

REPORT FROM PILATE TO CAESAR

Scholars have argued as to the authenticity of all or part of this letter, but as early as 138 AD this document is said to have existed in public records, as acceptable history.

There are additional papers with words ascribed to Pilate in "The Acts of Pilate," which are obvious forgeries by comparison.

[Translated from Latin / Vatican library]

Pontius Pilate to **Tiberius** Caesar, Emperor, Sends Greeting:

The events of those last few days were of such a character in my province that I have thought I should write concerning them in detail, since I should not wonder if, in coming years, they may change the fortune of our nation; for it seems of late that the gods have ceased to be friends. It is not far from me to say, "Cursed be the day on which I succeeded Valerius Gratus in the government of Judea." When I came up to Jerusalem and occupied the Pretorium, I ordered a banquet to be splendidly prepared, to which I invited the tetrarch of Galilee with his high priests and his prefects. At the appointed time no guests were present, which thing was an insult to my dignity. After a few days it pleased the high priest to call on me. He bore himself gravely and deceitfully. He feigned that his religion forbade him and his companions to sit down and offer up libations with the Romans. It seemed to me politic to accept his excuse, but from that time I was convinced that the conquered were the professed enemies of their conquerors. Of all the cities which had been overcome, it appeared to me that Jerusalem was the most difficult to be held in subjection. So turbulent were the people that I was in perpetual fear of a sedition, for repressing which there was one centurion only, and a small band of soldiers. I had requested aid from the prefect of Syria, who announced to me that he had scarcely sufficient troops for defense of his own province. I fear that the insatiate thirst of conquering beyond...are able to defend shall lose to us our noble government. Among the many rumors which were borne to my ears, one especially occupied my mind. A young man had come into Galilee, it was said, teaching with a noble zeal a new law in the name of the gods who had sent him. At first I feared his design might be to stir up the people against the Romans; but soon my fears were borne away. Jesus, the Nazarene, spoke more as a friend of the Romans than of the Jews. One day going by the place of Siloam, at which there was a great concourse of people, I saw a young man in the midst of the assembly, who, leaning against a tree, calmly addressed the multitude. I was told that it was Jesus. This I could have easily suspected, such was the difference between him and his hearers. His hair and beard, of golden yellow, gave a celestial aspect. He appeared to be about thirty years old. Never have I seen a gentler or more serene countenance. What a difference between him and those listening, with their black beards and tawny complexions. Since I was unwilling to interrupt him by my presence, I pursued my walking, but gave a sign to my secretary that he should draw near to the crowd and listen. The name of my secretary was Manlius. He was the grandson of the leader of the conspirators, who were encamped in Etruria awaiting Cataline. Manlius was an old inhabitant of Judea, and knew the Hebrew language well. He was devoted to me, and worthy of my confidence. On entering the Pretorium, I found Manlius, who related to me the words spoken at Siloam. Never have I heard from the Portico nor in the works of the philosophers, anything that can be compared with the maxims of Jesus.

When a certain one of the rebellious Jews, who are so numerous in Jerusalem, asked him whether it were lawful to give tribute to Caesar, Jesus answered: "Render unto Caesar the things which are his, and unto God the things which are God's."

It was on account of the wisdom of this saying that I granted so much liberty to the Nazarene, for it was in my power to have him arrested and exiled to Pontus; but this would have been contrary to the justice which has always characterized the Romans. This man was neither...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, to choose disciples, unrestrained by any praetorian mandate. Should it ever happen – may the gods avert the omen – I say should it ever happen that the religion of our ancestors be supplanted by the religion of Jesus, it will be to this noble toleration that Rome shall owe her premature obsequies; while I, miserable wretch, shall have been the instrument of what the Hebrews call providence, and we, destiny.

But this unlimited freedom granted to Jesus provoked the Jews; not the poor, but the rich and powerful. It is true that Jesus was severe on the latter; and this was a political reason, in my opinion, why I should not control the liberty of the Nazarene. "Scribes and Pharisees," he would say to them, "you are a race of the vilest sort. You are like painted sepulchers." At other times he would deride the proud alms of the publican, saying to him that the mite of the widow was greater in the eye of God. New complaints were made daily at the Pretorium concerning 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, and that if the Pretorium should refuse justice, appeal would be made to Caesar. Nevertheless, my conduct was pleasing to the Senate, and I was promised aid after the Parthian war was ended. Since I was too weak to suppress a sedition, I resolved upon a plan to give quiet to the city, yet not to lay aside the authority of the Pretorium. I sent a message to Jesus, desiring that he should come to me at the Pretorium. You know that the Spanish blood mixed with the Roman blood is in my veins, equally incapable of fear and childish emotion. When the Nazarene made his appearance, I was walking in my basilica, and my feet seemed fastened with an iron hand to the marble pavement, and I trembled in every limb as a culprit, while he was calm – the Nazarene – calm as innocence. When he came up to me he stopped, and by a sign seemed to say, "I am here." For a while I contemplated with admiration and awe this extraordinary type of man unknown to the many painters who have given form and figure to all the gods and heroes.

"Jesus," said I to him at length, and my tongue faltered, "Jesus of Nazareth, I have granted you for the last three years ample freedom of speech, nor do I regret it. Your words are those of a sage. I know not whether you have read Socrates and Plato; but this I do know, that there is in your discourses a majestic simplicity that elevates you far above these philosophers. The emperor is informed of it, and I, his humble representative in this country, am glad of having allowed the liberty of which you are so worthy. However, I must not conceal from you that your discourses have raised up against you powerful and inveterate enemies. Nor is this surprising. Socrates had his enemies, and he fell a victim to their hatred. Yours are doubly incensed against you, on account of your sayings and on account of the liberty extended towards you. They even accuse me of being indirectly leagued with you for the purpose of depriving the Hebrews of the little civil power which Rome has left them. My request – I do not say my order –

is, that you be more circumspect in the future, and more tender in arousing the pride of your enemies, lest they raise against you the stupid populace, and compel me to employ the instruments of justice.”

The Nazarene calmly replied: “Prince of the earth, your words proceed not from true wisdom. Say to the torrent, stop in the midst of the mountain home, because it will uproot the trees of the valley. The torrent will answer you that it must obey the laws of the Creator. God alone knows whither flows the torrent. Verily, I say unto you, before the rose of Sharon blossoms the blood of the just shall be spilt.”

“Your blood shall not be spilt,” replied I, with emotion. “You are more precious in my estimation, on account of your wisdom, than all the turbulent and proud Pharisees, who abuse the freedom granted them by the Romans, conspire against Caesar and construe our bounty into fear. Insolent wretches, they are not aware that the wolf of the woods sometimes clothes himself with the skin of the sheep. I will protect you against them. My Pretorium is open to you as an asylum.”

Jesus carelessly shook his head, and with a grace and divine smile said: “When the day shall have come, there will be no asylum for the Son of Man, neither in the earth nor under the earth. The asylum of the just is there” (pointing to the heavens). “That which is written in the books of the prophets must be accomplished.”

“Young man,” answered I mildly, “you oblige me to convert my request into an order. The safety of the province which is confided to my care requires it. You must observe more moderation in your discourses. Do not infringe. My orders, you know. May happiness attend you. Farewell.”

“Prince of earth,” replied Jesus, “I come not to bring war into the world, but peace, love and charity. I was born the same day on which Augustus Caesar gave peace to the Roman world. Persecution proceeds not from me. I expect it from others, and will meet it in obedience to the will of my Father, who has shown me the way. Restrain, therefore, your worldly prudence. It is not in your power to arrest the victim at the foot of the tabernacle of expiation.” So saying he disappeared like a bright shadow behind the curtains of the basilica.

To Herod, who then reigned in Galilee, the enemies of Jesus addressed themselves, to wreak their vengeance on the Nazarene. Had Herod consulted his own inclination, he would have ordered Jesus immediately to be put to death; but though proud of his royal dignity, yet he was afraid of committing an act that might diminish his influence with the Senate. Herod called on me one day at the Pretorium, and on rising to take his leave, after some insignificant conversation, he asked me what was my opinion concerning the Nazarene. I replied that Jesus appeared to be one of those great philosophers that great nations sometimes produce, that his doctrines are by no means sacrilegious, and that the intention of Rome was to leave him to that freedom of speech which was justified by his actions. Herod smiled maliciously, and saluting me with an ironical respect, he departed. The great feast of the Jews was approaching, and their intention was to avail themselves of the popular exultation which always manifests itself at the solemnities of the Passover. The city was overflowing with a tumultuous populace clamoring for the death of the Nazarene. My emissaries informed me that the treasure of the Temple had been employed in bribing the people. The danger was pressing. A Roman centurion had been insulted. I had written to the prefect of Syria for a hundred foot-soldiers and as many

cavalry. He had declined. I saw myself alone with a handful of veterans in the midst of a rebellious city, too weak to suppress a disorder, and having no other choice left but to tolerate it. They had seized upon Jesus, and the seditious rabble, although they had nothing to fear from the Pretorium, believing, with their leaders, that I winked at their sedition, continued vociferating, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Three powerful parties had combined together at that time against Jesus. First, the Herodians and the Saducees, whose seditious conduct seemed to have proceeded from double motives. They hated the Nazarene, and were impatient of the Roman yoke. They could never forgive me for having entered their holy city with banners that bore the image of the Roman emperor, and, although in this instance I had committed a fatal error, yet the sacrilege did not appear less heinous in their eyes. Another grievance, also, rankled in their bosoms. I had proposed to employ a part of the treasure of the Temple in erecting edifices of public utility. My proposal was scowled at. The Pharisees were the avowed enemies of Jesus. They cared not for the government. They bore with bitterness the severe reprimands which the Nazarene for three years had been throwing out against them wherever he had gone. Too weak and pusillanimous to act by themselves, they had embraced the quarrels of the Herodians and the Sadducees. Besides these three parties I had to contend against the reckless and profligate populace, always ready to join a sedition, and to profit by the disorder and confusion that followed from it. Jesus was dragged before the high priest Caiaphas performed a derisory act of submission. He sent his prisoner to me to pronounce his condemnation to death and secure his execution. I answered him that as Jesus was a Galilean, the affair came in Herod's jurisdiction, and ordered him to be sent thither. The wily tetrarch professed humility, and protesting his preference to the Lieutenant of Caesar, he committed the fate of the man to my hands. Soon my palace assumed the aspect of a besieged citadel. Every moment increased the number of the seditionists. Jerusalem was inundated with crowds from the mountains of Nazareth. All Judea appeared to be pouring...the devoted city. I had taken a wife—a girl from among the Gauls, who pretended to see into futurity, weeping and throwing herself at my feet—"Beware," said she to me, "beware and touch not that man, for he is holy. Last night I saw him in a vision. He was walking on the waters. He was flying on the wings of the winds. He spoke to the tempest and to the fishes of the lake; all were obedient to him. Behold! The torrent in Mount Kedron flows with blood, the statues of Caesar are filled with the filth of Gemoniae, the columns of the Interium have given away and the sun is veiled in mourning like a vestal in the tomb. O, Pilate, evil awaits thee if thou wilt not listen to the prayers of thy wife. Dread the curse of the Roman Senate, dread the powers of Caesar."

By this time the marble stairs groaned under the weight of the multitude. The Nazarene was brought back to me. I proceeded to the hall of justice, followed by my guard, and asked the people in a severe tone what they demanded. "The death of the Nazarene," was their reply. "For what crime?" "He has blasphemed. **He has prophesied the ruin of the Temple.** He calls himself the Son of God, the Messiah, the King of the Jews." "Roman justice," said I, "punishes not such offenses with death." "Crucify him, crucify him!" belched forth the relentless rabble. The vociferations of the infuriated mob shook the palace to its foundations. There was but one who appeared to be calm in the midst of the vast multitude. It was the Nazarene. After many fruitless attempts to protect him from this fury of his merciless persecutors, I adopted a measure which at the moment

appeared to me to be the only thing that could save his life. I ordered him to be scourged; then calling for an ewer, I washed my hands in the presence of the multitude, thereby signifying to them my disapproval of the deed. But in vain. It was his life that these wretches thirsted for.

Often in our civil commotions have I witnessed the furious animosity of the multitude, but nothing could be compared to what I witnessed in the present instance. It might have been truly said that on this occasion all the phantoms of the infernal regions had assembled at Jerusalem. The multitude appeared not to walk. It was borne off and whirled as a vortex, rolling along like living waves from the portals of the Pretorium even unto Mount Zion, with howlings such as were never heard in the seditions of the Panonia, or in the tumults of the forum. By degrees the day darkened like a winter's twilight, such as had been at the death of the great Julius Caesar. It was likewise towards the ides of March. I, the continued governor of a rebellious province, was leaning against a column of my basalic contemplating through the dreary gloom these fiends of torture dragging to execution the innocent Nazarene. All around me was deserted. Jerusalem had vomited forth her indwellers through the funeral gate that leads to the Gemonica. An air of desolation and sadness enveloped me. My guards had joined the cavalry, and the centurion, to display a shadow of power, was endeavoring to keep order. I was left alone, and my breaking heart admonished me that what was passing at that moment appertained rather to the history of the gods than to that of man. A loud clamor was heard proceeding from Golgotha, which, borne on the winds, seemed to announce an agony such as had never been heard by mortal ears. Dark clouds lowered over the pinnacle of the Temple, and, settling over the city, covered it as with a veil. So dreadful were the signs that were seen, both in the heavens and on the earth, that Dionysius, the Areopagite, is reported to have exclaimed, "Either the author of nature is suffering, or the universe is falling apart." Toward the first hour of the night I threw my mantle around me and went down into the city toward the gates of Golgotha. The sacrifice was consummated. The multitude was returning home; still agitated, it is true, but gloomy, taciturn and desperate. What it had witnessed had caused terror and remorse. I also saw my little Roman cohort pass by mournfully, the standard-bearer having veiled his eagle in token of grief, and I overheard some of the soldiers murmuring strange words, which I did not understand. Others were recounting prodigies almost similar to those which had so often smitten the Romans by the will of the gods. Sometimes groups of men and women would halt, then looking back towards Golgotha would remain motionless, in expectation of witnessing some new prodigy. I returned to the Pretorium, sad and pensive. On ascending the stairs, the steps of which were still stained with the blood of the Nazarene, I perceived an old man in a suppliant posture, and behind him were women in tears. He threw himself at my feet and wept bitterly. It is painful to see an old man weep.

"Father," said I to him mildly, "who are you, and what is your request?"

"I am Joseph of Arimathea," replied he, "and am come to beg of you upon my knees the permission to bury Jesus of Nazareth."

"Your prayer is granted," said I to him, and at the same time ordered Manlius to take some soldiers with him to superintend the interment, lest it should be profaned.

A few days after, the sepulcher was found empty. His disciples published all over the country that Jesus had risen from the dead, as he had foretold. A last duty remained

for me to perform, and that was to communicate to Caesar these deplorable events. I did it on the same night that followed the fatal catastrophe, and had just finished the communication when day began to dawn. At that moment the sound of clarions playing the air of Diana struck my ear. Casting my eye toward the Caesarean gate I beheld a troop of soldiers, and heard at a distance other trumpets sounding Caesar's march. It was the reinforcement that had been promised me – two thousand chosen troops – who, to hasten their arrival, had marched all night. "It has been decreed by the fates," cried I, wringing my hands, "that the great iniquity should be accomplished; that for averting the deeds of yesterday troops should arrive today. Cruel destiny, how thou sportest with the affairs of mortals." It was but too true what the Nazarene had proclaimed while writhing on the cross, "All is consummated."