

The Death of the Messiah

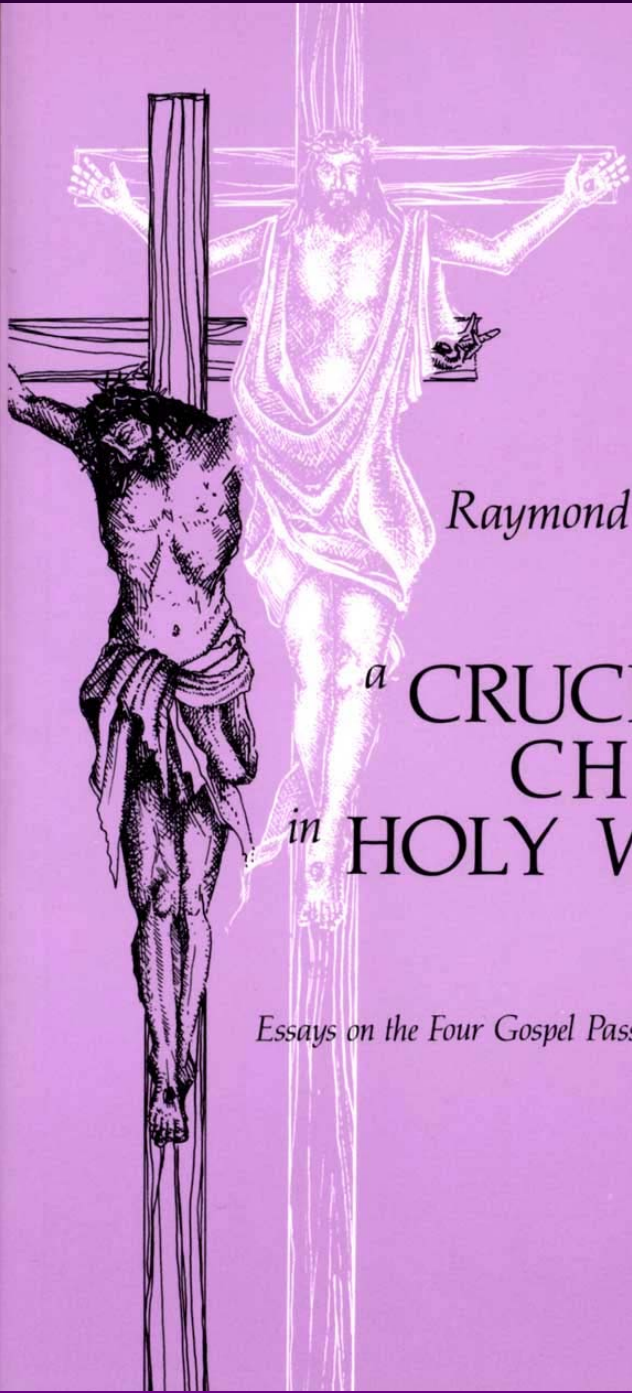
Jesus Before Pilate, the Roman
Governor

Series Outline

- **Mar. 14:** 1. Jesus prays and is arrested in Gethsemane on the Mount of Olives, Across the Kidron
 - Mark 14:26-52; Matt 26:30-56; Luke 22:39-53; John 18:1-11
- **Mar. 21:** 2. Jesus Before the Jewish Authorities
 - Mark 14:53—15:1; Matt 26:57—27:10; Luke 22:54—23:1; John 18:12-28a

Series Outline

- **Mar. 28:** 3. Jesus before Pilate, the Roman Governor
 - Mark 15:2-20a; Matt 27:11-31a; Luke 23:2-25; John 18:28b—19:16a
- **Apr. 4:** 4. Jesus is crucified and dies on Golgotha. He is buried nearby
 - Mark 15:20b-47; Matt 27:31b-66; Luke 23:26-56; John 19:16b-42



Raymond E. Brown

a **CRUCIFIED
CHRIST**
in **HOLY WEEK**

Essays on the Four Gospel Passion Narratives

Each year during Holy Week the Church reads two different accounts of Jesus' passion. On Palm (Passion) Sunday the account is from one of the first three Gospels (Matthew, Mark, or Luke), while on Good Friday it is always from John. Thus the liturgy makes it possible to note how very different the Gospel passions are, each one offering a unique vantage point from which to see and understand a crucified Christ.

We have all heard of the seven words of Jesus on the cross. In fact, however, Jesus says only one "word" in Matthew and Mark, three other "words" of very different import in Luke, and still three more different "words" in John. Separating these words as the evangelists intended rather than gluing them together offers Christians a much richer way to understand the demands of the cross in their own lives.

Fr. Raymond E. Brown, S.S., (1928–1998) was the Auburn Distinguished Professor of Biblical Studies at Union Theological Seminary in New York City. Author of some twenty-five books on the Bible and past president of three of the most important biblical societies in the world, by appointment of two popes (Paul VI in 1972, John Paul II in 1996) he was a member of the Roman Pontifical Biblical Commission. *Time* magazine has called him "probably the premier Catholic Scripture scholar in the U.S."

THE DEATH of the MESSIAH

From Gethsemane to the Grave:
A Commentary on the Passion Narratives in the Four Gospels

RAYMOND E. BROWN



VOLUME 1

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Background:
**The Roman Rule in
Judea (6-66 AD)**

Roman Prefecture in Judea

- Two Periods of the Roman Prefecture in Judea 6 AD to 66 AD
 - 1. “**Pre-Agrippa**” period 6 to 41 AD
 - Jewish kingship restored 41-44 AD (Herod Agrippa)
 - 2. “**Post-Agrippa**” period 44 to 66 AD
- Prefecture ended with the **Jewish Revolt**, which led to occupation by Roman army (led by **Vespasian**, declared emperor in 69 AD) and the destruction of the second Temple

Roman Prefecture in Judea

- Pre-Agrippa period was a time of relative peace
- Roman Prefecture in Judea was not simply a hostile occupation
 - After the baneful era of Jewish client kings (Herod the Great, Herod Archelaus), marked by oppression and persecution, Roman rule more sane and orderly
 - Jewish leaders had petitioned Caesar to end the reign of Herod Archelaus

Roman Prefecture in Judea

- During Jesus' adult years (7 to 30/33 AD):
 - No evidence of armed revolt
 - No Roman executions of notorious brigands, would-be kings, prophets, or revolutionaries

Background:

**The Prefecture of Pontius
Pilate in Judea
(26-36 AD)**

Pontius Pilate

Some Biographical Facts

- Was of Equestrian rank (lower Roman nobility), as opposed to the higher Senatorial rank
 - Suggests he probably had a military career before his appointment as Prefect / Governor of Judea
- Name:
 - **Nomen** (*gens* or tribe): Pontius, of Samnite origin
 - **Cognomen** (family): Pilatus (origin from *pileus*, “cap, helmet,” or *pilum*, “spear”)
 - **Praenomen** (personal name): *unknown*

Pontius Pilate

Some Biographical Facts

- Pure Legend (no data to support):
 - Praenomen: Lucius
 - Came from Seville
 - Married Claudia (the youngest daughter of Julia, the daughter of Caesar Augustus) with the approval of Caesar Tiberius, and was then immediately sent to Judea

Pontius Pilate

Some Biographical Facts

- Fifth of 14 Roman Prefects in Judea
 - Pilate's 10 year rule, and his predecessor's (Valerius Gratus) 11 year rule, stand out in longevity among the all the other Prefects
- May have been appointed by Roman noble Lucius Aelius Sejanus
 - In 26-27 AD Caesar Tiberius left Rome, eventually settling on the Isle of Capri
 - Sejanus was left by Tiberius in Rome to deal with routine administration of the empire

Pontius Pilate

Some Biographical Facts

- In 31 AD, treasonous ambitions of Sejanus uncovered, and he perished
 - Tiberius Caesar dismissed many of the Sejanus' appointees
 - Pilate however remained in office another 5 years
- Pilate's longevity: "caution(s) against prejudging Pilate as irresponsible or extremely controversial"

Pontius Pilate

Estimations of Pilate

- Mark's portrait is unflattering
 - Pilate, knowing Jesus handed over because of jealous envy, does little to help Jesus
- Matthew, Luke, John portray a nobler Pilate, who tries to deliver Jesus from exaggerated / false charges
- Tertullian (155- after 220 AD): Pilate a Christian at heart

Pontius Pilate

Estimations of Pilate

- Apocryphal *Acts of Pilate*: Pilate sympathetic to a portion of Jewish multitude that weeps for Jesus not be put to death
- Ethiopian homilies 5th and 6th centuries speak of Pilate's conversion and martyrdom
- 6th and 7th century: Pilate became a baptismal name among the Copts
 - Pilate is today a saint in the Coptic church
- Pilate's wife Procla a saint in the Orthodox Church (feast day Oct. 27)

Pontius Pilate

Estimations of Pilate

- Non-Christian sources tend to give an unfavorable picture of Pilate
 - Jewish writers Philo (20 BC to 50 AD) and Josephus (37 AD to 93 AD)
 - Roman historian Tacitus (56 to 115 AD)
- However, these writer's reports may have been exaggerated or inaccurate
 - For example: Tacitus often wrote unfavorably of appointees of Equestrian Rank

Pontius Pilate

Estimations of Pilate

- Brown: historical record suggests Pilate:
 - Was an unsubtle man, without native diplomatic skills, sometimes out of touch with Jewish sensitivities
 - Was not however a stubborn tyrant to the point of savagery
 - Sometimes underestimated the brutality of his own soldiers, so that the violence of repressive actions during his prefecture may not have reflected his own wishes

Background:
**Site of Jesus' Trial: The
Praetorium**

Site of Jesus' Trial

- Mark, Matthew, Luke:
 - Jesus stands before Pilate *in public, outdoors*
- John:
 - Jesus questioned by Pilate *in private, inside* the “Praetorium,” with Jewish leaders and crowd outside
 - Pilate shuttles back and forth between Jesus inside and crowd outside
 - Finally (19:13), Jesus led outside, and Pilate “sat on the judgment seat (*bema*) in the place called Lithostrotos (Stone Pavement), but in Hebrew Gabbatha”

Site of Jesus' Trial

- Praetorium: Governor's residence
 - Pilate's main praetorium in Caesarea
- Two candidates for Pilate's residence when in Jerusalem:
 - **Fortress Antonia**
 - Castle on eastern hill of Jerusalem, on high rock formation dominating the NW corner of the Temple area
 - Part of the Northern Defense of the city

Site of Jesus' Trial

- **“Palace of the King”**
 - Another fortress dwelling of Herod the Great
 - On the western hill of the city, also part of the Northern Defenses
 - Was the fortress for the upper city, as Antonia was fortress for the Temple
 - Exterior included three immense towers
 - In luxury and extravagance, said to be indescribable
 - Most likely the temporary Jerusalem praetorium of Pilate during the Passover

Background:
Roman Trial of Jesus

Roman Trial of Jesus

Sources

- Gospel accounts are dramatizing the *religious* meaning of Jesus' condemnation
- Practically *no legal details* of the trial are given in the Gospel accounts. No court record has survived. No witness sympathetic to Jesus said to be present
- With involvement of soldiers, servants, opponents, some information of contents of trial would have circulated

Roman Trial of Jesus

Relation to Sanhedrin Trial

- Relation of Roman Trial to Sanhedrin Trial:
 - 1. A **confirmation** of the Jewish Trial (an *exsequatur* = let it be carried out)?
 - 2. An **independent trial** to determine if an offense against Roman law had been committed?
- Majority scholarly opinion: independent trial

Roman Trial of Jesus

Roman Judicial Procedure

- Normal Roman judicial procedures seemingly *not* followed
- However, Jesus *not* a Roman citizen, so Pilate was free to conduct a trial *extra ordinem* (without full specifications of Roman law)
 - In particular, he could conduct a simple *cognitio* or investigation
 - Draw information from local authorities without proof of veracity demanded by ordinary law
 - Summarily reach a decision about guilt or punishment

Roman Trial of Jesus

Roman Judicial Procedure

- Typical trial would have included *assessores* (junior barristers), *comites* (attendants) and a translator
 - None of these are mentioned, but Gospel writers clearly left out many details
 - Fitzmyer: speculated that Jesus and Pilate may have spoken to each other in Greek, since no translator mentioned

Roman Trial of Jesus

Charge Against Jesus

- Charge Against Jesus: “King of the Jews”
 - Offense against *Lex Iulia de maiestate* (offenses against the majesty of Caesar), which bore death penalty
 - Cicero (106 BC to 43 BC): “diminishing *maiestas* consists of taking away something from the dignity or the fullness or the power of the people or from those to whom the people have given power”
 - Commentary by Marcion on *Lex Iulia de maiestate* includes as offenders a private person who acts as if he had an office or magistracy

Roman Trial of Jesus

Release of Barrabas

- Subject of much scholarly controversy: custom not described in other sources
- Gospels agree there was a festal custom attached to Passover to release a prisoner whom the Jewish crowds chose
- Disagreement:
 - Was it a custom of Pilate?
 - Was it a Jewish custom recognized by Pilate?

Roman Trial of Jesus

Outcry to “Crucify” Jesus

- Jewish crowds cry out “Crucify him,” as if they have say in the Roman judge’s decision
- Eastern custom of decision by *acclamatio populi* (“acclamation of the people”)
 - Some cases in Hellenized cities, (e.g. the Ten Cities constituting the Decapolis, east of Galilee, in the Province of Syria) decided by *acclamatio populi*
- Not a Jewish custom
- Brown: Best considered mob pressure, not voice of a “jury”

Jewish Before Pilate, the Roman Governor

Mark

Mark

- Mark 15:1: refers to a morning consultation of the Sanhedrin
 - Not clear if it is a second session
 - Or continuation of the night session
- Mark does not explain to reader why Sanhedrin must bind and deliver Jesus to Pilate
- Pilate already seems aware of what has gone on previously, and immediately confronts Jesus with question, **“Are you the King of the Jews?”**

Mark

- The charges at the Sanhedrin Trial (Destroying the Temple, Messiah / Son of God) do not come up
- Jesus' affirmation ambiguous **“You have said so.”** (Mark 15:4)
- Pilate wonders at Jesus
 - As nations wondered at the Suffering Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 52:15 Septuagint)

Mark

- The chief priests, unable to get Pilate to condemn Jesus, succeed in getting a crowd to demand for the release of a prisoner on the feast
- Pilate, knowing priests are acting out of envious zeal, offer Jesus to the crowd
- Chief priests persuade the crowd to demand:
 - Release of Barabbas, an imprisoned murderous rebel
 - Crucifixion of Jesus

Mark

- Pilate's last quoted words: **“Why, what evil has he done?”** underline Jesus' outrageous treatment

Mark

- Mark's portrait of Pilate less developed and sympathetic than in Matthew, Luke, and John
 - Pilate makes no special effort on Jesus' behalf
 - He yields rather easily to crowd's demands to avoid unpopularity
 - Impression is not the favorable Roman and the hostile Jew, but *no support on any side* for Jesus

Mark

- Jesus' lack of any support reinforced by the gratuitous brutality of the Roman soldiers:
 - They interrupt flogging the criminal to strike and spit on him, mocking the "King of the Jews"
- Both Sanhedrin Trial and Roman Trial end with the mockery of Jesus
 - Sanhedrin Trial: Mocking of a prophet
 - Roman Trial: Mocking of a king

Mark

- Disciple, Jewish leader, and Roman leader all participate and share guilt:
 - Judas hands Jesus over to the chief priests
 - Chief priests hand Jesus over to Pilate
 - Pilate hands Jesus over to be crucified

Jewish Before Pilate, the Roman Governor

Matthew

Matthew

- Confronting Pilate who can decree his death, Jesus remains silent
- His silence puts Pilate on the defensive
- Matthew, as do all the four gospels, describes the custom of releasing a prisoner at the feast, a possible out for Pilate

Matthew

- *Unique to Matthew*: dream of Pilate's wife
- Gives us the contrast between:
 - Gentile woman, in a dream-revelation recognizes Jesus' innocence and works for his release
 - Jewish leaders work the crowd to have a notorious criminal released and the innocent Jesus crucified

Matthew

- Some manuscripts phrase Pilate's question in 26:17 as **“Whom do you want me to release to you – Jesus Barabbas or Jesus called Christ?”**
 - Barabbas: probably means “Son of the Father”
 - Pilate thus faced with irony of choosing between “Jesus, Son of the Father,” and “Jesus, Son of God”

Matthew

- *Unique to Matthew:* Pilate publicly washes his hands to signify **“I am innocent of this [just] man’s blood.”**
 - Again, a Gentile recognizes Jesus’ innocence
- **“All the people”** answer **“His blood on us and on our children”**
 - Echoes Old Testament language of those who must be considered responsible for a death (2 Samuel 3:28-29; Josh. 2:19; Jer. 26:15)
 - Washing of hands: an Old Testament action signifying innocence of a murder (Deut 21:6-9)

Matthew

- Line has embittered Christian – Jewish relationship through the centuries
- Matthew tends to be generalizing and hostile to Jews
 - Pharisees and Sadducees a “brood of vipers”
- **“His blood on us and on our children”**
 - Remember Jesus’ own words: his blood is **“poured out for many [all] for the forgiveness of sins.”** (Matthew 26:27)

Matthew

- Pilate finally passes on Jesus the same sentence the Jewish Sanhedrin passed on him
- Pilate orders Jesus to be flogged and then crucified
- At the end of the Roman Trial, Jesus is mocked and spat upon – as he had been at the end of the Sanhedrin trial
- Although Pilate and his wife are favorable to Jesus, but he is ultimately rejected by both Gentiles and Jews

Jewish Before Pilate, the Roman Governor

Luke

Luke

- Luke's description of the Roman Trial much more elaborate than Mark or Matthew
- The charge “King of the Jews” and the offer of releasing a prisoner are also in Luke
- Luke also describes:
 - Details of violations of Roman law and the majesty of Caesar
 - Indifference of Romans to the religious issues involved
 - A desire to let the prisoner go after a whipping only

Luke

- *Unique to Luke:* On learning Jesus is from Galilee, Pilate sends Jesus to the client king of the Galilee area, **Herod Antipas** (ruled 4 BC to 39 AD), who happens to be in Jerusalem for the Passover feast

Luke

■ Christian Memory of Herodian Adversary

Images:

- **Herod the Great** – conspired to kill baby Jesus (Matt. 2)
- **Herod Antipas** – killed John the Baptist (Mark 6:17-29; Matt 14:3-12), and reputedly tried to kill Jesus
- **Herod Agrippa I** – killed James, son of Zebedee, sought to kill Peter (Acts 12:1-5)

Luke

- **Herod Agrippa II** – sat in judgment on Paul alongside Roman Governor (Acts 25:13-27)
- Apocryphal *Gospel of Peter*:
 - Herod is Jesus' chief adversary and crucifies him
- Herod annoyed by Jesus' silence and mocks him
 - In the end he confirms Pilate's judgment that Jesus innocent

Luke

- Herod's contact with Jesus heals the enmity between himself and Governor Pilate
 - Jesus again the healer, even for those who maltreat him
 - Unique to Luke: Jesus had healed the ear of the High Priest slave after a follower cut it off

Jewish Before Pilate, the Roman Governor

John

John

- We find in John a much different picture of Jesus facing Pilate
- Unlike Mark / Matthew / Luke, Jesus is not questioned by Pilate outside and in public with the chief priests looking on
- Rather, Jesus is questioned privately by Pilate inside the Praetorium, while all the chief priests are standing outside with a crowd

John

- Pilate shuttles back and forth between the priests and crowd outside, and Jesus inside
 - Outside: ceaseless pressure, conniving, outcry
 - Inside: calm and penetrating dialog
- Unlike Mark / Matthew / Luke, Jesus is not silent, but eloquent and supremely self-assured

John

- To Pilate's question: **“So you are a king?”**, Jesus does not refuse the title, but says the real reason he came into the world was to testify to the truth (18:37)
- So eloquent and self-assured is Jesus that it is as if Pilate is the one on trial to determine if he is of the truth
 - Pilate is calmly told he has no independent power over Jesus (19:10-11)

John

- Pilate knows the truth that Jesus is innocent
- The question is whether Pilate will bear witness to the truth, or betray himself in order to appease the crowd
- In the end, Pilate betrays the truth and bows to the crowd, exacting from them an insincere pledge of allegiance to Caesar

John

- *Unique to John*: scourging and mockery of Jesus not *after* the trial, but at the *center* of the trial
- Leads to climactic moment where Jesus, scourged, mocked, draped in a purple cloak, and wearing a crown of thorns, is brought from inside the Praetorium outside to the crowd

John

- The crowd cries “Crucify him!” as in the other Gospels, but here it is in response to the sight of the scourged Jesus, and Pilate’s *Ecce homo* **“Here is the man!”**
 - Makes the rejection of Jesus seem even more inhumane
 - Rejection of Jesus by the crowd, combined with their expressed preference for Caesar, implies abandonment by the Jews of their own messianic hopes
 - “The Man” may reflect an ancient christological title for Jesus, akin to the “Son of Man”

John

- John's hostility towards "the Jews" perhaps arises from the experience of his Christian community and the synagogue
 - Members of John's community have been driven out of the synagogue and persecuted for professing Jesus the Messiah (9:22, 12:42)
 - Within decades of John's gospel, a curse against deviants from Judaism will be added to the synagogue prayer (*Shemoneh Esreh* or the Eighteen Benedictions)

John

- Being driven from the synagogue exposed Christians to Roman investigation, punishment, sometimes death

John

- Pilate exacts from the priests:
 - A denial of their royal messianic hopes
 - A pledge of allegiance to the pitiful Tiberius Caesar (who had given up the day-to-day running of the empire, and lived in seclusion on the isle of Capri)
- He then turns Jesus over to the chief priests to be crucified

Next Week:
**The Crucifixion, Death
and Burial of Jesus**