

Easter - Meeting Jesus

Pontius Pilate

Foundation

Bible passage : Matthew 27.1-2 & 11-26 etc

Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea for roughly 10 years from about 26AD-36AD. A Jewish historian (Josephus) and Greek philosopher (Philo) both wrote about his conflicts with the Jews. Pilate is mentioned in all four gospels, in Acts, 1 Timothy and both the Apostles and Nicene Creeds because of his role in the crucifixion of Jesus.

Many Jewish leaders saw Jesus as a threat both to themselves and to the delicate peace under Roman rule in Judea. Previous attempts to kill Jesus had failed (eg Lk 4.28-30) because it was not the right time in God's purposes. In the days before the crucifixion they tried to trick Jesus into saying things that would inflame the crowd or the Roman authorities, such as the question about paying taxes (Mtt 22.15-22). In the end they had to resort to arresting Jesus in the dark, presenting false witnesses, rushing through the trial and stirring up the crowd against Jesus.

Only the Roman Governor, Pilate, had the authority to have someone executed and so he

"I find no guilt in this man"

presided over a formal trial. Pilate was presented a trumped up charge and came to the conclusion that Jesus was innocent of anything deserving of death (Lk 23.4). Even his wife warned him as a result of a dream (Mtt 27.19). But Pilate was also



One of very few surviving inscriptions to Pilate discovered in Caesarea Maritima in 1961.

flummoxed by the fact that Jesus made no attempt to answer the charges (Mk 15.4-5) because His death was God's plan.

Pilate could have released Jesus but evidently didn't want to upset the Jewish leaders. He therefore tried to shift the decision on to the crowd using a tradition of releasing a prisoner at Passover. But, stirred up by the leaders, it was a "notorious prisoner called Barabbas" who was therefore released (Mtt 27.15-23).

Pilate was therefore faced again with the decision himself and publicly washed his hands claiming to be innocent of the death before handing over Jesus to die (Mtt 27.24-26)

The gospels all show how Pilate found Jesus innocent, and yet how he also bowed to the pressure of the mob. He was therefore both unjust and weak in what he did. Many can face such situations where we have to choose between doing what is right when others are pressuring us to do wrong, or choosing to do the wrong because it feels like the easier course.



Despite bringing about God's will, Pontius Pilate bowed to pressure and did what he knew to be wrong.