

Luke Chapter 23

Luke 23:1 "And the whole multitude of them arose, and led him unto Pilate."

“The whole multitude of them”: I.e., the entire Sanhedrin, some 70 men. At least one member of the council, Joseph of Arimathea, dissented from the decision of condemn Christ (verses 50-52).

“Led”: Delivered him to Pontius Pilate. Jesus had two trials, one Jewish and religious, the other Roman and secular. Rome reserved the right of execution in capital cases, so Jesus had to be handed over to the Roman authorities for execution of the death sentence.

Pilate’s headquarters were in Caesarea, on the Mediterranean coast, but he was in Jerusalem for the Passover celebrations, so he oversaw the trial. Christ was brought before Pilate (Matthew 2:14), then was sent to Herod for yet another hearing (Luke 23:6-12), then returned to Pilate for the final hearing and pronouncing of sentence (Matt. 27:1 15-26).

Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea and Samaria during Christ’s ministry. Emperor Tiberius appointed him as the fifth procurator of Judea (A.D. 26-36). As procurator, he controlled the Judean province, having an army of from three thousand to five thousand Roman soldiers.

Usually he would govern from Caesarea, but during the Jewish feasts he and his troops would be garrisoned in Jerusalem just outside the temple area at the fortress of Antonia. Pilate was an insensitive, cruel leader who needlessly infuriated the Jews and Samaritans (Luke 13:1). This evidently led to his recall to Rome.

The multitude is speaking of those of the Sanhedrin. These Jews did not have the authority to kill Jesus, so they had to bring Jesus before Pilate for pronouncing the death sentence. Of course, this whole thing was against the law. Trial at night and crucifying the accused the same day was really against the law.

Luke 23:2 "And they began to accuse him, saying, We found this [fellow] perverting the nation, and forbidding to give tribute to Caesar, saying that he himself is Christ a King."

“Forbidding to give tribute to Caesar”: This was a deliberate lie. Members of the Sanhedrin had publicly questioned Jesus on the very issue (hoping to discredit Him before the Jews), and He expressly upheld Caesar’s right to demand taxes (20:20-25).

“Saying that he ... is Christ a king”: This was innuendo, implying that He was seditious against Rome, another untrue charge.

Of course, Jesus had not said anything about giving tribute to Caesar. This accusation was just to stir Pilate up so he would crucify Jesus. Jesus had not even told them that He was Christ. They had said that themselves. This whole trial was a set up. Very little truth was told.

Luke 23:3 "And Pilate asked him, saying, Art thou the King of the Jews? And he answered him and said, Thou sayest [it]."

“Thou sayest it” (John 18:33-37), gives a fuller account of Jesus’ reply to this question.

Pilate, perhaps, had heard that this Jesus was believed to be the King of the Jews, the Messiah. In the answer Jesus gave, Pilate knew that Jesus was indeed the King. Jesus answered in such a way that they could not accuse Him of saying that He was. In the other accounts of this, some of the other writers go into detail explaining that Pilate really did not want to kill Jesus.

John was probably somewhere near and heard these details. We know that Peter was near, as well.

Luke 23:4 "Then said Pilate to the chief priests and [to] the people, I find no fault in this man."

“No fault”: Despite the Jewish leaders’ desperate attempts to accuse Him, Pilate was satisfied that Jesus was no insurrectionist, but the ferocity of the people made him afraid to exonerate Jesus. He was relieved to hear that Jesus was a Galilean, because that gave him an excuse to send Him to Herod (verses 5-6).

There really was no evidence of any wrong doing on Jesus' part. Pilate realized that this was a move caused by jealousy on the part of these religious people who accused Jesus. This is a frame-up to get rid of Jesus.

Luke 23:5 "And they were the more fierce, saying, He stirreth up the people, teaching throughout all Jewry, beginning from Galilee to this place."

This is the nearest thing to the truth they have told. The church had gotten so stagnant that nothing was happening and here this Jesus comes along and gets everyone excited about God. He brings hope where there was no hope.

People the church had turned down, are becoming His followers. He even heals people when there was no healing going on in the church. Someone surely needed to stir up the people. In fact, we could use a good stir in the church now before it completely dies.

Luke 23:6 "When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked whether the man were a Galilean."

Pilate quickly sees a chance to get off the hook. If this man is a Galilean, perhaps, this decision belongs to someone else.

Luke 23:7 "And as soon as he knew that he belonged unto Herod's jurisdiction, he sent him to Herod, who himself also was at Jerusalem at that time."

“Herod’s jurisdiction”: Herod Antipas ruled Galilee and Perea. The Pharisees, no friends of Herod themselves, may have warned Christ because they hoped the threat of violence from

Herod would either silence Him, or drive Him back to Judea, where the Sanhedrin would have jurisdiction over Him (see Luke 13:31).

“Sent him to Herod”: Herod had come to Jerusalem for the feasts, and Pilate seized the opportunity to free himself from a political dilemma by sending Jesus to his rival.

We see from this that Pilate really believed Jesus to be innocent, but he did not want to stir up the Jews against him. He really did not want the blood of this innocent man on his hands, especially since his wife had dreamed about this very thing and told Pilate not to do this.

His fear of the people caused him not to release Jesus. He did not want to condemn Him, either. He was pleased that He was in Herod's jurisdiction; and since Herod was in Jerusalem, he just sent Him to Herod to judge.

Luke 23:8 "And when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceeding glad: for he was desirous to see him of a long [season], because he had heard many things of him; and he hoped to have seen some miracle done by him."

“Was desirous to see him”: Herod’s interest in Christ was funneled by the fact that Christ reminded him of his late nemesis, John the Baptist (9:7-9). At one time Herod had apparently threatened to kill Jesus (13:31-33), but with Christ in Judea rather than Galilee and where Herod ruled, the king’s concern seems to have been nothing more than an eager curiosity.

Herod's usual residence was Capernaum, and he had heard of the mighty miracles that Jesus had done; but had never had an opportunity to see a miracle. Herod was not interested in punishing Jesus.

Luke 23:9 "Then he questioned with him in many words; but he answered him nothing."

“Answered him nothing”: It is significant that in all Jesus’ various interrogations, Herod was the only one to whom He refused to speak. (Matthew 7:6). Herod had summarily rejected the truth when he heard it from John the Baptist, so it would have been pointless for Jesus to answer him (Isa. 53:7; Psalms 38:13-14, 39:1-2, 9; 1 Peter. 2:23).

Pilate it appears, questioned Jesus at length, not to find fault, but to take care of his curiosity. Jesus did not answer him.

Luke 23:10 "And the chief priests and scribes stood and vehemently accused him."

The chief priests and scribes went right along when they carried Jesus to Herod and they continued accusing Jesus.

Luke 23:11 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.

“His men”: I.e., his security force.

“Set him at nought”: Herod made Christ and the charges against Him as an occasion for a joke for Pilate’s amusement (verse 12).

“A gorgeous robe”: Probably not the same robe mentioned (in Matthew 27:28), which was a military cloak. This was an elegant king’s garment, probably one that Herod was prepared to discard.

Since Jesus didn't do a miracle in front of Herod, he decided there must not be anything to the stories about the miracles. He and his men made fun of Jesus, they even put a kingly robe upon Him, and then they sent Jesus back to Pilate.

Luke 23:12 "And the same day Pilate and Herod were made friends together: for before they were at enmity between themselves."

“Friends”: Based on the common unjust and cowardly treatment of Jesus.

We see here that Herod felt that Pilate had shown respect for him by sending Jesus who was from his district to be judged by him. Herod recognized Pilate's superiority when he returned Jesus to Pilate for such a serious decision. This caused them to become friends.

Luke 23:13 "And Pilate, when he had called together the chief priests and the rulers and the people,"

“Called”: Pilate intended to declare Christ not guilty (verse 14), and it was his intention to make the verdict as public as possible. He undoubtedly expected that it would put an end to the whole matter.

Verses 14-15: Pilate and Herod concurred in the verdict (1 Tim. 6:13).

Luke 23:14-15 "Said unto them, 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 this 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."

The fear of man brings many into this snare that they will do an unjust thing, against their consciences, rather than get into trouble. Pilate declares Jesus innocent, and has a mind to release him.

Luke 23:16 "I will therefore chastise him, and release [him]."

“I will therefore chastise him”: (verse 22). Though Pilate found Him innocent of any wrongdoing he was prepared to scourge Him merely to pacify the Jews. But even that punishment, severe as it was, could not quench their thirst for His blood.

The very first thing that shows up in this is that even though Pilate and Herod found Jesus to be completely innocent, they both punished Him. Pilate, to please these people of the Sanhedrin says he will chastise Him. If he is innocent, it is illegal to chastise Him. These chief priests and rulers of the people will not be satisfied with this, because they want to be rid of Jesus.

Luke 23:17 "(For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.)"

“For of necessity”: I.e. because it was a longstanding Jewish custom (John 18:39), traditionally honored by the Romans.

It was the custom to release a prisoner (pardoned) at feast time.

Luke 23:18 "And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this [man], and release unto us Barabbas:"

“Barabbas”: A robber (John 18:40), and murderer (Luke 23:18-19), in some way involved as an anti-Roman insurrectionist. Whether his involvement was motivated by political conviction or personal greed is not known.

It is impossible to identify the specific insurrection in question, but such uprisings were common in Jesus’ day and were precursors of the wholesale revolt of (A.D. 66-70).

Jealousy is one of the cruelest sins, because men do terrible irrational things to innocent people. Barabbas was a menace to society, a very evil man, and yet they chose him over the Lord of all the earth.

Luke 23:19 "(Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.)"

You can easily see Barabbas deserved punishing. He had led a revolt against the authorities. John calls him a robber; and here in Luke, we see him called a murderer. In other words, he was a very evil man.

Luke 23:20 "Pilate therefore, willing to release Jesus, spake again to them."

Pilate wants to release Jesus. He knows Jesus is innocent of any wrong doing. Once more, he tries to convince these people to release Jesus.

Luke 23:21 "But they cried, saying, Crucify [him], crucify him."

“Crucify him”: Crucifixion was the most painful and disgraceful form of execution the Romans employed.

Pilate by this time has washed his hands and said he was innocent of taking this innocent man's blood. These religious people of the day would not be hushed. They wanted to be rid of this Jesus.

Luke 23:22 "And he said unto them the third time, Why, what evil hath he done? I have found no cause of death in him: I will therefore chastise him, and let [him] go."

“The third time”: Pilate repeatedly gave powerful testimony to the innocence of Christ (verses 4:14-15). In doing so, he not only condemned the Jews, who demanded Jesus’ death, but also himself, because he handed the Savior over without cause.

A ruler, or anyone who judges, should never allow a mob to make his decision for him. He knows Jesus is innocent and he should not be swayed by the mob. His fear of losing his high position is swaying his better judgement.

Luke 23:23 "And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed."

Pilate gave in to these loud voices of these Jews. Public opinion should never sway a judge. Pilate is afraid these Jews will cause great trouble with his rule and might even overthrow him.

Luke 23:24 "And Pilate gave sentence that it should be as they required."

“Pilate gave sentence”: Pilate’s response reveals his lack of principle. His desire to please the Jews for political reasons (to save himself from Rome’s displeasure), ultimately overcame his desire to set Jesus free (verse 20).

(John 18:39 - 19:16), gives a much more detailed account of Pilate’s decision to hand Jesus over.

We see mob rule here. Pilate, against his better judgement, sentences Jesus to crucifixion. Pilate is not as guilty as these Jewish Leaders. Nevertheless, he could have stopped this and he didn't. He knew Jesus was innocent of wrong doing, yet he sentenced Him anyway.

He cannot plead innocence. What a terrible fate to stand before Jesus on judgement day and know that you ordered the crucifixion.

Luke 23:25 "And he released unto them him that for sedition and murder was cast into prison, whom they had desired; but he delivered Jesus to their will."

This is the grossest example of injustice ever in history. We know that God will use this terrible injustice and bring the greatest act of grace in all of history about at the crucifixion of His only begotten Son.

Luke Chapter 23 Questions

1. When the multitude arose, where did they take Jesus?
2. Who is this multitude?

3. Why did they take Jesus to Pilate?
4. What did they accuse Jesus of before Pilate?
5. What question did Pilate ask Jesus?
6. How did Jesus answer in verse 3?
7. In verse 4. what statement did Pilate make to the people?
8. Where did they say Jesus had preached?
9. Why did Pilate believe where Jesus had preached would get him off the hook?
10. Who did Pilate send Jesus to?
11. Why was he glad to see Jesus?
12. When he questioned Jesus, how did Jesus answer?
13. Who went with Jesus and accused Him to Herod?
14. What did Herod and his men do to Jesus?
15. What two men were made friends?
16. When they brought Jesus back to Pilate, what did he tell the chief priests and rulers?
17. In verse 16, how was Pilate willing to punish this innocent man?
18. Verse 17 tells us of a custom. What was it?
19. Who did the priests and rulers ask to be released?
20. What was this one guilty of?
21. What did they want Pilate to do with Jesus?
22. How many times did Pilate go back and ask them to let him release Jesus?
23. Why didn't he release Jesus?
24. Whose wishes prevailed?
25. Who sentenced Jesus?

26. What rule do we see here?

27. What should a ruler do, instead of listening to a mob?

28. Do you feel Pilate will be counted innocent when he stands before Jesus on judgement day?