

Pilate

Little is known of this upper middle-class Roman before AD26 when the Emperor Tiberius appointed him to be the fifth procurator of Judaea and in accordance with a change in policy by the Senate, Pilate was allowed to take his wife with him, [Matthew 27:19].

As procurator Pilate had full control of the province, being in charge of the army of occupation, [over 2,500 infantry, over 100 cavalry which were stationed at Caesarea with a detachment on garrison duty at Jerusalem in the fortress of Antonia.]

The procurator had full powers of life and death, and could reverse capital sentences passed by the Sanhedrin, which had to be submitted to him for ratification.

The procurator also appointed the high priests and controlled the Temple and its funds, the very vestments of the high priest were in his custody and were only released for festivals, when the procurator took up residence in Jerusalem and brought additional troops to patrol the city.

Josephus tells us that Pilate's first action on taking up his appointment was to antagonise the Jews by setting up Roman standards, bearing images of the emperor, at Jerusalem. Previous procurators had avoided using such standards in the holy city.

Because of the determined resistance of the Jewish leaders inspite of threats of death, Pilate yielded to their wishes after a short period of unrest and removed the images back to Caesarea.

Both Josephus and Eusebius allege a further grievance of the Jews against Pilate, in that he used money from the Temple treasury to build an aqueduct to convey water to the city from a spring some 25 miles away.

Tens of thousands of Jews demonstrated against this project when Pilate came to Jerusalem at the time of a festival and he in response sent his troops in disguise against them, so that a large number were slain. It is considered this riot was caused by the Galileans mentioned in **Luke 13:1-2**, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

The historian Noldius claims that Herod's enmity against Pilate [Luke 23:12] arose from the fact that Pilate had slain some of Herod's subjects.

This explains Pilate's subsequent care to send Jesus Christ to be tried before Herod, [Luke 23:6-7].

It is not known for sure that the tower at Siloam which collapsed [Luke 13:4] was part of Pilate's aqueduct.

Pilate finally over-reached himself by the slaughter of a number of Samaritans who had assembled at Mount Gerizim in the response to a call of a deceiver who had promised to show them that Moses had hidden the sacred vessels there.

A Samaritan delegation went with a protest to Vitellius, who was then the governor of Syria, and he ordered Pilate to answer this accusation of the Jews before the emperor, ordering Marcellus of Judaea in Pilate's place.

Pilate was on his journey to Rome when Tiberius died, [AD37].

We know of no record of the trial, but Eusebius preserves a report of Greek historians that Pilate was forced to commit suicide during the reign of Gaius, [AD37-41].

The historian Philo can find no good thing to say about Pilate, describing him as “*By nature rigid and stubbornly harsh and of a spiteful disposition and an exceedingly wrathful man.*” Philo also speaks of bribes, acts of pride, acts of violence and outrages, cases of spiteful treatment, constant murders without trial, ceaseless and grievous brutality.

The verdict of the New Testament record is that he was a weak man, ready to serve expediency rather than principle, whose authorisation of the judicial murder of Jesus Christ was less due to a desire to please the Jews, more a fear of imperial displeasure if the Emperor Tiberius heard of further unrest in Judaea.

Pilate’s little understanding of the Jews and even less liking is shown in the wording of the superscription on the cross of Jesus Christ, [John 19:19-22].

For Pilate there was never a doubt about Jesus Christ’s innocence. Three separate times he declared Jesus Christ not guilty, he could not understand what made the people want to murder Jesus Christ.

The fear that the Jewish people would inform the emperor that Pilate had not eliminated a rebel against Rome, caused him to do what he knew was wrong.

What can we learn from the recorded life of Pilate? –

Great evil can happen when the truth is at the mercy of political pressure.

Trying to control people by brute force never works in the end.

Constant political pressure can make a person cynical and an uncaring compromiser.

Resisting the truth leaves a person without purpose or direction.

The Creator God promises to honour those who do right, **not** those who follow the example of Pilate seeking to make everyone happy.