

# JESUS: The Greatest Life of All

## STUDY FOURTEEN

### The Last Trials and Torture of Jesus

*Selected Scriptures*

*Jesus had to be of an enormous physical strength to take the blows, but He took them. “By His wounds you were healed.”*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**W**ITH one voice, the high priest, the leading priests, and the supreme council of the Jews had declared their verdict—“Guilty!” they all cried. ‘He deserves to die!’” (Mark 14:63).

In their frenzied rush to judgment, these guardians of morality had broken almost every judicial code. According to the Talmud, trials were to be held during the daytime, in public, and not during a festival. The religious leaders, however, had tried Jesus at night and in secret during Passover week. They had no credible witnesses. Jesus had no defense attorney. The high priest himself led the questioning. The sentence was given without deliberation. All violations of their own laws.

But they had their death sentence. Now they needed the means to carry it out. Only the Romans could execute criminals, so the Jewish leaders took Jesus to Pontius Pilate to try the case.

How would Pilate judge Jesus when he came face-to-face with Him? Would Pilate see Jesus as a criminal deserving death? A misunderstood idealist unjustly accused? Or the only true King at whose name every knee will one day bow?

*What would Pilate do with Jesus?*



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### PREPARE YOUR HEART

Take a moment to ready your heart to experience the Roman trials of Jesus. Offer a prayer of worship to Christ and ask for deeper insight into the love that compelled Him through it all.



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The Roman emperor, Tiberius, appointed Pontius Pilate as procurator of Judea to maintain order in this volatile region—a daunting task for even the most skilled diplomat. Pilate, though, was an arrogant and churlish man with a habit of offending people, particularly the Jews whom he didn't understand or care about.

In his first visit to Jerusalem, he marched into the city with soldiers carrying Roman standards capped with a metal bust of Caesar—a graven idol to the Jews—and posted the standards as a reminder of Rome's rule. The standards outraged the Jews. A large delegation of Jews trailed Pilate back to Caesarea and dogged him for days to take them down. Pilate surrounded them in the amphitheater with a regiment of sword-wielding soldiers, but the Jews were willing to die rather than allow the standards to remain in Jerusalem.

Pilate acquiesced and removed the standards rather than risk news of unrest getting back to Caesar. From that point on, the Jews knew that they could bend Pilate to their will. When they brought Jesus to Pilate, they were confident Pilate would give them what they wanted.



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#### **Observation: The Roman Trials**

Pilate followed Roman trial procedures, which included four phases: accusation, interrogation, defense, and verdict.

#### **Trial 4: Before Pilate—Luke 23:1–2; John 18:28–38**

What did the Jewish officials do when they brought Jesus to Pilate, according to *John 18:28–30*? What hypocrisy do you observe in their sudden piety?

*Accusation.* The actual charge was blasphemy, but they didn't say that to Pilate. How did Luke record the accusation in *Luke 23:1–2*?

Pilate was no fool. He could see what was really going on (*Matthew 27:18*), and he tried to dismiss the case. What did the Jews say to press him into probing further, according to *John 18:31–32*?



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*Interrogation.* Was Jesus a threat to Rome? To find out, Pilate questioned Jesus—who asked questions of His own. What did Pilate and Jesus say to one another in [John 18:33–35](#)? *Who was interrogating whom?* What did Jesus want Pilate to think about?

*Defense.* Pilate allowed Jesus to argue His case. But Jesus was more interested in declaring the truth about Himself and inviting Pilate to believe in Him. Jesus was doing what He had always done—seeking a lost sheep.

In [John 18:36–38](#), how did Jesus help Pilate search his own soul?

*Verdict.* What verdict did Pilate reach, according to [John 18:38](#)? \_\_\_\_\_.

The case was closed it seemed, but the Jews weren't satisfied. They kept wagging their fingers at Jesus and stretching the truth, saying, "But he is causing riots by his teaching wherever he goes—all over Judea, from Galilee to Jerusalem!" (Luke 23:5).



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When Pilate realized Jesus was Galilean, he jumped at the chance to dump the whole mess on someone else. What did Pilate do next, according to [Luke 23:6–7](#)?

*One thing was certain, Jesus didn't deserve death. But Pilate had the emperor Tiberius breathing down his neck and the Jews about to turn him in. Herod was his out. Herod would take the case! —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

#### **Trial 5: Before Herod—Luke 23:8–12**

Herod Antipas was half Jewish, but by any moral standard, he was all Roman. He sent away his own wife so he could marry his sister-in-law with whom he was having an affair. When John the Baptizer denounced Herod, he arrested John and then beheaded him at the whim of Herod's new wife, whose daughter tantalized him with a sultry dance ([Matthew 14:1–12](#)).

Debauched. Self-indulgent. Weak-willed. This was the vile nature of the man who now sat in judgment over the Son of God.

What was Herod hoping for when Jesus was brought to him, according to [Luke 23:8–10](#)? Why do you think Jesus kept silent? Take a look at Jesus' own teaching in [Matthew 7:6](#).



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What was Herod's point in dressing Jesus in a royal robe when he sent Him back to Pilate in [Luke 23:11–14](#)?  
What do you think was Herod's verdict of Jesus?

### **Trial 6: Before Pilate Again—John 18:39–19:16**

Neither Pilate nor Herod considered Jesus a threat to Rome. The Jews, however, wouldn't back down. What attempt to release Jesus did Pilate try next, according to [John 18:39–40](#)?

Still unwilling to condemn an innocent man, Pilate thought the near-death punishment of a Roman scourging would satisfy the crowd's bloodthirst. What did the soldiers do to Jesus, according to [19:1–5](#)? See the article, "[Scourge](#)." How did Pilate hope the crowd would respond when they saw Jesus, now barely recognizable from the brutal torture?



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Back and forth Pilate went between the crowd and Jesus in *John 19:6–16*. How did the Jews tighten the screws? How did Pilate attempt to wriggle free from responsibility? How did Jesus keep reaching out to Pilate? What blasphemy did the Jews commit?

*In Matthew’s account, Pilate washes his hands of the whole mess. His problem isn’t dirty hands. The only way for Pilate to wash his heart is through the Lord Jesus, but he’s long past that, so Pilate says, “Crucify Him.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### **Interpretation: Jesus’ Message to Pilate**

Pilate was caught in the grip of a terrible dilemma. Would he order the death of an innocent man to pacify the Jews? Or would he release Jesus but risk the Jews reporting him to Caesar? Unable to discern a solution, Pilate despaired, “What is truth?” (John 18:38). In the end, as commentator William Barclay plainly states, “Pilate crucified Jesus to keep his job.”<sup>1</sup>

Sympathizing with Pilate’s plight, Jesus preached a profound sermon to him on faith. Piece together Jesus’ words in the following verses and summarize Jesus’ message.

*John 18:36–37:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*John 19:7–11:* \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



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What was Jesus declaring about Himself? What was He urging Pilate to do?

What should you do if you're trapped in a sticky ethical dilemma? What principle can you glean from Jesus' message to Pilate?



### **Correlation: The Message Behind Barabbas**

Matthew painted the scene with Barabbas in more detail, including a warning from Pilate's wife and Pilate washing his hands. Read [Matthew 27:15–26](#).

The innocent Jesus died in place of the guilty Barabbas. What truths from [Isaiah 53:5](#); [Romans 5:6–8](#); and [2 Corinthians 5:21](#) are behind Barabbas' story?



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Jesus, the King far greater than any earthly king, sacrificed Himself so that people might enter His Kingdom. What a Savior!

*I'm convinced that the cross Jesus was nailed to was a cross originally prepared for Barabbas. No one ever had his place taken by Jesus like Barabbas did. The one who deserved it was set free, and the One who didn't was crucified. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### **Application: Who Are You in These Scenes?**

In his final hours, Jesus was surrounded by people from all walks of life. Even today, we look around and find people:

1. Like Pilate—wanting to believe Jesus and do what's right but swayed by peer pressure.
2. Like Herod—too self-centered and superficial to take Jesus seriously.
3. Like Pilate's wife—trying to warn her husband but helpless to change the outcome.
4. Like the mob—driven by hatred and willing to abandon principle, justice, reason, and God.
5. Like the soldiers—sadistically and ignorantly mocking Jesus.
6. Like Barabbas—guilty and deserving death but set free.

Do you find yourself in any of these personalities? If so, whom and how so?



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At the center was the regal Jesus. Even when bloodied and broken, He was still reaching out to Pilate. Can you imagine Him reaching out to you in your current state? Based on what you've studied in these passages, what might His message be to you?

What response do you give Him?

We marvel at the strength of Jesus to endure suffering and to master His circumstances. At no time was Jesus a victim of events out of His control. He stood unshaken in the eye of the storm swirling around Him—just as He stands now in your storm. Cling to the Savior and keep your faith firmly planted in Him.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Father, the Jesus who bore the whip and wore the thorny crown, who patiently endured the mocking and hateful scorn, whom the world rejects and devils disdain—this Jesus is my Lord and Savior. I stand by Him no matter the consequences because He is my King. In His name, amen.*

#### ENDNOTE

1. William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 1, rev. ed., The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1975), 240.

