

# Matthew 27:11-14

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/matt/matt-27/matthew-2711-14/>

*Pilate's First Interview with Jesus and his First Declaration of Innocence*

*Not permitted to execute Jesus themselves, the Sanhedrin brings Jesus to Pilate early in the morning for His Roman (or Civil) Trial. Pilate investigates whether or not Jesus is guilty of insurrection. When Pilate asks Him, if He is the King of the Jews, Jesus answers "It is as you say." The Jews continue to press charges, which Jesus does not respond to. Jesus's silence amazes Pilate.*

*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 Mark 15:2-5, Luke 23:1-5, and John 18:29-38.

After describing Judas' remorse for betraying *Jesus* and his suicide after *the priests* refused to help him (Matthew 27:3-5), and explaining how *the priests'* use of the returned blood money fulfilled terrible prophecies in Jeremiah (Matthew 27:6-10), Matthew returns to his main subject which is the prosecution of *Jesus*.

This passage is a concise account 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 describes Pilate's interview with Jesus and the aftermath of Pilate declaring Jesus not guilty (the first time) as summarized by Matthew. The happenings of this account took place inside and 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 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.](#)"

After the Jewish religious leaders hastily and officially condemned *Jesus* to die for blasphemy at a cover-up sunrise trial (Matthew 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71), "they bound Him, and led Him away and delivered Him to Pilate the governor" (Matthew 27:2).

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 quickly. *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 (Matthew 26:47-56; Mark 14:43-51; Luke 22:47-53; John 18:1-11) sometime after midnight.

*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 called 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 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, which according to Jewish law means that *Jesus* should have been acquitted (Mark 14:64). Then *they* also illegally mocked and physically abused *Him*.

As the sun was coming up, *the chief priests and elders*, with Caiaphas presiding, held *Jesus's* third trial (Matthew 27:1; Mark 15:1; Luke 22:66-71). This took place in their Council chamber located on the temple grounds. *They* speedily recreated *Jesus's* illegal night-time trial that resulted in the crime of blasphemy and officially condemned *Him* to death.

However, 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 the time of *Jesus*'s third 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 jeopardized the religious leaders' case against *Jesus* in His Roman trials—(more on this later).

To learn more about the *Jesus*'s religious trials, see the Bible Says article,

[“Jesus’s Trial, Part 3. The 5 Stages of Jesus’s Trial.”](#)

### **The Praetorium and Pilate**

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.

John identifies the place they brought *Jesus* to 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 along 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).

*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 also known to be intolerant, bloody, and cruel. For instance, elsewhere in Luke’s Gospel, *Jesus* discusses a recent incident where *Pilate* 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 complained 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 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.

### **The Jews Accused Jesus Before Pilate**

*Jesus's* Civil Trial began with the Jews bringing *Jesus* from His cover-up sunrise trial under the supervision of Caiaphas at the temple. There *He* was condemned to death on the religious charge of blasphemy. Then the Jews delivered *Jesus* to *Pilate at the Praetorium* for His civil trial before Rome (Matthew 27:1-2; Mark 15:15; Luke 22:66-23:1; John 18:28).

*Pilate* opened the civil trial asking *the chief priests and elders* to state their accusation and evidence against *Jesus* (John 18:29). The answer *they* gave was unacceptable (John 18:30). The reason their initial accusation was insufficient was possibly because their star witness (Judas) had recently hanged himself (Matthew 27:3-5). At that point *Pilate* seemed ready to toss the case telling them to “judge Him according to your own laws” (John 18:31a).

*The chief priests* explained that *they* were unable to judge *Him* because Rome did not permit them to put anyone to death (John 18:32b). *Pilate* seems to have then allowed them to resubmit their case. At this point, *the chief priest and elders* accused *Jesus* of three things:

1. “We found this man misleading our nation...” (Luke 23:2a)
2. “and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar...” (Luke 23:2b)
3. “and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King” (Luke 23:2c).

The first charge was that *Jesus* was a public nuisance because His teachings upset the status quo and threatened the fragile stability and order Rome desired. Depending on the severity of this crime, the penalty under Roman law could be death.

The second charge they stated was that *Jesus* was instructing *the people* to rebel against Roman authority by not paying their taxes. This charge was a total lie—see Matthew 22:15-22. It was a charge of sedition and likely carried the death penalty under Roman law.

The third charge was that *Jesus* was challenging Caesar's political authority as the sovereign ruler of Judea. It was the charge of insurrection, and it was most serious. Under Roman law the penalty for insurrection was death.

### **Pilate Interviews Jesus**

Such charges, especially the third one, required the Roman *governor* to take them seriously. But without a witness (like *Jesus*'s disciple Judas) to testify, *Pilate* would have to interview *Jesus* personally. All four Gospels record that this is precisely what *he* did next (Matthew 27:11; Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3; John 18:33-38).

Matthew's summary of this interview consists of a single verse:

*Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor questioned Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And Jesus said to him, "It is as you say" (v 11).*

Of the four Gospel accounts of *Pilate*'s first interview of *Jesus*, John's is the most extensive.

The first thing *Pilate* did was to enter the Praetorium and summon *Jesus* so *he* could interview *Him* away from His accusers who waited outside (John 18:28b; 33). Once there, it appears that the conversation focused on the most serious of the three charges—the charge of insurrection.

Matthew, like Mark and Luke, appears to summarize this interview by stating *Pilate*'s main question and *Jesus*'s main answer (Mark 15:2; Luke 23:3). Matthew explicitly states this exchange took place as *Jesus stood before the governor* (v 11a).

*And the governor questioned Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" (v 11a).*

As the judge of this case, *Pilate* was interested in whether or not *Jesus* was guilty of claiming to be a *king* and therefore attempting to usurp Caesar's political authority in Judea.

*Jesus answered Pilate's question and said to him, "It is as you say" (v 11b).*

From John's much fuller account we see that *Pilate* basically asked *Jesus* a version of the question—*Are You the King of the Jews?* at least twice.

The first time *Pilate* asks this question is at the beginning of John's account of this interview.

"Are You the King of the Jews?"  
(John 18:33)

*Jesus* replied to this by asking a probing question to ascertain where *Pilate* was coming from, "Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?" (John 18:34). This could be a version of *Jesus*'s response recorded in the synoptic Gospels: *It is as you say*.

*Pilate* was asking *Jesus* this as a Roman *governor* presiding over a trial: "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You to me; what have You done?" (John 18:35).

*Jesus* then responded accordingly that *He* was not a threat to Rome or guilty of insurrection because: His kingdom was not of this world (John 18:36a). The proof *Jesus* provided to support His claim that His kingdom was not of this world was that neither *Jesus* nor His followers were resisting the Jewish authorities or the Romans (John 18:36b).

*Pilate* then asked his question a second time,

“So You are a king?”  
(John 18:37a)

*Jesus* appeared to answer in the affirmative, but *He* did so ambiguously.

“You say correctly that I am a king” (John 18:37b). Note the NASB 95 interpretively inserts the word “correctly” in *Jesus*’s reply. There is no such word in the Greek text of this answer. The NASB’s translation is therefore interpretative concerning *Jesus*’s response. The interpretation is reasonable because *Jesus* likely intended to signal an affirmative response to *Pilate*, but the interpretive translation masks the brilliant shrewdness of *Jesus* to both signal to *Pilate* that *He* is a *king*, but to do so without saying anything that would constitute self-incrimination, and make *Him* guilty of the charges against *Him*.

Again, *Jesus*’s literal response to *Pilate* here as recorded by John, “You say that I am a king,” (John 18:37b) is functionally the same as the responses in Matthew, Mark, and Luke: *It is as you say* (Matthew 27:11; Mark 15:2).

In John’s Gospel, *Jesus* elaborates upon His answer: “For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice” (John 18:37b). *Pilate* retorts, “What is truth?” as he ends the interview and exits the Praetorium to announce his verdict of “not guilty” to *the chief priests and elders* (v 12) waiting outside (John 18:28, 38).

### **Pilate Announces his Initial Verdict**

After *the governor* stepped out the Praetorium, “Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, ‘I find no guilt in this man’” (Luke 23:4—see also John 18:38b).

This was not the verdict or outcome *the chief priests* and *the crowds* of *Christ*’s accusers had come for.

It was an unacceptable outcome to *the chief priests and elders* who brought *Jesus* before *Pilate*. They hated *Jesus*. The *people* believed *He* was the Messiah, but *the priests and elders* could not control *Him*. *He* had outraged them when *He* cleared out their money changers in the Temple (Matthew 21:12-16). *He* had humiliated them as *He* answered their questions while teaching publicly in the temple (Matthew 21:23-23:39). Even before those events, *the chief priests* had conspired to murder *Him* because they feared if they let *Jesus* go on, *He* would turn the nation against them, and Rome would strip away their power (John 11:47-57).

Now *He* was aware of their conspiracy (Matthew 26:21-25) and *they* had illegally arrested (Matthew 26:55) and condemned *Him* (Matthew 26:57-66) and much abused *Him* (Matthew 26:67-68). If *Pilate* were to release *Jesus* now, *they* would likely be ruined once their crimes and abuse against the Man many people regarded as the Messiah came to light. *The chief priests and elders* were desperate for *Jesus* to die.

*The chief priests and elders* erupted in angry protest at this verdict. An avalanche of harsh accusations broke down upon *Jesus* as they furiously demanded that *Pilate* reconsider.

*And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He did not answer* (v 12).

Matthew's observation of *Jesus's* silence as His oppressors shouted their accusations against *Him* was in fulfillment of a Messianic prophecy within the fourth servant song of Isaiah (Isaiah 52:13-53:12),

“He was oppressed and He was afflicted,  
Yet He did not open His mouth;  
Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,  
And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,  
So He did not open His mouth.”  
(Isaiah 53:7)

This prophecy foretold how the Messiah would be silent before His oppressors as a lamb is before *the priests* who slaughter and sacrifice it.

*Pilate* also noticed *Jesus's* silence while *the chief priests and elders* harshly *accused Him* (Mark 15:3-4).

*Then Pilate said to Him, “Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?”* (v 13).

But, impressively, *Jesus did not answer him with regard to even a single charge, so the governor was quite amazed* (v 14) (See also Mark 15:5).

*Pilate was quite amazed* at *Jesus's* remarkable composure and silence during the slanders being made against *Him* as His life was on the line. *Jesus* was putting into practice His teaching: “do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also” (Matthew 5:39).

Perhaps *Pilate* was trying to get *Jesus* to say something that would either cause *Pilate* to change his mind and see *Him* as guilty so *the governor* could appease *the angry priests and elders*, or perhaps to say something that would shame His accusers and thus give *Pilate* an opportunity to finalize his verdict of innocence in such a way that *Jesus's* accusers would blame themselves for losing the case, and not blame the Roman Governor for their defeat.

### **Pilate's Dilemma and his Solution**

As the Roman *governor* of the Roman province of Judea, the final verdict was vested in *Pilate*. But tensions were high. It was clear that the leading *Jews, the chief priests*, hated *Jesus* and desperately wanted *Him* executed. And it was becoming apparent that *they* were determined to accept nothing other than this deadly outcome. This was not about justice; it was political.

*Pilate's* responsibilities were to uphold Rome's laws and to maintain good order. On one hand, he believed *Jesus* to be innocent (Luke 23:4; John 18:38). But *the governor* needed *the chief priests' and elders'* help in maintaining control over the masses of Jews who had crowded the city of Jerusalem for the Passover.

If the province turned against *Pilate*, he would lose his honor, his job, and possibly his life. Fear and indecision seemed to creep and fester within *Pilate's* heart as he tried to balance justice under Roman law, under which he had already declared *Jesus's* innocence, against keeping civil order. Meanwhile, the Jewish *priests* obsessed over one goal—kill *Jesus*.

The Gospel of Luke describes how the first phase of *Jesus's* civil trial ended (Luke 23:5-7).

*The chief priests and elders* were relentless and “kept on insisting” that *Jesus* be killed (Luke 23:5a). In their many accusations they said, “He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee even as far as this place” (Luke 23:5).

Something in this remark gave *Pilate* an idea—an idea that could absolve *him* from having to make a decision that was becoming harder and harder to make the longer this trial went on.

Judea was the entire Roman province over which *Pilate* was *governor*. Galilee was a district within that province.

When *Pilate* heard how *Jesus* stirred up the people of Judea, starting from Galilee—*the governor* “asked whether the man was a Galilean” (Luke 23:6).

*Jesus* was raised in Galilee (Nazareth) (Matthew 2:21-23), and *He* began and headquartered His public ministry in and around the town of Capernaum of Galilee (Matthew 4:12-13).

Luke says that when *Pilate* learned that *Jesus* “belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time” (Luke 23:7).

The “Herod” that *Pilate* addressed was Herod Antipas, son of King Herod the Great (builder). Herod Antipas was the Roman magistrate of Galilee, the district *Jesus* was from. This is why Luke describes *Pilate's* thought process: *Jesus* “belonged to Herod's jurisdiction” (Luke 23:7). *Pilate* sent *Jesus* to Herod to let him deal with this matter.

Sending *Jesus* to Herod conveniently shifted unwelcome blame and unwanted responsibility away from *the Roman governor* from having to decide between justice under the law and peaceful order. The law demanded the release of *Jesus* because no guilt was found in this man (Luke 23:4; John 18:38b). But such a verdict enraged *the chief priests* who helped maintain good order, and the reaction of these leaders threatened civil unrest.

*The chief priests and elders* demanded that *Jesus* be put to death. But such a verdict broke the law and condemned an innocent *man* to death. *Pilate* could not both follow the law and also appease *the priests*. He had to cross one for the sake of the other. He would be criticized for whichever side he chose. By sending *Jesus* to Herod, *Pilate* had (at least for the moment) seemed



to solve his dilemma. The Roman politician had extricated himself from having to make a decision that would risk criticism from his superiors in Rome.

Herod Antipas, the authority *Pilate* sent *Jesus* to be judged by, was the son of Herod, the ruler who had tried to execute *Jesus* when Christ was first born (Matthew 2:16); and he was the same ruler who beheaded John the Baptizer, *Jesus*'s cousin (Matthew 14:1-12; Mark 6:14-29; Luke 9:9).

This ended the first phase of *Jesus*'s civil trial. It was: "Jesus's Arraignment before Pilate" (Matthew 27:1-2, 11-14; Mark 15:1-5; Luke 23:1-7; John 18:28-38).

The second phase of *Jesus*'s trial takes place in the court of Herod Antipas. It is called, "Jesus's Audience before Herod Antipas" (Luke 23:8-12).

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>11</sup> Now Jesus stood before the governor, and the governor questioned Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And Jesus said to him, "It is as you say."<sup>12</sup> And while He was being accused by the chief priests and elders, He did not answer.<sup>13</sup> Then Pilate said to Him, "Do You not hear how many things they testify against You?"<sup>14</sup> And He did not answer him with regard to even a single charge, so the governor was quite amazed.**