
PONTIUS PILATE

In 1961 an Italian excavation uncovered an inscription bearing the name Pontius Pilate. This was first physical evidence found outside of the Bible to confirm his existence.

The huge block of limestone which carried the inscription was found at the city of Caesarea and is engraved with the words:

. S TIBERIEVM	(Tiberieum)
. . [PO]NTIVS PILATVS	(Pontius Pilate)
[PRA]ECTVS IVDA[EA]E	(Perfect Judea)

The first word, *Tiberieum*, probably refers to a temple dedicated to the emperor Tiberius.

Pilate's name was also recorded by the well-known Roman historian, Cornelius Tacitus, who mentioned that Pilate crucified Christ just as recorded in the Bible. Tacitus, who was born around 52 A.D. and became Governor of Asia in 112 A.D., wrote the following in his History:

"Nothing which could be done by man, nor any amount of treasure that the prince could give, nor all the sacrifices which could be presented to the gods, could clear Nero from being believed to have ordered the burning, the fire of Rome. So to silence the rumor, he tortured and falsely charged those who were called the Christians, who were hated for their large following. **Christus, the founder of the name, was executed by Pontius Pilate, the Judean procurator, during the rule of Tiberius.**"

Some ancient writers also believed that Pilate sent a report back to Rome of the trial of Jesus. For example, around 150 A.D., Justin Martyr, writing in his defense of Christianity (First Apology) which he sent to the Roman Emperor Antoninus Pius, directed him to Pilate's report which he believed existed

somewhere in the imperial archives:

"The statement, "They spiked my hands and my feet" he says, are they not an accurate portrayal of the nails that were fixed in his hands and his feet on the cross, and after he was executed, those who crucified him cast lots and divided his clothing amongst themselves; these things did occur, and you may find them in the **'Acts' recorded under Pontius Pilate.**"

Later on he says: "At his coming the lame shall leap, tongue's that stammer shall speak clearly, the blind shall see, and the lepers shall be cleansed, and the dead shall rise and walk about. And you can learn that he did all these things from the **Acts of Pontius Pilate.**"

According to other historians, Pilate is portrayed as being a very cruel man. Philo of Alexandria, who wrote around 40 A.D. and was a contemporary of Jesus, had this to say about Pilate in his work entitled *"The embassy to Gaius 299-305"*:

"An official by the name of Pilate was appointed to be prefect of Judea. Rather than honoring Tiberius, he caused trouble amongst the Jews. In Herod's palace, in the Holy City, he installed gilded shields. They were inscribed with no image or anything that was forbidden, except for a small inscription, which stated two things, the name of the one in whose honor it was dedicated and the name of the person who commanded it to be installed.

But when this became widely known amongst the Jews, they appealed to the four sons of King Herod, who were held in high respect and were treated as if they were kings. They urged Pilate to remove the shields, and not to violate their customs, as other kings and emperors had previously done.

Pilate was a proud man who was both stubborn and cruel, he refused their demands. But they cried out even louder: "Do not cause a war! Or a revolt by our people! Let the peace between us stand! To dishonor our long held traditions will bring no honor

to the emperor. Do not insult our nation and bring dishonor to Tiberius. He does not approve of your doing away with our traditions. If you say that he does, show us some letter or decree, so that we may stop appealing to you and go to our master by means of an ambassador."

On hearing this, Pilate became frightened, for he knew that if they really went to the Emperor, they would also report on how he had been governing, fearing they would accuse him, and justly so, of cruelty, violence, thefts, assaults, executing prisoners without a trial, and many others.

Pilate then became angry and apprehensive, he did not know which way to turn, for he had neither the courage to remove what he had done, nor the desire to do anything which would please those under his rule. But at the same time he knew that Tiberius would not approve of his behavior. Pilate tried to conceal his emotions, but when the Jewish officials saw that he was regretting what he had done, they in return wrote a letter to Tiberius, pleading their case as forcibly as they knew how.

Tiberius was furious and wrote back to Pilate rebuking him with great threats! This was unusual, for he (Caesar) was not easily moved to anger but let his actions speak for themselves.

Immediately, and without delay, he wrote back to Pilate, using an untold number of harsh words to rebuke him for his arrogance and pride and ordered him to remove the shields at once and to have them sent back to the seaport of Caesarea . . . , there they were to be placed in the temple of Augustus. This was promptly done. In this way both the honor of the emperor and the policy of Rome towards Jerusalem remained in place.

Pilate's fear of a rebuke from Tiberius Caesar can also be found in the gospel of John chapter 19:6-14:

Pilate said to them, "You take Him and crucify Him, for I find no fault in Him." The Jews answered

him, "We have a law, and according to our law He ought to die, because He made Himself the Son of God."

Therefore, when Pilate heard that saying, he was the more afraid, and went again into the Praetorium, and said to Jesus, "Where are You from?" But Jesus gave him no answer.

Then Pilate said to Him, "Are You not speaking to me? Do You not know that I have power to crucify You, and power to release You?"

Jesus answered, "You could have no power at all against Me unless it had been given you from above. Therefore the one who delivered Me to you has the greater sin."

From then on Pilate sought to release Him, but the Jews cried out, saying, "If you let this Man go, you are not Caesar's friend."

"Whoever makes himself a king speaks against Caesar." **When Pilate therefore heard that saying**, he brought Jesus out and sat down in the judgment seat in a place that is called The Pavement, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha. Now it was the Preparation Day of the Passover, and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, "Behold your King!"



Another historian, Flavius Josephus, also wrote an account which mentioned Pilate:

"On another occasion he caused a riot by spending the sacred treasure from the temple, without permission, on the construction of an aqueduct which brought water into the city from a distance of seventy kilometers away. Mad with rage at this proceeding, the crowd formed a ring around the tribunal of Pilate, who was visiting Jerusalem at the time, and attacked him with a violent outburst.

He foreseeing a revolt beforehand, had dispatched among the crowd a troop of his soldiers, disguised as civilians but armed, with orders not to use their swords but to beat any rioter who got out of hand. At the proper time he motioned to his men.

The Jews perished in large numbers, some from the blows which they had received, while others were trampled to death by the crowds who were trying to flee from the beatings. Frightened by the sight of the victims, the multitude grew silent." *The Jewish War* 2.175-177

It is possible that Jesus may have alluded to this event in the gospel of Luke 13: 1-3 which says:

"There were present at that season some who told Him about the **Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices**. And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things?"

"I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

The Bible in John 18: 33-38 states: Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?"

Jesus answered him, "Are you speaking for yourself about this, or did others tell you this concerning Me?" Pilate answered, "Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me. What have You done?"



Jesus answered, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here."

Pilate therefore said to Him, "Are You a king then?"

Jesus answered, "You say rightly that I am a king. For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the *truth* hears My voice." Pilate said to Him, "*What is truth?*" And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews, and said to them, "I find no fault in Him at all."

THE ANSWER OF JESUS CONCERNING WHAT IS TRUTH:

Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the **Truth**, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. "If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him."
John 14:6-7

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