

Luke 23:8-12

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Herod Antipas judges Jesus.

When Jesus first arrives in Herod Antipas's court, the tetrarch is greatly pleased because he has been wanting to see the miracle worker perform a sign. When Jesus remains completely silent, Herod's demeanor shifts to contempt and he leads his court in mocking Jesus, dressing him in a fine robe as a joke, and then returns Him to Pilate.

This is the second phase of Jesus's Civil Trial. It is known as Jesus's Audience before Herod Antipas.

There are no apparent parallels for this event in the other Gospels.

This passage is the Bible's sole account of the second phase of *Jesus's* civil trial, called "Jesus's Audience before Herod Antipas."

The happenings of this account took place at *Herod Antipas's* palace located in the center of Jerusalem. It was halfway between the Praetorium, located on the western side of Jerusalem, and the Temple, located on the eastern side of the city. This event happened while it was still morning, most likely sometime between 7:00 and 8:00am. (*Jesus* is on the cross at 9:00am, according to Mark 15:24). According to the Jewish calendar the date was likely 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](#)."

Jesus's Civil Trial occurred over the course of three phases.

1. *Jesus's* Arraignment before Pilate
(Matthew 27:1-2, 11-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-7; John 18:28-38)
2. *Jesus's* Audience before Herod Antipas
(Luke 23:8-12)
3. Pilate's Judgment
(Matthew 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:38-19:16)

The first phase of *Jesus's* civil trial ended when the Roman governor of Judea, *Pilate*, sent *Jesus* to Herod Antipas, the ruler of the district of Galilee, where *Jesus* was from (Luke 23:7).

Even though *Pilate* was vested with more authority, he did not want to make a decision in *Jesus's* civil trial.

A Summary of the First Phase of Jesus’s Civil Trial.

When *the chief priests* and elders first asserted their charges against Jesus (Luke 23:2) *Pilate* personally investigated them (John 18:33a)—especially the charge of insurrection. In John’s extended account of Pilate’s investigative interview of Jesus, the Roman governor asked the defendant more than once, “Are You the King of the Jews?” (John 18:33b and John 18:37). Luke summarized *Jesus’s* answer: “It is as you say” (Luke 23:3).

Pilate then went out and announced to the religious leaders who were hungry for His death, “I find no guilt in this man” (Luke 23:4). *The chief priests*, elders, and *scribes* (religious lawyers) railed more accusations against *Him* and vented their angry disappointment. *Jesus* said nothing (Matthew 27:12). *Pilate* marveled at His silent composure (Matthew 23:13-14; Mark 15:4-5), perhaps wishing *Jesus* would speak and say something that he could use to either condemn Him or humiliate His accusers so the governor could pin the acquittal on them.

But amidst the chaotic scene, Pilate heard an accuser mention that Jesus was from Galilee (Luke 23:5-6a). Pilate asked if this was true (Luke 26:6b). Once confirmed, the Roman politician, hesitant to give an untrue or unfavorable verdict to the priests, happily ridded himself of responsibility and sent *Jesus* to *Herod Antipas*, the ruler of Galilee, who was conveniently also in Jerusalem at that time of Passover (Luke 23:7).

Herod the Tetrarch of Galilee, the Religious Leaders, and Jesus

Herod Antipas, the authority *Pilate* sent *Jesus* to be judged by, was the son of Herod the Great (builder), the same ruler who had tried to execute *Jesus* when Christ was first born (Matthew 2:16). *Herod Antipas* was the same ruler who beheaded John the Baptizer, *Jesus’s* cousin (Matthew 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29; Luke 9:9). *Herod Antipas* was a puppet ruler in Galilee. When *his* father died, the Kingdom of Judea was divided into fourths—the quarter which he inherited was Galilee—which made *Herod Antipas* the “tetrarch” (ruler of a fourth) of Galilee.

Like *his* family, *Herod* was partially Jewish, but he lived like a pagan Roman. In the eyes of the elders and *scribes* (the party of the Pharisees) the Herodians represented the worst moral decay that could befall a Jew—to live like Gentiles. But now they had to go to this despised tetrarch in hopes that he would do to *Jesus* what he did to John the Baptist—execute Him. Normally, paying a visit to *Herod* might have seemed like an abomination to a legalistic and self-righteous Pharisee, and an uncomfortable visit for a self-respecting Sadducee. But it was something both Jewish sects were now eager to do if it meant getting rid of this radical rabbi—*Jesus*.

Herod meets the King

Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him (v 8).

Luke writes that *Herod*, unlike Pilate, was thrilled to see *Jesus*. *Herod was hoping to see some miracle or sign performed by Jesus*. He wanted to be entertained, not called to duty. He was not

especially interested in investigating charges so much as being amazed. Luke mentions that *Herod had wanted to see Jesus for a long time because of the things he had been hearing about Him*. This goes back to about a year earlier when as the tetrarch of Galilee, *Herod* began *hearing* reports of *Jesus's* miracles. These reports reached *Herod's* ear soon after *Herod had* reluctantly executed John the Baptist (Matthew 14:1). *Herod* even speculated that Jesus was John the Baptist come back to life, perhaps because of a rumor saying the same thing (Matthew 14:2):

“Now Herod the tetrarch heard of all that was happening; and he was greatly perplexed, because it was said by some that John had risen from the dead, and by some that Elijah had appeared, and by others that one of the prophets of old had risen again. Herod said, ‘I myself had John beheaded; but who is this man about whom I hear such things?’ And he kept trying to see Him.” (Luke 9:7-9)

Getting to see *Jesus* in person was the opportunity *Herod was hoping for*. But the immoral tetrarch would be greatly disappointed.

And he (Herod) questioned Him (Jesus) at some length; but He (Jesus) answered him nothing (v 9).

Luke's expression describing how *Herod questioned Jesus—at some length*—literally means, “in many words” in the Greek text. The idea is that *Herod* was very talkative and excited as *he questioned Jesus*.

Luke's account suggests *Herod's* investigation into the charges against *Jesus* was unprofessional. This is the same ruler who once offered “up to half my kingdom” for a strip tease (Mark 9:23). He appears to have been inclined to let *Jesus* go if only *He* would perform *some sign* or miracle for him. *Herod's* offer to *Jesus* might have been similar to Satan's temptations in the wilderness, when the devil told *Jesus* to use His power for Himself and to submit to his authority (Luke 4:2-3, 5-7, 9-11). But *Jesus* did not come to serve Himself; *He* came to serve others and follow His Father's will, even unto death (Matthew 20:28; Luke 22:42; John 13:13; Philippians 2:8).

While *Herod* was talkative and *questioned Jesus at some length*, *his* prisoner was mute. It could be that *Jesus* was doing what His Jewish accusers should have been doing as well—refusing to interact with the defiled, unrepentant, pagan-living Herod.

Jesus refused to speak to the man who had beheaded John the Baptist, His cousin and prophetic forerunner. *He answered him nothing*. A few months or weeks earlier while ministering in villages on His way to Jerusalem, *Jesus* was warned, perhaps as a trick to scare *Him* off, to “Go away for Herod wants to kill you” (Luke 13:31). *Jesus* sternly replied to that warning by calling *Herod* “a fox” before predicting His death and resurrection in Jerusalem (Luke 13:32-33). Now *Jesus* would not speak to the fox as His life was on trial in Jerusalem.

Once again, *Jesus's* silence before His accusers (Matthew 26:63; 27:12-14) was a fulfillment of what Isaiah prophesied of the Messiah's silence before His oppressors (Isaiah 53:7).

As Herod questioned Jesus at length—asking Him to perform some sign; then about the charges—he appears to have become disappointed and irritated that Jesus answered Him nothing.

Meanwhile, *the chief priests and the scribes who were standing there were accusing Him vehemently* (v 10).

The Greek word translated as *vehemently* means “forcibly” or “loudly.” The Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Old Testament—uses this word to describe the mighty noise and blowing of trumpets as Israel marched toward Jericho (Joshua 6:9). The idea is that *Herod’s* court grew extremely noisy with angry emotions. This commotion likely had an overpowering effect on the excitable tetrarch, and turned *Herod* against *Jesus*.

The Mockery of the Messiah

Since *Jesus answered him nothing* and would not perform a miracle to entertain *him*, as *Herod was hoping to see*, the tetrarch would find other ways for *Jesus* to amuse *him*.

And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe (v 11).

This is the third mocking of *Jesus*. The first was by Judas at the time of His betrayal when he warmly greeted *Jesus* and began to kiss Him (Matthew 26:49). The second mockery was by His accusers after His second trial (Matthew 26:67-68; Mark 14:65; Luke 22:63-65). *Jesus* will also be mocked by the Roman soldiers (Matthew 27:27-31); and those passing by His crucifixion (Matthew 27:39-40); and the criminals *He* was crucified with (Matthew 27:44). Before *He* dies, a representative of every category of people will have mocked *Him*—His disciple, the Sadducees (chief priests), the Pharisees (elders), the scribes, the Herodians, the Romans, ordinary Jews, and even criminals executed alongside *Jesus*.

Luke is clear that *Herod* takes the lead in the *mocking* of *Jesus*. *Herod’s* soldiers join in the fun with their tetrarch. *Herod’s* fascination of *Jesus* quickly turned to *contempt*. *And Herod with his soldiers were treating Jesus* accordingly. They were also *mocking Him*. They were amusing themselves at *Jesus’s* expense. Since *Jesus* was accused of claiming to be an anointed king (Luke 23:2), they teased *Him* as though *He* were “royalty.” They *dressed Him in a gorgeous robe*.

The Greek language for the expression that is translated as *gorgeous robe* clearly indicates that it was brilliantly white. Within the cultural context, it was not the *robe* of a presiding king, but rather it was the adornment of an heir or someone who was in line to become king. It seems they were teasing *Jesus* that *He* was only a pretender, and not a real king. Within the context of the trial, it seems *Herod* did not take *Jesus* seriously. Rather than regarding *Him* as the Messiah, he was regarded as a hilarious joke.

As *Jesus* would later be scourged and beaten (Matthew 26:26), His brilliantly white robe would have become blood soaked and turn to scarlet red (Matthew 26:28). The imagery of the white robe is one of innocence. The imagery of its becoming blood-stained is one of

substitutionary sacrifice and atonement. This robe of multiple colors—white and scarlet—is an allusion to Joseph, the favored son of Israel. Joseph prefigured *Jesus* as a Messiah who was a suffering servant. Like *Jesus*'s *gorgeous robe*, Joseph had his coat of many colors stained red by blood (Genesis 37:31).

Jesus's brilliantly white robe was humiliating. His beaten face and plucked beard (Isaiah 50:6; Matthew 26:63-65; Mark 14:65; Luke 22:63-65) made *Jesus* look all the more ridiculous as *Herod*'s court laughed and *the chief priest and scribes standing there* slandered *Him*.

Jesus the Messiah's ridiculous appearance was also foretold by the prophet Isaiah:

“He has no stately form or majesty
That we should look upon Him,
Nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him.
He was despised and forsaken of men.”
(Isaiah 53:2b-3a)

For His part, *Jesus* was able to withstand this cruel mockery because *He* trusted God, His Father, absolutely:

“For the Lord God helps Me,
Therefore, I am not disgraced;
Therefore, I have set My face like flint,
And I know that I will not be ashamed.
He who vindicates Me is near.”
(Isaiah 50:7-8a)

Jesus looked beyond His present painful and humiliating circumstances to the reward and joy set before *Him* by His Father. In comparison to what awaited *Him* for His faithfulness, *Jesus* despised and thought little of their shame. The author of Hebrews exhorts his fellow believers to fix their eyes on *Jesus* and emulate Christ's example:

“Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”
(Hebrews 12:2)

After *Herod* and his soldiers had mocked *Jesus*, the tetrarch sent *Him* back to *Pilate* dressed in the *gorgeous robe*, apparently intending to mock *Him*. *Pilate* would correctly understand *Herod*'s implied verdict: *Jesus* was innocent of the charges (Luke 23:15).

Herod's dismissal of *Jesus*, returning *Him* to *Pilate*, concluded the second phase of *Jesus*'s political trial. With its implied verdict of not guilty, it should have been the final phase. But as we will see, *the chief priests, elders, and scribes*, who hated and were threatened by *Jesus* would not accept this outcome, and will pressure *Pilate* in continuing the trial until they get the outcome they demanded—“Crucify Him!” (Luke 23:21, 23-24).

Luke's Commentary

After narrating the events of the second phase of *Jesus's* political trial, Luke makes an interesting remark,

Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been enemies with each other (v 12).

Pilate, the Roman governor, and Herod, the Roman-approved tetrarch of Galilee, had been rivals to *each other* before this moment. From reading accounts of the ancient historian, Josephus, it seems that their animosity may have initially arisen shortly after *Pilate's* appointment as the governor of Judea a few years before. *Pilate* ordered his guard to enter the holy city Jerusalem with flags bearing Caesar's likeness, in violation of the first two of the ten commandments: 1, "You shall have no other Gods before Me" and 2, "You shall not make for yourself an idol or any likeness..." (Exodus 20:2-4; Deuteronomy 5:7-9).

Because Caesar claimed to be regarded as a god, the standards bearing his likeness unfurling in Jerusalem would have greatly upset the Jews. *Herod*, who had spent his life in Judea, understood the trouble this would cause the pro-Roman Herodians, and asked the new governor to take them down. *Pilate* refused. Then *Herod* complained of *Pilate's* foolish behavior and disrespectful insolence to the Senate in Rome (Josephus Antiquities XVIII.3). From then on, the rulers resented one another.

But Luke points out that these political enemies *became friends* over the death of *Jesus* on *that very day*.

Herod was likely honored by *Pilate's* deferment to let him judge *Jesus*, and the tetrarch was *very glad* to have an opportunity to see the famous miracle worker *he had wanted to see for a long time*.

Pilate, it seems, was also amused by *Herod's* joke, and the implicit agreement with his assessment.

This ended the second phase of *Jesus's* civil trial. It was: "Jesus's Audience before Herod Antipas" (Luke 23:8-12).

The third phase of *Jesus's* civil trial takes place back in the Praetorium. It is called "Pilate's Judgment" (Matthew 27:15-26; Mark 15:6-15; Luke 23:13-25; John 18:38-19:16).

The next section of scripture describes how the third and final phase of *Jesus's* political trial began (Luke 23:13-16).

Biblical Text

⁸ Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed

by Him.⁹ And he questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing.¹⁰ And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently.¹¹ And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate.¹² Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been enemies with each other.