

Luke 23:1-2

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The Priests bring and accuse Jesus to Pilate.

Not permitted to execute Jesus themselves, the Sanhedrin brings Jesus to Pilate early in the morning for His Roman or Civil Trial. They present three charges against Jesus: He is misleading the nation; He teaches people to not pay their taxes; He claims to be a king. The third accusation is the most serious and the one that the trial chiefly pursues.

This event is part of the first phase of Jesus's Civil Trial. It is known as Jesus's Arraignment before Pilate.

The parallel Gospel accounts of this event are found in Matthew 27:2; Mark 15:1; and John 18:28-32.

These events are the beginning of the first phase of Jesus's civil trial. The first phase of Jesus's civil trial is called "Jesus's Arraignment before Pilate." This scripture details the charges against Jesus which the chief priests and elders presented to the Roman governor, *Pilate*, as recorded by Luke. The happenings of this account took place outside the Praetorium (likely Herod's Palace which was built on the western side of the upper city along the city wall). This event happened while it was early (John 18:28) in the morning (likely before 7:00am). According to the Jewish calendar, the date was probably Nisan 15—the first day of Unleavened Bread. By Roman reckoning the day was probably a Friday.

To learn more about the timing and sequencing of these events, see The Bible Says' "[Timeline: Jesus's Final 24 Hours.](#)"

After the Jewish religious leaders officially condemned Jesus to die for blasphemy at a sunrise trial (Matthew 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71), *the whole body of them got up and brought Him before Pilate* (v 1) to begin His civil or Roman trial.

This marks the beginning of Jesus's Civil trial. Just as His religious prosecution took place over three trials, so will His civil or political trial occur over the course of three distinct phases.

The three phases of Jesus's political trials under the Roman authorities were:

1. Jesus's Arraignment before Pilate
(Matthew 27:1-2, 11-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-5; John 18:28-38)
2. Jesus's Audience before Herod Antipas
(Luke 23:6-12)

3. Pilate's Judgment
(Matthew 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:38-19:16)

Earlier that Night...

It had already been an eventful night.

When Judas reported to the chief priests that Jesus had identified him as His betrayer and had knowledge of their plot to murder *Him*, the priests and elders scrambled to take action. *They* requested and received a Roman Cohort and sent their temple guard who was led by Judas to locate and identify Jesus. Judas led them to the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus submitted to arrest sometime after midnight (Matthew 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-51; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:1-11).

Jesus was immediately brought to the house of Annas, the former high priest, who interrogated *Him* in search of something that could be used to charge and condemn *Him* in Jesus's preliminary trial (John 18:12-13, 19-23). Annas found nothing. This was Jesus's first of three religious trials.

Meanwhile, the chief priests and elders of the ruling Jewish body, the Sanhedrin Council, had been summoned from their homes that *Passover* night (v 28b) to the home of Caiaphas, the sitting high priest, to hold an illegal night-time tribunal discovering and/or manufacturing the charges that would condemn Jesus to death. Once Jesus was brought here from Annas (John 18:24), His second religious trial began (Matthew 26:57-68; Mark 14:53-65).

After many false witnesses failed to substantiate a charge, Caiaphas intervened. He illegally ordered Jesus to answer whether or not *He* was the Christ, the Son of God. When Jesus answered in the affirmative, Caiaphas blasphemously tore his priestly robes, in a hypocritical display of outrage and asked the Council to convict and condemn *Him* at once. Jesus was condemned. The vote was unanimous (Mark 14:64) which according to Jewish law means Jesus should have been acquitted. Further, the priests greatly mocked and physically abused *Him*, again in violation of Jewish law.

Then as the sun was coming up, the Sanhedrin, with Caiaphas presiding, held Jesus's third trial (Matthew 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71) in their Council chamber located on the temple grounds. *They* speedily recreated Jesus's "crime" of blasphemy and officially condemned *Him* to death. This was a coverup, since night-time trials were illegal.

To learn more about the illegality of Jesus's religious prosecution, see The Bible Says article: ["Jesus's Trial, Part 1. The Laws Broken By The Religious Leaders: A Summary."](#)

But the Jews had no authority "to put anyone to death" under Roman rule (John 18:31). Therefore, *they* had to bring Jesus to the Roman governor *Pilate* to have *Him* tried, condemned, and executed.

During the course of Jesus's first two religious trials, Peter denied Jesus three times (Matthew 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-71; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-18; 25-27). Sometime around Jesus's third religious trial, Judas felt remorse over his betrayal and returned the silver to the priests in the temple. When *they* refused to receive it, Judas ran away and hanged himself (Matthew 27:3-5). Judas's remorse and suicide likely jeopardized the religious leaders' case against Jesus in His Roman trials—(more on this later).

To learn more about Jesus's religious trials, see The Bible Says article, "[Jesus's Trial, Part 3. The 5 Stages Of Jesus's Trial.](#)"

The Praetorium, Pilate, and the Religious Leaders

As mentioned above, this event is known as "Jesus's Arraignment before Pilate."

- John details the beginning and middle of the first phase of Jesus's political trial (John 18:28-38a), and he summarizes the end (John 18:38b).
- Matthew and Mark focus on the middle and end of this first phase (Matthew 27:11-14 and Mark 15:1-5).
- Luke summarizes the entire first phase (Luke 23:1-7).

Reading all four Gospel accounts together gives us a complete picture of what happened during this phase of Jesus's civil trial.

Luke begins his account of the first phase of Jesus's civil trial by establishing the scene:

Then the whole body of them got up and brought Him before Pilate (v 1).

The term the *whole body* refers to the Sanhedrin Council consisting of chief priests (leading Sadducees) and elders (leading Pharisees). This Council was under the direction of Caiaphas, the high priest. *The whole body of the Sanhedrin got up* from their Council Chamber where they had just condemned Jesus to death on the religious charge of blasphemy (Matthew 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71).

They brought Jesus before Pilate, the Roman Governor of Judea to judge and condemn *Him* to death.

Pilate was appointed under Tiberius Caesar to be the Roman governor of the imperial province of Judea in 26 A.D. and served until 36 A.D. Jesus's trial likely took place around the midpoint of his tenure. *Pilate* was greatly disliked by the Jews. According to the Jewish historian, Josephus, *Pilate* had a habit of provoking Jews by flaunting Rome's supremacy and pouring salt on Jewish sensibilities (Josephus. Antiquities of the Jews XVIII. 3.1-2).

Pilate was known to be intolerant, bloody, and cruel. For instance, elsewhere in Luke's Gospel Jesus discusses an incident where *Pilate* had executed some Galileans and mixed their blood with their sacrifices (Luke 13:1-2). Later, *Pilate* will be recalled to Rome and relieved of his appointment by the Emperor after the Samaritans complain about how he slaughtered their

worshippers on Mount Gerizim (Josephus. Antiquities of the Jews XVIII. 4.1-2). History shows Pontius *Pilate* to be the opposite of a merciful or sympathetic man. He had all the qualities of an insecure, overbearing, appointed-politician who was prone to use excessive violence to get his way.

Pilate's main residence as the Roman governor of Judea was in the town of Caesarea on the Mediterranean coast. Even though Jerusalem was the cultural and religious capital of Judea, Caesarea was the Roman capital, and its location was optimal for communicating quickly with Rome. But as governor, *Pilate's* duties necessitated that he visit Jerusalem from time to time. The Jewish Passover was apparently one of those occasions.

John identifies the place to which they brought Jesus as “the Praetorium” (John 18:28).

The Praetorium was the Jerusalem residence and office of the Roman governor of Judea. The Praetorium was located in the western side of the upper city near the city wall. Inside was a luxurious fortress-palace built by Herod the Great. Because it was constructed under Herod, the Praetorium is sometimes called “Herod’s Palace.” Its judgment hall, with its paved court and judgment seat, was built on the outer side of the city wall and was likely canopied. The Praetorium can be visited at the time this commentary is written (2023).

Jesus’s Civil Trial Begins

John described how the trial was almost tossed out in its opening moments.

When *Pilate* began the trial asking the prosecution to state their charges and present their evidence, the chief priests balked and said the reason *they* were here was because Jesus was an evildoer (John 18:29-30). *Pilate* reminded them that without legitimate charges and solid evidence there would be no Roman conviction: “Take Him yourselves, and judge Him according to your law” (John 18:31).

A possible reason that the chief priests lacked evidence, and were therefore reluctant to begin with a charge was because *they* may have intended Judas, Jesus’s disciple who betrayed *Him* to them (Matthew 26:14-16; Luke 22:47-48), to be their star witness. But Judas was dead. Having regretted his betrayal of an innocent Man, Judas returned the blood-money, and hanged himself (Matthew 27:3-5). Without Judas’s testimony to provide evidence to support their charges, the Sanhedrin’s civil case against Jesus in *Pilate's* court was thin.

With the trial about to be tossed, the chief priests reminded *Pilate* that Rome would not permit them to try and punish Jesus under their law because only Rome could put someone to death. (John 18:31). It seems *Pilate* gave them an opportunity to start over.

This time, Luke records what crime *they* charged Jesus with in answer to *Pilate*.

And they began to accuse Him, saying, “We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King” (v 2).

The religious leaders accused Jesus of three things. Conspicuously, none of them involved blasphemy, the religious charge they manufactured and used to illegally condemn *Him* in His religious trial (Matthew 26:65-66, 27:1; Mark 14:64; 15:1a; Luke 22:66-71).

Apparently in their hatred of Jesus, the chief priests and elders conveniently and dishonestly twisted their much-strained and highly-illegal religious conviction into something different for the sake of having Jesus killed. But this dishonest sleight of hand was among the least of their crimes.

To see a more complete list of the laws the religious leaders violated in their prosecution of Jesus, see the Bible Says' article, "[Jesus's Trial, Part 1. The Laws Broken By The Religious Leaders: A Summary.](#)"

The first thing *they* accused Jesus of was: *We found this man misleading our nation.*

This charge amounted to teaching Jewish heresies that would unsettle the public order and stir up riots. *They* were claiming Jesus was a disturber of the peace and a nuisance to Roman stability in the province. Depending on how disruptive or bothersome Jesus was, this crime could carry the penalty of death.

The second thing *they* accused Jesus of was: *forbidding Jews to pay their taxes to Caesar.*

This charge was a lie. Jesus never taught this. Recall how when the pro-Roman Herodians and the pro-Jewish Pharisees tried to trick Jesus in the temple when they asked Him whether or not it was lawful *to pay taxes to Caesar* (Matthew 22:15-17):

“But Jesus perceived their malice, and said, ‘Why are you testing Me, you hypocrites? Show Me the coin used for the poll-tax.’ And they brought Him a denarius. And He said to them, ‘Whose likeness and inscription is this?’ They said to Him, ‘Caesar’s.’ Then He said to them, ‘Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s.’”
(Matthew 22:18-21)

It seems their second accusation was grounded in the answer *they* wished Jesus had given to their malicious question rather than the answer Jesus actually gave. Jesus taught people to pay Roman *taxes*. But His accusers falsely claimed He *forbid* His followers from paying *taxes*, thus encouraging them to reject Roman authority and disregard the law. This charge was the charge of sedition and would likely warrant the death penalty.

The third thing they accused Jesus of was: *He is saying that He Himself is Christ, a King.*”

This charge was the most serious, and it was one *Pilate*, as a responsible Roman governor, had to investigate. It was the charge of insurrection. *Pilate* was sensitive of the Jewish provinces' bristling under the Roman yoke and their zealous streak of militant nationalism. He was likely cognizant of the Jewish fever for a *Christ* (Messiah) to liberate them from Roman rule and lead them.

But Jesus's Jewish accusers made sure that *Pilate* was keenly alert that anyone who claimed to be this Messiah was claiming to be *a King* and rival to the Caesar as the supreme authority. Anyone found guilty of this would be summarily executed.

With these three accusations brought against Jesus, especially the charge of insurrection, *Pilate* was obliged to investigate. But without a witness or any evidence to support these accusations (because Judas was dead), *Pilate* had to interview Jesus himself.

That is precisely what *Pilate* did (Matthew 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3; John 18:33-38). Upon completion of the interview, *Pilate* declared Jesus to be innocent (John 18:38).

We will look at Pilate's interview and the remainder of the first phase of Jesus's religious trial as described by Luke in the next section: Luke 23:3-7.

Biblical Text

¹ Then the whole body of them got up and brought Him before Pilate. ² And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King."