

# The Gospel of Luke

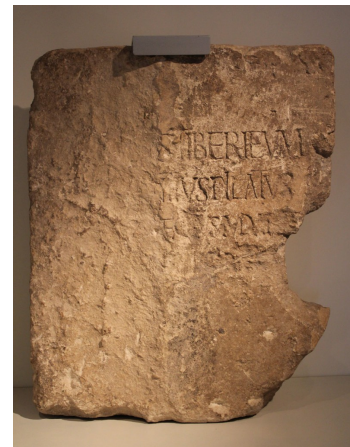
## Lesson 25

### Pilate

**Luke 23:1** Then the whole body of them got up and brought Him before Pilate. <sup>2</sup> And they began to accuse Him, saying, "We found this man misleading our nation and forbidding to pay taxes to Caesar, and saying that He Himself is Christ, a King."

The accusations by the whole body are outright lies. The Lord has not been misleading the nation, nor has He forbidden the nation to pay taxes! He has stated to them to "render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's."<sup>25</sup>

They bring Jesus before Pilate who is the Roman Governor of Judea. Without him, the Jews have no power to put the Lord to death. Physical evidence relating to Pilate was discovered in 1961 when a block of black limestone was found in the Roman theatre at Caesarea Maritima bearing a damaged dedication by Pilate of Tiberieum. This dedication states that he was *prefect/governor* of Judaea. The inscription is currently housed in the Israel museum in Jerusalem and dates from to 26-37.



### Herod

**Luke 23:3** So Pilate asked Him, saying, "Are You the King of the Jews?" And He answered him and said, "*It is as you say.*" <sup>4</sup> Then Pilate said to the chief priests and the crowds, "I find no guilt in this man." <sup>5</sup> But they kept on insisting, saying, "He stirs up the people, teaching all over Judea, starting from Galilee even as far as this place." <sup>6</sup> When Pilate heard it, he asked whether the man was a Galilean. <sup>7</sup> And when he learned that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod, who himself also was in Jerusalem at that time. <sup>8</sup> Now Herod was very glad when he saw Jesus; for he had wanted to see Him for a long time, because he had been hearing about Him and was hoping to see some sign performed by Him. <sup>9</sup> And he questioned Him at some length; but He answered him nothing. <sup>10</sup> And the chief priests and the scribes were standing there, accusing Him vehemently. <sup>11</sup> And Herod with his soldiers, after treating Him with contempt and mocking Him, dressed Him in a gorgeous robe and sent Him back to Pilate. <sup>12</sup> Now Herod and Pilate became friends with one another that very day; for before they had been enemies with each other.

After inheriting his territories upon the death of his father Herod the Great in 4 BC, Antipas ruled the area as a client state of the Roman Empire. Antipas had divorced his first wife, the daughter of King Aretas IV of Nabatea, to marry Herodias, who was divorced from his brother. According to the New Testament Gospels, it was John the Baptist's condemnation

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<sup>25</sup> Matthew 22:20-22

of this arrangement that led Antipas to have him arrested and put to death. Besides provoking his conflict with John the Baptist, the tetrarch's divorce added a personal grievance to his previous father-in-law, Aretas, over territory on the border of Perea and Nabatea. The result was a war that proved disastrous for Antipas. A Roman counter-offensive was ordered by Tiberius but abandoned upon his death in AD 37. In AD 39, Antipas was accused by his nephew, Agrippa I, of conspiracy against the new Roman emperor, Caligula, who sent him into exile in Gaul, modern-day France. Accompanied there by Herodias, he died on an unknown date.

Here is Herod's report to the senate.

### ***To Tiberius Caesar and the Senate of Rome***

My Noble Lords, Greeting:

It is true, as my opponent asserts that I was defeated in battle with Aretas, King of Arabia, but I was forced to fight when unprepared for the conflict. I either had to fight or have the country overrun by this wicked people. It is true I was defeated, but it was owing to the want of time and better preparation. Aretas came upon me without warning. Notwithstanding I was defeated, his army was so crippled that he had to withdraw his forces from the field, and had not been able to rally them since. So our country was saved from the devastation of a foreign foe.

I understand that the superstitious Jews say my defeat was for my wickedness in beheading John the Baptist. My understanding of the God of the Jews is that He does not chastise the innocent for the crimes of the guilty. What did my actions have to do with the poor, suffering soldier? But if He had to punish all in order to reach me, then where is His almighty power they boast so much of? I do not know whether their God was angry at me or not. There is one thing I know, the act was done with the holy intention of bringing the greatest amount of good to the greatest number of people; and if this is so, no court can gainsay it or condemn it.

The facts in the case are about as follows: John the Baptist had set up a new mode of religion altogether different from the Jewish religion, teaching baptism instead of circumcision, which had been the belief and custom of the Jews in all ages past. According to their theory, God appeared to Abraham hundreds of years before, and told him with His own lips how and what to do to be saved; and the Jews have lived according to this until it had become their nature, and all their forefathers had lived in this way. David, Solomon, Isaac, Jacob, and all the holy prophets had gone to heaven in this way of God's own appointment. Now, the question came to them, as they suggested it to me: Had God found that He was wrong? Has His wisdom failed Him? Or has the unchanged changed, and He is wavering in His purpose? Such would be the natural conclusion of a sensible man under the circumstances. Now, John the Baptist had no authority from God for what he was doing, as Abraham had. All he could say was, "He that sent me to baptize is true;" and he cannot tell who he was. Then his going into the wilderness: God had ordered Solomon to build the finest temple that was ever built in the world, and made promises that whosoever

came to that house with his offerings his prayers should be heard and answered. This temple had been the place of their meeting for hundreds of years, for the Jews think this temple the next place to heaven.

Now see the difference: 1st. John has no authorized authority. 2nd. He changes God's place of worship. 3rd. He changes the doctrines. 4th. He changes the mode of application.

Now, the idea of Gamaliel was that John wanted to be some great man; hence, he took this mode of eccentric life to establish it. And there is nothing better qualified than the course he took to make an impression upon the ignorant and unlearned – to go away out into the wilderness by himself, get a few friends from Jerusalem to go out and hear him, and come back and tell of the great wonders which they had seen in the wilderness. Then John's appearance – his long, uncombed hair and beard, his fantastic clothing, and his food, nothing but bugs and beans – such a course and such a character are well qualified to lead the illiterate astray. These troubles on the Jewish mind were very heavy, and gave such men as Hilderiuim, Shammai, Hillel, and others great concern. And no wonder, for in their judgment it was vacating the temple of religious worship; it was blocking the road to heaven, and driving the poor and unsuspecting to ruin, as well as destroying the whole nation. So it was, by their request, as so ordered, that it was better to execute one to save the many from a worse fate. And this is the true reason for the deed, and not to please the whim of a dancing-girl, as you have heard. Now, my lords, if this is not satisfactory, I would ask my accuser, Caius, to write any of the learned Jews, and learn if my statement is not correct.

As to Agrippa's accusing me of having arms for seventy thousand soldiers, it is correct; but they were left me by my father, Herod the Great. And as they were needed to defend the province, and I did not know it was necessary to report them, I never thought of keeping them secret. But as to my being in league with Sejonius, I appeal to the virtue of my conduct, and demand investigation.

As to what Pontius Pilate says in regard to my cowardice and disobedience in the case of Jesus of Nazareth, I will say in my own defense: I was informed by all the Jews that this was the same Jesus that my father aimed to destroy in his infancy; for I have it in my father's private writings and accounts of his life, showing that when the report was circulated of three men inquiring where was he that was born King of the Jews, he called together the Hillel and Shammai schools, and demanded the reading of the sacred scrolls; that it was decided he was to be born in Bethlehem of Judea, as read and interpreted that night by Hillel. So when my father learned that there was a birth of a male child in Bethlehem under very strange circumstances, and he could not learn who nor where the child was, he sent and had the male children slain that were near his age. Afterward he learned that his mother had taken him and fled into the wilderness. For this attempt to uphold the Roman authority in the land of Judea the world has not ceased to curse him to this day; and yet the Caesars have done a thousand worse things, and done them a thousand

times, and it was all well. Just think how many lives have been lost to save the Roman Empire; while those infants were only removed in their innocence from the evil to come. The proper way to judge of action is to let the act judge, or the one with whom the action terminates. If this should be done, and there is a life of happiness beyond for innocence to dwell in, those infants as well as the Rachel's should be thankful to my father for the change. Again, my lords, Pilate is a higher officer than I; and you know in our law the lower court always has the right to appeal to the higher. As to Pilate's saying that Jesus was a Galilean, he is mistaken. Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, as the records show. And as to his citizenship, he had none. He wandered about from place to place, having no home, making his abode principally with the poor. He was a wild fanatic, who had taken up the doctrines of John (but not his baptism), and was quite an enthusiast. He had learned sooth-saying, while in Egypt, to perfection. I tried to get him to perform some miracle while in my court, but he was too sharp to be caught in a trap; like all necromancers, he was afraid to show off before the intelligent. From what I could learn he had reprimanded some of the rich Jews for their meanness, and his reproaches were not out of the way, from what I heard they would have been much better men if they had practiced what he preached.

So this is my defense. I submit it for your consideration, praying clemency."  
HEROD ANTIPAS

#### [Herod sends Jesus back to Pilate.](#)

**Luke 23:13** Pilate summoned the chief priests and the rulers and the people, **14** and said to them, "You brought this man to me as one who incites the people to rebellion, and behold, having examined Him before you, I have found no guilt in this man regarding the charges which you make against Him. **15** "No, nor has Herod, for he sent Him back to us; and behold, nothing deserving death has been done by Him. **16** "Therefore I will punish Him and release Him." **17** [Now he was obliged to release to them at the feast one prisoner.] **18** But they cried out all together, saying, "Away with this man, and release for us Barabbas!" **19** (He was one who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection made in the city, and for murder.) **20** Pilate, wanting to release Jesus, addressed them again, **21** but they kept on calling out, saying, "Crucify, crucify Him!" **22** And he said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has this man done? I have found in Him no guilt *demanding* death; therefore I will punish Him and release Him." **23** But they were insistent, with loud voices asking that He be crucified. And their voices *began* to prevail. **24** And Pilate pronounced sentence that their demand be granted. **25** And he released the man they were asking for who had been thrown into prison for insurrection and murder, but he delivered Jesus to their will.

Here is the first section of Pilate's report to Caesar about his encounter with Jesus.

### ***To Tiberius Caesar, Emperor of Rome***

Noble Sovereign, Greeting:

The events of the last few days in my province had been of such a character that I will give the details in full as they occurred, as I should not be surprised if, in the course of time, they may change the destiny of our nation, for it seems of late that all the gods have ceased to be propitious. I am almost ready to say, cursed be the day that I succeeded Vallerius Flaceus in the government of Judea; for since then my life has been one of continual uneasiness and distress.

On my arrival at Jerusalem I took possession of the Praetorium, and ordered a splendid feast to be prepared to which I invited the tetrarch of Galilee, with the high priest and his officers. At the appointed hour no guests appeared. This I considered an insult offered to my dignity, and to the whole government which I represent. A few days after the high priest deigned to pay me a visit. His deportment was grave and deceitful. He pretended that his religion forbade him and his attendants to sit at the table of the Romans, and eat and offer libations with them, but this was only a sanctimonious seeming, for his very countenance betrayed his hypocrisy. Although I thought it expedient to accept his excuse, from that moment I was convinced the conquered had declared themselves the enemy of the conquerors; and I would warn the Romans to beware of the high priests of this country. They would betray their own mother to gain office and a luxurious living. It seems to me that, of conquered cities, Jerusalem is the most difficult to govern. So turbulent are the people that I live in momentary dread of an insurrection. I have not soldiers sufficient to suppress it. I had only one centurion and a hundred men at my command. I requested a reinforcement from the prefect of Syria, who informed me that he had scarcely troops sufficient to defend his own province. An insatiate thirst for conquest to extend our empire beyond the means of defending it, I fear, will be the cause of the final overthrow of our whole government. I lived secluded from the masses, for I did not know what those priests might influence the rabble to do yet I endeavored to ascertain, as far as I could, the mind and standing of the people.

Among the various rumors that came to my ears there was one in particular that attracted my attention. A young man, it was said, had appeared in Galilee preaching with a noble suasion a new law in the name of the God that had sent him. At first I was apprehensive that his design was to stir up the people against the Romans, but my fears were soon dispelled. Jesus of Nazareth spoke rather as a friend of the Romans than of the Jews. One day in passing by the place of Siloe, where there was a great concourse of people, I observed in the midst of the group a young man who was leaning against a tree, calmly addressing the multitude. I was told it was Jesus. This I could easily have suspected, so great was the difference between him and those listening to him. His golden-colored hair and beard gave to his appearance a celestial aspect. He appeared to be about thirty years of age. Never have I seen a

sweeter or more serene countenance. What a contrast between him and his hearers, with their black beards and tawny complexions!

Unwilling to interrupt him by my presence, I continued my walk, but signified to my secretary to join the group and listen. My secretary's name is Manlius. He is the grandson of the chief of the conspirators who encamped in Erturia waiting for Cataline. Manlius had been for a long time an inhabitant of Judea, and is well acquainted with the Hebrew language. He was devoted to me, and worthy of my confidence. On entering the praetorium I found Manlius, who related to me the words Jesus had pronounced at Siloe. Never have I heard in the works of the philosophers anything that can compare to the maxims of Jesus. One of the rebellious Jews, so numerous in Jerusalem, having asked Jesus if it was lawful to give tribute to Caesar he replied: "Render unto Caesar the things that belong to Caesar, and unto God the things that are God's."

It was on account of the wisdom of his sayings that I granted so much liberty to the Nazarene; for it was in my power to have had him arrested, and exiled to Pontus; but that would have been contrary to the justice which has always characterized the Roman government in all its dealings with me; this man was neither seditious nor rebellious; I extended to him my protection, unknown perhaps to himself. He was at liberty to act, to speak, to assemble and address the people, and to choose disciples, unrestrained by any praetorian mandate. Should it ever happen (may the gods avert the omen!), should it ever happen, I say, that the religion of our forefathers will be supplanted by the religion of Jesus, it will be this noble toleration that Rome shall owe her premature death, while I, miserable wretch, will have been the instrument of what the Jews call Province, and we call destiny.

This unlimited freedom granted to Jesus provoked the Jews; not the poor, but the rich and powerful. It is true, Jesus was severe on the latter, and this was a political reason, in my opinion, for not restraining the liberty of the Nazarene. "Scribes and Pharisees," he would say to them, "you are a race of vipers; you resemble painted sepulchers; you appear well unto men, but you have death within you." At other times he would sneer at the aims of the rich and proud, telling them that the mite of the poor was more precious in the sight of god. Complaints were daily made to the praetorium against the insolence of Jesus.

I was even informed that some misfortune would befall him; that it would not be the first time that Jerusalem had stoned those who called themselves prophets; an appeal would be made to Caesar. However, my conduct was approved by the Senate, and I was promised a re-enforcement after the termination of the Parthian war.

Being too weak to suppress an insurrection, I resolved upon adopting a measure that promised to restore the tranquility of the city without subjecting the praetorian to humiliating concession. I wrote to Jesus requesting an interview with him at the praetorian. He came. You know that in my veins flows the Spanish mixed with

Roman blood; as incapable of fear as it is weak emotion. When the Nazarene was as calm as innocence itself! When he came up to me he stopped, and by a signal sign he seemed to say to me, "I am here," though he spoke not a word. For some time I contemplated with admiration and awe this extraordinary type of man, a type of man unknown to our numerous painters, who have given form and figure to all the gods and heroes. There was nothing about him that was repelling in its character, yet I felt too awed and tremulous to approach him.

### **Simon of Cyrene**

**Luke 23:26** When they led Him away, they seized a man, Simon of Cyrene, coming in from the country, and placed on him the cross to carry behind Jesus.

It appears that the Lord carries his own cross until He can no longer do so and a man named Simon is pressed into carrying it by the soldiers. Nothing certain is known about this Simon, although his sons, Alexander and Rufus, are mentioned in Mark 15:21.

**Mark 15:21** They pressed into service a passer-by coming from the country, Simon of Cyrene (the father of Alexander and Rufus), to bear His cross.

This passage leads us to suppose that Simon is a disciple of Christ because of Mark's notation in his Gospel regardless of what he was at the time of the crucifixion.

### **Stop Weeping**

**Luke 23:27** And following Him was a large crowd of the people, and of women who were mourning and lamenting Him. <sup>28</sup> But Jesus turning to them said, "Daughters of Jerusalem, stop weeping for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children.

Women are all around Jesus. He is anointed by a woman for his burial. Women are the last at His grave and the first at His resurrection. Women minister to His needs. Women bewail and lament for Him. A pagan woman pleads with her husband, Pilate, for His life and, above all, of a woman He was born.

### **Coming Days**

**Luke 23:29** "For behold, the days are coming when they will say, 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' <sup>30</sup> "Then they will begin TO SAY TO THE MOUNTAINS, 'FALL ON US,' AND TO THE HILLS, 'COVER US.' <sup>31</sup> "For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

The Lord contrasts Himself to the Jewish nation by saying, "For if they do these things when the tree is green, what will happen when it is dry?"

### **Two Criminals**

**Luke 23:32** Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with Him.

His being crucified with criminals is a literal fulfillment of Isaiah' prophecy that the Messiah would be "numbered with the transgressors."

**Isaiah 53:12** Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.

### **The Skull**

**Luke 23:33** When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. **34** But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.

These words are probably spoken while the Lord is being nailed to the cross, or as soon as the cross is set up. It is worth noting that as soon as the blood of the Great Sacrifice begins to flow, the Great High Priest begins to intercede. During the six hours that the Lord is on the cross He shows that He possesses the full power as the Son of God and that, although He is suffering, His agony is undertaken voluntarily. As King and Prophet He opens the gates of life to the penitent thief and foretells His entry into paradise. As Priest, He intercedes in this prayer for those who crucified Him.

The Lord is evidently crucified naked. The shame of such a posture in death must doubtless have added much to the misery of the punishment of crucifixion.

### **The Inscription**

**Luke 23:35** And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One." **36** The soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, **37** and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!" **38** Now there was also an inscription above Him, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS."

Observe that the Lord is crucified in the end as a King. He came to set up a spiritual kingdom and as its King He has died.

### **The Insults**

**Luke 23:39** One of the criminals who were hanged *there* was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" **40** But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?" **41** "And we indeed *are suffering* justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." **42** And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" **43** And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

Here we see the sovereignty of God in saving sinners. We are told of the two criminals, one on His right hand and the other on His left. Both are equally physically close to Christ. Both

see and hear all that happens during the six hours that He hangs on the cross. Both are men dying and suffering acute pain just as the Lord. Both are equally sinners and need forgiveness. Yet, one dies in his sins as he had lived, hardened, impenitent and unbelieving; one repents, believing, crying to Jesus for mercy and is saved. One thief is saved from his despair, one thief is not.

## **Darkness**

**Luke 23:44** It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, <sup>45</sup> because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup> And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, "Father, INTO YOUR HANDS I COMMIT MY SPIRIT." Having said this, He breathed His last. <sup>47</sup> Now when the centurion saw what had happened, he *began* praising God, saying, "Certainly this man was innocent." <sup>48</sup> And all the crowds who came together for this spectacle, when they observed what had happened, *began* to return, beating their breasts. <sup>49</sup> And all His acquaintances and the women who accompanied Him from Galilee were standing at a distance, seeing these things.

It is right for everyone in Jerusalem to focus on the great sacrifice for sin which is being offered and on the Son of God who is dying. Signs and wonders were wrought for all the Israelites to see when the law was given at Sinai. Similarly, there are signs and wonders when the atoning blood of Christ is shed on Calvary as a sign for the unbelieving world. The darkness at midday is a miracle which will force people to think and for the professing church and also the ministers of the temple. The tearing of the veil which hangs between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies is a miracle which will strike awe in the heart of every priest and Levite in Judaism.

## **Joseph of Arimathea**

**Luke 23:50** And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man <sup>51</sup> (he had not consented to their plan and action), *a man* from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God; <sup>52</sup> this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. <sup>53</sup> And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid Him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain. <sup>54</sup> It was the preparation day, and the Sabbath was about to begin. <sup>55</sup> Now the women who had come with Him out of Galilee followed, and saw the tomb and how His body was laid. <sup>56</sup> Then they returned and prepared spices and perfumes. And on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

Christ has some disciples about whom little is known. Joseph is a good and righteous man who has not agreed to their plan and action. He is waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God. This man goes boldly to Pilate after the crucifixion and asks for Jesus' body, takes it down from the cross and lays it in his own rock-hewn tomb.