

Study Notes for [John 19:1-16](#)

THE TRIAL OF THE KING II

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Setting:

In this passage John describes the second phase of Jesus' trial before Pilate. The first phase began ([18:28-40](#)) when Caiaphas and the Sanhedrin leaders brought Jesus to Pilate expecting a quick rubber stamp of their decision to put Jesus to death. Instead Pilate decided to 'try' Jesus himself. However, Pilate found that Jesus had done nothing of great concern. Pilate also knew that the city was swollen with pilgrims who had come to the Passover Feast. Many of these pilgrims were very curious about Jesus ([12:20-21](#)), wondering if he was the Messiah ([7:40-44](#); [Luke 24:15-21](#)). Pilate's primary concern was to keep the peace and to look good to Rome. He had already tried to by-pass the Jewish leaders and go directly to the people by suggesting that Jesus be released as a favor to them but that also did not work ([Mark 15:8-11](#)). Even his wife tried to persuade Pilate to let Jesus go free because of a bad dream she had had ([Matthew 27:19](#)).

Pilate had had previous run-ins with Rome when he put the Roman Eagle in the Temple. Tiberius Caesar had made him take it out. Pilate also raided the Temple treasury to build the aqueduct. And again Tiberius Caesar told him to return the money. Pilate did not want yet another bad report to get back to Rome.

The passage begins with Pilate trying one more time to placate the religious leaders and free Jesus. But this too did not work and in the end he handed Jesus over to be crucified. In many ways this was an 'ordinary' event. Thousands of Jews had and would be crucified during this period of political unrest in Palestine. Yet out of the 'ordinary,' God reveals his glory and love. No doubt it took true spiritual eyes and ears, as given by the Holy Spirit, to understand the meaning of this terrible wonderful event ([Acts 2:1-4,22-24](#)).

Proposed chiasmic structure:

- A Pilate took Jesus and had him flogged (v. 1)
- B Soldiers torture Jesus but mockingly call him king (vv. 2-3)
- C Pilate brings Jesus out to free him (vv. 4-7)
- D Pilate hears that Jesus is the Son of God (vv. 8-9)
- X God is completely in control (vv. 10-11)
- D' Pilate hears that he is not a 'friend of Caesar' (vv. 12-13a)
- C' Pilate brings Jesus out to judge him (v. 13)
- B' Pilate condemns Jesus but mockingly calls him king (vv. 14-15)
- A' Soldiers took Jesus and had him crucified (vv. 16-17)

Notes:

- 19:1 Since Pilate had judged that Jesus was not guilty of treason and since his tactic of trying to free Jesus as part of the customary Passover amnesty failed, Pilate tried to pacify the Jewish leaders by punishing Jesus ([Luke 23:16,22](#)). This was a compromise. The flogging does not imply Pilate thought Jesus was guilty. It was not unusual for a Roman governor to inflict such a heavy punishment on a non-Roman, even when that

person was not convicted of any crime as was the case here. Most likely Pilate thought Jesus was guilty of being a trouble maker (Bruce, 358).

There were three degrees of flogging: beating, flogging and scourging. Here the Greek word means scouring; it was the most severe form from which the prisoner often died. It was severe enough to expose muscle and bone. It was done with a whip that had pieces of metal or bone tied to the ends to cause the flesh to rip open. However we should note carefully that the Gospels do not use any words to describe the horrible-ness of Jesus' torture. They make no attempt to "play on our emotions" (Morris, 699).

19:2-3 The crown of thorns was intended to mock Jesus' "kingship" as was the purple (royal) robe. The torture of Jesus was both physical and psychological ("again and again", NIV). The irony is clear; the soldiers had no idea that when they called him "King of the Jews" when he in fact, was (See [1:10-11](#)).

19:4 After Jesus' severe flogging and given the crown of thorns and purple robe he was brought out to the Jewish leaders. This was the first time Jesus was brought before them. No doubt the picture was horrific. Pilate is hoping that this spectacle of a disfigured Jesus would entice the leaders to be satisfied (Bruce, 359). But as we see in v. 6 the chief priests and their associates had no intention of letting this moment get away from them. Nothing but the death of Jesus would satisfy them.

19:5 Pilate's words were an unconscious allusion to [Zechariah 6:12-13](#), "Look, here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD." Throughout this passage, Pilate ironically presented Jesus to the Jewish nation as their Messiah.

19:6 "Crucify! crucify!" was the infuriated cry from the crowd. The sight of a ridiculed Jesus (royal robe and thorns) did the opposite of what Pilate hoped for in that it make them even more angry. It is clear that Pilate thought the accusations of the leaders were ridiculous which resulted in heightened tension between them. As Bruce states, "The Roman soldiers had expressed their contempt for the Jews by their treatment of Jesus, and the Jewish authorities were further exasperated" (Bruce, 360).

"Take him yourself and crucify him ..." is simply understood as frustration, sarcasm and teasing on Pilate's part; it was not a serious suggestion since he knew they could not do it. Pilate was at his wits end with the leaders and wanted nothing more to do with them. The contrast between the "you take him" and the "as for me" is emphatic (Morris, 703).

Crucifixion was the cruelest form of Roman execution. Roman citizens were exempt from this form of death. It was reserved for the the worst criminals, usually those involved in treason. Cicero (106-43 BC) called it "a cruel and disgusting penalty" and Josephus, a Jewish historian, called it the worst of deaths.

19:7 The leaders were quoting [Leviticus 24:16](#), "Whoever blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death. All the congregation shall stone him. The sojourner as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death." Notice that the form of death is stoning.

Since the Jewish authorities were getting nowhere with Pilate in claiming that Jesus broke Roman law that deserved death (treason) they now tried a different approach. They told Pilate that Jesus broke Jewish law that deserved death by claiming to be the Son of God (See also [5:18](#); [8:53](#); [10:33](#)). This accusation was the ultimate irony since the Jewish leaders accusation was indeed the truth.

19:8-9 The Jewish accusation that Jesus is the Son of God had a profound effect on Pilate. Romans were superstitious and they also believed that humans could be divine. No doubt Pilate's previous interaction with Jesus would have affirmed his suspicions. So he immediately asked Jesus "where are you from? But now Jesus was silent. In any case, Pilate would never have understood or believed the answer to that question.

19:10 Pilate was annoyed at Jesus' silence which he thought bordered on contempt. There is a Roman saying "he that has power to condemn has power to acquit" and in Pilate's mind he certainly had that power (Bruce, 362).

19:11 "from above" means "from God" ([3:3, 7, 31](#); [8:23](#)) and not Rome (Keener, 1127).

"You would have no authority over me ..." these are Jesus' final words to Pilate.

God is in control even when it seem that he is not. See [Daniel 4:32](#); [Acts 2:23](#). He gives evil men the power, ability and authority to perform their evil acts. All so-called authority that man has is given to him by God.

"he" refers to the Jewish authorities and in particular Caiaphas and not to Judas.

"greater sin" implies a lesser sin. Pilate was not exonerated, he was also guilty although he did not bear all the responsibility. The greater sin was committed by the Jewish leaders who handed Jesus over to Pilate.

19:12 Something in Jesus' answer to Pilate in the previous verse effected him profoundly. Pilate did not want to condemn Jesus either on the charge of being king of the Jews or the Son of God. However, his final attempts at freeing Jesus went go nowhere. This was not because of the Jewish authorities' persistence which would appear to be the case from a human perspective but because of God's plan for our redemption ([Acts 2:23](#)).

"Friend of Caesar" may be a technical term although there is some dispute; at least it means "loyal supporter of Rome" (Morris, 706). The Jewish leaders were putting a great deal of pressure on Pilate. They were in effect saying that if he released Jesus he was releasing a traitor to Rome and that would not speak well for him in Rome. As we have already noted, Pilate's relationship with Rome was already compromised. The argument between the Jewish leaders and Pilate had now become very personal. It was the leaders' trump card; if they could not get Jesus condemned through the accusations of treason and blasphemy they would blackmail Pilate into action. Not surprisingly it worked.

The way John presents this latest interaction between the Jewish leaders and Pilate highlights the choice that Pilate had: does he choose what he knows is right, that is, for Jesus or does he choose for his personal benefit, that is, for Caesar; the choice is Jesus or Caesar (Morris, 706). As Plummer states, "They (the Jewish leaders) know their man: it is not a love of justice, but personal feeling which moves him to seek to release

Jesus; and they will overcome one personal feeling by another still stronger” (Morris, 707). Pilate got the message loud and clear. He realized that unless he could convince the Jews, he would have to execute Jesus. He could no longer, as an independent judge, decide what was right.

19:13,15 As a result of this personal attack, Pilate brought Jesus forward one more time but by then he knew it was hopeless.

Again, he aggravated them by stating Jesus was their king. Three times Pilate had brought Jesus out stating, “here is your king” or “here is your man.” Pilate, like Caiaphas before him, spoke the truth about Jesus even though he had no real understanding of what he was saying (Carson, 605)

19:14 “the sixth hour” was noon. Time is very important in John’s Gospel. In it, Jesus will be slaughtered at exactly the same time the Passover lambs were being slaughtered. This occurred between noon and twilight because there were so many of them. Because this was the Passover Feast in excess of a hundred thousand pilgrims were there. As a result there would have been tens of thousands of lambs killed during the time Jesus died.

19:15 “we have no king but Caesar” is an amazing statement from the Caiaphas and the crowd. They very well knew they had no king but God ([Judges 8:23; 1 Samuel 8:7;10:19](#)). But in fact, here they finally did speak the truth. Their commitment was not to God but to Caesar which really meant that they were only committed to themselves.

19:16a In the end Pilate agreed and condemned Jesus of the first charge of treason after all. He did this not because he believed it but because it had become personally expedient for him to do so.

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