

It ensured that Jesus sentencing was not done in secret behind closed door, this was unfortunate for the Sadducees.

? **Do you notice anything strange about these verses? v28-32**
How convincing is 'if he were not a criminal we would not have handed him over to you' as a legal argument?

It is because of this that we assume the high priest has already visited Pilate by night to prepare him. He must have explained that Jesus was dangerous and it is in everybody's best interests for him to be executed immediately. The substance of this meeting may be recorded in Luke 23v13-14.

How would Pilate be likely to treat this request?

Knowing his track record with the high priest he must have treated it with great suspicion. Pilate has two choices he can simply endorse the Sanhedrin's verdict or he can retry Jesus case. If he does the latter it would be sensible for him to wait until after the feast. This would be the most obvious course of action.

? **Which does the high priest want him to do?**
How would you rate the high priest's chances?

This must have been some hard sell! Against the odds Caiaphas comes away from his midnight meeting with Pilate with an agreement that Pilate will simply endorse the Sanhedrin's sentence.

? **What does verse 29 suggest Pilate is going to do?**
Why do you think he did this?

Pilate has either had a change of heart or was tricking Caiaphas the night before. He intends to try Jesus himself, exactly what the Sadducees had hoped to avoid.

At this point the Sadducees plans for Jesus hand on a knife edge, it all depends on a stubborn and capricious Roman governor.

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Pilate and Judea

***** Pilate was the governor or procurator of Judea for 10 years between 26AD and 36AD, during the reign of the Roman Emperor Tiberius. The Jewish writers Philo and Josephus both comment on his career. In 1961 a block of limestone was discovered at Caesarea bearing an inscription which mentioned Pilate (Tiberieum Pontius Pilate). It was part of a temple he consecrated to Tiberius.

Pilate came from the upper middle classes, not the background you would expect for a governor. He was a career military man, certainly not a diplomat. He owed his position as governor to his wife Claudius, who was related to Tiberius.

Neither Josephus nor Philo are complimentary concerning Pilate, they describe him as a hard brutal man, what we would expect of a career Roman soldier. He had no understanding or patience with Judaism and no intention of making allowances for it.

Jerusalem needed sensitive handling. Their faith in God stood out from the paganism of the Romans. The Romans struggled to understand their strong, to the Romans irrational, opposition to idolatry and paganism, or their willingness to die for what they believed.


Five incidents describe Pilate's governorship

1 The first thing Pilate did on becoming governor was to set up the Roman legionary standards in Jerusalem. This was the first thing any governor across the empire would do, but it was something his predecessors had carefully avoided. The standards bore the image of Caesar and were associated with worship. They broke the third commandment. Josephus says he did this secretly, intending to flout the Jewish laws. Suddenly he finds the whole city up in arms and on the point of rioting.

A huge crowd of Jews went to Caesarea, the seat of Roman government and besieged him. The stand-off lasted for six days. In the end Pilate gave them an ultimatum, back down or die. At this the entire crowd uncovered their necks and offered to die. In the end Pilate had to back down, creating a bad precedent. So began the mutual antagonism that existed throughout his governorship.

? **What does this incident tell us about Pilate?**

As governor Pilate was responsible to Caesar. The Romans kept their governors fully accountable, they always had to watch their backs. Being governor was a lucrative post, big money could be made out of the provinces. As governor Pilate had two overriding jobs. Collect Roman taxes and keep the peace. A governor who failed to do these would be short lived.

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Tiberius appointed only 2 governors to Judea in 26 years, most emperors changed them every few years. When asked about this, Tiberius told the story of a beggar covered with blood sucking flies, a man passing by cleared the flies from him only to receive a rebuke. *"What did you do that for? Those flies have already drunk as much blood as they want, new flies will drink more."*

To complicate matters Jerusalem had 'temple sweeper status' under Roman law, as an important religious centre it was autonomous and self governing. The high priest and Sanhedrin had civil control of the city but Pilate ruled the province and was in overall control. This made control of the city very awkward. The Romans built the Antonian fortress overlooking the temple mount to try to keep order.

2 To get his own back for the defeat he had suffered over the standards Pilate had golden shields made and hung on the wall of the fortress, and the conflict started again. Knowing Pilate would not back down a second time, Herod's sons took the issue to Tiberius. Herod always maintained good relations with Caesar and the Herod's father had previously ruled over Jerusalem. Tiberius ordered the shields removed and placed in the temple in Caesarea. From this incident sprung the animosity between Pilate and Herod. Luke 23v11

? **What does this tell us about Pilate?**
How do you think Pilate felt about a second public defeat?
How do you think his attitude was towards the Jews?

! These incidents exposed Pilate's two critical weaknesses. Danger of riot or revolt and appeal to Caesar.

3 The third incident was quite different. Jerusalem's water has always been problematic. Pilate wanted to build an aqueduct from springs beyond Bethlehem to the temple. The water was seriously needed especially when Jerusalem filled up with pilgrims three times a year. Again the crowds protested. They didn't want Pilate doing anything that encroached on the sovereignty of Jerusalem or the temple, especially if he was going to confiscate temple funds to do so. The protest took place during the lead up to one of the festivals. Pilate dressed his soldiers up in civilian clothes, they mingled with the crowd. When the command was given, they pulled out their swords and massacred a large number of unarmed civilians.

▶ **Read Luke 13v1**
This verse probably refers to this incident.
Galileans would not have been the only victims, but Jesus was in Galilee at the time.
What does this incident tell us about Pilate?

4 He minted coins with the emperors bust on them, again something his predecessors had avoided.

5 The final straw in Pilate's long and violent career occurred in Samaria. A false prophet gathered a large crowd around himself at Mt Gerazim. He promised to show them where the temple vessels had been hidden. Pilate sent out his troops to prevent them reaching the mountain, a blood bath ensued. This was a religious crowd of unarmed people who were not engaged in a riot. Representation was made to Vitellius in Syria, Pilate immediate

superior. Pilate was sent back to Rome. This coincided with Tiberius' death. Pilate stood trial before Caligula. We do not know the result of the trial.

Pilate ended his life in Lausanne in Switzerland. According to Eusebius, he committed suicide on Caligula's orders. Philo describes Pilate as '*naturally inflexible, a blend of self-will and relentlessness*' who, '*feared exposure for his conduct as governor... the briberies, the insults, the robberies, the outrages and wanton injuries; executions without trial constantly repeated, the ceaseless and supremely grievous cruelty... his vindictiveness and furious temper.*' Philo, Legatio ad Gaium

Tacticus (112AD) is the only Roman historian to mention Pilate. Tacticus' only mention of Pilate is that he condemned Jesus to death.

! Jesus is arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane at about 10pm on Thursday night. If He is to be executed it must happen before sunset on Friday, less than 20 hours later. The Sadducees are completely unprepared for His arrest. During the first part of the night Jesus is interviewed by Annas the previous high priest and then held captive. The high priest during this time has to assemble the Sanhedrin and put together witness to condemn Jesus. This he clearly struggles with.

? **How do we know this?** Mark 14v55-59
How hard would it be to fabricate evidence against Jesus?

This just goes to illustrate the unpreparedness of the high priest and the hurry they were operating under. The Sanhedrin could not condemn a man to death under cover of darkness. Jesus final sentence could not be reached until first light. Immediately after this Jesus is taken to Pilate. Although in most regards Jerusalem was self governing the Romans held the death penalty under their own control. Only Pilate could order Jesus execution.

? **What was Jesus condemned for before the Sanhedrin?** Mark 14v62-64
What was Jesus accused of before Pilate? Luke 23v2

The Sanhedrin has found Jesus guilty of blaspheme, under Jewish law this received an automatic death penalty. Pilate would never agree to this, so the charges Jesus faced carefully changed from blaspheme before the Sanhedrin to sedition before Pilate. The first mention of Pilate in the passion accounts comes when Jesus is brought before him for sentencing by the high priest. The accounts are brief, John is the only Gospel that gives the details of the interaction.

*** Read John 18v28-32.**
Pilate lived in Caesarea. Festival times were tense and dangerous times. Pilate was in Jerusalem because of the danger of riots. It was a concession by itself that Pilate came out to receive the delegation. Pilate would not normally have held court on a day like this.

? **Why did Pilate come out to address them, rather than receiving them in his chambers?**
The passover was to be eaten that evening.
What difference does this make to the story?