. Thus, Jesus' accusers did not show up to testify, but passed the responsibility onto Pilate due to their religious customs. If they did anything, they could not celebrate Passover. A crowd converged in the courtyard and Pilate addressed them; *what is your charge against this man?* They replied *we would not give Him to you unless He was guilty of something.* No real trial, no real charges, no real prosecution; just innuendos, ducking responsibility, and puffed-up, colossal pride running amok that all converged to condemn the most innocent of all. Pilate, who does not want to be trapped in Jewish customs and this eternal matter, seeks a way out by telling them to put Jesus on trial themselves. But, they wanted Jesus dead and did not have the power to do so, so they wanted Pilate to do something instead. Pilate, afraid that the crowds might get unruly, thus causing him trouble, placates while the Scriptures are being fulfilled. Pilate confronts Jesus with *are you the King of the Jews?* Jesus replied *yes; who is asking you or who are those who put you up to this?* Pilate retorts back, *I am not a Jew, I do not care; why, it is your own people who are doing this to you—not me!* Jesus then said, *my kingdom is not of this earth, if so, my followers would overtake you.* Pilate retorts back *so you are a king!* He did not realize Jesus was the King of kings, ruler of the universe and of all. Jesus said, *I have purpose and bring Truth to the world and if you know and love Truth you will know and love me.* Pilate responds in a post-modern fashion; *what is truth?* So, Pilate went out and proclaimed that Jesus was not guilty, but the crowds demanded that Jesus be crucified. Then Pilate said *I can let Him go by your tradition of letting a criminal go at this time.* The crowd said *no; release Barabbas!*

**Contexts and Background:** This passage shows us the perfect storm of irresponsibility, militant enforcers, jealous and conniving pious, fraud leaders, hostile crowds, and a common disdain for true Truth, all evil at its best. All this was at hand to go after Jesus. Religious leaders wanted Him dead and then they could say *it is the Passover, I can't be involved, it is Pilate's fault.* Pilate can say *it is not my doing; I am not even a Jew.* Luke records that Herod also passed the buck to Pilate and he blamed the religious leaders. It seemed to be everyone else's fault while all the instruments were in place for Jesus' execution—the Romans, the apparatuses, and a hot angry crowd that was blood-lusting for entertainment on this prime holiday. John was written last and does not record the details that the other three Gospels do, as each one focused on its emphasis (Luke 23:5-12).

### Commentary—Word and Phrase Meanings

- *Palace of the Roman governor / Headquarters / Praetorium / Hall of Judgment.* This would be the courtyard of the "Praetorium," the Fortress Antonia at the northwest side of the Temple mount area; it had ease of access to people and the Temple. It was also the governor's palace where Pontius Pilate resided when in town. This was also Herod the Great's old palace used by Roman dignitaries and prefects and used through the thirteenth century with Crusaders. It was a prime target to the Zealots as it was a place of hostility between Rome and Judea and the place of collaboration to end Jesus, which did not work. *Praetorium* refers to a general's tent, or a military camp command center. The priests at this time were aristocrats and a few words to a few people would bring a lot of people together on very short notice. They would know that Pilate would easily be swayed by crowds because of the fear of rioting and that would mean he would lose his very nice job. A lot of manipulation is going on here (Matt. 14:53-15:15; 27:27; Mark 15:1-16).
- *Early morning.* Meaning sunrise or first light. Roman officials were morning people. They met at first light and took care of business as soon as possible; they were done by noon, leaving the rest of the day for personal pleasures and pursuits, and the evenings were for rest and entertainment (Matt.27:1-2).
- *Ceremonial uncleanness / not be defiled.* Jews, including the priests and aristocrats, could not enter the palace during the seven days of the Passover because it was Gentile territory and they would be defiled and thus could not celebrate this prime religious holyday, which was like Christmas, Easter, and Thanksgiving all rolled into one with all one's relatives there too.

- *Passover*. Many liberal commentators say this is a biblical contradiction because Matthew states Jesus had already observed the Passover and Jewish tradition states that the Romans crucified Jesus on Passover. However at this time, the Passover was a part of the “Feast of Unleavened Bread” which was celebrated over a seven day period. The main meal eaten during this time usually came in the last two days; Jesus ate it one day and the priests either this day or the following night, depending on which Jewish faction you were a part of. They did not have calendars then so they would watch for the new moon. If you were rich, you did it each day; the poor did it just one day. The point here is Jesus becomes the Passover Lamb sacrificed for our sins (John 19:14-36).
- *Pilate*. Pontius Pilate (governed 26-36 A.D.) lived in Caesarea and was primarily there with a Roman detachment of soldiers to keep order during the Passover. The overcrowded and angry people had the potential of rioting over the oppression of losing their lands and livelihood (Mark 15:1; Luke 23:1; John 18:28).
- *Charges / what accusation*. Meaning the law that the accused was supposed to have violated, although a governor did not need an official charge or permission to inflict punishment if a crowd got out of hand, or from a non-Roman citizen to hear and judge a case. In Jesus’ case, no law was violated for which to be condemned. Romans were concerned with uprisings and treason, not philosophical thinking or even anti-social that the Jews saw Jesus as, as long as it did not become problematic to the public. A rhetorician (lawyer) could be hired but none were state-supplied like today. Pilate considered this was a religious matter only, and beneath him; however, a charge against Jesus that caused the Romans to take interest was that He claimed to be king. This would have been an act of rebellion. It was a capital offence and would be quickly dealt with as there could be no king except Caesar. However, Pilate saw through the pious, fraud leaders, and knew Jesus was innocent. Jesus even testified of His innocence to the Romans in saying His kingdom was not of this world. Thus, Pilate tried to please the people and religious leaders by first punishing Jesus, then trying to set Him free (Matt. 27:18; John 12:32-33; 18:36-37; Acts 18:14-15).
- *Criminal / malefactor*. Means evildoer. Pilate follows a Roman legal procedure called the “cognito,” which was basically an inquiry to determine what happened so that he could make the final decision, unless an official complaint went to Rome, which he would do all he could to stop. For Romans, teaching the truth was not a criminal offense, but it was for the Jewish leaders!
- *Judge him / take Him by your own law*. Pilate needed specific charges to officially conduct a proper trial; knowing Jesus’ popularity, he feared an uprising so he wanted it done quickly. The religious leaders were unable to carry out their death penalty until 70 A. D. Called the “right of the sword” by Roman law, it was probably to protect Roman citizens and its supporters and keep Rome at center point. Thus, Jesus could only be executed under Roman law; therefore, they had to scheme to involve the Romans and have them do their dirty work. The stonings, like the stoning of Steven, were done by mobs, and not officially sanctioned (Matt. 26:64; Luke 22: 69-71; 23:2; John 10:33; 19:7; Acts 7; 12:1-2).
- *Kind of death ...be fulfilled*. Meaning that traditional Jewish execution was by stoning, but Jesus was destined to be “lifted up,” as in crucifixion. Jesus knew what His mission was and He stayed focused in the midst of reprobates who thought they determined His destiny and death. The Romans, not the Jews, were responsible for Jesus’ execution, yet God was sovereign over the whole procedure even in the midst of the greatest injustice (Lev. 24:16; Deut 21:22-23; Isa. 53:7; Eccles. 3:7; John 3:14; 12:32-34; Acts 2:23; 4:27; 5:30; 6:8-7:60; 7:57-58; Gal. 3:13).
- *King of the Jews?* This was the charge the priests brought to incite the Romans because it constituted treason and a capital crime that they would have quickly quenched. But, this may have been a charge of sedition by the Jews; it was not by the Romans. This was done so that Rome would do their dirty work. It does not appear that Pilate was mocking Jesus, rather seeing if He was indeed guilty. Actually, the mocking came from the religious leaders! This was such an extreme insult to the Romans, they exiled Herod Antipus for asking for the title of king, even though his father, Herod the Great, was given the title by Augustus (Matt. 2:2; Luke 1:32-33; 19:38; 23:2; John 12:33; 21:19).

- *Not of this world.* The Romans, as well as most people, see “kingdom” as a political and military border and force. However, in God’s view it is so much more—submission to Him, not political ideologies. Although Jesus often taught on this, His hearers either did not grasp it, or more likely, took His words out of context and twisted them to fit their scheme (Dan. 2:44; 7:14-27; John 1:11; 3:3; 6:15; Acts 7:55; Col. 1:13; ).
- *I am / thou sayest a king.* Meaning, *because I am.* Jesus had the power and ability to take out all those who were causing Him harm. With a single thought, they would have been reduced to ashes and vapor or endured the same suffering as He did. Jesus chose to stick to the plan, God’s will, even though its price was beyond human comprehension (Ex. 12:5).
- *What is truth / you say?* Another sarcastic reply of cynicism, as the one to judge truth diminishes its relevance. *Truth* is one of the most important ideas of God. Truth does not matter to those whose pursuits are wicked or if it goes against someone’s worldview or for one who is overly skeptical or focused on just one thing like Pilate’s time schedule. Romans who were not pious or over philosophical saw any truth as relative to one’s view, idea, ideal, and/or school of thought or unable to be found, such as the then popular “Stoics,” the classic Greek thought and/or the other extreme, “Cynics,” who were anti-social. Most upper-class Romans in that time preferred the abstract with irony, ideas, and rhetorical devices, which Jesus saw as foolish. Thus, for them, there were no absolutes outside of Roman law. God sees truth, good character, integrity, and adherence to His precepts in His covenant to us; any divergence of these is a sin and not truth, and the ultimate Truth is who and what Christ does. So, Pilate saw Jesus as a philosopher with a view and did not consider it real truth or relevant to him; how wrong he was (John 1:7-17; 8:32; 14:6; 1 Cor. 4:8)!
- *Went out again to the Jews.* Since the Jews could not go into the palace, Pilate went outside to meet with them. Pilate saw Jesus as mostly harmless who did not deserve a death sentence, but we will see he will get coaxed into it in the next passage. Crowds are easily swayed as in those who hated Saul’s becoming King changing quickly to support of him (1 Sam. 11; Luke 23:4; John 19:4-6)!
- *To release to you one prisoner.* Ironically Pilate, who is a pagan invader, tries to release Jesus, while God’s chosen people, Jesus’ own, seek to kill Him! Romans preformed acts of amnesty from acquittal before a trial, or a pardon after. This was to show altruism and mercy so to captivate crowds, avoid further unrest and uprisings, and give just enough hope to the conquered people to motivate them not to feel defeated, thus helping spur on loyalty. The specifics were left to the local governor; this seems to be an act Pilate instigated after Passover (John 1:11).
- *No, not him!* The other Gospels record, *crucify him.* The crowd that welcomed Jesus, calling Him *Hosanna*, was the same crowd that now called for His execution (Matt. 21:1-11)!
- *Barabbas...rebellion / bandit / robber/ revolutionary.* Means “son of the father;” he was a heroic, insurrectionist rebel who sought to fight against Rome. This was another irony as Jesus is God the Father’s Son. Barabbas was a revolutionary figure who more depicted the people’s mindset of what a messiah ought to be. So, they favored him and not the true Messiah who came to save the lost. They sought a military leader, not a soul saver. Ironically he, not Jesus, is the exact kind of person Rome would execute. The people preferred a revolutionary son of the political will, not the Son who comes after the will of the heart that was so much needed then as it is now. (Jer. 38:1-6; Matt. 21:13; 27:38; Luke 10:30; 23:19; John 18:40; 2 Cor. 11:26)!

## Devotional Thoughts and Applications

Pontius Pilate states, *what is it you have done? And what is truth? And judge him by your own law*, all defense mechanisms to avoid responsibility. He, like many people today, was a man in a hurry and not concerned with truth, just his own personal matters. He was a bit tolerant for the sideshow put on by the religious leaders, perhaps even perplexed and struck by Jesus, but not enough to go beyond his comfort zone and act truthfully with justice and mercy, something Jesus will do for us. Jesus would even forgive Pilate if he did right, just as Jesus forgives all those who seek to condemn Him. How many of us miss opportunities because we take hold of our desires, scheme and seek ourselves regardless of

consequences, and refuse to deal with our sin, so sin takes us over. How often we see those who are responsible for justice overlook justice and guilt. If we do not deal with sin, it will take us out, as sin produces all of the disasters of life.

**The Essential Inductive Questions** (for more Inductive questions see Inductive Bible Study):

1. What does this passage say?
2. What does this passage mean?
3. What is God telling me?
4. How am I encouraged and strengthened?
5. Is there sin in my life for which confession and repentance is needed?
6. How can I be changed, so I can learn and grow?
7. What is in the way of these precepts affecting me? What is in the way of my listening to God?
8. How does this apply to me? What will I do about it?
9. What can I model and teach?
10. What does God want me to share with someone?

**Additional Questions:**

1. Have you ever been accused of doing something you did not do and you got in big trouble for it? How did you feel? What do you think about the fact that Jesus takes your place of punishment?
2. How and why are *Truth* and absolutes the most important ideas of God? For you, what is truth? For God, what is truth? For the world, what is truth? Does truth matter? Why do some people have such a hard time finding truth?
3. How have you seen pride run amok to condemn innocent people or just do general mayhem?
4. How do you and your church “testify to the truth?” How do you and your church “listen to” Jesus? What blocks this? How can you make this better?
5. This passage tells us that Jesus is *King of the Jews*. How then is he King over you? What is the charge people make today against Jesus?
6. How is it ironic that for pagan Romans, teaching the truth was not a criminal offense but for the Jewish leaders, it was? How do people do this today?
7. Why did the religious leaders scheme and take Jesus’ words out of context and twist them? How and why do people, even Christians, do this today?
8. How does it make you feel that God was sovereign over the whole procedure even in the midst of the greatest injustice?
9. Why do you suppose the people then favored a criminal and not the true Messiah who came to save the lost? How and why do people do this today?
10. Have you ever missed opportunities because you took hold of your desires and yourself regardless of anything else? What were the consequences of refusing to deal with your sin?
11. If you do not deal with sin, how will it take you out? How does sin produce all of the disasters of life?
12. Jesus tells us that His *purpose* is to *bring Truth to the world and if you know and love Truth you will know and love me*. So, how do you show that love? How does His purpose become yours?