



**The DAILY JESUS NEWS #315**  
**Friday... Day of Agony and Atonement**

**Jesus' Three-Phase Roman Trial**

**Pilate Declares Jesus' Innocence, But the Crowd Demands Barabbas Be Released**  
**LK 23.13-16, 18-19 (Parallel Texts : MT 27.15-21; MK 15.6-11; JN 18.39-40)**

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13 Pilate called together the chief priests, the rulers and the people, 14 and said to them,

“You brought me this man as one who was inciting the people to rebellion. I have examined him in your presence and have found no basis for your charges against him. 15 Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us; as you can see, he has done nothing to deserve death. 16 Therefore, I will punish him and then release him.”

<sup>MT</sup>Now it was the governor’s custom at the Feast to release a prisoner chosen by the crowd. At that time they had a notorious prisoner, named Barabbas, <sup>L</sup>who had been thrown into prison for an insurrection in the city, and for murder.

<sup>MT</sup>So when the crowd had gathered, <sup>M</sup>they came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. Pilate said to them,

<sup>J</sup>“It is your custom for me to release to you one prisoner at the time of Passover. <sup>MT</sup>Which one do you want me to release to you? Barabbas, or <sup>M</sup>the King of the Jews, <sup>MT</sup>Jesus who is called Christ?” <sup>MT</sup>For he knew that it was out of envy that <sup>MT</sup>the chief priests <sup>MT</sup>had handed Jesus over to him.

While Pilate was sitting on the judge’s seat, his wife sent him this message: “Don’t have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him.”

But the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus executed.

The governor asked: “Which of the two do you want me to release to you?”

<sup>L</sup>With one voice they <sup>J</sup>shouted back, “No, not him! <sup>L</sup>Away with this man! Release Barabbas to us!”

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NOTE: We use superscript identification of the source gospel in "blended texts" as follows: Matthew = <sup>MT</sup>, Mark = <sup>M</sup>, Luke = <sup>L</sup>, John = <sup>J</sup>, Acts = <sup>A</sup>. This “superscript ID” is inserted at the beginning of the quoted text, identifying that Bible book until a different superscript appears. In addition, *red italics identify the words of Jesus*. Old Testament quotations are CAPITALIZED.

CONTEXT DIGEST	
Location	The Praetorium: Palace of the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate

Timeline	Early April (Month 39)
Jesus' Life Context	Stage VIII: Passion Week
	E. Friday: Day of Agony and Atonement
	Jesus' Three-Phase Roman Trial
Title	Pilate Declares Jesus' Innocence, But the Crowd Demands Barabbas Be Released

This text begins Phase III of Jesus' Roman trial. Herod had found no basis for condemning Jesus, so he had sent the Lord back to Pilate for disposition. Phase III was the most extensive stage of Jesus' trial. Pilate became increasingly desperate to set Jesus free, while the Jewish leaders whipped up the crowd to demand Jesus' crucifixion. Many important truths and insights in to the meaning of Jesus' death emerged in this final phase of Jesus' trial.

The narrative began with the second statement by Pilate exonerating Jesus of any wrongdoing. Pilate added that Herod had also found no fault with Jesus. That makes three affirmations of Jesus' innocence to this point. Several more will follow. The gospel writers made it clear that Jesus was a righteous man, without any guilt, who died because of the unrighteousness of those who falsely accused him.

Pilate also made the irony of Jesus' circumstances clear for us. The Lord was wrongly charged with exciting rebellion against Rome. Therefore, Pilate made the decision to punish and release Jesus. The "punishment" was intended as a political carrot to appease Jesus' enemies--the Sanhedrin. The release was another indication of Jesus' legal and moral innocence.

This made the irony of the Jewish choice of Barabbas over Jesus stunning. Jesus was declared NOT to be an insurrectionist by the two Roman authorities in the region. On the other hand, Barabbas was a murderer, insurrectionist, and leader of others into rebellion. Barabbas was the reality that the Sanhedrin had falsely accused Jesus of being. So, Pilate thought that the people would surely choose Jesus over Barabbas. It was a no brainer. To choose Barabbas was to invite murder, mayhem, and possible mass destruction from Rome if the insurrectionist was more successful the next time.

If it seems unbelievable that the crowd chose Barabbas over Jesus, think again. That choice was a microcosm of our common sinfulness. People choose eternity with the Devil in the place that was prepared especially for him--hell--over eternity with Jesus all the time.

Every rejection of God in rebellion against his will is a choice of the Barabbas that dwells within us--our sinful nature--over Jesus. The insanity of the mob in rejecting Jesus was a powerful revelation of the sin that deceives us all.

All the gospel highlight Pilate's major character flaw: the fear of man. Pilate saw Jesus' innocence clearly. This was confirmed by even Herod Antipas, a much more vile man than Pilate. The governor correctly perceived the hatred and envy of the chief priests that motivated their despicable treatment of Jesus. His wife had premonitions about Jesus and warned him concerning Jesus' righteousness.

Pilate had all the power of Rome behind him. Yet he did not have the moral courage to do what was right. The struggle within his soul, and final failure to protect Jesus will emerge clearly over the following readings.

The sinfulness of falsely accusing the sinless Son of God; the sinfulness of choosing Barabbas over Jesus; the sinfulness of fearing man rather than God--these and many other expressions of our sinful nature permeate the narrative of Jesus' trials. The darkness will only grow thicker from here forward. In

contrast, the radiant righteousness of Jesus burns bright in every verse. Our hearts can only cry: "Lord, you are beautiful!"

#### APPLICATION:

*Do you ever go along with the crowd, even when you know you are failing your Lord in doing so? What does this reading say to you about that behavior?*

*Jesus walked in righteousness with no help from any man. His strength was in the presence of his Father and the Spirit. What does this example say to you about your own source of strength?*

*How will you praise your Lord today for the beauty of his example in his trials, and sufferings?*