

When Herod Saw Jesus, He Was Greatly Pleased

Luke 23: 8-12

About 6:30 am Friday morning, the fifteenth of Nisan

DIG: What does Pilate's referral of the case to Herod show about the seriousness with which he viewed Christ as a threat? What do you learn about Herod's character? What did he want from Jesus? Why didn't Messiah answer him at all? How do you account for the new friendship between Pontius Pilate and Herod Antipas?

REFLECT: When was the last time you were mistreated? Mocked? Abused? Were you a doormat? Should you be a doormat? Was Christ a wimp? What did Rabbi Sha'ul say about that (Second Corinthians 12:10)? Is it wrong to stand up for yourself? Can you be assertive and yet reflect the image of Messiah?

The priests could hardly believe their ears. Pilate had been aware of this troublemaker and His origins, and if it were a matter of jurisdiction, he could have told Caiaphas last night that the prisoner properly belonged to Herod, who was in Jerusalem for the Passover. This amounted to dangerous meddling in the internal affairs of Judea. The mock Messiah was a Jew, charged with a religious crime in Tziyon, to which was added a crime against Rome. How then could he be brought before Herod, whose jurisdiction was confined to Galilee?

In the back of his mind, Caiaphas was terrified by the delay that this might cause. This death sentence needed to be wrapped up by sundown. If Jesus had not been put to death by then, the holy day that could not be defiled by a dead body that would be upon them. Of course, to the Pharisees, Pesach was already a holy day. But to the Sadducean priest it was not. The high priest thought that Pilate was deliberately delaying any judgment so that nothing could be done that day. If the execution were to be postponed until after the Sabbath, it would have to be delayed until after the eight-day Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread festival. And by that time the proponents of Yeshua would rally by the thousands against the authorities of the Temple and there would be bloodshed and perhaps a division within Isra'el herself. Caiaphas was not going to let that happen.

Pilate stood. He wasn't going to argue about it. He had first acquitted Jesus, and then reconsidered and ordered Him to be sent to a man Pilate had offended a long time ago. The procurator nodded to the soldiers to take charge of the prisoner and bring him to Herod. The sweet balm of belated pleasure twisted the face of Pilate into a smile as he walked back across the court and up the steps to his quarters.

The Roman governor was pleased with himself. Pilate and the ruler of Galilee had not spoken since the procurator's soldiers had mistakenly killed Herod's subjects on the Temple grounds. The procurator was now making a gesture of friendship . . . or respect. Herod could not interpret it any other way. So the breach between them would be healed over a worthless Galilean. Not only that, the gesture forced the Galilean ruler to become a part of the trial of Jesus, and now no matter what happened, Herod Antipas could hardly write any lying, poisonous letter to Tiberias about Pilate, when it would be so easy to prove that the whole case had been turned over to the ruler of the Galileans for full disposition. In one brilliant stroke Pilate had removed himself from a highly sensitive case, had embroiled Herod in it, at the same time made a friend of him, and had placed Annas and Caiaphas in a dangerous, almost untenable position. Yes, he was very pleased with himself.

At the double gate of the praetorium the priests argued among themselves about what should have been said to Pilate. Outside the gates people who were not disguised Temple guards had been attracted by all the commotion, and among them were also followers of Jesus. The high priest worried because just a few hours ago this had been a small, secret case. But now it threatened to become public. Caiaphas could not allow a debate about the pros and cons of executing this criminal. When the Nazarene was dead the priests would not mind a discussion because the issue would be moot and would go away in a few days. Besides, if Jesus were put to death, His followers would be silenced. How could anyone argue that the renegade Rabbi was God if a man had put him to death?

There was nothing to do but to proceed to Herod. Caiaphas dispatched a courier to run ahead and acquaint the Galilean ruler with the circumstances, and to tell him that the prisoner and priests would be there with all speed. Once again, the Messiah is paraded through the streets in the early morning hours of upper Yerushalayim. There is no sign of the Passover pilgrims from Galilee or any other poor Jews that would rush to His defense. They would have no reason to be meandering through wealthy neighborhoods of the Upper City at such an early hour. Everything looked normal. Slaves were performing their menial tasks, while their wealthy owners ate their morning meals.

They started toward the palace of Herod Antipas. They passed the gate at the top of the hill that led to Golgotha, the place of the skull, the Roman ground of crucifixion. It awaited Him. This was why He took on human flesh. When He was a child and God the Father would wake God the Son morning by morning and teach Him of His destiny: Adonai ELOHIM has opened My ear, and I neither rebelled nor turned away. I offered My back to those who struck me, My cheeks to those who plucked out My beard; I did not hide My face from insult and spitting. For Adonai ELOHIM will help Me. This is why I have set My face like a flint, knowing I will not be put to shame (Isaiah 50:5-7 CJB).

Herod and his court had come down from **Galilee** three days before to sacrifice at the Temple. **The ruler of Galilee** was not a righteous Jew, but needed to keep up appearances. According to his custom when he was visiting **the City of David**, he stayed in the Hasmonean Palace. His real name was **Herod Antipater**, but he was known by his nickname . . . Antipas. He bore the title of **tetrarch**, meaning **ruler of the quarter**. When his father, Herod the Great, died Antipas' older brother **Archelaus (Matthew 2:22)** was to become ethnarch (not a king), meaning *the ruler of a homogenous ethnic group*, of **Judea**, Idumea (biblical Edom) and Samaria, while **Antipas** would rule Galilee and Perea with the lesser title of **tetrarch**. His half-brother **Philip** was **tetrarch** of Gaulanitis (the Golan Heights), Batanaea (southern Syria), **the Iturean and Trachonian region (Luke 3:1a)**, and Auranitits (Hauran). Then Doctor Luke mentions **Lysanias** as **tetrarch of Abilene (Luke 3:1b)**.

When **Herod** heard the news from the courier he was elated and at once resolved to heal the breach between himself and **Pilate**. **That day Herod and Pilate became friends - before this they had been enemies (Luke 23:12)**. The source of their hatred for each other started when **Pilate** became **procurator**. He erected the Roman shields on the Temple walls in violation of the strict teaching of the Oral Law against any images in the Temple compound. As a result **Herod** Antipas sent a letter of complaint to **Cesar Tiberias**, and he ordered the shields removed. But once **Pilate** sent **Jesus** to **Herod**, recognizing his authority over **Galilee**, and **Herod** sent **the Nazarene** back to **Pilate**, who saw it as quiet a show of solidarity with him, **they became friends**. For **Herod**, a **Jew**, had clearly chosen to back Rome instead of **Caiaphas** and the Sadducees. But life was not kind to either one of them.

The tetrarch thought it was unusually diplomatic of the **procurator** to send the **Galilean** to the ruler of the **Galileans**. Then, too, he welcomed the chance to meet the man who had once referred to him as **that fox** (see Ho - **No Prophet Can Die Outside Jerusalem**). **Herod** Antipas went to his quarters and waited eagerly for the party to arrive. Word was left with the gatekeeper to escort the **Sadducees**, the **Torah-teachers**, the Roman guard and the **prisoner** to the royal presence at once.

The tetrarch used the time to discuss what he knew of the case with his royal advisers. He knew a great deal, and he announced at once that, unless someone could give him a good reason why he should sit in judgment of this case, he planned to merely see **Jesus** and then send him back to **Pilate** for final disposition. **Herod's** reasoning was succinct and sensible: **Yeshua** had many followers in His home province of **Galilee**. Why alienate these people? Let the onus of the **rebel's** death be on **Caiaphas** and **Pilate** here in **Jerusalem**. No one in the royal entourage argued against **Herod's** reasoning. The case against **Jesus** and the evidence came from **Jerusalem**. Let the **culprit** be brought into his presence as a token of respect from the Romans, and then let him be sent back to **Pilate**.

Now **he** was about to confront **the man** who, in **Herod's** eyes, resembled John the Baptist. **He** could partially atone for what **he** had done to the Immerser by sparing the life of this one. In any case, **he** was as eager to see **Jesus**, as a child would be to watch a fire-eater. The palace was magnificent, but **Christ** was not impressed. The things **He** knew about Antipas had engraved themselves on **His** mind. **The tetrarch** was the murderer of **His** cousin John. **He** was a coward could remain loyal to no one and an adulterer who had stolen **his** own brother's wife. And **he** would do nothing in this case except for ask for a show of power.

When **Herod** Antipas saw **Yeshua**, **he** was greatly pleased, because for a long time **he** had wanted to see **Him** (Luke 23:8a). The group went into the palace and **Herod** treated **the prisoner** as a guest. **He** offered chairs to all, but **Christ** stood. **The Sadducees and the Torah-teachers** were nervously excited and **they** also wanted to stand. **They** considered all this a waste of time. **They** could not prove charges of blasphemy in **Galilee**, and **they** hoped to secure the support of **the Galilean ruler** so that **they** could go back to **Pilate** and announce that **the Nazarene** was also a blasphemer within the jurisdiction of **Herod**.

Herod Antipas sat. **He** was cordial and admitted that **he** had heard much about **Jesus**. **The Lord** said nothing. **Messiah** looked at **the tetrarch**, but **His** mouth remained closed. From what **he** had heard about **Him**, **Herod** hoped to see **Him** perform a sign of some sort. Would **Yeshua** mind performing? There was no answer. A small feat of magic, perhaps? A little miracle? Could **he** make water pour from the walls or thunder toll through the sky? **He** went at **Him** with many questions, but **Jesus** gave him no answer (Luke 23:8b-9).

Silence. "It might help **Your** case," **the tetrarch** said, "if **You** were more cooperative." **Herod** Antipas, the son of **Herod** the Great (see [Aw - Herod Gave Orders to Kill all the Boys in Bethlehem Two Years Old and Under](#)), had no fear of **Caiaphas** or **the Sadducees**, for **they** had no power over **him**. So even when **the Sadducees and the Torah-teachers** were standing there, **vehemently accusing Him**, hoping to sway **Antipas** over to **their** side (Luke 23:10), **he** refused to listen. **The tetrarch** wasn't about to get in the middle of a spat between Rome and the Jews. Besides, **he** was still haunted by the death of the forerunner (see [F1 - John the Baptist is Beheaded](#)). The last thing **he** needed was the blood of another holy man on **his** hands.

Herod waived **his** hand for silence. **He** couldn't care less about the charges or legalities. **He** had called **his** friends and **his** entourage into the room with a promise that they would see things from **the Galilean** that they had never seen before. Now **Jesus** not only refused to perform for **the tetrarch**, but also had the nerve not to answer when spoken to.

Antipas tried one more time. Tick. Tick. Tick. **The Suffering Servant** stood staring at **Herod**, the lines of fatigue under **his** eyes had deepened. **Herod's** words were sweet and friendly. **The Meshiach** did not answer. **Herod** waited. **He** asked **Yeshua** if **He** could hear **him**. Silence. **The ruler of the Galileans** grew angry. The behavior of **Jesus** was an affront to royal dignity. Not only that . . . **the magician** had disappointed and humiliated **him**.

Herod stood. When **Jesus** didn't perform for **him**, **the second mocking took place**. Then **tetrarch** and **his soldiers** ridiculed and mocked **Him**. **Herod Antipas himself** walked around **the prisoner**, making personal remarks about **His** shabby appearance, **His** lacerated face, **His** dirty clothes, now-unwashed feet, and swollen eyes. A king indeed!

Then Antipas had an idea. **He** called one of **his** assistants and whispered to **him**. **He** winked at **the Sadducees and the Torah-teachers**, and everyone waited in silence. After a few minutes, the aide returned with a beautiful robe. But it was more theatrical than kingly. **Herod** took it in **his** hands and shook the dust from it, to the laughter of **his** friends. **Jesus** may not have given them a show, but **tetrarch** was going to make sure they got one anyway. Then, with a friendly smile, **the ruler** swung it over the shoulders of **Christ**. It was comic. Even **the Jews** had to smile. This **Nazarene** made the most sorrowful and ridiculous king they had ever seen. After **dressing him in the elegant robe**, **Herod Antipas** ordered the prisoner **sent back to Pilate at his headquarters at the praetorium (Luke 23:11)**.¹⁵⁵⁸

Six years after washing his hands of **Christ's** execution, **Pontius Pilate** had trouble with another messiah - and this time he lost everything. A Samaritan preacher had entrenched himself in a mountaintop sanctuary on Mount Gerizim. According to the Jewish historian Flavius Josephus, **he** made a major error and suppressed a small uprising in Samaria. "But afterward, the Samaritan senate sent an embassy to Vitellius, a man that had been consul, and who was now president of Syria, and accused **Pilate** of the murder of those that were killed . . . So Vitellius sent Marcellus, a friend of his, to take care of the affairs of Judea, and ordered **Pilate** to go to Rome, to explain **his** actions to the emperor. **Pilate** thought **his** friend Emperor Tiberias would hear **his** appeal. But by the time **the procurator** reached Rome, Tiberias was dead and replaced by the unstable twenty-four year old Caligula.

Eusebius, one of the early Church fathers, reported that **Pontius Pilate** committed suicide during the reign of Emperor Caligula, who had banished **him** to Leon, France. Eusebius records the following for us, "It is worthy of note that **Pilate** himself, who was governor in the time of our **Savior**, is reported to have fallen into such misfortunes under Emperor Caligula, whose times we are recording, that **he** was forced to become **his** own murderer and executioner; and thus divine vengeance, as it seems, was not long in overtaking **him**. This is

stated by those Greek historians who have recorded the Olympiads, together with the respective events which have taken place in each period." The quote reveals that many Greeks considered **Pilate's** misfortunes to be divine justice for the death of **Jesus Christ**. Tradition adds that **Pontus Pilate** died in Gaul (Vienne, France).

With **Pilate** out of the picture, **Caiaphas** was left without a Roman political ally. **He** had cultivated many enemies in **Yerushalayim** over that years and was soon replaced as the Temple **high priest**. **He** then faded into history, with the date of **his** death left unrecorded.

Herod Antipas didn't fare well either. Although **he** thought **he** was well schooled in political intrigue, it eventually brought **him** down. **His** nephew Agrippa was a close friend of the Roman emperor Caligula. Once again Josephus tells us that when Antipas foolishly asked Caligula to name **him** king, instead of **tetrarch** (at the suggestion of **his** wife, Herodias, who continued to get **him** into trouble). It was Herod Agrippa, Judean monarch, son of Herod the Great, and son of Aristobulus IV and Berenice, who charged Antipas with wanting to assassinate Caligula. As proof, Agrippa pointed to the massive arsenal of weapons Antipas' army had at its disposal. As a result, Caligula banished **Herod** to Gaul for the rest of **his** life. Herodias joined him there. But **his** fortune and territories were handed over to his treacherous nephew Agrippa.¹⁵⁵⁹

The apostle John thought that the best way of circulating the tragic news of the Sanhedrin taking **Yeshua** to **Pontius Pilate** for judgment would be to go to a few key places and to ask them to spread the news. **He** called first at the home of **Mark's** father; then **he** met **Peter** and one or two of the other **apostles** and told **them** that **the Messiah** had been condemned to death and, so far as **he** knew, the Romans had **Jesus** at **Pilate's** headquarters at **the praetorium**. Then young **John** ran out to Bethany to tell Lazarus, Martha and Mary, but most of all to break the news as gently as possible to **Miryam**, the mother of **Jesus**. This was a special assignment that **John** had undertaken. **He** realized that **Miryam** had heard from **her son's** lips what would be happening to **him**, but **Yochanan** knew that even the warnings of **Christ himself** would not stop the grief in the heart of **a mother**. At Bethany **John** sat panting, and in halting phrases told all four of them in detail of what **he** had just seen. **Yochanan** told **them** about the Passover supper, and what **he** could remember about Gethsemane. **He** told **them** of the raid, the arrest and the verdict.

His listeners wept quietly, but there was no loud lamenting. They listened, the tears came, they asked questions, and they bowed to the will of **the Father**. **Miryam** was especially determined that **she** should not cause any more anguish than **John** would be already in with a display of emotion. When **Yochanan** finished no one could think of any more questions to ask. **Jesus' mother** said that **she** would accompany **John** back to **Jerusalem**.

The young man, however, was hesitant. He did not want to expose the gentle woman, whom he had learned to love and respect, to the harsh cruelties that were going to be imposed on her son. He asked her to stay with Mary and Martha and he promised that he would be back before the Sabbath started to relate everything to her.

Miryam shook her head. No. She would go. If, as her Lord had prophesied, He would die in Zion, then she wanted to be with Him. John looked to Lazarus for help. But Lazarus looked away. Argument, however polite and logical, would do no good. She had been with her son when he drew his first breath, and she wanted to be with Him when He drew His last.¹⁵⁶⁰

Yeshua was led back to the praetorium. It was obvious to the guards that this man was fatigued. His steps were slower. The face was weary with pain. The mouth was open a little to make breathing easier. The eyes moved from side to side.

The Sadducees and the Torah-teachers were in a dilemma. Their only consolation was that Pilate was in a much deeper one. He refused to dispose of this case and had sent it to Herod, the tetrarch of the Galileans, hoping that he would take it off his hands. But not if was coming back to his doorstep, and he would be forced to judge . . . one way or the other. The dilemma of the priests was that having started this action against the prisoner they must see it through successfully. There was no way they could turn back now. This matter had started, to their way of thinking, as stark blasphemy. In their minds, the big lie had grown and grown until now the Temple and the whole nation was threatened.

Had Pilate, who had sent the Roman cohort to aid in the arrest of the criminal in the garden of Gethsemane, listened to the charge and followed the Roman custom of permitting local authorities to try and judge local offenses, he would have endorsed their findings without argument and crucified the prisoner immediately. But no - because he was irritated with Annas and Caiaphas, the governor preferred to pretend ignorance.

On the way back, the ranking Sadducees agreed that Pilate would not be persuaded to confirm a death sentence on the Nazarene by logic on their part, but he *could* be persuaded by an angry public outburst. If Pilate thought he was making his case by embarrassing Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin, they could turn the tables on him by directing the crowd to scream for the blood of Jesus. This would throw the dilemma back into Pilate's hands, because he could hardly dare to defy public opinion in an internal affair that was, as far the Roman Empire was concerned, a small matter. So the word was passed from mouth to mouth to wait for the signals from the priests and to demand the death of the prisoner.¹⁵⁶¹