

Christ Before Pilate

Lucius Pontius Pilate was a Spaniard, born in the city of Seville, probably about the time of the birth of Christ. We never would have heard of him, except by a unique set of events that made him one of the most famous men of all history. For Pilate was the judge that approved the death sentence upon Jesus Christ.

The name "Pontius" may have been given him because of fighting that was done earlier by someone in the family in the Pontus (Black Sea region) of the Roman Empire. "Pilate" may stem from pilatus, "javelin" which was given to victors of certain armed combats. We are told that his father, Marcus Pontius, won the pilium, or javelin, for heroic Roman service, and that the name Pilati was taken henceforth as the family name to commemorate this medal of valor.

Having fought in the German campaigns of Germanicus, young Pilate at the conclusion of the war went to Rome. Rome was the place to go if you wanted a good job, and Pilate was determined to get it.

He had not long been in this city famous for size and debauchery, when he met Claudia, the youngest daughter of Julia. Now, this Julia was the daughter of the previous emperor--Augustus Caesar. Julia was the black sheep of the family. She was so vile that after having married Tiberius, her third husband, her own father Augustus banished her from Rome because of her lewd and dissolute life. Suetonius, the Roman historian, tells us that nothing so embittered the life of Augustus as did the shameful conduct of his own daughter, Julia.

While Julia was in exile, she gave birth to an illegitimate daughter, Claudia. The father was a Roman soldier. But all would go well for Claudia for on the death of Augustus, her mother's third husband, Tiberius, became Emperor. At about the age of thirteen, Claudia was sent to Rome to be raised in the palace of the Emperor. Pontius Pilate arrived in Rome when she was about sixteen.

After the wedding in a pagan temple in Rome, as Lucius Pilate and Claudia came out to enter an imperial litter, thus to be borne by slaves to the palace, Pilate was stopped and drawn aside. It was Tiberius, the Emperor himself. He had been one of the twelve witnesses required to attend the marriage ceremony. He held him back and handed him an official document which he had taken from under his coat.

And so Pontius Pilate received his wedding present--the governorship of Judea, --with orders to proceed at once to Caesarea to take over the office recently vacated by the recall of Valerius Gratus.

It was 26 AD., and what would the future hold for Pilate? Little did he dream what it would bring five years later.

Palestine had been conquered by Pompey, the Roman general in 63 B.C., and thus passed under Roman rule. Two years before the birth of Christ, in 6 B.C., Judea was made a Roman province under the rulership of procurators, or governors. Pontius Pilate was the sixth of these Procurators. The procurators were personally appointed by the emperor, and were sent out from Rome as his personal representatives. Judea was considered one of the most difficult of the provinces to rule at this time and it is somewhat surprising that it was given to a man as inexperienced as Pilate.

Immediately, Pilate was notified that his ship was waiting to take him to his province--and that Claudia would be sent soon after. He did not see her again for several months, at which time she rejoined him at the port city of Caesarea, on the coast of Palestine.

It was a large area that Pilate had been given the rulership over. But when he arrived in Judea, he was totally unprepared for governorship. He had never governed anything in his life, much less an entire nation. One blunder after another brought upon him the intense hatred of the Jewish people that he now ruled over.

The coastal city of Caesarea was the Roman capital of Judea. Pilate decided to make it his summer capital, and relocate the winter capital in Jerusalem. This bothered the Jews. But when he brought with him to Jerusalem the military standards on which Caesar's image was prominently displayed, the city went into a near-riot. The people petitioned Pilate to remove them, but he refused. This went on for several days and then following a near-slaughter of a large number of the populace, he finally relented and sent the shields and images back to Caesarea.

Then Pilate made a secret deal with some of the Jewish leaders and obtained Temple money to use to repair the aqueduct, or water supply, to Jerusalem. When this was found out another riot took place. Pilate sent his soldiers among the mob with concealed daggers--and a great massacre followed. Still later he placed pagan shields dedicated to heathen gods into his winter home in Jerusalem. Again he refused to remove them, until at the request of the people a direct order came from Tiberius that Pilate take them away.

The predecessors of Pilate had been careful to avoid offense to the Jews because of their religious ideas, but of this Pilate cared little. Proud and tactless, Pilate defied the religious beliefs of those whom he had been sent to govern, until the emperor himself had to step in, at the appeal of the people, and personally require Pilate to retract some of his more headstrong ways. All of these experiences served only to deepen Pilate's hatred of the Jews, and their hatred of him.

Both Josephus and Philo, two first century writers, have left on record a very ugly picture of the character of Pontius Pilate. Philo Judaeus lived at the same time Pilate did, and he charged him with "corruptibility, violence, robberies, ill-treatment of the people, grievances, continuous executions without even the form of a trial, endless and intolerable Cruelties."--*Philo Judaeus, De Legatione ad Cajum, page 1034.*

By 31 AD., Pilate had learned to spend most of the year in Caesarea, the provincial capital of Judea. He spent but a few days each year in Jerusalem, and this was usually during the great national Jewish festivals when the danger of insurrection was the greatest. And he had reason to be wary, for throughout that century, the Romans repeatedly had more trouble with the Jews than with any other people that they governed. The Jews had become a turbulent nation, embittered because of the loss of their kingly and judicial authority, and seething with continual discontent that a foreign power ruled them. These feelings seemed to run highest during their national gatherings. Josephus, the first century historian, estimated the number attending a single Passover at 2,700,000, including the population of Jerusalem. And so it was, that on such occasions, the governor made sure he too was at Jerusalem--accompanied by a small army.

Before his death in 4 B.C., Herod the Great had built an ornate fortress-palace in Jerusalem, and during his visits to the city, Pilate stayed there. Josephus tells us it was the official residence of the procurators--the governors--of the province, whenever they stopped over in Jerusalem.

The palace was located in the northwest quarter of the city, on the heights of Mount Zion. From its upper windows the entire city and surrounding countryside could be seen. One of the wings of the palace contained an assembly room in which Roman court trials were held. This was the praetorium of Mark 15:16, the common hall of Matthew 27:27, the hall of judgment of John 18:28, and the judgment hall of John 18:28,33; 19:9, and Acts 23:35.

The palace of Herod was the most magnificent home in the city. It was surrounded by walls forty-five feet high, from which rose strong towers. Within the palace were spacious rooms with elaborate carvings on both wall and ceiling, inlaid with gold, silver and precious stones. Between the palace and the guard walls were groves and gardens, pools and walkways.

This palace was to become the hall of judgment and condemnation for Jesus Christ, the Creator of the world and its only Saviour.

It was the time of morning when the birds sing their hardest. The sun was just coming up. But Pilate didn't want to hear it. He wanted to sleep. And he knew he would need it, for this was the time when trouble could come. For tomorrow was the Passover.

Hurrying through the streets, priests and rabble pressed toward the gate of the palace of Herod.

But upon reaching it they halted. Passover preparation had already begun and defilement was sure to be theirs if they entered this heathen building today. Gradually the crowd increased, and with it the noise. And so when aroused, Pilate knew he had better get out there right away.

And so it was that the Roman trial of Christ took place outside the gate, and not in the praetorium. This was the first of several illegalities that occurred during that trial.

There were two trial sessions before Pilate, interrupted by another before Herod Antipas. You can read the complete story of the first trial before Pilate in Matthew 27:2, 11-14, Mark 15:1-5, Luke 23:1-5, and John 18:28-38. The trial before Herod is given in Luke 23:6-12. The continuation of the trial before Pilate is given in Matthew 27:15-31, Mark 15:6-20, Luke 23:13-25, and John 18:38 to 19:16.

As he strode through the massive rooms of the palace toward the gate, Pilate was told that the Jews had a prisoner to be sentenced,--and just now he was only too glad to be agreeable. It would put the Jews in a good humor and perhaps make the weekend go better. Pilate had never been a man to worry much about justice.

Stepping outside, Pilate immediately directed his attention toward the priests, and called out, "What accusation bring ye against this man?" In reply came an evasive answer, "If he were not a malefactor, we would not have delivered him up unto thee." Pilate was used to this kind of reply from these men. So let them have him--that's what they wanted. "Take ye him, and judge him according to your law." "We can't do it ourselves --for we want the death sentence!" And just then, for the first time Pilate saw Jesus. Now Pilate hardly saw the crowd, hardly heard the curses and impatient calls of the rabble and the Pharisees. For Pilate's eyes were riveted on the face of Jesus.

Pilate had never seen a face like that before in his life. It was so pure--and there was such a kindness in it. It bore a kinglike bearing of patience and dignity beyond anything he had ever seen before. And Pilate was no stranger to the palaces of royalty and kings.

From somewhere he heard contemptuous voices call out the name of the prisoner. "Jesus", they said. He had heard of Him. What had he heard? Memories of reports submitted to him over the past three years about this man's activities--his sayings, the speeches, those miracles--it was coming back to his memory.

Pilate was confused. It seemed like an immense decision lay ahead of him. And somehow he knew he hadn't prepared himself to meet it.

And now Pilate spoke, and demanded a formal charge against the prisoner. The Jews were surprised. Pilate usually went along with them better than this. Amid hooting and yells from back in the crowd, the priests called out that Pilate should accept their conclusions in the matter without asking too many questions. But by now, Pilate was trying for the firmness of decision that in the past he had never taken time to develop. More clearly he was recalling to mind stories of paralytics and lepers cleansed--and even members of his own Centurians' family healed. Although Pilate did not have much firmness of character, his office had taught him to read people, and it was clear as the day that the man before him was totally innocent of any accusation. But it was not the innocence nor the stories--it was the face of Jesus that held Pilate back from handing Him over to His enemies. Pilate knew he didn't dare. In the shimmering heat of the early morning, Pilate saw before him a man that was god-like.

But the uncertainty that Pilate's apparent firmness had brought to the Jewish leaders quickly passed away. Important principles in the great controversy between Christ and Satan were here being worked out, and it seemed as if on this day, these men were in close league with devils in their desperation to destroy Jesus.

"We found this fellow perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that He Himself is Christ a King." The men who sought in vain to find a valid charge against Christ when He appeared before them four times earlier that morning (see our study--"[The Hebrew Trials of Christ](#)"), now dreamed up another on the spot. A political charge was needed--and so three were given. And each one, though without a foundation in fact, was a charge of treason against the government of Rome.

It might be well at this point to give a little background information. The Jews had authority to hold court trials, but the Romans forbade them from executing the death sentence. For this reason they had to have the Roman government confirm their sentence as correct. Now a procurator when holding a trial against a provincial citizen, could use either Roman law or the laws of the national that was being judged. But if the charge was treason, only Roman law could be applied. And so it is Roman law that Pilate must follow in this, the most famous court trial in history.

We well know what Roman court law was, for it was the law used in court trials at Rome, and it was required that it be applied the same way in the provinces. And because of this we can know that the Roman trial of Jesus before Pilate was illegal in several instances. Here are some of them. We may consider more later in this study:

- (1) Private citizens preferred the charges and prosecuted the case, not public officials as was done in the case of Jesus by the priests. Even though a trial had already been conducted by the Sanhedrin, their death sentence required a brand new trial by Rome--and private citizens must initiate it and prosecute it.
- (2) If there was more than one accuser, a preliminary hearing must be held to decide which one should prosecute the case.
- (3) This preliminary hearing must be an entirely private one--a closed door affair with the defendant and the prosecutors and those testifying alone being present.
- (3) Only after this hearing could the several prosecutors frame an indictment--state in words the charge against the man.
- (4) And it was only after this hearing that the indictment could be presented to the judge.
- (5) It was only now that the trial date could be appointed and fixed on the legal calendar of coming events.
- (6) When the day of the trial actually came, the judges as well as the jurors were summoned by heralds.
- (7) Now the impaneling of the jury began. This was done in this way: The names of a number of citizens were written on clay tablets, and deposited in an urn or clay howl. Then the number required were drawn out.
- (8) Only in the Forum, or Roman courtroom, could the trial be conducted. In this legislative hall seats were placed for the judges.
- (9) Decisions were arrived at by balloting, and this was done as black (condemnation) stones or white (acquittal) stones were deposited in an urn as it was passed.

These charges of sedition or treason against the government hit Pilate in a weak spot. We are told the emperor, Tiberius Caesar, was "a morbid and capricious temper, whose fretful and suspicious temper would kindle into fire at the slightest suggestion of treason in any quarter. Tacitus [the Roman historian] records fifty-two cases of prosecution for treason during his reign--The most harmless acts were at times construed into an affront to the majesty or into an assault upon the safety of this miserable despot ."--*Walter M. Chandler, The Trial of Jesus, volume 2, page 70.*

Also, Pilate knew that Judea was a powder-keg,--and that Rome knew it. A charge such as this would be the more serious in the eyes of the Emperor and the Senate, in view of where it originated.

And now for the first time, Pilate entered the Forum, or Roman judgment hall--the Praetorium--where the trial was supposed to be held. But it was only for a few minutes. Pilate wanted to speak with Jesus. Hearing the charge of treason, already his firmness was crumbling, and he thought that something Jesus might say

could give him a fresh outlook on a direction he should head in all this. The idea of standing for the right because it was right--and without further adieu simply setting Jesus free--never occurred to him.

The conversation can be read in John 18:33-38. It has many lessons for us. At a time when Jesus must not acknowledge that He might be a king,--He told Pilate three times in this interview that He was. And each time He also told him that His kingdom was not of this world. *But more than information or settlement of a court trial, it was truth that Pilate needed. Pilate needed salvation. And Jesus was more concerned that Pilate have it, than that His own life be spared. And Pilate asked Him for this understanding--and then he walked out. Business was calling. If I could write one phrase on Pilate's tombstone, I would pen, "He didn't wait for an answer."*

Pilate was convinced now that Jesus was thoroughly innocent. Reaching the gate, *Pilate rendered his official decision in the case as the presiding Roman judge--"I find in Him no fault at all."*

One of the most prominent legal minds in American court history has written a book on this trial. Consider his words: "Here was a sentence of acquittal, judicially pronounced, and irreversible, except by a higher power, upon appeal; and it was the duty of Pilate thereupon to have discharged Him."--*Simon Greenleaf, The Testimony of the Evangelists Examined by the Rules of Evidence Administered in Courts of Justice, page 565.* Dr. Greenleaf was a professor of law at Harvard University at the turn of the century, and was considered to be one of the keenest students of jurisprudence of his time.

Clearly, it was the duty of the procurator to enforce his decision, and not only to immediately release Jesus, but to protect Him from the fury of the mob as well. This he could easily do, for at one word from him and a detachment of Roman soldiers would immediately have dispersed the crowd. But this Pilate did not do.

With eager anticipation the Jewish leaders awaited the return of Pilate. When he appeared and summarily declared the man innocent, it was too much. With a roar as of wild beasts about to be robbed of their prey, a terrific shouting and hollering began, and amid it the same charge in new wording was again hurled at Jesus. "He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place." The Jews were trying to reopen the case that Pilate had just closed, and this Pilate should not have permitted. He had already rendered a verdict of innocence, and the trial was actually over, the case dismissed. It was a rule of Roman law that "no man shall be put twice in jeopardy." This principle of double jeopardy is an important one, even in modern law. A man cannot be tried in a court of law twice on the same charge.

But instead of reacting to this offense to the Roman system of law, Pilate used it as an excuse for an easier way out of it all. Rather than stand by Roman law now that the trial had been concluded, Pilate reopened the case and sent Jesus to Herod. When everything was all settled, Pilate opened it up again as a way to solve it.

Herod Antipas (4 B.C.--39 A.D.) was the younger brother of Archelaus (mentioned in *Matthew 2:22*), who in turn was the eldest of the three sons of Herod the Great, who tried to kill Christ at His birth (*Matthew 2:13, 16*). Herod Antipas was tetrarch of Galilee and Perea, and his provincial capital was Tiberius in Galilee. He happened to be in Jerusalem for the weekend, and when Pilate heard mention of "Galilee" he thought that perhaps he could transfer jurisdiction in this case that had been concluded--to Herod. So Jesus, the One everybody needed, and the One no one wanted, was sent to Herod--the man who in a drunken party had ordered the death of John the Baptist.

Pilate, the man who was constantly looking for a loophole, now sent Jesus, under escort of a praetorian cohort, to the palace of the Maccabees where Herod was accustomed to stay on his trips into Jerusalem.

Down the streets of the city the mob headed, again bound for a court room. The residence of Herod when in Jerusalem was in the same quarter of the city as was the palace of Herod. It was an older building, this palace of the Asmoneans, and lay but a few streets to the northeast, within the same old city wall. It was on the slope of the hill that Herod's palace crested.

The Jews had refused to enter Pilate's headquarters, but Herod was in a far uglier spirit. His life stained with the blood of John, he cared nought for Jewish fooleries, and upon learning that Jesus had been sent to him,

he demanded that He be immediately brought into his assembly room. Interestingly enough, the Jewish leaders now made no complaint, but quickly followed on in. Jesus was now to appear before Herod Antipas, who had been responsible for the deaths of nearly all of his ten wives, as well as thousands of innocent victims, and the prophet John as well.

But hardened though he was, Herod was glad to see Jesus. But much of this seems to be from idle curiosity (*Luke 23:8*). He was hoping for grand entertainment, and ordered the sick and the lame to be brought in that he might see them healed. And thereafter Jesus would be released, he promised. The Jewish leaders well knew Jesus' power over disease and feared for what was ahead. But to every one's surprise--Jesus did nothing and said nothing. Jesus' life, both in earth as well as in heaven, has never been to live for Himself.

Herod had no intention of killing this Man who was so popular with the common people throughout two provinces. Jesus was considered by many to be a prophet, just as John had been. And the stain of one of their deaths was enough for Herod.

But he was not prepared for the amazing self-control of Christ. Herod was without conscience--he had long since seared it away. And Jesus had no words for him. Try as he would, Herod could obtain no healings, and not even a reply, from the Man who stood before him. This was a rebuke to his authority that Antipas could not take.

But finally the silence of Jesus brought the patience of Herod to an end. "And Herod with his men of war set Him at nought, and mocked Him, and arrayed Him in a gorgeous robe, and sent Him again to Pilate."--*Luke 23:11*.

There is evidence that if the Roman soldiers that were standing there in Herod's courtroom that day had not saved Him, Herod and the rabble and the priests would have torn Him to pieces. Maddened with fury, Herod left his throne and acted like a demon, and he was immediately accompanied in this diabolical work by nearly everyone in the room. *Few will ever know what Jesus went through that day so that man might have another chance to return to God and again in His strength obey His laws.*

Herod refused to pronounce sentence in the case, and this was the equivalent of an acquittal. And Pilate acknowledged it as such upon the return of Jesus. "Ye have brought this man unto me as one that perverteth the people. And, behold, I, having examined him before you,--have found no fault in the man touching those things whereof ye accuse him. No, nor yet Herod, for I sent you to him, and,--lo, nothing worthy of death is done unto him."--*Luke 23:14-15*.

For a second time Pilate had rendered a verdict of "not guilty." But instead of releasing Jesus, he said he would have Him beaten before freeing Him.

Again, Pilate was trying to escape the responsibility for freeing Jesus. For the second time he had a golden opportunity to release Him, and for the second time lie cowardly let it go. Pilate's fatal vacillation doomed Jesus and was to destroy himself.

Immediately there went up a crying and shouting for Jesus' death that was deafening. Gradually it subsided as Pilate proposed something new.

It was a Jewish custom that one criminal be freed at each yearly Passover. Pilate now graciously offered to let Jesus be the one set at liberty. Placing Jesus before the people next to Barabbas, a hardened criminal, he appealed to their sympathies, and asked them which man they wanted released. "Whither of the twain will ye that I release unto you?" The contrast between the two men was unmistakable. Pilate was certain the crowd would choose Jesus. But Pilate was wrong.

With a roar as of an ocean in storm came the reply, "Barabbas, Barabbas, release unto us Barabbas." "And what shall I do then with Jesus which is called Christ?" he shouted at the top of his lungs. Like surging waves of sound came the answer. "Let him be crucified!"

This pagan custom had come down from the days of Athens and early Rome. During national festivals the

people had the privilege of choosing one imprisoned criminal, and the government would release him. Pilate had selected as the alternate choice to stand by Jesus the most dangerous and notorious criminal in custody.

An ancient Syriac New Testament was found in 1892 in St. Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai, that has a different translation of Matthew 27:18. "Which Jesus will you have, Jesus the son of Abba, or Jesus the King?" We have reason to believe that Barabbas was an emboldened criminal who had claimed to be the Messiah and had gathered something of a following prior to his imprisonment for robbery and murder. To prove his claim as king of the Jews, he had instigated an insurrection that resulted in the death of many men (Mark 15:7). "Ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; and killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the."--*Acts 3:14-15. Many men are still doing the same thing today. In countless ways, small and great, they are rejecting the only One who can save them.*

Forgotten now, amid the hollering, cursing and shouting, was the last concern for legality or justice. All that remained was the battle between the will of Pilate and the will of the mob. Pilate saw that amid it all, Jesus stood there calm and god-like, while the deafening noise of jealousy, envy and hatred beat about Him. Pilate was never to forget the scene, but just now he felt very helpless and defeated.

When Pilate had aroused from sleep early that morning at the cries of the Jews, his wife Claudia, the adopted daughter of Tiberius, continuing in sleep was given in a dream a view of the entire court trial, Pilate, the Jews and Christ. She, too, looked upon the face of Jesus, and she heard all that was said. She saw the death sentence handed down by her husband, and she saw Calvary.

And now the granddaughter of an emperor was fully awake, hearing from her maids what was going on at the gate of the palace--and she penned an urgent note to her husband. "Have nothing to do with that righteous man, for I have suffered much over him today in a dream." --*Matthew 27:19.*

Receiving it, with bloodless face he read it. Pilate was more frightened than he had ever been before in his life. Perhaps this was a god that stood before him. What was he to do? All he knew was to try and work out another deal with the adversaries. He was sure it would take some kind of compromise to make the Jews willing to see Jesus released.

"And the soldiers plaited a crown of thorns, and put it on His head, and they put on Him a purple robe, and said, Hail, King of the Jews! and they smote Him with their hands. Pilate therefore went forth again, and saith unto them, Behold, I bring Him forth to you, that ye may know that I find no fault in Him. Then came Jesus forth, wearing the crown of thorns, and the purple robe. And Pilate saith unto them, BEHOLD THE MAN!"--*John 19:1-5.*

In his desperation, Pilate allowed this beating of the Innocent One to take place, hoping that in some way this terrible scene would at last awaken pity and mercy in the minds of the blood thirsty rabble. But it didn't.

The lashes that Jesus received came from a whip with a short handle to which were fastened several cords tipped with pieces of iron, lead, or bone. With each lash, these sharp pieces tore into the flesh and buried themselves in the victim's bare back.

This had been followed by a beating and mauling at the hands of the soldiers that was a spectacle of horror. In it all, Jesus maintained a dignified silence through which shone a kingly bearing that astonished even the men beating Him.

This living torture took place within the praetorium, and following it, Jesus was brought out and presented to the Jews.

"Behold the Man!" Pilate cried, as he presented Him. And now, twenty centuries later, I ask you, Behold the Man! Behold what He went through for you. Behold all that He did that you might have eternal life--Behold what your God has done for you!

And in presenting Jesus to the multitude, for the third time, Pilate had declared Jesus to be innocent. "That

ye may know that I find no fault in Him." In response, a massive crescendo of sound erupted. "Crucify him, Crucify him!" In disgust with the unfeeling Jews, Pilate cried out above the uproar "Oh, take ye him, and crucify him yourselves!--for I find no fault in him!" (*John 19:6*) Pilate had challenged them to take the law into their own hands, and in response they flung back, "We have a law, and by our law he ought to die--because he made himself the Son of God!" (*John 19:7-8*). So that was it! It wasn't treason at all. They said he must die because he was a god--and what did that mean? Pilate's fearful thoughts were in a whirl.

"From thenceforth Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar."--*John 19:12*.

That settled the matter for the procurator. The battle was over. Pilate felt like a broken man. Calling for a chair, for the first time in this "trial" he sat down.

Pilate's backer in Rome, Sejanus, was fast losing his hold over Tiberius, and Pilate well knew this. In fact, later that same year Sejanus was put to death at the order of the Emperor. Three times in five years Pilate had nearly driven the Jews to revolt, and another near-miss might mean his end.

"When Pilate therefore heard that saying, he brought Jesus forth, and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called the Pavement, but in the Hebrew, Gabbatha."--*John 19:13*. Archeologists have found that pavement or lithostrotos. Vincent found it several years ago about fifteen feet below the present level of Jerusalem, buried under two thousand years of rubbish. Large, flat stones mark this raised place from whence the Roman governor would issue his official decisions.

Seating himself on the judgment seat, Pilate pointed to Jesus and said, "Behold your King!" Back came the thunderous bellow--their unanimous decision--"Away with him, away with him, crucify him." "Shall I crucify your King?"

Just the slightest pause . . . and then "We have no king but Caesar!"

It was time for a legal decision, based on the authority of Rome--but Pilate wasn't thinking about authority. He wanted to wash his hands. And calling for a basin of water, he did so before them all. "I am innocent of the blood of this just person. See ye to it." *Pilate had given his fourth acquittal of Christ*. In response came the cry, "His blood be on us, and on our children."--*Matthew 27:24-25*.

"And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that He might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed. And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required."--*Luke 23:23-24*.

"Then released he Barabbas unto them, and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified."--*Matthew 27:26*.

This is what Pilate did with Jesus. He had innumerable opportunities to choose the right, but he did not do so. Something told him that another path would be the easier way. And Pilate liked easier ways.

But it wasn't, for it cost Pilate his job, and his life,--and his soul. Not too long after, a complaint brought an order from the governor of Syria that Pilate appear in Rome before Tiberius to answer on serious charges. Arriving there he found his wife's foster-father dead, and a new emperor on the throne,--the cruel Caligula. Pilate was stripped of all honors and fired from his office, and soon after "wearied with misfortunes," as Eusebius tells us, he committed suicide.

"What shall I do then with Jesus, who is called the Christ?" What will you do with Him? You saw what the rabble and Herod and Pilate did with Him. He let them do it for your sake--What will you do with Him? Will you accept Him and all that He did for you?

Choose Him, just now--It is the best choice you will ever make--And then write me, won't you? I want to hear of your decision. Heaven isn't far off - I want to meet you there.