

# **THE CHARACTERISATION OF PONTIUS PILATE IN THE FOUR GOSPELS**

**BY**

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## **PREFACE**

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the aim of this study, as well as the methodology that will be followed. Furthermore a brief overview of the study will be provided. First, however, a brief survey of the way in which various scholars approached the figure of Pontius Pilate thus far, will be provided.

### **1. An overview of studies of Pontius Pilate during the last decades**

In most Biblical dictionaries one finds discussions of Pontius Pilate. See, for example, the discussions by Hilliard (1963:771-772), Wheaton (1974:996), Jones (1960:115-125) and Roth (1971:847-848). The approach followed in all these discussions tends to be an overview of what is said about Pontius Pilate in the Gospels and other extra-Biblical literature, often followed by an attempt to integrate all the information into a coherent historical picture of Pilate. Apart from the discussions one finds in Biblical dictionaries, scholars regularly devoted attention to Pilate. Some of these studies will now be discussed. Note that the primary aim of this overview is to indicate the broad tendencies in the way in which scholars approached this subject. Therefore these will be summarised very briefly and presented in chronological order.

Doyle (1941:190-193) uses certain events in Pilate's career to determine the date of the crucifixion, in particular the shield incident. He

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points out that the shield incident precedes the crucifixion, and that the crucifixion should therefore be dated after 30 A.D., i.e. 33 A.D. remains the only possible date. The date of 32 A.D. is then a very likely date for the shield incident. Doyle's approach can thus be classified as a historical approach.

Kraeling (1942:263-289) investigates the episode of the Roman standards in Jerusalem, in particular how it may be linked to Jesus' last days in Jerusalem. In this regard he suggests that there were some Jews whom the eschatological potential of the episode of the standards held in suspense. The episode, as they recalled, had occurred most probably in the fall of 26 A.D. and, as Daniel had specified an interval of three and a half years between the appearance of the "abomination of desolation" and the coming judgement, the tension rose in the spring of 30 A.D., the season and probably also the year of Jesus' final, tragic appeal to Jerusalem, when these three and a half years were due to expire. To suggestible minds this could have provided an occasion for speculation and excitement at the time of the fatal Passover. Kraeling follows a historical approach.

Ziberty (1944:38-56) discusses the importance of Pontius Pilate in the Christian creeds and the Gospels. He approaches the problem from a theological perspective. He argues that the interpretation of the word "under" in the sense of "in the time of" answers neither the sense of the passage nor the conditions under which it was written. He argues that we have to conclude that something more than the announcement of a synchronism was intended when the name of Pilate was linked to that of Christ in solemn adoration. He also points out the deep impression made on the Christian phraseology by Pilate's part in the death of Christ. This was the result of its importance in the Gospels and in the doctrine of the cross. He further argues that the accusation of Christ before Pilate was a distinct step in the

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proceedings, a startling and momentous act whereby the chosen nation (for wordly reasons) decided to place the promised Messiah in the hands of the heathen oppressor. Ziberty's approach can be described as a combination of both a historical and a systematic-theological perspective.

Smallwood (1954:12-21) focuses on the date of Pilate's dismissal from Judea. After careful investigation of the sources, he concludes that Pilate's departure from Judea can be dated fairly exactly to the second half of December 36 A.D., and Vitellius' first visit to Jerusalem to the last days of 36 or the early days of 37 A.D. If Pilate had left Judea earlier, he would probably have reached Rome before Tiberius' death. If he had left later, Vitellius' visit would have been too late for a reply to his letter to Tiberius. Smallwood's approach can be described as a historical approach.

Batsford (1968:523-530) attempts to distinguish between history and legend in the various Gospel portrayals of Pilate. According to him, when one considers the trial of Jesus objectively, all the versions have a distinct anti-Jewish pattern. They present what is essentially a contest between the Roman magistrate, who recognised the innocence of Jesus and sought to save him, and the malevolent Jews, who were intent on murdering their victim. The sentence of Pilate was basic and intelligible for maintaining Roman Rule. However, the Gospels attempted to make Pilate a witness to Jesus' innocence, thus representing the earliest essay in Christian apologetic. The fundamental improbability of such an attempt was matched by its internal contradictions. Batsford follows a historical approach.

Horvath (1969:174-184) focuses on the question why Jesus was brought to Pilate. He discusses the views of scholars such as Winter, Klausner, Haim, and Cohn, and concludes that the Jews (especially the

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leaders) repeatedly asked for more indications and signs. However, Jesus did not give them the sign they demanded. According to Horvath, there was only one sign that would prove Jesus' claim in the eyes of the Jews and that sign was the liberation of Israel from the mighty Roman Empire. Hence, they took Jesus to Pilate. This afforded Jesus the opportunity to demonstrate his power and the trustworthiness of his claim, i.e. if He were really what He pretended to be, the Son of God supported by Yahweh, then salvation of Israel and the end of the Roman Empire was at hand. However, Jesus failed to prove that and died on a cross. Horvath's approach can be described as a historical approach.

Maccoby (1969:55-60) investigates the events surrounding Jesus and Barabbas, in particular the historical basis of the Barabbas episode. He suggests the following: the first stage of the gospel story relating to Barabbas, as found in the pre-Markan phase, reflects a time when relations between the early Christian church and the Jewish people were relatively amicable. According to this version, the crowd shouted for the release of Jesus Barabbas i.e. Jesus the Teacher, whereas the high priest shouted, "Crucify Him!" However, later, when the hatred between Christians and Jews increased, the story was altered. Now the Jewish crowd shouted for the death of Jesus. It was another Jesus whose release they wanted, Jesus Barabbas, who was a different person from Jesus of Nazareth. The story now achieved a certain drama; a choice had entered the scene, a choice between two Jesuses. So the *privilegium paschale* was invented. Maccoby's approach can be described as a historical approach.

Bammel (1970:85-90) focuses on the trial of Jesus, in particular the question why Pilate handed Jesus over to Antipas. He states that Pilate was not obliged to hand Jesus over to Antipas, but he did so for diplomatic

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reasons. The trial of Jesus proved to be an awkward case for Pilate, and since Jesus' activities were centred in Galilee, it was an opportune time for him to make a diplomatic gesture. He had nothing to lose and everything to gain. In the end he gained, for he and Antipas became friends from that day onwards. Bammel's approach can be described as a historical approach.

Lampe (1970:173-182) discusses the trial of Jesus in the *Acta Pilati*. He points out that the anonymous author of this work was of the opinion that the stories were very important for his main purpose, namely to confirm the truth of the resurrection and ascension by producing public evidence for those events, which had been communicated to the Jewish leaders who were responsible for the death of Jesus. The narrative of the trial is more interesting, not because it has historical value or explains the problems presented by the canonical accounts, but for the way in which it transposes the New Testament material into a framework constructed out of the Christian-Jewish theological controversies of a much later age, and enlists the advocacy of Pilate as a Christian apologist. Lampe's approach can be described as a historical approach.

Maier (1971:362-371) investigates all the legends with regard to Pilate's fate in order to establish whether they hold any historical truth, in particular with regard to his fate. He concludes that that they cannot be accepted as historically reliable at all. He states that we should think of Pontius Pilate's eventual fate as that of a retired government official, a pensioned Roman ex-magistrate, rather than something disastrous. He was possibly satisfied that history did not record his last years. He may even have spent his time searching for an answer to the question he once asked, under circumstances he may well have forgotten, "What is the truth"? Maier follows a historical approach.

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Fuks (1982:503-507) investigates the episode of the gilded Roman shields in Jerusalem. He uses a historical perspective and evaluates several interpretations by other scholars. He concludes that historically the best explanation seems to be that the Orthodox and religiously sensitive inhabitants of Jerusalem were enraged by the unprecedented engraving of the name of an alien deity (*divus Augustus*) within their holy city. Incidentally, the final removal of the shields on Tiberius' orders to the temple of Augustus in Caesaria lends further support to this supposition. Fuks basically follows a historical approach.

Ehrman (1983:124-131) follows a literary approach. He discusses Jesus' trial before Pilate as portrayed in the Gospel of John. He focuses on the literary aspect and points out that John uses the traditions at his disposal to underscore the theological significance of the event. He states that the staging of the trial, the role of the main characters, the discussion of the judge with plaintiffs and defendant, and the temporal and spatial settings did not establish what had happened at the trial, but elucidated the significance of the trial. According to Ehrmann, John had discovered a number of ironies in the Christian traditions, for example the fact that the innocent Jesus was executed as a criminal, and that his own people were responsible. John took over these ironic traditions and remoulded them in order to heighten their inherent tensions. Jesus and Pilate were then portrayed in purely ironic terms.

Schwartz (1983:26-45) follows a rhetorical approach and discusses in detail the facts provided by Josephus and Philo with regard to Pilate. In particular, he focuses on the fact that the writings of both Philo and Josephus included accounts of a conflict between Jews and Pilate. Schwartz concludes that the accounts of Josephus and Philo are very similar. The discrepancies that do exist may be explained by Philo's apologetic bias. This bias caused

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Philo to distort the story to such an extent that it is unintelligible whereas the story in Josephus is simple and convincing. According to Schwartz, the more reasonable opinion would seem to be that there was only one such incident, of which we have two accounts.

Giblin (1986:221-239) also focuses on John's narration of the hearings before Pilate. He concentrates on the structure of the narrative, in particular the progression in terms of the various encounters and the role of Pontius Pilate. According to him, Pilate's actions and reactions provide the main element of dramatic continuity and account for the overall cohesion of the narrative. Giblin's approach can be summarised as a literary approach.

Merrit (1985:57-68) focuses on Jesus Barabbas and the event of the Paschal pardon. In his study he disagrees with Maccoby, Brandon, and others, who argue that Mark interpolated the custom of *privilegium paschale* in the Barabbas episode. He argues that Mark used the custom of reprieve of a prisoner at Passover, which echoed the known custom of releasing a prisoner at festivals in the ancient world, and thus lending an aura of authenticity to the episode wherein Barabbas was depicted as the beneficiary of such a reprieve. The choice between two prisoners further facilitated the portrayal of the penitent Messiah as taking upon himself the punishment intended for the guilty, an allusion to the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy of Deutero-Isaiah. Merrit also follows a historical approach.

Davies (1986:109-114) investigates the meaning of Philo's text in respect of the gilded shields. He argues that Philo emphasises the facts of the inscription, i.e. on dedication, and not the inscription itself. The inscription was secondary. It derived its offensiveness from the dedication, in which it played an essential role as a symbol and announcement. Philo tried to present

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anti-Semitism as an un-Roman policy, which contravened the normal imperial tradition: Augustus and Tiberius respected Judaism whereas antisemitism was the mark of disobedient subordinates such as the traitor Sejanus and the stubborn Pilate and Gaius. Davies' approach can be described as a historical approach.

McGing (1991:416-438) focuses on the historical sources on Pontius Pilate, in particular the question whether the New Testament portrays Pilate in the correct way. According to McGing, the Pilate of Philo and Josephus can be reconciled fairly easily with the Pilate of the New Testament. The basic features of the Gospel portraits of Pilate, namely opposition and eventual capitulation, are remarkably consistent with the Pilate portrayed in Philo and Josephus. In the end, advantage dictated that he yielded. Thus, according to McGing, it may be observed that as far as describing the details of Pilate's actions and behaviour is concerned, the accounts of Philo and Josephus, and those of the evangelists concur substantially. McGing thus follows a historical approach.

Brown (1994:693-705) presents a survey of all what is known of Pontius Pilate from ancient sources. He discusses the following issues, mainly from a historical perspective: the context and data of Pilate's career; favourable and unfavourable estimates of Pilate; six incidents or items involving Pilate (the iconic standards; coins with pagan cultic symbols; the aqueduct riot; the Galilean sacrifices; the golden shields; and the Samaritan prophet). Brown's approach is dominated by a historical perspective.

Thatcher (1995:215-218) discusses the portrayal of Pilate in Philo. He focuses on the question whether Philo's portrayal of Pilate is historically reliable or whether it is merely used for rhetorical purposes. He concludes



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that there is reason to doubt the basic historical veracity of the Pilate narrative, especially when compared to similar events recorded by Josephus. It suggests that on one occasion Pilate miscalculated Jewish sensitivities by installing an honorarium for the Emperor in Jerusalem. This was removed after a Jewish appeal to Tiberius. Regarding the trial of Jesus, this episode confirms that hostility existed between Pilate and leading Jews. It also confirms the potential reality of the threatened report to Caesar in John 19:12-13. Thatcher follows a historical approach.

Weaver (1996:179-196) who focuses on Matthew's use of irony in the portrayal of political leaders also discusses Pilate. She states that Pilate who was the most powerful man in Palestine, however, is portrayed ultimately as powerless to do what he knows is right. Rather, the "governor" reveals himself as the puppet of those whom he purports to govern, namely, the Jewish crowds and the religious authorities who support them. According to Weaver, the ultimate irony, is one that reveals the powerlessness not only of Pilate but also of the crowds and the religious authorities. Weaver follows a literary approach.

Bond published two important studies on Pilate. The first one (1996:241-261) investigates the issue whether the coins introduced by Pilate were meant to provoke the people or to integrate them into the Empire. She believes that Pilate did not deliberately circulate the offensive coins in Judea to encourage general unrest and resentment to the Roman rule. She states that the coins could reflect the Empire's increasingly compromising attitude towards the Jews under Tiberius. Pilate might have felt less inhibited by Jewish sensitivities than his predecessors, especially those under Augustus who seemed to have particularly favoured the Jews' might. His coins, therefore, revealed a freer mixture of both Roman and Jewish designs,

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perhaps in an attempt to integrate this province into the Empire. The coins would have been in circulation throughout Judea at least until Agrippa's issue of A.D. 42/3. Bond follows a historical approach. In 1998 Bond published an extensive study on Pontius Pilate titled *Pontius Pilate in history and interpretation*. She divides her study into the following chapters: Pontius Pilate and the Roman province of Judea, in Philo, Josephus, Mark's gospel, Matthew's gospel, Luke-Acts, John's gospel and the historical events behind the gospel narratives. Her approach may be described as a combination of a literary and historical approach. As a rule she begins with a literary analysis, in the sense that she discusses the way Pilate is portrayed in a particular book. However, this is mostly combined with a historical approach in the sense that she tries to link what is said about Pilate to historical sources, in particular the way in which the presentations of the Roman prefect are influenced by their authors' attitudes towards the Romans with whom they have come into contact. She also wishes to establish whether the portrayal of Pilate would in each case give any indication of the author's attitude towards the Roman State, and what type of readers might have found this useful. Bond uses the analyses of Philo and Josephus' Pilate to determine the core of the historical Pilate. She then points out that the Gospels portray Pilate as a weak and vacillating, and in a sense as very simplistic character.

## **2. The approach to be followed in this study**

The above survey indicates that scholars have devoted a fair amount of attention to Pontius Pilate. However, as is evident from the above overview, most of the studies focused on historical issues and are based on a historical approach. The only notable exceptions are the studies of Weaver and Bond. However, even in their case, a consistent narratological approach

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has not been followed. In particular, in the case of Bond, one might say that she uses a literary approach in service of a historical approach.

The absence of a consistent narratological analysis of Pontius Pilate may thus be indicated as a gap in the research on this interesting figure. The aim of this study is to rectify this by presenting a detailed study of the portrayal of Pontius Pilate in terms of a narratological approach, in particular in terms of a narratological approach to characterisation in texts. This will be achieved by analysing each gospel in the following way:

- First, a brief overview of authorship, date of writing and occasion for writing each gospel will be provided. As these issues have to a great extent been settled by scholars, the main purpose of these overviews will be to indicate my own views in this regard.
- Secondly, some basic characteristics of the narrators of each gospel will be outlined.
- Thirdly, a brief overview of the way in which each gospel narrative develops will be provided.
- Lastly, the characterisation of Pilate in each Gospel will be discussed. In this regard, most attention will be paid to two issues, namely Pilate's role in terms of the plot within the events in which he functions, and the way in which he is characterised. In both cases the methodological approach that will be used is primarily based on that of Rimmon-Kenan (1983; see also Tolmie 1999). This will now be outlined briefly:

With regard to the way in which Pontius Pilate functions in terms of the plot of each gospel narrative the study will focus on the plot in terms

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of the surface structure of events, that is the way in which events are organised syntagmatically (one after the other).

The procedure for analysing the surface structure of events can be divided into three steps:

- a) Paraphrasing the events
- b) Classifying the events
- c) Determining the relationship between the events

Paraphrasing the events can be achieved in various ways, but the option to be followed in this study is that each event will be summarised in terms of a single sentence in such a way that the subject performing the action, as well as the action that is being performed, is clearly indicated, for example: The soldiers crucify Jesus.

The next step will be devoted classifying the events and is followed by a distinction between the various types of events (as paraphrased in the previous step). In this study the system developed by Seymour Chatman (1978) will be used. This may be summarised as follows:

A first distinction is that between actions and happenings. Although both are changes of state, in the case of actions a character is the narrative subject (not necessarily the grammatical subject) of the event. Example: The thief stole the diamonds/the diamonds were stolen by the thief. In the case of happenings, a character is the narrative object of the event. Example: The storm casts Peter adrift.

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A second useful distinction is that between durative events (for example, she loves him) and punctual events (for example, he kicks his dog). Since the sections that will be studied contain a large number of speech acts, some of the distinctions normally used in speech act theory will be used.

With regard to the third step, namely indicating the relationships between events, two important aspects will be considered. First, the hierarchy between events is examined. Some events are more important than others. Accordingly, one can distinguish between those events that are crucial to the logic of the plot and those events that may be deleted without disturbing the logic of the plot (although their omission will impoverish the narrative in other ways). Seymour Chatman (1978:53-54) calls the events that are absolutely crucial to the understanding of the logic of the plot *kernels* whereas he calls the others *satellites*. These are defined as follows: "Kernels are narrative moments that give rise to cruxes in the direction taken by events. They are nodes or hinges in the structure, branching points which force a movement into one of two (or more) possible paths ... Satellites entail no choice, but are solely the workings-out of the choices made at the kernels. They necessarily imply the existence of kernels, but not vice versa. Their function is to fill in, elaborate, and complete the kernel; they form the flesh on the skeleton.

The second procedure is to combine the individual events into microsequences, which, in turn, should be combined into macrosequences. In order to identify the microsequences, each action mentioned by the narrator will be described as a separate

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microsequence. These will then be grouped together to form macrosequences.

Lastly, the way in which macrosequences are combined to form the plot of a particular section in the narrative will be considered. The following principles used as a rule in the combination of macrosequences will be considered in each case:

- Time: The implied reader will usually assume that, unless indications are given to the contrary, events are narrated in chronological order.
- Causality: One micro-/macrosequence may serve as the cause of another micro-/macrosequence.
- Space: Micro-/macrosequences may also be combined by the fact that they are situated in the same geographical location.
- Character: Micro/macrosequences may be dominated by the same character(s). In this case the principle of character can be indicated.
- Internal relationships: In some cases structural relationships can be indicated between various groups of micro-/macrosequences.

With regard to the way in which Pontius Pilate is characterised by the narrator, the following is important. One may distinguish between two processes, namely direct and indirect characterisation. In the case of direct characterisation a specific trait (Pilate is dishonest) is mentioned by the narrator. In the case of indirect characterisation a trait is not

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mentioned directly, but portrayed by the way in which the character acts. In this case, the implied reader must evaluate the actions of the character and decide what the trait is. It happens as a rule that the implied reader associates a paradigm of traits with each character. Whenever the character appears in the narrative, the implied reader will evaluate the information provided by the narrator and add new traits to the paradigm of traits or, in some cases, modify the traits that have been added to the paradigm. In this study of Pontius Pilate the paradigm of traits associated with him in each Gospel will be outlined.

Lastly, the way in which Pilate is portrayed in terms of the other characters will be discussed. In order to achieve this, the various systems outlined by Rimmon-Kenan (1983) will be used. She summarises these systems as follows (Rimmon-Kenan 1983:40ff.):

E. M. Forster's distinction between so-called "flat" and "round" characters will be used by distinguishing between the number of traits associated with each character and/or whether there is any development.

W. J. Harvey uses three categories for classifying characters. He calls the important character(s) in the narrative protagonist(s). These characters are characterised in more detail than others, are more complex and change as the narrative progresses. There are also the so-called background characters. They are not characterised extensively and their only function is to serve as a part of the mechanics of the plot. Between the protagonists and the background characters there is a third category of intermediary figures of which there are two types: i.e. "a card" is a character who approaches

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greatness, but who is not cast into the role of the protagonist. It is relatively steadfast, and may be simultaneously comic and pathetic. Harvey calls the second type of intermediary character “ficelles”. These are usually characterised more extensively than the background characters, yet they exist only with the purpose of fulfilling certain functions within the narrative, for example, as transitional agents between the protagonist and society, as foils to the protagonist, or as alternatives to the protagonist.

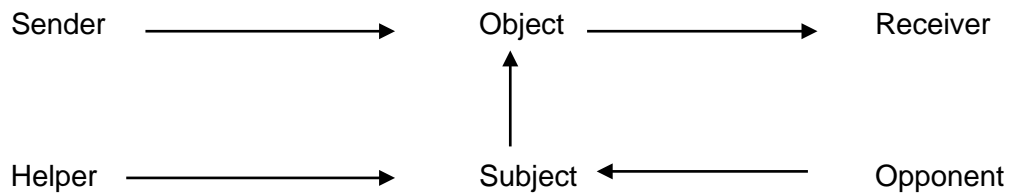
Joseph Ewen proposes that characters should be viewed in terms of points along a continuum and should not be classified in terms of exhaustive categories. He distinguishes three axes on which each character can be located:

- Complexity: a continuum that varies from those characters displaying a single trait to those displaying a complex paradigm of traits.
- Development: a continuum that varies from those characters that show no development at all to those who undergo an intensive development in the narrative.
- Penetration into inner life: a continuum that varies from those characters that are viewed (“focalised”) continually from the outside to those whose inner life is portrayed extensively.

Lastly, the following actantial system developed by A. J. Greimas will be used:



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These actants can be defined as follows:

- 1 The object is the goal or destination of the action.
- 2 The subject is the preformatted agency of the action.
- 3 The sender initiates or enables the event.
- 4 The receiver benefits from or registers the effect of the event.
- 5 The opponent retards or impedes the event by opposing the subject or by competing with the subject for object.
- 6 The helper advances or fulfils the action by supporting or assisting the subject.

The chapters in this study will be divided as follows. In the second chapter the way in which Pontius Pilate is portrayed in the non-Biblical sources will be discussed. In chapters 3-6 the way in which Pontius Pilate is portrayed in each of the four Gospels will be discussed in terms of the approach outlined above. In the last chapter the way in which Pontius Pilate is characterised in the four Gospels will be compared in terms of the similarities and differences. Conclusions will be drawn.

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **PONTIUS PILATE: A BRIEF SKETCH BASED ON OTHER SOURCES**

The aim of this chapter is to present a brief overview of the information available on Pontius Pilate from other sources from antiquity. As the way in which Pilate is portrayed in the New Testament is discussed in detail in the rest of this study, it will not be discussed here. The picture of Pilate gained from other sources serves as background to the discussion in the rest of the study.

According to Josephus *Antiquities* 18.32f, 35, 89 Pontius Pilate was the fifth governor of the Roman province of Judea. His rule began in 26 A.D. and lasted until early 37 A.D.

## **1. Background**

### **1.1 The province**

Herod I died in 4 B.C. and August decided to uphold his will. Therefore his kingdom was divided between three of Herod's surviving sons. Antipas

was given Galilee and Peraea, whereas Philip was given Batanaea, Trachonitis, Auranitis and certain parts of Zeno in the vicinity of Panias (or Ituraea). Both were given the title "tetrarch", meaning the ruler of a fourth part of a kingdom. The remainder of Herod's kingdom, approximately half of the original kingdom, consisting of Idumaea, Judea and Samaria, was given to Archelaus with the title "ethnarch" (Josephus *War* 2.93-100 and *Antiquities* 17.317-320).

However, ten years later August again intervened in the situation in Judea as a result of certain dynastic intrigues amongst the Herodians, a change in Roman expansionist policies in the Near East, and possibly Archelaus' brutality. August exiled Archelaus and transformed his territory into a Roman province. Although it included Samaria and Idumaea, the new province was known simply as Judea. This happened in 6 A.D. (Josephus *War* 2.111 and *Antiquities* 17.342f).

Judea was formally classified as a third class imperial province. As a rule those provinces that were least important in terms of expanse and revenue were classified as third class imperial provinces. The population of such provinces was often regarded as presenting particular problems for the Roman government. The governors of these provinces were drawn from the equestrian rank and commanded only auxiliary troops. Though Judea was technically independent, it was to a large extent under the guidance of the powerful and strategically important neighbouring province of Syria. The Syrian legate was a man of consular standing and usually had three Roman legions at his disposal. After 18 A.D. a fourth legion was even added. Should any trouble arise in Judea he could provide military support to ensure that Roman interests would not be harmed. He could also be called upon as an

arbitrator by either the Judean governor or the people if the need arose (Bond 1998:4-5).

Judea remained a Roman province from 6 A.D. until the outbreak of the Jewish Revolt in 66 A.D., with the exception of the brief period under Herod Agrippa I (41-44 A.D.). Its borders remained unchanged throughout the first period of Roman rule but altered somewhat in the second period, i.e. 44-66 A.D. The province of Judea was extremely small. In its first phase (the phase of Pilate's governorship), it was only approximately 160 km from north to south and approximately 70 km from west to east. However, despite the fact that it was relatively small, the population of the province consisted of diverse ethnic groups, namely Jews, Samaritans and Gentiles. The Gentiles were located in particular in the Gentile cities of Caesarea and Sebaste. One could even say that, to some extent, the province had two capital cities. The traditional capital, Jerusalem, was the focus of Jewish religious life whereas the governor usually resided in Caesarea with his troops and entourage. Caesarea thus became the Roman administrative headquarters. On occasion, the governor would move to Jerusalem - in particular during the religious festivals when it was necessary to keep the peace. On some occasions he also had to hear criminal cases in Jerusalem (Bond 1998:6-9).

## **1.2 The governor**

This section briefly outlines the rank of the Judean governor, his duties, his responsibilities with regard to law and order, judicial matters, collection of taxes, and general administration. This discussion is based on the more detailed discussions of Brown (1993:693-698), Schwartz (1992:395-401) and Bond (1998:1-23).

## Pontius Pilate: a brief sketch based on other sources

- *Rank:* As was the custom in respect of all the relatively unimportant imperial provinces, all the governors of Judea were drawn from the equestrian rank. Equestrians formed the middle rank of the Roman nobility and under August their order usually provided suitable men for a large variety of important public offices. These ranged from military commands to jury work and the collection of taxes.

- *Duties:* As a rule, the Roman government only had a handful of public officials in its provinces. An imperial province only had a governor and a small number of personal staff. This meant that the governor's duties had to be limited to essentials, namely the maintenance of law and order, judicial matters and the collection of taxes. To help him in his duties, the governor possessed *imperium*, or the supreme administrative power in the province.

- *Law and order:* The primary responsibility of the governor of Judea was military. This was regarded as the most important aspect of the governor's task as is evident from his title. In the period before Agrippa I's reign (41-44 A.D.) he was called *prefect*. The fact that governors were appointed as military prefects emphasises that the early emperors were very determined to hold on to the subjugated territory and to bring all inhabitants firmly under Roman control. However, Claudius changed the title of *prefect* to a civilian title, *procurator*. The reason for this decision might have been a desire to indicate that the pacification process had to a large extent been successful.

The governors of Judea had only auxiliary troops at their disposal. These troops appear to be mainly descendants of the Herodian troops and most of them came from Caesarea and Sebaste. The troops totalled five infantry cohorts and one cavalry regiment. They were not all kept at one place in Judea, but were scattered throughout the province and moved wherever the governor deemed their presence as essential. One cohort was kept permanently in the Antonia Fortress in Jerusalem.

- *Judicial matters*: The governor possessed the supreme judicial authority in Judea. It is possible that he had a system of assistants who heard cases and who could receive a hearing on his behalf.

- *Collection of taxes*: Rome relied to a large extent on the help of local authorities and private agents for the collection of taxes. This was also the case in Judea. The Roman governor in Judea was in charge of this process and acted as the emperor's personal financial agent. Various taxes were levied, but the heaviest tax was the *tributum*. In the first century A.D. this was primarily a tax on provincial land. The amount of tribute required from each person was worked out by means of a census. Only one census appears to have been conducted in Judea, namely the one organised by Quirinius on the occasion of the formation of the new province in 6 A.D.

- *General administration:* As was the Roman practice in most of the provinces, the entire day-to-day administration of the nation in Judea was left mostly to the Jewish High Priest and aristocracy in Jerusalem. The Romans expected the High Priest and the aristocracy to uphold Roman interests, and, in turn, their own privileged positions were safeguarded by Rome. The Roman governors realised the political importance of the High Priesthood and sought to keep a tight control over it, appointing and deposing High Priests at will.

## 2. Pontius Pilate

Nothing is known of Pilate before his arrival in Judea. However, it is known that in those times advancement in the public service depended on patronage, in particular the connections and influences in the imperial court. One may thus speculate that Pilate must have been helped by powerful patrons, perhaps even Tiberius himself or his powerful friend Sejanus. Pilate could possibly have had previous military experience before coming to the province, but there is no evidence of this. Most governors ruled over Judea between two and four years; however, both Pilate and his predecessor Gratus, governed the province for approximately eleven years. This should not be interpreted as an indication that Pilate and Gratus were especially competent, as it was the Tiberius' provincial policy to keep men in office for a long time (Schwartz 1992:395-7).

In general, Pilate's term of office corresponds to the general picture of Judean governors sketched in the previous section of this Chapter. Two aspects, however, distinguish Pilate's governorship to a certain extent from

those of other governors. First there was no Syrian legate for the first six years of Pilate's governorship in Judea. Tiberius appointed Aelius Lamia to the post but did not send him to Syria. Instead he was kept in Rome. This may have been due to the fact that Tiberius was trying out some kind of centralised government. It does not seem to have been successful, as subsequent legates governed from the Syrian capital, Antioch, again. This implies that for the early part of his governorship Pilate had no legate in Syria on whom he could call in an emergency. Thus, unlike his predecessors, Pilate could not rely on the immediate reaction from the Roman legions from Syria in the case of unrest. In practice, this meant that Pilate depended more than was ordinarily the case on his auxiliaries. He had to suppress any potential uprising as soon as possible to prevent it from escalating. A second interesting feature of Pilate's governorship is that he did not replace the High Priest during his governorship. In the case of his predecessor Gratus, the High Priest was replaced four times over a period of eleven years. The reason for this was most probably not the fact that Pilate wished to respect Jewish sensitivities but rather that Gratus' last appointee, Caiaphas, proved to be a man whom he could rely on to support Roman interests, yet still succeeded in commanding some respect among the people (Bond 1998:38-46)

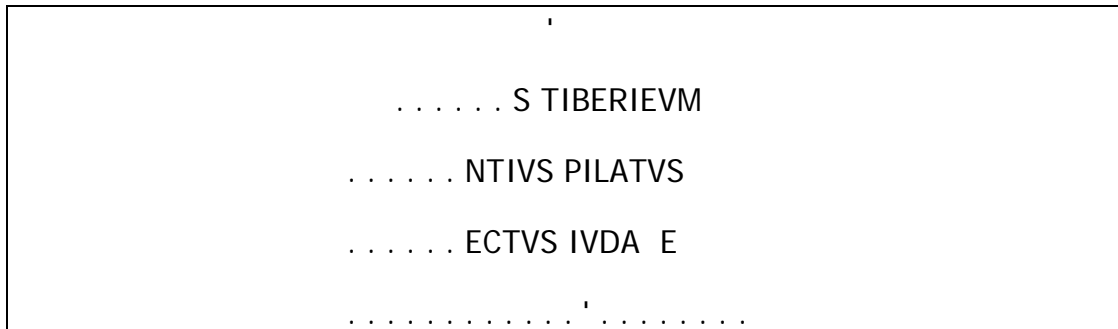
## **2.1 Primary sources of information for Pilate's governorship**

The primary sources of information for Pilate's governorship fall into two groups, namely archaeological and literary.



### 2.1.1 Archaeological sources

There are two archaeological links to Pilate. The first is an inscription found on a block of limestone at Caesarea Maritima in 1961. Although much of the inscription is mutilated, the following letters are still visible:



As not much of the inscription survived, it is possible to reconstruct it in various ways. However, three issues are clear. First, it is obvious that the second line refers to Pontius Pilate, as it gives the first of his three names in the mutilated left side. Secondly, his title can be reconstructed as "praefectus Iudaeae" ("prefect of Judea"). Thirdly, the inscription appears to have been attached to a building known as a "Tiberiëum", which was presumably a temple or a secular building dedicated to Tiberius (Brown 1994:605).

The second archaeological link to Pilate is three bronze coins struck by the prefect in three successive years, 29/30, 30/31 and 31/32 A.D. Each coin depicts a typical Jewish design on one side of the coin and a pagan symbol on the reverse side of the coin. The first coin shows three ears of barley on one side and a *simpulum* (a sacrificial vessel or wine bowl) on the reverse side. Both the second and third coins have a similar design with a *lituus* (a crooked staff or wand) on the one side and a wreath with berries on the reverse side. One may speculate that this blending of Jewish and pagan designs may have

stemmed from an attempt by Pilate to integrate the Jewish nation into the empire. One may also infer that the coins were not generally regarded as offensive, because they were apparently used until Agrippa's reign who changed the design only in his second year (Bond 1998:39-43).

### **2.1.2 Literary sources**

Specific events from Pilate's governorship are recorded in the writings of six authors of the first century- Josephus, Philo and the four evangelists. As pointed out above, the gospels will be discussed in the following Chapters in this study. Accordingly, only the information provided by Josephus and Philo is discussed now.

#### **Josephus**

The largest amount of information that we have on Pontius Pilate comes from the Jewish writer Flavius Josephus. He composed his two well-known works, the *Antiquities of the Jews* and the *Jewish War*, towards the end of the first century A.D. Although Josephus' accounts are very important, they are not unbiased historical reports. One can indicate apologetic and rhetorical motives in each narrative to a large extent, particularly his desire to impress on other nations that it is futile to revolt against Rome, an attempt to stress that Judaism is very old, and an attempt to blame the Roman governors of Judea for the Jewish revolt (Bond 1998:49-52).

Josephus describes four incidents involving Pilate. In his earlier work, the *Jewish War*, he describes Pilate's introduction of iconic standards into Jerusalem and his construction of an aqueduct for the city. In the *Antiquities* he again describes these two incidents (with slightly

## Pontius Pilate: a brief sketch based on other sources

different emphases), adding two other incidents, namely the story of the execution of Jesus of Nazareth, and an incident involving Samaritans - this eventually led to Pilate's removal from the province.

### The standards

This is described as follows in *Jewish War* and *Antiquities* (Translations of all the sections from Josephus and Philo from the Loeb Classical Dictionary):

*War* 2.169-174

Pilate, being sent by Tiberius as procurator to Judaea, introduced into Jerusalem by night and under cover the effigies of Caesar which are called standards. This proceeding, when day broke, aroused immense excitement among the Jews; those on the spot were in consternation, considering their laws to have been trampled under foot, as those laws permit no image to be erected in the city; while the indignation of the townspeople stirred the country folk, who flocked together in crowds. Hastening after Pilate to Caesarea, the Jews implored him to remove the standards from Jerusalem and to uphold the laws of their ancestors. When Pilate refused, they fell prostrate around his house and for five whole days and nights remained motionless in that position. On the ensuing day Pilate took his seat on his tribunal in the great stadium and summoning the multitude, with the apparent intention of answering them, gave the arranged signal to his armed soldiers to surround the Jews. Finding themselves in a ring of troops, three deep, the Jews were struck dumb at this unexpected sight. Pilate, after threatening to cut them down, if they refused to admit Caesar's images, signalled to the soldiers to draw their swords. Thereupon the Jews, as by concerted action, flung themselves in a body on the ground, extended their necks, and exclaimed that they were ready rather to die than to transgress the law. Overcome with astonishment at such intense religious zeal, Pilate gave orders for the immediate removal of the standards from Jerusalem.

*Antiq* 18.55-59

Now Pilate, the procurator of Judaea, when he brought his army from Caesarea and removed it to winter quarters in Jerusalem, took a bold step in subversion of the Jewish practices, by introducing into the city the busts of the emperor that were attached to the military standards, for our law forbids the making of images. It was for this reason that the previous procurators, when they entered the city, used standards that had no such ornaments. Pilate was the first to bring the images into Jerusalem and set them up, doing it without the knowledge of the people, for he entered at night. But when the people discovered it, they went in a throng to Caesarea and for many days entreated him to take away the images. He refused to yield, since to do so would be an outrage to the emperor; however, since they did not cease entreating him, on the sixth day he secretly armed and placed his troops in

## Pontius Pilate: a brief sketch based on other sources

position, while he himself came to the speaker's stand. This had been constructed in the stadium, which provided concealment for the army that lay in wait. When the Jews again engaged in supplication, at a pre-arranged signal he surrounded them with his soldiers and threatened to punish them at once with death if they did not put an end to their tumult and return to their own places. But they, casting themselves prostrate and baring their throats, declared that they had gladly welcomed death rather than make bold to transgress the wise provisions of the laws. Pilate, astonished at the strength of their devotion to the laws, straightway removed the images from Jerusalem and brought them back to Caesarea.

It is obvious from the above that Josephus basically accused Pilate of deliberately bringing standards with offensive images of Caesar into Jerusalem by night. In the *Antiquities* version Josephus even accuses Pilate of deliberately wanting to subvert Jewish practices. When the Jews saw what had happened, they flocked to Caesarea and surrounded Pilate's house for five days, begging him to remove the standards. When Pilate finally had them encircled with his troops, the Jews declared themselves willing to die rather than to contravene their ancestral laws. According to Josephus, Pilate was so amazed at their religious devotion that he had the standards removed.

Upon careful study of Josephus' version of the events, it is evident that he has allowed his rhetorical concerns to influence this story. This is particularly obvious in his portrayal of Pilate as deliberately provoking the Jews, as well as the portrayal of the unflinching devotion of the Jews to their ancestral religion. Yet, the historical event behind the narrative can be reconstructed: due to its position at the beginning of the accounts in both the *War* and the *Antiquities*, this incident according to most scholars took place in the early stages of Pilate's term of office, perhaps as early as winter 26 A.D. According to Roman tradition, a squadron could not be separated from its standards. Therefore, if new standards were brought into Jerusalem, it can be assumed that an entirely new squadron was being stationed in

## Pontius Pilate: a brief sketch based on other sources

Jerusalem, one which had not been used in the city previously. Because Pilate was a military prefect, his interest would have been primarily in the troops themselves and their strategic positioning. The particular emblems on their standards would not really have mattered to him. Because Pilate was a new governor, he might not even have realised that this specific cohort and its standards would cause offence in Jerusalem. Pilate could also have been warned beforehand, but he could have seen no reason why troops deployed until then in Caesarea could not be moved to Jerusalem. Thus, one can get the impression of Pilate as a new governor, as someone who is anxious to take no nonsense from the people he is to govern. The fact that he was eventually willing to reconsider the position to change the troops reveals a certain amount of wisdom and concern to avoid unnecessary hostilities (Brown 1994:698-699).

### The Aqueduct

This is described by Josephus in *War* 2.175-177 and *Antiq* 18.60-62:

#### *War* 2.175-177

On a later occasion he provoked a fresh uproar by expending upon the construction of an aqueduct the sacred treasure known as Corbonas; the water was brought from a distance of 400 furlongs. Indignant at this proceeding, the populace formed a ring round the tribunal of Pilate, then on a visit to Jerusalem, and besieged him with angry clamour. He, foreseeing the tumult, had interspersed among the crowd a troop of his soldiers, armed but disguised in civilian dress, with orders not to use their swords, but to beat any rioters with cudgels. He now from his tribunal gave the agreed signal. Large numbers of the Jews perished, some from the blows which they received, others trodden to death by their companions in the ensuing flight. Cowed by the fate of the victims, the multitude was reduced to silence.

## Pontius Pilate: a brief sketch based on other sources

*Antiq* 18.60-62

He spent money from the sacred treasury in the construction of an aqueduct to bring water into Jerusalem, intercepting the source of the stream at a distance of 200 furlongs. The Jews did not acquiesce in the operations that this involved; and tens of thousands of men assembled and cried out against him, bidding him relinquish his promotion of such designs. Some too even hurled insults and abuse of the sort that a throng will commonly engage in. He thereupon ordered a large number of soldiers to be dressed in Jewish garments, under which they carried clubs, and he sent them off this way and that, thus surrounding the Jews, whom he ordered to withdraw. When the Jews were in full torrent of abuse he gave his soldiers the prearranged signal. They, however, inflicted much harder blows than Pilate had ordered, punishing alike both those who were rioting and those who were not. But the Jews showed no faint-heartedness; and so, caught unarmed, as they were, by men delivering a prepared attack, many of them actually were slain on the spot, while some withdrew disabled by blows. Thus ended the uprising.

These accounts again clearly indicate how Josephus accused Pilate of deliberately attempting to arouse hostilities. According to Josephus, this time Pilate did it by using temple money to build an aqueduct for Jerusalem. Matters came to a head during Pilate's visit to Jerusalem when the people rioted and many were killed. The way in which Josephus narrates the events reveals that he is biased, in particular in the way in which he describes Pilate's motivations. The building of an aqueduct for the city was surely a worthwhile undertaking and would definitely have benefited all the people living there. The point of conflict seems to centre on the fact that Pilate wanted to use temple money. It would seem that Pilate must have had the co-operation of Caiaphas and the temple authorities whose duty it was to control the temple treasury. Nevertheless it is also clear that this was not

acceptable to the other Jews, thus giving rise to the riot (Schwartz 1992:395-397).

### The execution of Jesus of Nazareth

This is narrated in *Antiq* 18.63-64:

About this time there lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one ought to call him a man. For he was one who wrought surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as accept the truth gladly. He won over many Jews and many of the Greeks. He was the Messiah. When Pilate, upon hearing him accused by men of the highest standing amongst us, had condemned him to be crucified, those who had in the first place come to love him did not give up their affection for him. On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the prophets of God had prophesied these and countless other marvellous things about him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has still to this day not disappeared.

This passage, recorded only in the *Antiquities*, is generally referred to as the *Testimonium Flavianum*. Most scholars assume that the original wording has been lost, as it seems to have been altered by later Christian interpreters. However, within its context, Josephus' original purpose might have been to record it as another disturbance during the time of Pilate, focusing on Jesus or his followers after his death. As it now stands, one can deduce almost nothing of the historical Pilate in the the *Testimonium Flavianum*. Pilate is portrayed as working closely with the Jewish religious leaders to get rid of a common threat. It may also be significant that he has the messianic leader executed and not his followers, a fact that may reveal a dislike for excessive violence (Schwartz 1992:395-397).

The Samaritan uprising and Pilate's return to Rome

This is narrated by Josephus in *Antiq* 18.85-89:

The Samaritan nation too was not exempt from disturbance. For a man who made light of mendacity and in all his designs catered to the mob, rallied them, bidding them go in a body with him to Mount Gerizim, which in their belief is the most sacred of mountains. He assured them that on their arrival he would show them the sacred vessels which were buried there, where Moses had deposited them. His hearers, viewing this tale as plausible, appeared in arms. They posted themselves in a certain village named Tirathana, and, as they planned to climb the mountain in a great multitude, they welcomed to their ranks the new arrivals who kept coming. But before they could ascend, Pilate blocked their projected route up the mountain with a detachment of cavalry and heavy-armed infantry, who in an encounter with the firstcomers in the village slew some in a pitched battle and put the others to flight. Many prisoners were taken, of whom Pilate put to death the principal leaders and those who were most influential among the fugitives.

When the uprising had been quelled, the council of the Samaritans went to Vitellius, a man of consular rank who was governor of Syria, and charged Pilate with the slaughter of the victims. For, they said, it was not as rebels against the Romans but as refugees from the persecution of Pilate that they had met in Tirathana. Vitellius thereupon dispatched Marcellus, one of his friends, to take charge of the administration of Judaea, and ordered Pilate to return to Rome to give the emperor his account of the matters with which he was charged by the Samaritans. And so Pilate, after having spent ten years in Judaea, hurried to Rome in obedience to the orders of Vitellius, since he could not refuse. But before he reached Rome Tiberius had already passed away.

According to Josephus' version a messianic figure stirred up the Samaritans and they decided to climb Mount Gerizim with him. In order to do this they assembled in a nearby village carrying weapons. However, before they could proceed far, Pilate's men blocked their route and killed some of them. They also took many prisoners and the



leaders were arrested and put to death. Later, the council of the Samaritans complained to Vitellius, the legate of Syria, about the harsh way in which Pilate treated them. Vitellius then sent his friend Marcellus to take charge of Judea and ordered Pilate to return to Rome (Bond 1998:46-56).

In view of the fact that the Samaritans appear to have been armed as they ascended Mount Gerizim, Pilate's actions do not appear to be unnecessarily harsh. Any Roman prefect neglecting to deal with such an uprising would in fact be neglecting his duty.

### **Philo of Alexandria**

A fifth incident from Pilate's term of office is described in Philo's *Legatio ad Gaium*, an incident in which Pilate set up gilded shields in Jerusalem (*Legatio* 299-305):

Pilate was an official who had been appointed procurator of Judaea. With the intention of annoying the Jews rather than of honouring Tiberius, he set up gilded shields in Herod's palace in the Holy City. They bore no figure and nothing else that was forbidden, but only the briefest possible inscription, which stated two things - the name of the dedicator and that of the person in whose honour the dedication was made. But when the Jews at large learnt of this action, which was indeed already widely known, they chose as their spokesmen the king's four sons, who enjoyed prestige and rank equal to that of kings, his other descendants, and their own officials, and besought Pilate to undo his innovation in the shape of the shields, and not to violate their native customs, which had hitherto been invariably preserved inviolate by kings and emperors alike. When Pilate, who was a man of inflexible, stubborn and cruel disposition, obstinately refused, they shouted, 'Do not cause a revolt! Do not cause a war! Do not break the peace! Disrespect done to our ancient

## Pontius Pilate: a brief sketch based on other sources

laws brings no honour to the Emperor. Do not make Tiberius an excuse for insulting our nation. He does not want any of our traditions done away with. If you say that he does, show us some decree or letter or something of the sort, so that we may cease troubling you and appeal to our master by means of an embassy'. This last remark exasperated Pilate most of all, for he was afraid that if they really sent an embassy, they would bring accusations against the rest of his administration as well, specifying in detail his venality, his violence, his thefts, his assaults, his abusive behaviour, his frequent executions of untried prisoners, and his endless savage ferocity. So, as he was a spiteful and angry person, he was in a serious dilemma; for he had neither the courage to remove what he had once set up, nor the desire to do anything which would please his subjects, but at the same time he was well aware of Tiberius' firmness on these matters. When the Jewish officials saw this, and realized that Pilate was regretting what he had done, although he did not wish to show it, they wrote a letter to Tiberius, pleading their case as forcibly as they could. What words, what threats Tiberius uttered against Pilate when he read it! It would be superfluous to describe his anger, although he was not easily moved to anger, since his reaction speaks for itself. For immediately, without even waiting until the next day, he wrote to Pilate, reproaching and rebuking him a thousand times for his new-fangled audacity and telling him to remove the shields at once and have them taken from the capital to the coastal city of Caesarea (the city named Sebaste after your great-grandfather), to be dedicated in the temple of Augustus. This was duly done. In this way both the honour of the emperor and the traditional policy regarding Jerusalem were alike preserved.

This was written by Philo only a few years after Pilate's departure from Judea, but the highly polemic nature of Philo's portrayal of Pilate is evident. The events are presented as part of a letter, written by Agrippa I to Gaius Caligula. In the letter the Jewish king tries to persuade the emperor not to set up his statue in the Jerusalem temple. Philo uses all possible devices at his disposal to cast Pilate in a particularly brutal light, in particular by contrasting him with Tiberius, a

virtuous emperor, who (unlike Gaius) was intent upon preserving the Jewish law (Brown 1994:698-701).

Pilate is portrayed as corrupt, cruel, abusive and violent; he intentionally attempts to annoy the Jews by setting up gilded shields in Herod's palace in Jerusalem. These shields contained no pictures but only an inscription indicating to whom they were dedicated and the person who dedicated it. When the Jews learnt the significance of this inscription, they chose four Herodian princes to go to Pilate and plead on their behalf that the shields be removed. When Pilate refused, they said that they would send an embassy to Tiberius. This worried Pilate enormously, because he was aware of the atrocities committed throughout his governorship. However, the embassy went ahead and Tiberius upheld the Herodian complaints. He ordered Pilate to remove the shields to the temple of Augustus at Caesarea (Brown 1994:698-702).

Although Philo's portrayal of Pilate is over-exaggerated, it seems to have a historical basis. Honorific shields were common in the ancient world and they usually contained both a portrait and an inscription. Pilate's shields were of this type, but the fact that they contained no images suggests that he deliberately tried to avoid offending the Jews. Furthermore, they were set up inside the Roman governor's *praetorium* in Jerusalem, which seemed the most appropriate place in the city for them. It seems that he wanted to honour the emperor without antagonising the Jews. However, he made a mistake in the wording of the inscription. This probably contained both Pilate's name and that of Tiberius. In official inscriptions the emperor was referred to as: "Ti. Caesari divi Augusti f. (divi Iuli nepoti) Augusto pontifici Maximo." The

reference to the "divinity" of August was probably viewed by some Jews as offensive to their religion (Schwartz 1992:396-398).

#### Later references to Pilate

Church tradition portrayed Pilate in increasingly favourable terms. In the *Gospel of Peter* (written in the second century), Jesus is not condemned by Pilate but by Herod Antipas. *Tertullian* described Pilate as a Christian at heart and said that Pilate wrote a letter to Tiberius to explain what had happened at Jesus' trial (*Apology* 21). *Eusebius* cited a tradition according to which Pilate had committed suicide in the reign of Gaius Caligula out of remorse for his part in Jesus' condemnation (*Hist. Eccl.* 2.7.1). The fourth or fifth century *Gospel of Nicodemus* (which contains the Acts of Pilate) also portrays Pilate as more friendly towards Jesus than any of the canonical gospels.

### **3. Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter was to present a brief overview of the information in other sources (excluding the Four Gospels) in antiquity. From the discussion in this Chapter the following may be indicated in this regard:

- According to *Antiquities* 18.32f, 35, 89 Pontius Pilate was the fifth governor of the Roman province of Judea. His rule began in 26 A.D. and lasted until early in 37 A.D.
- Judea was formally classified as a third class imperial province, possibly because the population was regarded as presenting particular problems for the Roman government. The governors of these

## Pontius Pilate: a brief sketch based on other sources

provinces were drawn from the equestrian rank and commanded only auxiliary troops, and they were to a large extent under the guidance of the powerful and strategically important neighbouring province of Syria.

- As governor of Judea, Pilate basically limited his duties to the maintenance of law and order, judicial matters, and the collection of taxes. The day-to-day administration of the Jewish nation was left mainly to the Jewish High Priest and the aristocracy in Jerusalem.
- There are two archaeological links to Pontius Pilate. An inscription on a block of limestone indicates his title as "praefectus Iudaeae". Secondly, three coins struck during his governorship have been found.
- Josephus describes four incidents involving Pilate, namely the introduction of iconic standards into Jerusalem, his construction of an aqueduct for the city, the story of the execution of Jesus of Nazareth, and an incident involving Samaritans - the incident which eventually led to Pilate's removal from the province. In all four cases Josephus paints a rather negative picture of Pilate.
- A fifth incident from Pilate's term of office is described by Philo, namely one in which Pilate set up gilded shields in Jerusalem. His portrayal of Pilate is highly polemic, namely that of a person who was corrupt, cruel, abusive, violent, and who was intentionally attempting to annoy the Jews.

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# **CHAPTER 3**

## **THE CHARACTERISATION OF PONTIUS PILATE IN THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MARK**

Before the characterisation of Pilate in the Gospel of Mark is discussed, some other issues concerning the Gospel in general will be examined first.

### **1. Author**

Achtemeier (1992:541-557) points out that we do not have much knowledge about the origin, date and authorship of the Gospel known as the Gospel of Mark. The title "The Gospel according to Mark" was attached to this writing only by the end of the second century or perhaps a little earlier and thus does not provide any sure knowledge regarding the issue of authorship (Brown 1997:158).

The earliest record we have of the authorship of this Gospel is found in the work of the church historian Eusebius (*Hist. Eccl.* 3.39.14-17). He quotes Papias who in turn quoted someone identified as the "elder". From this we learn that Mark was Peter's interpreter and that "he had written down accurately all what he remembered, although not in order". "Interpreter"

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probably means that Mark was in a position to have a very sound knowledge of Peter's understanding of the gospel, whereas "order" refers to some kind of arrangement of the content, without it being clear exactly what Papias had in mind. Papias further indicated that Mark was not an eyewitness, but depended on Peter's preaching, and that he had imposed his own order on what he wrote. Papias could then be stating that Mark reorganised and rephrased the content that derived from a standard type of preaching considered to be apostolic (Kümmel 1975:95). This information by Eusebius basically forms the basis for the traditional view that the Gospel was written by John Mark.

The name Mark was quite common in biblical times. Acts mentions a man it calls "John whose surname was Mark" three times and once only Mark (Acts 15:39). He is associated with Peter, Barnabas and Paul. In Philemon 24 Paul also mentions a person called Mark, one of his fellow workers. A person called Mark is also mentioned in Colossians 4:10, 1 Peter 5:13 and 2 Timothy 4:11. It could be that all of this refers to the same man: a man known to Peter in Jerusalem, at a later stage a companion of Paul, who had a row with him somewhere between 46 and 50 A.D., who was reconciled with Paul at a later stage and who accompanied him again, ultimately reaching Rome with him where he helped both Paul and Peter before their martyrdom (Kümmel 1975:95-98).

However, modern scholarship criticises the information provided by Papias and Eusebius. Whereas some scholars, for example Cranfield (1963:5), Kürzinger (1977:245–64), and Hengel (1985:47-50) still accept Papias' testimony, others such as Niederwimmer (1967:172-88), Kümmel (1975:97), and Körtner (1980:171) reject it. There are several reasons for this:

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- The Papias tradition seems to be primarily aimed at linking the Gospel in some way or another to an apostle, thereby giving it some apostolic authority.
- It is clear from the Gospel that the author does not have good knowledge of the geography of Palestine. An examples is Mark 7:31.
- The author writes to Gentile Christians with sharp polemic against the Jews who did not believe in Jesus.
- The author's fluency in Greek makes it likely that he grew up in an area outside Palestine.
- The Gospel does not seem to be a translation from an Aramaic source.

Therefore, the tradition that the Gospel was written by John Mark seems unreliable.

Some scholars also found some hints of the authorship in the account of the lad who fled naked during Jesus' arrest (Mark 14:51-52), but there is no indication in the text that this refers to the author of the Gospel. It is more likely that this was an event known to some of the people in Mark's congregation, but that it was eventually forgotten (Achtmeier 1992:542).

Although we cannot be absolutely sure, we should rather accept that we do not really know who the author of this Gospel is. We can guess that he was a non-Jewish Christian who wrote the Gospel for use by a congregation consisting of non-Jewish Christians. This is evident from the fact that the Aramaic words and phrases which Mark found and used in his sources are translated into Greek, for example *talitha cumi* 5:41; *ephatha* in 7:34; *eloi*,



*eloi lama sabachthani* in 15:34. Thus it seems as if he intended readers of the Gospel were also from outside the Aramaic-speaking regions of Palestine. Tradition has located that area to be Rome. It could also have been Antioch (known as the place where the Christian gospel was first proclaimed to the non-Jews) where we find the first Gentile congregation (Guelich 1989:xxx-xxxi).

## **2. Date of writing**

Achtemeier (1992:543) states that, prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, scholars believed that Matthew was the first Gospel to be written, followed by Luke and Mark. William R. Farmer upheld this theory. However, many scholars now rightly maintain that Mark was written first as both Luke and Matthew tend to shorten and polish Mark's stories. For example, Matthew 17:13 eliminates a potential confusion regarding the subject of Jesus' conversation in Mark 9:11-13, and both Matthew 8:28-34 and Luke 8:26-39 condense and clarify Mark 5:1-20. Furthermore, both Matthew and Luke possess two accounts of some Jesus sayings, one is close to the form used in Mark, namely Mark 4:25, Matthew 13:12 and Luke 8:18 as one set, and Matthew 25:29 and Luke 19:26 as another set. These doublets point to the fact that the authors of Luke and Matthew had a source of Jesus sayings in addition to Mark (namely the Q document). Therefore most scholars would conclude that Mark was the first Gospel to be written.

Most scholars also maintain that the Gospels were written towards the end of the first century. They use the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D. as the dating for Mark. Some scholars found references to the fall of Jerusalem in Matthew 22:7 or Luke 19:43. Mark 13 also has some references to the fall of Jerusalem, which indicates that Mark was written close to or during that

time. Brown (1997:162) states that there is a wide agreement amongst scholars that Mark was written in the late 60s or just after 70 A.D. Some date the writing of Mark to 64 A. D. Their argument is based on the information provided by Papias, who associated Mark with Peter. However, this association is questionable, because it seems apologetic. Therefore, other scholars like Anderson (1976:25-26), Cranfield (1963:8), Lane (1974:17-21), Nineham (1963:42), Schweizer (1970:25), and Taylor (1970:32) place the writing of Mark during the early stages of the war of A.D. 65-68, whereas others such as Achtemeier (1992:1992:543), Guelich (1989:xxxi), and Kümmel (1989:98) believe that a date closer to the fall of Jerusalem is more likely. The last option seems to be the best.

### **3. Occasion for writing**

According to Achtemeier (1992:543), the circumstances of the writing surrounding the Gospel of Mark are not clear, but a study of the Gospel enables us to discover some of the problems which the writer of Mark wanted to address.

It is clear that, at the time of the writing of Mark, traditions were already circulating regarding the sayings and deeds of Jesus of Nazareth. Several examples can be cited in this regard:

- See, for example, I Corinthians 7:10-11b where Paul quotes the saying of Jesus about divorce. Something similar is found in Mark 10:11-12, but the difference is so clear that one could conclude that they circulated independently.

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- Furthermore, I Corinthians 9:14 can be compared with Matthew 10:10b; and both Galatians 5:14 and Romans 13:8-10 can be compared with Matthew 22:37-39.
- Luke has a saying of Jesus in Acts 20:35 which is independent of the Gospels.
- Paul also mentions the appearance of the Risen Christ in I Corinthians 15:3-7 which differs from the accounts in the Gospels.
- Paul's version of the Eucharist in I Corinthians 11:23-26 is similar to that in the Gospels, but also contains some differences. Hence, scholars believe that Paul did not obtain his materials from the tradition underlying the Gospels.

It can be concluded that several traditions circulated independently apart from their later gospel context.

Apparently, the existence of these independent traditions caused problems, as they could be interpreted in diverse and even contradictory ways. This can be deduced from the Gospel of Mark, as Mark makes it clear that Jesus performed many miracles, of which he mentions a few (cf. Mark 3:10, 6:56). It could happen that, if all these miracles were told and often repeated independently, some people would have mistaken Jesus for a magician, as the stories about Jesus would fit a pattern known in antiquity, namely that of a travelling magician doing "tricks". Another danger was that people could identify Jesus as a philosopher as the stories about Him could also fit the well-known pattern of the many philosophers who were roaming about displaying their wisdom in those times (Achtemeier 1992:554).

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To solve these problems Mark incorporated the various traditions of Jesus' mighty acts, his sayings, and the events of his life and developed these into a narrative with the cross as its climax. A third of Mark's narrative deals with the passion story, that is Jesus' death and resurrection. These became the hermeneutical framework for understanding the sayings and deeds of Jesus. According to the narrative of Mark, one can only understand Jesus if one understands him via the perspective of his death and resurrection. He was neither a magician nor a philosopher. He was the Son of God, the "Secret Messiah", who died on the cross. Hence Mark included the early traditions in his Gospel, and remoulded them to serve this bigger framework.

Furthermore, by emphasising the suffering of Jesus, Mark wished to explain to his followers that as Jesus was persecuted, they would also have to endure a similar ordeal. Persecution was part of the kind of life that those who followed the Man on the cross had to expect. Because of their belief in Christ, the Christians were distinct from the Jews, and also could, for example, not participate in the regular Roman festivals, which included the worship of pagan deities. In his study Price (1984:35) indicated the problems facing the Christians who refused to participate in the Roman festivals. Mark emphasised the idea that nobody could understand Jesus' message unless he understood the message of death and suffering on the cross. Jesus' own disciples also had to understand this message. (Cf. Mark 6:51-52, 8:17; 9:9-10). As the master suffered, so his followers must suffer (Mark 8:34).

Mark's story about Jesus also highlights the fact that one could not estimate when the risen Christ would return in glory by evaluating the historical events. This idea is repeated time and again in Chapter 13. Mark maintains that Jesus had predicted the destruction of the Temple (for example 13:2), but he also points out that Jesus' Second Coming is not linked

directly to the destruction of the temple. This might have been done in order to prevent discouragement amongst some believers when Jesus did not come immediately after the destruction of the temple. Accordingly, Mark carefully included traditions stressing the fact that not historic events (for example 13:7-8, 12-13, 22-23), but cosmic signs (13:24-25) would herald Jesus' second coming. Jesus himself did not know when the kingdom will come in power (13:32) (Achtemeier 1992:545).

#### **4. Mark as narrator**

The term "narrator" is a literary term that refers to the storyteller in a narrative. The narrator is not the author but a rhetorical device used by the author to tell the story in way that suits the author's purposes. The narrator may be a character in the story, the protagonist, or perhaps a peripheral character. Some authors prefer the "I – We" or first person narrators whereas others prefer to use a character as a narrator. If character-narrators are used, there are limitations to the way they tell a story, for example, Huckleberry Finn can tell only what he himself has seen or heard, what he and not any other character is thinking, and what his own limited values or experiences will enable him to understand (Rhoads and Michie 1982:35).

In the case of the Gospel according to Mark the author does not use a first person narrator or one of the characters as a narrator, but the narrator is a person who was not part of the events himself. This is sometimes called a third person narrative, since the narrator stands outside his narration and refers to the characters as "he", "she" and "they".

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Furthermore, the narrator used by the author of the Gospel according to Mark, is not bound by time or space in telling the story. He is invisibly present in every scene, capable of being everywhere. Furthermore, the narrator is omniscient and can tell anything about the world. Like all third person narrators, the narrator in the Gospel according to Mark narrates what he deems necessary and conceals what he wishes to conceal about a character. He moves from one character to the next. The omniscient narrator speaks in the third person from outside the story and does not figure in the story as a character–narrator would (Rhoads and Michie 1982:36).

As indicated above, the narrator in the Gospel according to Mark is not bound by time or space. Mark's narrator tells the story in the past tense. The narrator speaks from a temporal point of view sometimes after the incidents he narrates, that is some unspecified time after the last event, namely the empty tomb. The narrator knows the whole story, including the imaginative past time and the imaginative future time. He can depict events happening privately in the house, or on a boat, or in remote areas in the desert (Vorster 1983:110).

The narrator in the Gospel according to Mark is also able to give inside views of the characters' minds. For example, the narrator relates that the opponents think that Jesus is a blasphemer, and he also relates that Herod considers John to be a just man. The narrator also describes the inner feelings of characters, for example, their compassion, anger, astonishment, fear, sadness, amazement and love (Vorster 1983:110).

Furthermore, the narrator in the Gospel according to Mark speaks to the reader through asides in most of the story. Often the narrator is occupied with narrating the dialogue or thoughts or actions of characters. As a result

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the reader is caught up in the story itself, unaware of the narrator. Occasionally the narrator addresses the reader directly. In Mark's story, the asides are like brief interruptions in the description of events, for example, defiled hands are unwashed hands.

Like all narrators, the narrator in the Gospel according to Mark also speaks from an ideological point of view. Usually a narrator functions more or less as a director of a movie, as someone who is responsible for the presentation of the entire story. For example, viewers observe the scenes and characters from the director's perspective, although they never see the director. The narrator of a story in literature is responsible for the entire story and not only for the asides. The narrator favours some characters and not others. In the course of telling the story, the narrator discloses the point of view of each character, for example by revealing the ideological perspective a character adheres to or relating physical characteristics, characteristic style of speech, and the mental actions of a specific character. For example, the narrator guides the reader through the narrative, showing what the authorities think of Jesus or what Jesus himself says about the authorities. In Mark there are two very specific ideological points of view, namely either thinking in terms of God's values or thinking in terms of human values. The narrator also controls distance and establishes a relationship between the reader and the characters, for example, by divulging the secret of Jesus' identity long before it becomes known to the characters in the story, namely that Jesus is the anointed one, the Son of God. This technique places the reader on the inside, among those who know, and it enables the reader to understand more than many of the characters in the story understand (Rhoads & Michie 1982:37).

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A narrator also arranges the order of events. A narrator may arrange a story in any order, for example, chronologically or beginning the story at the end or flashing back to some events. In the case of the Gospel according to Mark, the narrator sometimes creates suspense, for example, by relating that the disciples will become fishers of men, or mentioning in advance that the bridegroom will be taken away and that Judas will hand Jesus over. Mark also uses prophecy as a device, for example, Jesus prophesying his impending fate and that of the disciples. The narrator also brings the reader into the future narrative world by giving him some clues, but in the end, he ends the story abruptly (Rhoads & Michie 1982:37).

By means of retrospection the narrator also leads the reader to look back over the story and to reconsider earlier events in the narrative, for example, the story about the strong man suggests that Jesus has already defeated the Devil.

It is also important to take note of the following narrative patterns and literary features that are characteristic of the way in which the narrator is used in the Gospel according to Mark (See Rhoads & Michie 1982:45-62 and Vorster 1983:105-111 for a detailed discussion of these issues):

### Style:

This refers to the way in which the story is told. In Mark words are concrete rather than abstract, for example, descriptions such as "dressed in camel's hair", or "like a dove" are used. The narrator usually prefers to show the action directly. Furthermore, rapid movement is reinforced by participles such as "and", "immediately".

### Narrative patterns:



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Each story has its own narrative patterns. Likewise, Mark has his own rhetorical devices whereby the narrator orders and weaves the story, for example, repetition of words, two-step progression, questions and dialogue, framing of episodes by another, arrangements of episodes in a concentric pattern and the repetition of similar episodes in a series of three.

Repetitions: Mark's narrator repeats certain words and phrases. These repetitions alert the reader to the major themes in the narrative and keep the motif before the reader.

Two-step progression: This occurs in phrases, sentences, pairs of sentences, and in the structure of episodes. There are also two-step descriptions of people and objects, for example, the woman who was Greek, the widow who gave everything, Jesus touching a blind man and causing him to see.

Questions: Questions heighten the drama by creating suspense and tension for the reader. Jesus directs many questions to his disciples, for example, "Why are you afraid?", "Weren't you strong enough to keep watch one hour?", "Simon are you sleeping?" Jesus also addresses authorities with questions. The questions - in particular rhetorical ones - involve readers by leading them to answer the questions for themselves.

The questions posed by the disciples are single questions asking Jesus to explain something. The opponents pose very few rhetorical questions. Rhetorical questions involve readers by leading them to answer the questions for themselves, or they want to know how they will be answered in the story.

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Framing: The framing device creates suspense. Framing also provides commentary, for example, commenting on, and clarifying the meaning as happens when Jesus curses the fig tree or attacks on the Temple authorities.

Episodes in concentric patterns: Mark occasionally arranges episodes in a concentric pattern, for example, the five conflicts between Jesus and the authorities in Galilee, the four episodes where Jesus teaches about fasting, and the series of Jesus' conflicts in Jerusalem.

Episodes in a series of three: Mark has a threefold repetition of similar actions and events, for example, Peter denies Jesus three times, Pilate asks the crowd three leading questions, Jesus three times finds his disciples sleeping and Jesus predicts his death three times.

### Other literary features

Riddles: In Mark we find a character, Jesus, telling strange stories. The parables in Mark could even be called riddles. They are stories about a hidden reality. For example, by explaining his exorcism with a riddle, Jesus avoids a charge of blasphemy.

Quotations from the writings: Mark has twenty-two quotations from the writings, including the Law. The writings like the riddles often interpret characters and events in relation to the plan of God.

Prophecies: Jesus knows that according to prophecies it is God's plan for Him to suffer. All the prophecies have an impact on the reader, some of which will be fulfilled in future.

Irony: Irony is a dominant feature of Mark's story. It occurs when a speaker says something but means the opposite. Situational irony occurs when there is a discrepancy between what a character expects to happen and what actually happens.

We also find verbal irony in Mark, for example the Jews mock Jesus by calling Him "King of the Jews". In situational irony the speaker is confident that what he says is the real situation, but in fact it is the direct opposite, for example, the contrast between the opponents' expectations and what is really happening comes to a climax at the trial.

Ironic contrasts quite often structure the story in the Gospel according to Mark, for example, the rule of God is hidden, the identity of the Anointed One is secret, Israel's leaders are blind to the rule of God, and the greatest becomes the slave.

## **5. A brief overview of the narrative of Mark**

Before considering the sections in which Pontius Pilate plays a role in the Gospel according to Mark a brief overview of the narrative is provided as background for the rest of the analysis. (This overview is based on Johnson 1999:169-179, Kelber 1979:117-134 and Smith 1996:82-112).

### **5.1 The Prologue (1:1-15)**

Mark provides the reader with no account of Jesus' childhood. John's baptism fulfils the promise of a forerunner (1:2-3). After his baptism Jesus is driven into the desert to be tested by Satan (1:12-13). Thereafter Jesus

announces the effective rule of God: "The kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the good news" (1:15).

## **5.2 Conflict and selection (1:16-3:34)**

There are three patterns in this section of Mark's narrative:

1. The demonstration of Jesus' authority and his power in healing and exorcism, for example in 3:7-12.
2. A positive response to Jesus by those whom He calls (See also 1:16-20; 2:13-14) for example, the choosing of the twelve (3:13-19).
3. The rejection of Jesus by his opponents (2:1-12, 15-28). The climax of this conflict deals with the Sabbath. It was the Pharisees and Herodians who sought Jesus' death (3:1-6).

Mark weaves these three patterns together artfully. The Messiah begins his ministry with preaching and healing. His ministry causes religious leaders to reject Him and to seek His death. This conflict is on a historical level, but the cosmic conflict is also illustrated by exorcism (1:21-28). Mark fits the exorcism into the account of Jesus' teaching in the synagogue.

The second controversy in the synagogue is caused by Jesus' healing on the Sabbath (3:1-6). He is accused of breaking the Torah and his opponents leave with the intention of killing Him.

Jesus has already chosen those who will be with Him (3:13-19). From now on they will be his family (3:35). His natural family shows itself to be against Him. In this context Jesus' first parable is told. It interprets the cosmic

implications of this human conflict, i.e. He is the Stronger One who has entered the house of the strong one and overcome him.

Thus this section shows how Jesus' opening preaching has already created a division between insiders and outsiders, for example, on the one hand those who have rejected his teaching and healing powers and have put themselves on the outside, and on the other hand Jesus speaking to this people in parables.

### **5.3 Teaching in parables (4:1-41)**

The dominant use of parables among contemporary Jewish teachers was a means of clarifying difficult issues in Scripture. It could thus lead someone from understanding the familiar to understanding the strange. This is the dominant function of parables in both Matthew and Luke. However, Mark uses parables differently. Mark uses the parables to confuse rather than to instruct. Because Jesus' open preaching caused Him violent opposition, and He was threatened with death, He began to teach in a veiled way.

By doing this He separated those who are "inside" from those who are "outside". Everything is parabolic to those who are outside, because they do not have the single essential hermeneutical key, i.e. the acceptance of Jesus. The people who are outside will not understand until they turn around and are forgiven (4:12)

The irony in Mark also plays a role, in that those who are supposed to be inside and are to understand, for example the disciples, do not understand. They seek an interpretation of the parable (4:10). The disciples should not have asked this question as they already have the key, i.e. Jesus.

The understanding that Jesus wanted from his followers was the commitment of the heart.

### **5.3 To Caesarea Philippi (5:1–8:26)**

This part of the narrative is given structure by doublets. Furthermore, Mark emphasises the reaction to Jesus' works: in the stilling of the storm, the positive response is that of faith, whereas the negative response is that of disbelief.

Mark had already established a connection between healing and the forgiveness of sins and faith, for example, when Jesus said to the paralytic "My son, your sins are forgiven" (2:5). Now he inserts the story of the healed woman into the raising of the young girl, to demonstrate that the same power was at work here (5:30).

Ordinary needy people, even among the Gentiles, came to Jesus to be healed (6:30-31; 7:35-36). On the contrary, He was opposed by the scribes and Pharisees and rejected by his own nation (6:1-6). Herod gave an ironic testimony to the power he could see in Jesus' resurrection (6:13), but the disciples remained dull and imperceptive as can be seen when the ailing woman touched Jesus garment (5:31).

Therefore Jesus asked his disciples after the second feeding if they did not perceive or understand. Were their hearts hardened? They had eyes but they did not see; they had ears but they did not hear (8:17-21). These harsh questions of Jesus were followed immediately by the healing of the blind man in two stages (8:22-26). This is one of the few stories not taken over by Matthew and Luke. This story anticipates the progression of the disciples from a state of complete blindness to a state of feeble sight.

#### **5.4 To Jerusalem (8:27–10:52)**

In the previous section, Peter was able to recognise Jesus as a messianic figure from Jesus' multiplication of the loaves. Peter saw Christ as a shepherd who fed the sheep (6:30-34). However, Peter's vision was still blurred like the man who saw humans walking about like trees (8:24). One thus notices that the sight of the disciples needed some correction and that the disciples misunderstood his Messiahship.

Here, in response to this misunderstanding, Jesus clarifies the nature of discipleship, namely that it meant the demand to follow Him in service even to the extent of loosing their lives (8:34-38; 9:35-37,39-41; 10:38-45.).

However, Peter does not want Jesus to speak about suffering. He "rebuked" Jesus, i.e. tried to bind Jesus in the same way as Jesus bound Satan. But Jesus answered Peter by rebuking him: "Get behind me Satan" (8:33). Throughout the rest of the journey the disciples were confused and full of fear (9:6, 32; 10:32). It was clear that they did not want a suffering Messiah (8:32). They used human standards of greatness (9:34). They divided the world into us and them (9:38). They wanted authority over others in the Kingdom (10:37). Mark's teaching is very clear, i.e. to be a disciple of Jesus, one must take up the cross and follow Jesus (8:34). One should also be willing to loose one's life (8:35). One should be least of all and servant of all (9:43), be initiated into the death of Jesus, and be willing to live as slaves for all (10:42-45).

The closest disciples see Jesus in the transfiguration and they wanted to preserve that condition of glory. They wanted to make three booths on the mountain. Mark immediately shows the reader that that decision is wrong. Peter made two mistakes, first he wanted to reduce the mystery to ritual

expression, namely tents. Secondly, he equalled Jesus to other men of God, like Moses or Elijah. Hence the voice from Heaven made it clear who Jesus was, and that one has to look to Jesus alone.

### **5.5 Jesus in Jerusalem (11:1–13:37)**

While Mark thus far focused the reader's attention on Jesus and the disciples, he constantly reminded him/her of the opposition against Jesus: the Jewish leaders opposed Jesus and threatened to kill Him; the scribes accused Him that He had a demon (3:22-27); the Pharisees and scribes challenged Him on the purity regulations. (7:1-13); the Pharisees questioned Him on divorce (10:2-9). However, Jesus reacted: He instructed his followers and also corrected the view of Elijah's return (9:11-13). He also rebuked the Pharisees when they asked Him for a sign (8:15). Hence Jesus entered Jerusalem proclaimed as the Messiah by the crowd. The readers knew that He was entering the arena of his enemies, as the leaders were planning to kill Him. The parable of the vineyard, placed in the middle of the Jerusalem sequence, offers the reader the interpretation of events (12:1-11).

From here onwards the temple plays an important role in the narrative. Jesus privately predicted the temple's fall in his discourse (13:2). Later, in the Sanhedrin trial, they accused Jesus that He said He would destroy the temple (14:58). Later, when Jesus died on the cross, the curtain of the temple was torn into two parts, from top to bottom. (15:38). In Mark this is a sign that the separation between insider and outsider, between sacred and profane, had disappeared. Hence, Jesus was the centre where the mystery and the holiness are revealed. By the cleansing of the temples, Jesus was in fact sealing his own fate (11:18), since this scene is used by Mark as a final confrontation between Jesus and his enemies (11:27). It caused the



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Sanhedrin members to question Jesus about his authority (11:28-33) whereas the Pharisees and Herodians attempted to trap Him on the issue of giving taxes to Caesar (12:13-17). Furthermore, the Pharisees challenged Him on the question of the resurrection from the dead (12:18-27).

The chief opponents of Jesus were the scribes. Jesus debated with them in the temple. Jesus said that a scribe who observed the love of God and the love of his neighbour as the first commandment of the Torah was not far from the Kingdom of God (12:28-34). He also pointed out to them that those who thought that the Messiah was but the son of David (i.e. human) and not Lord were misguided (12:35-37).

In his last words in the Temple Jesus attacked the scribes for stealing from widows (12:38-40). This provided a sharp contrast with the widow who put all her living into the Temple's fund for the poor (12:41-44). Jesus then withdrew from the Temple, and sitting with his closest disciples on the mountain facing the temple, he predicted the Temple's fall (13:1-4). The disciples who were insiders were now in danger of falling away, and becoming outsiders. The disciples who were told to watch, were incapable of doing so. Hence, Mark in his Gospel wanted them to be warned. He also warns the readers in the same tone "What I say to you all, watch!" (13:37).

### **5.6 The Passion (14:1–15:47)**

Mark's narrative has developed steadily and gradually towards the death of Jesus. The dialectic between the inner and the outer circles becomes intensified as Mark shifts the readers back and forth from the outer plot to the inner plot. The outer plot portrays Jesus caught up in an attitude of rejection, condemnation, and finally death. The chief priests and scribes were out to arrest Jesus, they seek his death (14:1-2).

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They arrested Him in the garden (14:43), they tried Him (14:53-65) and handed Him over to the Gentiles. However, Jesus had predicted all this (15:1-15). Although Judas was in the inner circle and close to Jesus, he decided to betray him (3:19). Mark had warned the readers about this betrayal by Judas. He joined the enemies of Jesus, and led them into the garden to arrest Him (14:44). Emphasis on his betrayal of Jesus is repeated by the words "one of the twelve" (14:10 and 14:43).

Peter who promised never to leave Jesus (14:29) denied Jesus three times (14:66-72). When Jesus was arrested he fled. Mark adds a statement that when Peter fled (14:50) a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth around his body. When they caught him, he left his linen clothing and ran naked (14:51-52).

Although the disciples were chosen to be with and follow Jesus, they all failed Him and left Him alone. Mark now unravels the inner plot. He introduces the readers to three scenarios, i.e. the anointing, the Last Supper and the garden.

In the anointing, the woman's actions symbolise Jesus' Messiahship inseparably bound up with his death. This anointing also shows more insight into the identity of Jesus. We see only women staying near Jesus, they followed Jesus and ministered to Him. (15:41) They did the works of the disciples i.e. to minister. The burial was also witnessed by women (15:47). The women were the first to be entrusted with the message of the resurrection (16:1-8). In the other Gospels it was also the women who fled and told no-one about the resurrection.

At the Last Supper the mystery of the Kingdom was revealed in the breaking of the bread. The Passover meal was transformed by Jesus'

impending death for many (10:45). This cup pointed to a future beyond Jesus' betrayal and death, when Jesus said he would drink this cup anew in the Kingdom of God (14:25). Jesus warned his disciples that they would all fall away, as it was written "I will strike the shepherd and the sheep will be scattered. But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee" (14:36).

In the garden Jesus prayed that the cup be taken away. This revealed his obedience to the will of God: "Father, not my will but yours be done" (14:36). Whilst Jesus was praying his disciples fell asleep. Jesus asked them three times to stay awake. In this instance they failed Him and remained outside.

Jesus was surrounded by triumphant and mocking enemies. His followers abandoned Him. The women from Galilee watched Him from far bearing witness (15:40-41). In Mark there is the apparent cry and hope when Jesus cried "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" This is the hope offered in Psalm 22:1. According to Mark, it was the one who was executing Jesus who finally admitted "Truly this was God's Son" - an admission by an outsider (15:39).

### **5.7 The empty tomb (16:1-8)**

Mark's narrative ends full of hope. The hope is that the disciples who had abandoned Jesus will see Him and meet Him again in Galilee (14:28). Jesus has risen and requests them to follow Him to Galilee. The young man who delivered this message of hope was dressed in a white robe. He sat at the right hand of the tomb, the white robe indicating that he has been transformed. This seems to be an allusion to the young man who fled naked in the garden (14:51-52). This could be an indication that those who fell away could also be restored. It could also be an allusion to the naked demoniac in

the tomb (5:2-5). The demoniac recognised Jesus as "Son of the most high God" and when he was forgiven, he was found clothed seated next to Jesus on his right hand (5:15). He wanted to be with Jesus as his disciple (5:18), but Jesus did not allow that. He told him to go and tell all what the Lord had done for him (5:19). This young man gave the same message to the women who went to the tomb; he was newly clothed, and sat at the right side of the tomb. However, the healed demoniac did not remain silent, but went to proclaim and preach in Decapolis, a Gentile territory. He testified how Jesus had helped him (5:20).

Thus, in spite of fear, silence and even faithlessness, Mark ends his gospel on a positive note. A note which has to be proclaimed that the Stronger One lives.

## **6. The characterisation of Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Mark**

Mark mentions Pontius Pilate only in Mark 15. Since characterisation and plot complement one another, the plot of Mark 15 will be discussed first.

### **6.1 The role of Pilate in terms of the plot of Mark 15**

Scholars describe the plot of Mark's Gospel, and, in particular, the plot of Mark 15 in various ways. Before providing my own analysis of the plot of Mark 15 some of the ways in which other scholars have outlined the plot of Mark 15 will be indicated first:

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Mark

- **Kelber** (1979:71-87) summarises the plot of Mark 14:1-16:8 as "The coronation as humiliation" with the main emphasis on the conflict between Jesus and his disciples. Jesus loses his life in order to save that of the disciples, whereas they try to save their lives but lose it. In the case of Mark 15, Kelber focuses primarily on the fact that Pilate yields to the pressure of the Jewish leaders and issues the penalty reserved for political criminals - even though he "wonders" about the identity of Jesus. In the end, Jesus dies as someone who has been falsely confessed and falsely accused all his life. He thus dies as a victim of mistaken identity.
- **Kingsbury** (1979:31-62) divides his analysis of the plot of Mark's story according to three perspectives: the story of Jesus, of the authorities and of the disciples. With regard to the story of Jesus in Mark 15, Kingsbury (1979:58) emphasises that the narrator wishes to show his readers that Jesus was indeed the King of the Jews, yet not as Someone who aspired to political or military rule, but as Someone who served and saved his people through suffering. With regard to the story of the authorities in Mark 15, Kingsbury (1979:83-83) emphasises that the plot is structured in such a way that the Jewish authorities are portrayed very negatively. Throughout the trial they exemplify the negative quality of deceitfulness. Furthermore, they show themselves to be deluded and unable to perceive reality. With regard to the story of the disciples in Mark 15, Kingsbury (1979:111-112) summarises their actions during the Passion of Jesus as apostasy.
- **Matera** (1981:60-62) points out that Mark had a number of traditions available when he composed the story in Mark 15: the silence of Jesus before his accusers, the release of Barabbas and a

series of mockeries. He combined all of this to form a narrative that moves inexorably towards the death of Jesus and the centurion's confession. In the structure of the plot Mark highlights a series of incidents that point to the kingship of Jesus. For example, Jesus is accused as King (15:2), rejected as King (15:9, 12) and mocked as King (15:26). Thus in every instance in Mark 15 the narrative is structured in such a way that the royal theme dominates.

- **Rhoads & Michie** (1982:88-89) view Mark 15 as the resolution of the plot in Mark's story about Jesus, the Son of God. In Mark 15 the reader notices how one important aspect in the story, namely the conflict between Jesus and the authorities, is resolved. This happens when the authorities succeed in getting Jesus condemned to death, thereby getting rid of Him. However, this is an ironic resolution, since although they think that they have eliminated Jesus, proved Him not to be the anointed one, and ended the messianic issue, the opposite prevails. In fact, Jesus wants the same resolution they have sought and even helps to bring it about, since He is obedient to God and wants to give His life for many. Through this ironic resolution, Jesus is depicted as the real authority in Israel and the Jewish authorities are revealed as being false. In fact, they are on trial and condemned. This irony is hidden from the characters, but open to the reader. He/she will also be aware of the fact that the apparent resolution will be reversed when God finally establishes his rule.

- **De Klerk and Schnell** (1987:33-40) emphasise the dominant role played by Jesus' mandate as the Son of God in the development of the plot in Mark's Gospel. They argue that one can actually detect three mandates in the Gospel, namely the mandate Jesus receives as the

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Mark

Son of God, the mandate Jesus gives to the disciples and the mandate the Jewish leaders take upon themselves, namely to get rid of Jesus. In the case of Mark 15 the three mandates converge in an interesting way: the disciples fail in their mandate; furthermore, the Jewish leaders seem to succeed in their mandate and Jesus fails in his mandate. However, this is not the case. On the surface it may appear that the Jewish leaders succeed in getting rid of Jesus, but, in fact, it is Jesus' mandate that dominates all the events in Mark 15. He achieves what God wants Him to achieve.

- In his analysis of the plot of Mark 15, **Blackwell** (1986:64) emphasises the unwillingness of the characters to understand what is really happening. This is true of the Jewish authorities, the crowd and Pilate. In the case of the Jewish authorities, they are not merely deceitful, but show that they do not really want to understand who Jesus is and that He has been sent by the Father. In the case of the crowds, it is clear that they are mere puppets by suspending their conscience and by participating in the killing of an innocent man. In the case of Pilate, the dominant feature is his lack of character. He does not show any genuine concern for truth or justice. He fails to understand the nature of Jesus' discipleship as well as the plot to have Him killed.

The above survey indicates that the plot of Mark's Gospel, and in particular the plot of Mark 15, can be analysed in various ways. Scholars do not all agree on the issues that prevail in the formation of the plot. I will now present my own analysis of the plot of Mark 15 in terms of the approach

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outlined in Chapter 1. As will become clear, the analysis of the plot of Mark 15 presented here, overlaps to some extent with that of some of the scholars discussed above, but there are also some differences, primarily in terms of the procedures followed to analyse the plot of Mark 15, as well as some of the (theological) aspects that will be emphasised.

The diagram below represents the results of the following procedures: a) the paraphrasing of the events; b) the classification of the events; c) an indication of the kernels (*italics*); d) a short summary of each microsequence (**bold print**).

### **A. The religious leaders bring Jesus to Pilate**

1. *As soon as it is morning, the chief priests, the nation leaders and the teachers of the Law of Moses hold council.* Verbal act: consultation.
2. They tie Jesus up. Physical act.
3. They lead Jesus to Pilate. Physical act.
4. *They hand Jesus over to Pilate* Physical act.

### **B. Pilate questions Jesus who answers only one question and then remains silent**

1. *Pilate asks Jesus whether He is the King of the Jews.* Verbal act: question.
2. *Jesus responds that this is the opinion of Pilate.* Verbal act: response.
3. The chief priest brings many charges against Jesus. Verbal act: accusation.
4. *Pilate asks Jesus why He does not respond to the accusations.*  
Verbal act: question.
5. *Jesus does not answer Pilate.* Non-verbal act.
6. Pilate is amazed. Mental act.

### **C. The crowd asks Pilate to free Barabbas and hand Jesus over to be crucified**



## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Mark

[The narrator provides background information:

1. At the festival Pilate usually releases any prisoner whom the Jews want to see released.
2. At this stage Barabbas is in prison with the rebels who have committed murder during the insurrection.]

1. *The crowd asks Pilate to free one prisoner according to his custom.* Verbal act: request.
2. Pilate realises that the chief priests handed Jesus over because they are jealous of Him. Mental act.
3. *Pilate asks if they want him to free the King of the Jews for them.* Verbal act: question.
4. *The chief priests tell the crowd to ask for Barabbas instead of Jesus.* Verbal act: manipulation.
5. *Pilate asks them what he should do with the King of the Jews.* Verbal act: question.
6. *The crowd shouts that He should be crucified.* Verbal act: response.
7. Pilate asks the crowd what evil Jesus has done Verbal act: question.
8. *The crowd shouts that Pilate should crucify Jesus* Verbal act: response.
9. *Pilate wants to please the crowd.* Mental/emotional act.
10. Pilate releases Barabbas. Verbal act: directive.
11. *Pilate orders the soldiers to beat Jesus.* Verbal act: directive
12. *Pilate hands Jesus over to be crucified.* Verbal act: directive.

### D. The soldiers mock Jesus as King of the Jews

1. The soldiers bring Jesus into the courtyard of the palace . Physical act.
2. They call the other troops together. Verbal act: request.
3. They put a purple robe on Jesus. Physical act.
4. They twist some thorns into a crown and place it on His head. Physical act.
5. They mock Jesus and call Him the King of the Jews. Verbal act: mocking.
6. They beat Him on the head with a stick. Physical act.
7. They spit on Jesus. Physical act.
8. They pretend to worship Him. Physical act.

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9. They mock Him. Verbal act: mocking.
10. They take off the purple robe. Physical act.

### E. The soldiers lead Jesus off to be crucified

1. The soldiers put Jesus' own clothes back on Him. Physical act.
2. *They lead Jesus off to be nailed on the cross.* Physical act.  
[The narrator provides background information: One of the passers-by is Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. He comes from the country.]
3. The soldiers force Simon to carry the cross of Jesus. Verbal act: directive.

### F. The soldiers crucify Jesus.

1. *The soldiers take Jesus to Golgotha.* Physical act.  
[The narrator provides background information: Golgotha means "Place of a skull".]
2. They give Him wine mixed with myrrh. Physical act.
3. Jesus refuses to drink it. Verbal act: reject.
4. *The soldiers crucify Jesus.* Physical act.
5. The soldiers gamble in order to divide Jesus' clothes between them. Physical act.  
[The narrator provides background information: It is nine o' clock in the morning.]
6. The soldiers put a sign on the cross: "King of the Jews". Physical act.
7. The soldiers crucify two bandits: one on Jesus' left side and one on his right side Physical act.

### G. The people mock Jesus while He hangs on the cross

- 1 People passing by say terrible things about Jesus. Verbal act: mocking.
- 2 Some passers-by shake their heads and shout to Him that He should come down from the cross and save Himself Verbal act: mockery.
- 3 The chief priests and the scribes also make fun of Jesus. Verbal act: mockery.
- 4 They say that Jesus saved others but is unable to save Himself. Verbal act: mockery.
- 5 They say if Jesus is the Messiah, the king of Israel, He

must come down from the cross so that they can believe  
in Him

6 The two criminals also mock Jesus.

Verbal act: mockery.

1. From noon until three in the afternoon darkness comes over the whole land.

2. Jesus shouts "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani" (My God, my God why have you deserted me?).

3. Some of the bystanders think Jesus is calling Elijah.

4. One man grabs a sponge and soaks it in wine.

5. The man puts it on a stick and holds it up to Jesus to drink.

6. He says: "Let's see if Elijah will take him down!"

7. *Jesus cries out loudly and then dies.*

8. A Roman centurion testifies that Jesus was the Son of God.

9. Some women watch everything from a distance.

Physical act.

## I. The curtain in the temple tears

1. The curtain in the temple tears in two from top to bottom. Physical act.

[The narrator provides background information: It is evening, before the Sabbath, on the day of preparation.]

1. *Joseph from Arimathea goes boldly to Pilate and asks for the body of Jesus.*

Verbal act: request.

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## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Mark

- |  |                         |
|--|-------------------------|
| 2. Pilate is amazed to hear that Jesus is already dead.                          | Mental act              |
| 3. He calls in the army officer to find out if Jesus is already dead.            |                         |
|  | Verbal act: request.    |
| 4. The officer answers Pilate.   | Verbal act: response.   |
| 5. <i>Pilate gives the body of Jesus to Joseph.</i>                              | Verbal act: permissive. |
| 6. Joseph buys a linen cloth.  | Physical act.           |
| 7. <i>He takes down Jesus' body from the cross.</i>                              | Physical act.           |
| 8. He wraps Jesus' body in the linen cloth.                                      | Physical act.           |
| 9. <i>He lies Jesus in a tomb</i>  | Physical act.           |
| 10. He rolls a stone against the door of the tomb.                               | Physical act.           |
| 11. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph see<br>where the body was laid. | Physical act.           |

The main groups of events in Mark 15 may thus be summarised as follows:

- A. The religious leaders bring Jesus to Pilate.
- B. Pilate questions Jesus who answers only one question and then remains silent.
- C. The crowd asks Pilate to free Barabbas and hand Jesus over to be crucified.
- D. The soldiers mock Jesus as King of the Jews.
- E. The soldiers lead Jesus off to be crucified.
- F. The soldiers crucify Jesus.
- G. The people mock Jesus while He hangs on the cross.
- H. Jesus suffers and dies.
- I. The curtain in the temple tears.
- J. Jesus is buried.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the above analysis:

1. If one focuses merely on the plot as outlined above it should be described as a process of deterioration, as the events seem to develop in a

continuous negative direction. This is obvious if one concentrates on the kernels (indicated in italics above). They indicate a process of deterioration that worsens as the process develops. However, if the development of the plot as indicated above is viewed in terms of information in the rest of the Gospel, the reader will reach another conclusion. For example, the reader will be aware that Jesus has to die, because it is part of God's plan. Furthermore, in this chapter there are several indications that remind the reader of this perspective, for example the ironic use of the kingship motif, the fact that Jesus quotes Psalm 22 as He dies, the fact that the curtain in the temple tears from top to bottom, and the testimony of the Roman officer. Although these events are not kernels in the strict sense of the word, they enable the reader to understand that what may seem like a process of deterioration, in fact, forms part of a much greater pattern in the Gospel according to Mark. That such an understanding of the plot of Mark 15 is indeed correct, will be confirmed when the reader reads the next chapter.

2. With regard to the issue that is the theme of this study, it is significant to note the role Pilate plays in the development of the plot. This could be summarised as follows: although Pilate plays a vital role in the progression of the plot, the underlying logic of the plot makes it clear that he is not actually the one who determines the flow of events; rather he *reacts* to events as they unfold. Take note of the following:

- 2.1 The development of the events as a whole begins as a result of the decision of the religious leaders to bring Jesus to Pilate. See microsequence A.
- 2.2 In microsequence B one can clearly see how Pilate is portrayed as someone who is actually not in charge of the development of

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Mark

events. Although Pilate takes the initiative by asking Jesus whether He is the King of the Jews (B1), Jesus' response (B2) leaves him with no answer. Then the chief priests take over the initiative by bringing in charges against Jesus (B3), with Pilate seemingly as onlooker. Pilate then takes over and asks Jesus why He does not respond to the accusations (B4), but once again Jesus' response is extraordinary (B5): He remains silent. The microsequence ends with Pilate's passive reaction: he is amazed (B6).

- 2.3 In microsequence C one can detect more or less the same pattern. In this case it is the crowd that takes the initiative (C1) by asking Pilate to free one prisoner according to his custom. Pilate who realises what is going on, tries to take the initiative by asking them if he could free "the King of the Jews" for them (C3), but this is neutralised by the chief priests who instigate the crowd to ask for Barabbas (C4). To what extent Pilate is actually manipulated by events, is clear from the events in C5-C9: in C5 he even asks the crowd what to do with the "King of the Jews"! By explicitly indicating in C9 that Pilate wants to please the crowd, the narrator also indicates that Pilate's final acts in this microsequence (C11 and C12) are not really his own independent decisions, but a result of the actions of the crowds (and, of course, the chief priests!).

- 2.4 Even in the final microsequence in this chapter (J: Jesus is buried) Pilate is portrayed as one who reacts. Joseph of Aramathea is the one whose actions initiate this microsequence: he is bold enough to go to Pilate to ask him for the

body of Jesus (J1). Pilate again reacts: (again!) by being amazed, but this time due to the news that Jesus has already died. He then calls in an army officer to make sure that Jesus is indeed dead (J3) before giving Joseph permission to take Jesus' body from the cross.

## **6.2 The characterisation of Pontius Pilate in Mark 15**

As pointed out earlier, the procedures outlined by Seymour Chatman will form the basis for the analysis of characterisation in this study. According to Chatman (1972:57-79), a trait is any relatively stable or abiding personal quality associated with a character that may be unfolded, replaced or even disappear in the course of a narrative. Whenever an implied reader is confronted with a new character in the text, it opens a paradigm of traits to be associated with this particular character. If a new information cannot be accounted for in terms of these traits, a new trait will be added or a given trait will be reformulated, replaced or removed. The paradigm of traits associated with Pilate in Mark 15 will now be discussed.

With regard to the *identification* of Pilate in Mark 15 it is important to note that the narrator introduces Pilate without any detailed explanation. He just calls him "Pilate" without any indication as to his title or function. This is an indication that the narrator assumes that Pilate must have been known to the intended reader.

In verse 2 the narrator portrays Pilate as questioning Jesus. Pilate was most probably not interested in the religious meaning of Jesus' Messiahship, but in its political implications - in particular whether Jesus might pose a threat to the political stability at that stage. In terms of characterisation, Pilate is characterised in a neutral sense here, namely he acts in a way that

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any judge would act in those days in that he wishes to establish the truth. Thus the particular trait that is portrayed here is indicated as follows: *attempting to be just*.

In verse 3 the narrator focuses the attention of the implied reader on the behaviour of the chief priests. In fact, it appears that the narrator wishes to indicate that the chief priests do not want Pilate to find out the truth and therefore they take the initiative by accusing Pilate of "many things". In verse 4 Pilate's reaction is portrayed by the narrator. He asks Jesus: "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." It seems as if Pilate wants to give Jesus a fair chance to defend Himself against the accusations. In other words, Pilate's behaviour is in line with the characterisation of Pilate in verse 2, and therefore one could say that the narrator is *reinforcing* the trait: *attempting to be just*.

In verse 5 the characterisation of Pilate is continued: Jesus does not respond to the accusations against Him and Pilate is amazed about this. Scholars interpret Pilate's amazement in various ways. Some (for example Nineham 1963:412) interpret Pilate's amazement as a sign of deep religious significance in Pilate's attitude at this point. Others (for example Brown 1994:735) view it as a sign that Pilate is amazed that Jesus holds Himself aloof from the charges. It may also be interpreted as an indication of the strength of Jesus in withstanding Pilate's attempts to question Him (for example, Gundry 1993:925), as a symbolic indication of later Gentile sympathy towards the gospel (for example, Anderson 1976:336), as an indication of Jesus' condemnation of Pilate (for example, Hendriksen 1975:632) or as an indication that Pilate is unable to understand Jesus (for example, Best 1983:60). The last interpretation seems to be the best, as this appears to be in line with the way in which the word "amazed" is used in the



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rest of the Gospel according to Mark. As Bond (1998:108) points out, this word is used throughout the Gospel to indicate those who are least perceptive of Jesus' identity. Accordingly, another trait can be added to the paradigm of traits associated with Pilate, namely *unable to understand Jesus' identity*.

In verses 9-10 the narrator reveals another trait of Pilate. In verse 10 he points out that Pilate realised that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over. In other words, Pilate had seen through the chief priests and realised that they had their own motives for handing Jesus over to him: they are not guided by loyalty to Rome (as they pretend), but by fear for their own position. This explains Pilate's behaviour in verse 9 if he asks them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" In the light of his knowledge of the true motives of the chief priest, the trait revealed by Pilate in this behaviour can be indicated as *shrewdness*.

In verses 12-14 the narrator relates Pilate's two questions to the crowd. After they had indicated that they want Pilate to release Barabbas for them, he asks them: "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" This can be indicated as an attempt by Pilate to make it clear to the crowd that Jesus is innocent and that He should be released, too. In other words, Pilate's behaviour still reflects the trait revealed earlier, namely *attempting to be just*. However, another trait is also revealed by Pilate's behaviour in this section of the text. The fact that he asks the crowd what to do with Jesus indicates a trait that can be described as *weakness*. This is definitely not how the most powerful man in Palestine should act in such a situation! The oppressor asks the oppressed what should be done!

When the crowd responds by asking for Jesus to be crucified, Pilate asks them again: "Why, what evil has he done?" This question clearly implies

that Pilate knows that Jesus is innocent and, once again, *attempts to be just*. However, the fact that he asks a question instead of making a direct statement to the fact that he knows Jesus is innocent and that he should be released, indicates that this trait (attempting to be just) is undermined by the other trait just revealed, namely *weakness*. In the next verse the narrator confirms this impression by using direct characterisation to point out to the implied reader that Pilate's final decision was made in the light of his wish to satisfy the crowd. This trait can be summarised as *wanting to please people*, and it can be regarded as a further development of the trait revealed earlier on, namely *weakness*. The fact that the narrator uses direct characterisation to point out this trait, and the fact that it is indicated as the reason for Pilate's final decision, indicates the importance of this trait in the characterisation of Pilate.

It should be pointed out that not all exegetes would agree with this interpretation of verse 15. Bond (1996:104) argues that Pilate is not to be understood as a weak, but rather as an astute governor who had to handle a potentially difficult case with a certain amount of mockery and at the same time a great deal of political shrewdness. Mann (1986:640) views the matter in more or less similar vein. He argues that it is easy to regard Pilate's action as weak, but we must consider that he was faced with a choice between a mob incited to an angry demonstration and a group of people hoping to negotiate a judicial amnesty. From this argument he concludes that Pilate had to make a difficult decision, a decision which would not only have made him unfavourable with the crowds, but also with Emperor Tiberius. He might also have been afraid of losing his job. The interpretations provided by Bond and Mann may be true in terms of a historical approach, but it is very important to draw a clear distinction between a historical reconstruction of the events

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behind this narrative and the way in which these events are portrayed in the narrative. The narrator chooses to portray Pilate as weak figure, trying to please the people and thereby forsaking his duties as a judge. Thus, Hiebert (1974:384) seems to be closer to the right view on this matter. He maintains that Pilate was no longer concerned with the administration of justice, but was motivated by other considerations. He now deliberately resolved to satisfy the crowds lest they accuse him to emperor Tiberius, and his own position be jeopardised.

Pilate is again mentioned in verses 44-45 when Joseph of Aramathea asks him for the body of Jesus. Once again Pilate is amazed. This could be interpreted as an indication that Pilate was amazed that Jesus had died so quickly (for example, Gundry 1993:980, Hendriksen 1975:671), but perhaps it is best to understand it in the same way as verse 5, namely that Pilate's amazement was due to his inability to understand the identity of Jesus.

That Pilate first made sure that Jesus was really dead, can be explained by the fact that the Romans did not allow executed criminals to be buried; often the bodies were left to rot on the cross or to be devoured by animals and birds (Brooks 1991:265, Herbert 1944:306). Furthermore, it would have been extremely unwise to allow someone who was crucified to be moved from the cross when he was not dead, because this could give rise to new problems. Thus the fact that Pilate first makes sure that Jesus was dead, can be seen as an indication of a trait that can be summarised as *thoroughness*.

To summarise: the paradigm of traits that the narrator associates with Pilate in Mark 15 can be summarised as follows:

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identification: Pilate</li></ul> |
|--|

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Mark

- ***Attempting to be just***
- Unable to understand Jesus
- Shrewd
- ***Weak >> Wanting to please people***
- Thorough

With regard to the paradigm of traits indicated above, it should be pointed out that all the traits are not on the same level. The two traits that dominate the characterisation of Pilate in Mark 15 are indicated in bold print above. In fact, the characterisation of Pilate in Mark 15 can basically be viewed as *the conflict between these two traits* - a process that dominates the characterisation of Pilate in this chapter. Although Pilate tries to be just, this trait is undermined by his weakness and the fact that he wants to please people. In the end, the last trait becomes the dominant one, as this picture is what the implied reader will take with him/her at the end of Mark 15.

The last aspect to be considered with regard to the characterisation of Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Mark is the way in which he could be classified in terms of the various approaches outlined in Chapter 1:

In terms of the approach of *E. M. Forster*, Pilate should be classified as a "flat" character, since the number of character traits associated with him is relatively few. In fact, almost all the characters in Mark 15 should be identified as flat characters, as nearly all of them have only a limited number of traits associated with them. This is true in the case of the Jewish chief priests, the crowd, Barabbas, Simon of Cyrene, the soldiers, the centurion and Joseph of Aramathea. The only exception is Jesus who has been characterised extensively throughout the Gospel thus far and who could therefore be classified as a *round* character.

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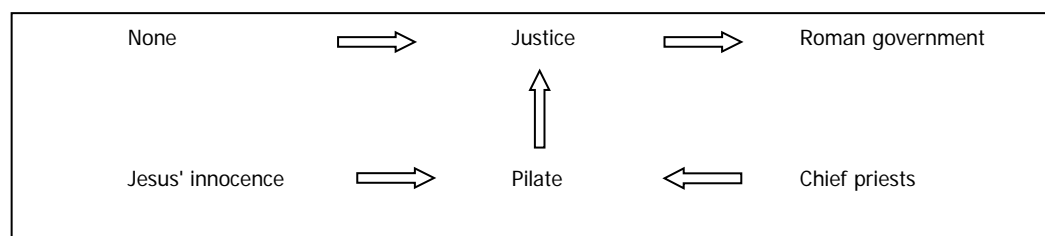
In terms of *Harvey's* approach, Jesus Christ, the high priests and Pontius Pilate should be classified as *protagonists*. The crowd and Barabbas can be identified as *ficelles*. Simon of Cyrene, the soldiers, the centurion and Joseph of Arimathea can be identified as background characters.

In terms of *Ewen's* approach, the characterisation of Pontius Pilate in Mark could be described as follows:

- Complexity: Only a few traits.
- Development: None at all.
- Penetration into inner life: Only a little (verse 5: he was amazed, verse 10: he realised that the chief priests had handed Jesus over out of jealousy; and verse 44: he was amazed).

If *Greimas's* actantial system is used one can organise the underlying actants in several ways in terms of the object (that is, the goal or destination of action) of the various actants.

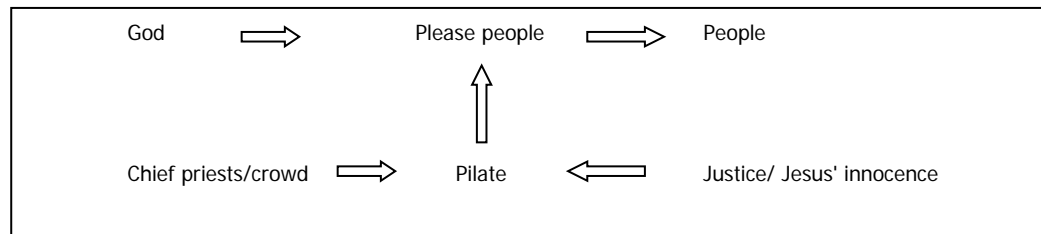
Viewing the actantial system from the perspective of Pilate, one can draw the following two systems:



This reflects the situation at the outset of the plot in Mark 15: as Roman governor, Pilate attempts to do justice (*object*) as the Roman

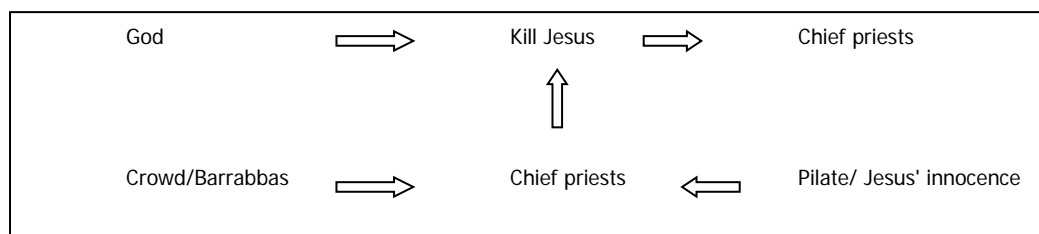
## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Mark

government (*receiver*) would want it to be done. Jesus' innocence functions as *helper*, but the chief priests act as the *opponent*. As the plot unfolds, the situation changes as follows:



This reflects the underlying logic when Pilate's object of pursuing justice is replaced by another *object* namely pleasing the people, with the people functioning as the *receiver*. In this process the chief priests become the *helper* while justice and Jesus' innocence serve as the *opponent*. It is important to note that God is indicated as the *sender* in this system, as it is actually his plan that dominates all the events.

Viewing the underlying actants from the perspective of the chief priests, the actantial system can be drawn as follows:



This system indicates the system from the point view of the chief priests: they function as the *subject* with the *object* of having Jesus killed. The *receiver* of this process is the chief priests as they want Jesus to be killed

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in order to safeguard their own position ("out of jealousy" as the narrator indicates in verse 10). The crowd and Barabbas function as the *helper* since they are used by the chief priests to achieve their objective. Pilate and Jesus' innocence function as the *opponent* in this actantial system, since they pose a threat to the chief priest as they try to achieve their objective. In the end, the chief priests succeed in achieving their objective. However, as the narrator has revealed to the reader, this is not actually due to their own actions, but to the fact that all this is part of God's plan. Therefore God is identified as the sender in this actantial scheme.

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# **CHAPTER 4**

## **THE CHARACTERISATION OF PONTIUS PILATE IN THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO MATTHEW**

### **1. Authorship of the Gospel according to Matthew**

Two of the oldest and best manuscripts indicate the title of this Gospel simply as "According to Matthew". Later manuscripts indicate the title more fully as the "The Gospel according to Matthew" or "The Holy Gospel according to Matthew". All these titles date from the middle of the second century A.D. These titles as well as those provided for the other Gospels indicate how important it was to early Christianity to attach apostolic names to its key documents; not because they were consciously falsifying history, but primarily because they wanted to claim theological adequacy and legitimacy for the contents of the four Gospels. In this way the church expressed the claim that these writings represent legitimate and authentic interpretation of what the Christ-event meant, although it is possible that the titles may in some cases



convey authentic tradition with regard to the actual author of a particular Gospel (Boring 1995:106).

With regard to the question whether the title added to the Gospel according to Matthew by the early church has any historical value, most New Testament scholars nowadays assume that the Gospel was not written by an apostle. There are some exceptions, for example Gundry (1982:609-622). However, most scholars agree that the following evidence against apostolic authorship is overwhelming (for what follows, see the more detailed discussions by Hagner 1993:xii-xx, Brown 1997:208-210, and Boring 1995:106-107):

1. The Gospel itself is anonymous, and makes no claim for apostolic authorship. In other words, apostolic authorship is a claim made *for* the book, not a claim made *by* the Gospel itself.
2. The fact that the Gospel according to Matthew uses Mark and Q as sources indicates that it could not have been written by an eye witness, since someone who had been an eyewitness to the events narrated in the Gospel would not have used accounts by people who were not eyewitnesses themselves.
3. The Greek language used by the author of the Gospel according to Matthew seems to have been his native language and is of a higher quality than the relatively unpolished language used by the author of the Gospel according to Mark. The author apparently had enough knowledge of Hebrew and Aramaic to work with texts, although he was not fluent in these languages.

4. The claim for apostolic authority can sufficiently be explained by the historical and theological factors outlined at the beginning of this section.
5. The evidence sometimes used to "prove" authorship by the publican Matthew, for example that the numerical patterns used in the narrative supposedly point to a tax collector's facility with figures, is not convincing.

Thus, it is best to assume that the author of the Gospel according to Matthew is anonymous. We can guess that he was a Greek-speaking Jewish Christian who possibly had some rabbinic knowledge and who felt himself obligated to a development in the Jesus tradition which interpreted the sayings of Jesus according to Jewish viewpoints. He wanted to proclaim to the church the importance of the Jewish Messiah and therefore, in a very real sense, his Gospel became the Gospel of the church (Kümmel 1975:121).

## **2. Date of writing**

In order to date the Gospel according to Matthew scholars as a rule use the following arguments:

1. Since the author of Matthew had used the Gospel according to Matthew and Q, it must have been written after these documents had been completed. As indicated in the previous chapter, the Gospel according to Mark could be dated roughly 70 A.D., which implies that the Gospel according to Matthew must have been written sometime later (Boring 1995:105).

2. The Jewish-Roman War seems to be reflected in Matthew 22:7: "The king was enraged. He sent his troops, destroyed those murderers, and burned their city" - this is apparently a reflection of the destruction of Jerusalem (Kümmel 1975:119).
3. It seems as if Matthew had been concerned with the developments in formative Judaism in the era following 70 A.D. - perhaps even the Birkath ha-Minim (Boring 1995:106).

In the light of these arguments, the Gospel according to Matthew can be dated in the period 80-100 A.D. with 90 A.D. being a good choice.

### **3. Occasion for writing**

Scholars do not agree on the purpose of the Gospel, and many possible reasons have been advanced. Some, for example Shuler (1982), view its purpose as primarily biographical, in particular that it could be classified as an encomium or "laudatory biography". Others, for example Goulder (1974), point out that the Gospel contains much Midrash, and argue that it truly is a midrashic or "interpretive" expansion of the Gospel of Mark. The fact that Jesus' sayings are collected into five discourses in the Gospel has led some scholars to conclude that it should be thought of as a catechetical document for the development of Christian discipleship (for example, Stendahl 1968). Some, for example Thompson (1979), regard Matthew as providing correctives to a community facing serious difficulties, and find in the negative material a clue to the purpose of the Gospel. Still others, for example Gärtner (1954), argue that one of the main intentions of Matthew is to demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah and that the Gospel may be regarded primarily as a tool to be used in the Church's mission to the Jews. Other scholars argue that

the primary purpose of the Gospel can be described as a polemic against the rabbis. For example, Davies (1963:256–315) regards Matthew as a Jewish-Christian counterpart of, and response to, the rabbinic activity at Jamnia.

The fact that scholars have advanced so many reasons for the Gospel being written indicates that the Gospel has a multifaceted character. Several of these explanations may be equally true, since the author might have had several purposes. However, it is clear that the Gospel according to Matthew is a "community book", written primarily to meet the immediate needs of the author's church or churches during the period between the historical events narrated and the return of Christ. In particular, the author wants to help his Jewish-Christian readers understand their new faith as a continuity of the faith of their ancestors, as the fulfilment of the Scriptures, and as the beginning of the realisation of the hope of Israel. The author wrote, above all, for the Church to interpret the Christ-event but also to instruct and edify the Christians of his own and future generations (Hagner 1993:xiv-xxx). In more practical terms (see Combrink 1980:77):

- The readers of the Gospel had to clarify the relationship between themselves, being Christians, and Judaism. For this reason the author emphasises that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God (16:16), the One who would redeem his people from their sin. His aim is to provide his readers (both Gentile and Jewish Christians) with a perspective on the importance of the law and the way in which the Old Testament was fulfilled in the New Testament.
- The author also wants to point out certain dangerous practices in the congregation(s). By emphasising the "Jewishness" of the Gospel he wants to make certain that the Gentile Christians do not forget the

Jewish foundation of the gospel. His emphasis on the law is an attempt to curb an antinomian tendency. Furthermore, the author also has a pastoral purpose: he wants to cure his readers of their slackness. Therefore the book has the nature of a "catechetical" book.

#### **4. Matthew as narrator**

Boring (1995:106) correctly points out that one should regard the Gospel according to Matthew neither as a record made by a reporter nor as a collection assembled by an editor, but rather as a narrative composed by an author. The author did not compose *ex nihilo*, but used sources and traditions grounded in the actual events of the life of Jesus. However, the final composition is the literary creation of an author who unconsciously made authorial decisions about the following issues: 1. Which literary genre to adopt. 2. Where and how to begin his story. 3. How to structure his narrative so that its movement communicated exactly what he wanted to communicate. 4. What kind of narrator would tell his story. 5. How to plot the narrative. 6. Who the characters would be and how they would be characterised. 7. The identity of the implied author. (See Boring 1995:108-109 for a more detailed discussion of this issue.)

Basically the narrator's aim in the Gospel according to Matthew is to convince the readers of a particular narrative christology. This may be summarised as follows:

- The narrative combines in one text various narrative portrayals of Christ which reveal both the power of God and the weakness of Jesus as human being. The Gospel narrates the earthly career of a historical

figure who is both exalted and present Lord, and continues to speak and act to his church. Jesus is portrayed as the divine Lord and a truly human being who suffers and dies. Prior to Mark, these two Christologies contradicted each other. Mark sought a way of combining them in the concept of the "Messianic secret", an important literary device. Matthew adopted this device, but used it only marginally, as this was not his primary interest.

- The life of Jesus is portrayed as a definite segment of the redemptive history. The narrative world is much larger than the events surrounding Jesus. In fact, it stretches from creation to the end of time. Within this broad perspective the story of Christ is narrated as a definite story of God's saving act. One could say that the narrator provides an advanced picture of the eschatological victory of the kingdom of God, within the events surrounding Jesus. This is fundamental for the confession that Jesus is the Christ.
- The central figure of the narrative is Jesus of Nazareth. He is narrated simultaneously as a figure in past history and as the risen Lord who is present in his church today. Thus faith in the risen Christ is fundamental for this perspective.
- The narrator relates narrative Christology in such a way that its implications for ecclesiology become clear. The double perspective on Jesus has a bearing on the other actors in the story. The narrator tells his story in such a way that the disciples are not only the pre-Easter followers of Jesus. They become transparent to the Christian readers of his time. For example, the Pharisees are not merely figures in Jesus'

time, but they also represent the opposition to the church in the time of the implied readers (Boring 1995:110-111).

With regard to the technical aspects according to which one can classify the narrator, the following could be highlighted:

- In ancient narratives the narrator's reliability is almost always assumed and this is also the case in the Gospel according to Matthew where the narrator is presented throughout as reliable. This is obvious at the beginning of the Gospel. For example, in the birth story, the narrator relates the contents of Joseph's dream and tells the implied reader directly that Joseph was a "just man" who "decided to divorce Mary quietly" because he "did not want to put her to shame" (Matthew 1:18-22). It is obvious that no attempt is made to justify either the moral judgement or the omniscience of the narrator. The implied reader simply has to accept it (as is the case in all ancient narratives) (Anderson 1994:47).
- Furthermore, the narrator of the Gospel according to Matthew can be described as almost completely undramatised. This is obvious from the fact that there are not many clues as to his identity apart from the general theological view and some direct comments to the narratee. With regard to the last issue, the following can be mentioned: The narrator translates several Hebrew/Aramaic expressions for the narratee (see 1:23, 27:33 and 27:46) (Anderson 1994:47).
- The narrator tells the story from a specific ideological point of view whereby he seeks to persuade the implied reader to accept Jesus and

his message. From the very beginning of the story the implied reader is informed of Jesus' identity and its significance for human beings. The narrator paints a positive picture of Jesus by means of commentary, superscription and genealogy, Old Testament fulfilment quotations, and plotting events and characters' responses to Jesus. The character traits of those who accept Jesus and who obey God's will are commended, whereas negative responses and rejection of Jesus are judged negatively (Howell 1990:190-195).

- One should also note the fact that the narrator is not presented as the sole spokesperson for the values which the implied author wishes to communicate to the implied reader. Throughout the narrative the focus is placed on Jesus. The narrator tells the story of the main character in such a way that he aligns himself closely with Jesus. For example, phraseologically the narrator and Jesus share more or less the same kind of speech. Psychologically, the inside views of Jesus are given in more detail and presented more sympathetically than those of most of the other characters in the narrative. Temporally, the narrator is often synchronised with Jesus when he speaks. Accordingly, the ideological perspective of the narrator and that of Jesus align as the narrative develops. Much emphasis is placed on what Jesus says and this becomes the medium for conveying the implied author's values system; thus Jesus addresses the implied reader together with the characters (Howell 1990:200-203).

- As to the narratee of the Gospel according to Matthew, the following is important: She/He is not a character in the narrative. Furthermore, a few specific details can be drawn (mainly from the direct narratorial comments). For example, the narrator does not speak Hebrew/Aramaic



as the narrator provides explanatory glosses in 1:23, 27:33 and 27:46. Furthermore, the narratee is someone who may or may not realise the significance of the desolating sacrifice mentioned in 27:15. The narrator calls the reader's attention to this with the famous "wink" to the reader: "Let the reader understand!" Etiological comments in 27:18 and 28:15 also seem to indicate that the narratee might be aware of the location and the rumour explained there. They also situate the narratee, along with the past tense used throughout the Gospel, in a time contemporaneous with the narrator (that is subsequent to the events narrated in the narrative) (Anderson 1994: 51-52).

## **5. A brief overview of the narrative of Matthew**

Before considering the sections in which Pontius Pilate plays a role in the Gospel according to Matthew, a brief overview of the narrative is provided as background for the rest of the analysis. (This overview is based on Howell 1990:110-154; Kingsbury 1983:3ff. and Anderson 1994:133-191.)

### **5.1 Matthew 1:1–4:16**

The opening chapters of Matthew play a very important role in the reader's experience of the story since they are used by the narrator as basis for what is to follow: introduction of the major characters, indication of the conflict between Jesus and his opponents, and illustration of the narrative techniques used in the rest of the narrative. The narrator uses the genealogy of Jesus (Mat. 1:1-17) to situate the story of Jesus in the history of Israel. In 1:18 the plotted narrative itself begins with the birth and naming of Jesus. This part of the narrative is dominated by the notion of the fulfilment of the

will of God. In the infancy stories in Chapter 2 the themes of prediction/fulfilment and acceptance and rejection are intertwined as can be seen from the reactions of the magi and king Herod. In 2:19 ff. the notion of prediction/fulfilment resurfaces when Joseph responds positively to the instruction of the angel and returns to Nazareth. This is interpreted as a fulfilment of another Old Testament prophecy.

In 3:1 the narrative resumes with the appearance of John the Baptist. The same plotting devices are used as in Chapters 1-2. John's appearance is interpreted as fulfilment of a prophecy and, furthermore, the notion of rejection is evident in the reaction of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Together with the chief priests and the scribes they become the chief antagonists in the narrative. The narrator also uses the story of the ministry of the Baptist in order to draw a distinction between the Jewish crowds and their leaders. In 3:11ff. the narrator tells of the baptism of Jesus. This part of the narrative is dominated by the notion of acceptance, as both Jesus' and John's actions are in obedience to the will of God. The scheme of acceptance/rejection is also used to plot the account of Jesus' temptation in 4:1ff. Contrary to Israel, Jesus, the Son of God, withstands the temptations and accepts the way of humble obedience to God. After the temptation, news of John's arrest (4:13) prompts Jesus to move to Capernaum and begin his ministry. Once again the theme of prediction and fulfilment governs the plot (e.g. 4:12ff.). In Matthew 4:17 Jesus begins his active ministry.

## **5.2 Matthew 4:17-11:1**

The content of Jesus' message (4:17) is similar to that of John (3:2), challenging those who hear it either to accept or reject it. In 4:18ff. the

calling of the disciples is narrated. The calling of the two sets of brothers is illustrative, since it presents incidents that are typical of Jesus' ministry: the calling of people to leave home, family and possessions in order to follow Jesus (see 8:21; 10:35ff., 19:27). By accepting Jesus' call the brothers illustrate the notion of acceptance.

In 4:23-25 the narrator continues to illustrate events that are typical of Jesus' ministry. Jesus' acts of ministry and the response to them are portrayed as habitual and recurrent.

In Chapters 5-7 the narrator illustrates Jesus' teaching and preaching ministry. As it is a discourse, and not a narrative, the Sermon on the Mount is plotted and arranged differently from the narrative. Yet, the themes of acceptance and rejection are still prominent in the individual sayings and the discourse as a whole. The entire discourse is concluded and summed up by the parable of the wise and the foolish men, whereby the implied reader is exhorted to hear and do the words of Jesus.

After the completion of the discourse by means of the stereotypical concluding formula (7:28), the narrator relates a second element in Jesus' ministry in more detail, namely Jesus' healing. In Chapters 8-9 a series of miracles is narrated whereby the alternative responses of acceptance and rejection of Jesus are highlighted. Several times faith is illustrated as positive response. The negative response is obvious in the reaction of the Jewish leaders (9:3; 9:34) and the Gentiles (8:34). Chapters 8-9 also include other events besides miracles, e.g. the two men wishing to follow Jesus (8:18ff.) - a story that also shows the theme of acceptance/rejection. The notion of promise/fulfilment is also used in the narration of Jesus' healing ministry, e.g.

in 8:17 where another quotation is used to show how Jesus' healing fulfils Old Testament prophecy.

In 9:35 the narrator uses a summary identical to the one that opened the account of Jesus' ministry, thereby functioning as a transition to the ensuing discourse. The disciples share in Jesus' ministry as they are sent out to preach and heal (10:1, 7, 11). The discourse explains two issues: 1. Although the instructions in 10:5-15 allow for both positive and negative responses, the juxtaposition of the predictions of persecution (10:16-23) emphasises the notion of rejection. 2. The principle of solidarity between Jesus and his disciples is emphasised; his fate will become their fate. No report of the disciples' mission is given. The discourse ends with another stereotypical formula and the resumption of Jesus' ministry (11:1).

### **5.3 Matthew 11:2-16:20**

The first incident in this section refers past the mission of the disciples to the previous accounts of Jesus' ministry as John the Baptist asks if Jesus is the Messiah. Jesus' answer indicates that his ministry fulfils Messianic hope, thereby emphasising prediction/fulfilment as plotting device.

Furthermore, the emphasis in the narrator's use of plot themes now shifts from acceptance to rejection: rejection becomes the most dominant response and is not restricted to the Jewish leaders. For example, the generation of Jesus' contemporaries is mentioned five times in Chapters 11-12 (11:16, 12:39, 41, 42, and 45), and in each case the reference is pejorative. In Chapter 12 the intensity of opposition of the Pharisees to Jesus increases (e.g. 12:1ff. and 12:9ff.), and they are portrayed as going out to

plot to destroy Jesus (12:14). The theme of rejection is also developed by reverse example in Chapters 11 and 12, in particular in the theme of the "family of God" and the theme of acceptance and commitment to Jesus (e.g. 11:25ff. and 12:46ff.).

In Chapter 13 the theme of rejection is continued in the five discourses, as Jesus teaches the crowd who does not understand. The plotting device of acceptance/rejection in fact divides the discourse in half and places it in its context in the narrative as a whole. The first half of the discourse can be interpreted as the narrator's apology for the rejections and lack of understanding displayed by Israel. The crowds are contrasted with the disciples and their positive response (understanding) which has as its object the doing of the will of God. The contrast is also evident at the end of the chapter when Jesus is rejected by his home town.

Chapter 14 reveals the only major temporal deformation in the narrative. Herod identifies Jesus as the resurrected John the Baptist and the narrator pauses to tell John's death. The narrator uses this story to show that the rejection of John the Baptist foreshadows Jesus' death. The news of John's death prompts Jesus to withdraw to a lonely place (14:13) where Jesus heals sick people and feeds the five thousand (14:14ff.). In a second scene about the calming of the storm the theme of acceptance is used ambiguously: the disciples are full of fear and Peter is reproached for his scant faith. However, one can also detect a development in the plot of the narrative, since, unlike the first incident (8:27), the miracle ends with a correct confession instead of a question (14:33).

In Chapter 15:1ff. the narrator tells about the dispute over purity laws. Again the notion of Old Testament fulfilment surfaces as Jesus cites another

prophecy from the Old Testament. The scribes' and the Pharisees' lack of understanding contrasts with the disciples who do understand, although their understanding is flawed. The rejection of the Jewish leaders is also contrasted with the faith of the Canaanite woman (15:21ff.). The repetition of a second feeding miracle (15:32ff.) again reveals the wavering nature of the disciples' faith and understanding.

In the first part of the plot the pattern repeats itself, since there is rejection by the Pharisees and the Sadducees followed by partial understanding on the part of the disciples. In this way the narrator guides the implied reader to realise that the Jewish leaders become increasingly perverse in the course of the narrative.

#### **5.4 Matthew 16:21-20:34**

In the next section of the narrative the disciples are the most important recipients of Jesus' teaching. This teaching deals either with Jesus' mission of suffering or with matters concerning the church. In the second half of Chapter 16 the narrator uses the plotting device of prediction to project incidents beyond the temporal boundaries of the narrative, e.g. the predictions about the coming of the Son of Man (16:28ff.) and the founding of the church (16:18). The prediction of Jesus' passion (16:21) is fulfilled later within the temporal boundaries of the narrative. All these predictions are connected with the themes of rejection and acceptance. For example, the logia in 16:24ff. challenge the disciples to accept Jesus' fate as their own, but the way in which Peter reacts reveals how difficult this is.

After the first passion prediction, the narrator tells about the transfiguration. It is evident that the narrator wishes the implied reader to link this event to the baptism, as the heavenly voice functions in a similar way

here, namely to confirm Jesus' obedience. In this case, however, the broader context specifies obedience as a willingness to suffer and die. The command to the disciples to listen to Jesus (17:5) emphasises the importance of Jesus' teaching.

The response of rejection once again comes to the fore, e.g. after the healing of the epileptic boy (17:14ff.). Jesus makes a remark about his unresponsive contemporaries (17:17). The narrator uses the incident as an occasion for Jesus to teach about faith to the disciples. A second passion prediction follows in 17:22ff. - underlying the approaching dangers and challenges.

In Chapter 18 another great discourse follows and it forms the centre of this narrative section. The notions of acceptance and rejection are used differently in this discourse, since they are now applied to the relationship between members of the community, and not to people's response to Jesus. Jesus uses the example of a child to teach that greatness in the Kingdom of heaven is defined by humility (18:1-4) and this norm is then applied to various situations that may arise in the church. The discourse closes with a parable stressing the importance of grace (18:21ff.). In 19:1 the narrator concludes the discourse, followed by a summary to recount more healing successes (19:2). This is followed by a controversy with the Pharisees about divorce. It appears that the narrator wishes to contrast the negative response of the Jewish leaders with the mixed response of the crowds. Furthermore, the trusting acceptance of children is held as an example for the disciples (19:13ff.) which is followed by a contrasting incident, namely the self-reliance of the rich young man (19:27ff.).

The final passion prediction is found in 20:17ff. The role of understanding in the plotting device of acceptance/rejection is evident in the fact that the disciples are unable to fully comprehend the nature of Jesus' ministry and mission, despite all his teachings and predictions.

This section of the narrative closes with a second episode of Jesus' healing of two blind men (cf. 9:27-31). The major difference now can be linked to the response of the healed men and the crowd. Earlier, the healed men exhibit faith, but fail to obey Jesus (9:31), whereas now they "follow" Jesus after being healed, and are thus represented in a more favourable light. This is in stark contrast with the "blindness" Jesus faces in the Jewish leaders. The fact that the crowd rebukes the blind men in this episode should be linked to the gradual movement toward Jesus' death.

### **5.5 Matthew 21:1–25:46**

In these chapters the narrator tells about Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem. The theme of rejection dominates the events of the plot. The section begins with Jesus' entry into Jerusalem and the narrator emphasises Jesus' willingness to accept God's way of suffering and service (20:28).

Jesus' first act in Jerusalem is the cleansing of the temple, thereby challenging the authority of the Jewish leaders. The narrator uses the same set of motifs in the cleansing of the temple to show the Jewish leaders' rejection of Jesus: Jesus heals the sick and is called the "Son of David" by children. This leads to indignation and rejection by the chief priests and the scribes. The subsequent controversy story re-examines the fate of John the Baptist and points out that the Jewish leaders' rejection of Jesus is parallel to their rejection of John (21:23ff.).



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Reacting to this rejection Jesus tells a series of parables that reflect the history of the Jewish leaders (inside and outside the plotted story of the Gospel). In each parable Israel has failed to respond in the correct way to the rule of God, for example they do not act (21:28ff.), they do not bear fruit (21:33ff.) and they do not want to accept the invitation to the wedding feast (22:1ff.). The narrator indicates that the Jewish leaders realised that Jesus was referring to them (21:45) and the implied reader has already been informed that the leaders were actively planning to kill Jesus. The fact that they "understood" the parable emphasises their perversity.

The theme of rejection is used in the next section, too. The narrator tells a series of controversy stories. The circle of Jewish leaders who oppose Jesus becomes even larger, and the series only ends when Jesus confounds them with a question (22:46). Unable to answer Jesus, they withdraw and then Jesus launches a bitter attack against them in Chapter 23. The theme of rejection is dominant in the speech of woes against the Pharisees and the scribes. It ends with a prediction of the rejection of Jesus' message. Although this will not happen within the boundaries of this narrative, it further highlights the pattern of rejection that characterised the history of Israel.

After Jesus leaves the temple, He delivers his eschatological discourse to the disciples in private (Chapters 24-25). This is the last great discourse in the Gospel. The notions of acceptance and rejection are once again prominent: a future of tribulation and rejection is projected for the church, but, on the other hand, the disciples are called to stand firm in the face of persecution and to continue to accept Jesus by doing the will of the heavenly Father.

## **5.6 Matthew 26:1–28:20**

Chapters 24 and 25 end with the final concluding formula in 26:1 where the narrator makes it clear that Jesus' teaching ministry is completed: all that remains is his obedient death. The final section in the narrative is introduced with a prediction of the passion (26:2) and conveys the idea to the implied reader that Jesus is in full control of his destiny. Prediction and rejection are very important in this part of the narrative, too. Rejection, in particular, plays a very prominent role, since Jesus comes into conflict both with the people of Israel (who reject Him at the urging of their leaders) and with the disciples (who cannot accept that He has to suffer and die).

In 26:3ff. the theme of rejection is evident when the narrator tells of the Jewish leaders' plan to kill Jesus. It reappears when the disciples fail to understand the true nature of Jesus' ministry (26:6ff.). Their dullness is contrasted with the act of loving service performed by the woman.

The theme of rejection appears again in 26:14ff. when the narrator tells of Judas collaborating with the Jewish leaders in planning to arrest Jesus. However, the narrator continues to point out that Jesus is in full control of his destiny by using the themes of promise/fulfilment to emplot the Last Supper. The preparation for the Passover meal is plotted with the device of prediction as Jesus' instructions are immediately fulfilled (26:17ff.) At the meal Jesus also predicts which disciple will reject and betray Him (26:14ff.), as well as Peter's denial and the flight of the disciples (26:30ff.). The scene at Gethsemane illustrates how Jesus, in contrast with the failure and misunderstanding of the disciples, accepts the will of God and embraces the cross in obedience to God.

In the last part of Chapter 26 the theme of rejection again occurs when the narrator stresses the perversity of the opposition by the Jewish leaders. They seek "false testimony" at the trial (26:59ff.) and are unsympathetic towards Judas when he repents. Finally, they urge the people to insist that Pilate should crucify Jesus (27:20ff.). Throughout the passion Jesus continues to act with consistency and absolute integrity, unlike the other major actors in the narrative. Jesus' fearless confession stands in contrast to Peter's denial (26:59ff.). Unlike Caiaphas (26:63) and Peter (26:72), Jesus refuses to swear an oath. He accepts his humility and suffering. Jesus obediently fulfils the will of God and in the end dies in an act of obedience, yielding his spirit to God (27:50). The rejection of the Jewish leaders continues even after Jesus' death: they post guards at Jesus' tomb to prevent disciples from stealing Jesus' body and they spread this rumour after his resurrection (28:11ff.).

However, in the midst of all the rejection, some individuals who stand, because they do not reject Jesus: the Roman centurion (27:54), the women who watch the crucifixion (27:55) and Joseph of Arimathea who provides Jesus with a tomb (27:57ff.).

In the resurrection stories in Chapter 28 acceptance becomes the major plotting device. The women accept the task given to them to report to the disciples what they have seen (28:7ff.), and the disciples go to Galilee as Jesus directed them to (28:16). The narrative closes as the narrator tells of the commission given to the disciples to make people disciples of Jesus by teaching them to observe (=accept) all that Jesus has commanded. The other important aspect with regard to the way in which the narrator tells of the resurrection of Jesus is the fact that Jesus' trust and obedience to God has been vindicated by his resurrection. His resurrection fulfils the predictions

made earlier in the narrative and the narrative closes with an open-ended promise/prediction of the presence of the resurrected Jesus with the disciples.

## **6. The characterisation of Pilate in the Gospel according to Matthew**

### **6.1 The role of Pilate in terms of the plot of Matthew 27-28**

Scholars describe the plot of Matthew's Gospel, and, in particular, the plot of Matthew 27 in various ways. Before providing my own analysis of the plot of Mark 27 some of the ways in which other scholars have outlined the plot of Matthew 27-28 will be indicated first:

- **J. P. Heil** (1991:57ff.) summarises the plot of this section as follows: "The innocent Jesus dies as True King and Son of God". He then describes the development of the plot in terms of several scenes, each of which is divided into three sections which are arranged in the form of a "sandwich" (aba):

26:57-75: Jesus admits his divine sonship to the High Priest and is condemned to death.

A<sup>1</sup> Peter follows while Jesus is led to the High Priest

B<sup>1</sup> Jesus admits his divine sonship to the High Priest and is condemned

A<sup>2</sup> Peter denies Jesus in the courtyard of the High Priest

27:1-14: The innocent Jesus admits his kingship

B<sup>2</sup> The condemned but innocent Jesus is led to Pilate

A<sup>3</sup> Judas repents because of Jesus' innocence

B<sup>3</sup> The innocent Jesus admits his kingship

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Matthew

27:15-54 Jesus dies as God's innocent royal Son

A<sup>4</sup> Jewish people accept guilt for the death of the innocent Jesus

B<sup>4</sup> While dying, the innocent Jesus is mocked as King and Son of God

A<sup>5</sup> The death of the innocent Jesus vindicates his divine sonship

27:55-61 Women followers witness Jesus' death

A<sup>1</sup> Women followers from Galilee witness to the death of Jesus

B<sup>1</sup> A disciple from Arimathea buries Jesus and departs

A<sup>2</sup> Mary Magdalene and the other Mary sit facing the tomb of Jesus

27:62-28:4 Jewish leaders try to thwart Jesus' resurrection

B<sup>2</sup> The Chief Priests and Pharisees receive Pilate's permission to seal the stone and guard the tomb

A<sup>3</sup> Mary Magdalene and the other Mary come to see the tomb

B<sup>3</sup> An angel rolls back the stone and the fearful guards become as if dead

• In his analysis of the plot of this part of the Gospel **Donald Senior** (1997:164–171) emphasises three crucial aspects. The first one is Christology. He emphasises that the attention of the passion story falls mainly on Jesus who even in the midst of suffering and death remains a figure of majesty and authority. The second one is ecclesiology. The narrator uses the passion narrative to confirm his mixed portrayal of the disciples as beings of "little faith". Most of the events in the passion story reveal their weakness and failure in the face of suffering and death. The third one is what Senior calls "theology of history". The narrator uses the events in this part of the narrative to convey the idea that the death (and resurrection) of Jesus form the decisive turning point in the history of salvation. For the narrator the passion of Jesus is

an eschatological event, bringing to an end the old age and ushering in the new.

- **Warren Carter** (1996:169-171) places the events in Matthew 27 within a broader narrative context covering Matthew 21:1-27:66. In this regard Carter identifies Matthew 21:1-27 as a kernel (in terms of the theoretical framework developed by Seymour Chatman). As kernel it has a twofold function. First, it moves the plot forward toward Jesus' final rejection and crucifixion. Secondly, it addresses the question as to how Jesus' death will come about. According to Carter, the rest of this narrative block is linked to this kernel in the sense that it further develops this kernel. In this regard Carter identifies several satellites that develop this kernel. These are the series of parables that Jesus tells (21:28-22:14), the arguments about his authority (22:15-46), the decision to arrest (21:46) and entangle Jesus (22:15) which lead eventually succeed in that Jesus is sentenced to death (26:4, 47, 27:2, 20, 41). Thus, in terms of Carter's analysis of the plot of the Gospel according to Matthew, the events in Matthew 27 are reduced to mere satellites, linked to a kernel identified six chapters earlier.

- **J. D. Kingsbury** (1986:85) emphasises the following aspects in his analysis of the events in Chapter 27: The initial scenes are calculated to establish, respectively, the culpability of the Jewish religious leaders for the death of Jesus, the unreadiness of the disciples to master the events happening to Jesus (and to them), and the inability of Judas to foresee the true nature of the act he committed when he agreed to

betray Jesus for money. By contrast, Jesus demonstrates, by guiding and by telling beforehand what would happen, that He is truly aware that God is with Him, and that He is fulfilling a divine plan for salvation. With regard to Pilate, Kingsbury points out that the role Pilate plays is not unlike that of Judas, since, by abetting the Jewish conspiracy, Pilate is, ironically, facilitating God's plan of salvation.

The above survey indicates that the plot of Matthew 27 can be analysed in various ways and that scholars do not all agree on the issues that prevail in the formation of the plot. I will now present my own analysis of the plot of Matthew 27 in terms of the approach outlined in Chapter 1. As will become clear, my analysis of the plot of Matthew 27, overlaps to some extent with that of some of the scholars discussed above, but there are also some differences, primarily in terms of the procedures followed to analyse the plot of Matthew 27, as well as some of the (theological) aspects that will be emphasised.

The diagram below represents the results of the following procedures: a) the paraphrasing of the events; b) the classification of the events; c) an indication of the kernels (*italics*); d) a short summary of each microsequence (**bold print**):

#### **A. The religious leaders bring Jesus to Pilate**

- |   |                           |
|---|---------------------------|
| 1. <i>All the chief priests and the elders of the people confer together against Jesus in order to bring about his death.</i> | Verbal act: consultation. |
| 2. They bind Jesus.   | Physical act.             |
| 3. They lead Him away.  | Physical act.             |
| 4. <i>They hand Him over to Pilate the governor.</i>  | Physical act.             |

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Matthew

### B. Judas commits suicide

1. Judas sees that Jesus is condemned. Physical act.
2. Judas repents. Emotional act.
3. Judas brings back the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. Physical act.
4. He says: "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood." Verbal act: repentance.
5. The chief priests and elders say: "What is that to us? See to it yourself." Verbal act: rejection.
6. Judas throws down the pieces of silver in the temple. Physical act.
7. He departs. Physical act.
8. He goes and hangs himself. Physical act.

[The narrator interprets the events:

1. This is the reason why the field has been called the Field of Blood.
2. Thus is fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one on whom a price had been set, on whom some of the people of Israel had set a price, and they gave them for the potter's field, as the Lord commanded me."]

### C. Pilate questions Jesus who answers only one question and then remains silent

1. *Pilate asks Jesus whether He is the King of the Jews.* Verbal act: question.
2. *Jesus responds that this is the opinion of Pilate.* Verbal act: response.
3. *The chief priest and elders bring many charges against Jesus.* Verbal act: accusation.
4. Jesus does not answer. Non-verbal act.
5. *Pilate asks Jesus why He does not respond to the accusations.* Verbal act: question.
6. *Jesus does not answer Pilate at all.* Non-verbal act.
7. Pilate is amazed. Mental act.

### D. Pilate tries to free Jesus

[The narrator provides background information:

1. At the festival Pilate usually releases any prisoner whom the crowd wants.
2. At this stage Jesus Barabbas, a notorious prisoner, is in prison.]



## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Matthew

1. The crowd gathers. Physical act.
2. Pilate asks them: "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" Verbal act: question.
3. Pilate realises that it is out of jealousy that the leaders have handed Jesus over. Mental act.

### **E. Pilate's wife warns him that Jesus is innocent**

1. Pilate sits on the judgement seat. Physical act.
2. His wife sends word to him, "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him." Verbal act: warning.

### **F. The chief priests and elders persuade the crowd to ask Pilate to set Barabbas free, and Jesus to be put to death.**

1. *The chief priests and the elders persuade the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to have Jesus killed.* Verbal act: manipulation.
2. *Pilate again asks them, "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?"* Verbal act: question.
3. *They answer: "Barabbas."* Verbal act: response.
4. *Pilate asks them: "What should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?"* Verbal act: question.
5. *All of them answer: "Let him be crucified!"* Verbal act: response.
6. Pilate asks: "Why, what evil has he done?" Verbal act: question.
7. They shout all the more, "Let him be crucified!" Verbal act: response.
8. Pilate realises that he can do nothing and that a riot is beginning. Mental act.

### **G. The crowd as a whole invoke Jesus' blood upon themselves**

1. He takes some water and washes his hands before the crowd. Physical act.
2. He says: "I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." Verbal act: assertion.

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Matthew

3. The crowd as a whole answers: "His blood be on us and on our children!" Verbal act: response.
4. He releases Barabbas for them. Verbal act: directive.
5. He has Jesus flogged. Verbal act: directive.
6. *He hands Him over to be crucified.* Verbal act: directive.

### H. The soldiers mock Jesus as King of the Jews

1. The soldiers of the governor take Jesus into the governor's headquarters. Physical act.
2. They gather the whole cohort around Him. Verbal act: request.
3. They strip Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. Physical act.
4. They twist some thorns into a crown and put it on his head. Physical act.
5. They put a reed in his right hand. Physical act.
6. They kneel before Him and mock him, saying: "Hail, King of the Jews!" Verbal act: mockery.
7. They spit on Him. Physical act.
8. They take the reed and strike Him on the head. Physical act.
9. They strip Him of the robe and put his own clothes on Him. Physical act.

### I. The soldiers lead Jesus off to be crucified

1. *They lead Jesus away to crucify Him.* Physical act.
2. They come upon a man from Cyrene (Simon). Physical act.
3. They compel him to carry Jesus' cross. Verbal act: directive.

### J. The soldiers crucify Jesus

1. They come to a place called Golgotha. Physical act.  
[The narrator provides background information: Golgotha means "Place of a skull".]
2. They offer Jesus wine to drink, mixed with gall. Physical act.
3. When Jesus tastes it, He refuses to drink it. Verbal act: reject.
4. *The soldiers crucify Jesus.* Physical act.
5. They divide his clothes among themselves by casting lots.

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Matthew

- |   |               |
|---|---------------|
|   | Physical act. |
| 6. They sit down there and keep watch over Him.   | Physical act. |
| 7. They put up the charge against Him, which reads:<br>"This is Jesus, the King of the Jews." | Physical act. |
| 8. The soldiers crucify two bandits: one on Jesus' left side<br>and one on His right side.    | Physical act. |

### K. The people mock Jesus while He hangs on the cross

- |  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| 1. People passing by say terrible things about Jesus.  | Verbal act: mockery. |
| 2. Some passers-by shake their heads and shout to Him<br>that He should come down from the cross and save<br>Himself.            | Verbal act: mockery. |
| 3. The chief priests, elders and the scribes also make fun<br>of Jesus.  | Verbal act: mockery. |
| 4. They say that Jesus saved others but is unable to save<br>Himself.  | Verbal act: mockery. |
| 5. They say if Jesus is the Messiah, the king of Israel, He<br>must come down from the cross so that they can believe<br>in Him. | Verbal act: mockery. |
| 6. They say: "He trusts in God; let God deliver Him now,<br>if He wants to; for He said, 'I am God's Son.' "                     | Verbal act: mockery. |
| 7. The two criminals also mock Jesus.  | Verbal act: mockery. |

### L. Jesus suffers and dies

- |  |                               |
|--|-------------------------------|
| 1. From noon until three in the afternoon darkness comes<br>over the whole land.   | Physical act.                 |
| 2. Jesus cries out with a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema<br>sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you<br>forsaken me?" | Verbal act: expressing agony. |
| 3. Some of the bystanders think Jesus is calling Elijah.   | Mental act.                   |
| 4. One man grabs a sponge and soaks it in sour wine.   | Physical act.                 |
| 5. The man puts it on a stick and holds it up to Jesus<br>to drink.  | Physical act.                 |

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Matthew

6. The others say: "Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to save Him." Verbal act: mockery.
7. *Jesus cries again with a loud voice and breathes his last.* Emotional/Physical act.

### M. Eschatological events accompany the death of Jesus

1. The curtain in the temple tears in two from top to bottom. Physical act.
2. The earth shakes. Physical act.
3. Rocks are split. Physical act.
4. The tombs are opened. Physical act.
5. Many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep are raised. Physical act.
6. After his resurrection they come out of the tombs and enter the holy city and appear to many. Physical act.
7. The centurion and those with him, who are keeping watch over Jesus, see the earthquake and what takes place. Physical act.
8. They are terrified. Emotional act.
9. They say: "Truly this man was God's Son!" Verbal act: assertive.
10. Many women are also there, looking on from a distance. Physical act.

[The author gives background information with regard to these women: they have followed Jesus from Galilee. Among these women are Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of the James and Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.]

### N. Jesus is buried

[The narrator provides background information: It is evening, and Joseph from Arimathea, a rich man, is a follower of Jesus.]

1. *Joseph of Arimathea goes to Pilate and asks for the body of Jesus.* Verbal act: request.
2. *Pilate orders that it should be given to him.* Verbal act: directive.
3. Joseph takes the body and wraps it in a clean linen cloth. Physical act.
4. *He lies Jesus' body in his own new tomb, which he had*

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Matthew

*hewn in the rock.*

Physical act.

5. He rolls a great stone to the door of the tomb and goes. Physical act.
6. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary are there, sitting opposite the tomb. Physical act.

### **O. The chief priests and the Pharisees ask Pilate to secure the tomb of Jesus.**

1. The next day the chief priests and the Pharisees gather before Pilate. Physical act.
2. They say: "Sir, we remember what that impostor said while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise again.' " Verbal act: informative.
3. They ask Pilate: "Therefore command the tomb to be made secure until the third day; otherwise his disciples may go and steal him away, and tell the people, 'He has been raised from the dead,' and the last deception would be worse than the first." Verbal act: requestive.
4. Pilate tells them: "You have a guard of soldiers; go, make it as secure as you can." Verbal act: directive.
5. They go with the guard and make the tomb secure by sealing the stone. Physical act.

The main groups of events in Matthew 27 may thus be summarised as follows:

- A. The religious leaders bring Jesus to Pilate.
- B. Judas commits suicide.
- C. Pilate questions Jesus who answers only one question and then remains silent.
- D. Pilate tries to free Jesus.
- E. Pilate's wife warns him that Jesus is innocent.
- F. The chief priests and elders persuade the crowd to ask Pilate to set Barabbas free, and Jesus to be put to death.

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Matthew

- G. The crowd as a whole invoke Jesus' blood upon themselves.
- H. The soldiers mock Jesus as King of the Jews.
- I. The soldiers lead Jesus off to be crucified.
- J. The soldiers crucify Jesus.
- K. The people mock Jesus while He hangs on the cross.
- L. Jesus suffers and dies.
- M. Eschatological events accompany the death of Jesus.
- N. Jesus is buried.
- O. The chief priests and the Pharisees ask Pilate to secure the tomb of Jesus.

The following conclusions can be drawn from this analysis:

1. With regard to the principles used for the combination of the events into microsequences the following is important

- Time: The microsequences are narrated by the narrator in a chronological order. There are a few cases where individual events are situated in a place that differs from the chronological order, for example E2 refers to an event (a dream) that happened earlier on in the story level, but it is narrated only the next morning. Another example that could be cited is M6 where the narrator refers to the resurrection - an event that will occur only later in the story level. However, the overall pattern is that events are narrated in a chronological order.
- Causality: This principle is used often to link individual events to other events. For example, Pilate is portrayed as being afraid of the crowds. He decides to release Jesus, and then washes his hands in order to exonerate himself. Another example that could be cited is the

ignorance of the crowd that causes them to be easily manipulated by the religious leaders. A last example that could be cited is the fact that the centurion and the other soldiers confess that Jesus was truly the Son of God when they see the eschatological events accompanying the death of Jesus.

The principle of causality is also used to combine the microsequences to form the plot of this Chapter, in that one microsequence leads to the next one. The only two microsequences that do not fit into this pattern, are B and E.

- Space: This principle also plays an important role in combining the events. All the microsequences are located geographically in the same area and one can detect a clear movement in physical space in the order of events.

2. If one focuses merely on the plot outlined above, it should be described as a process of deterioration, as the events develop constantly in a negative direction. This is all the more evident in the kernels (indicated in italics above), which indicate a process of deterioration that worsens as the process develops. However, if the development of the plot as indicated above is viewed in terms of information in the rest of the Gospel, the reader will reach another conclusion. For example, the reader is aware that Jesus has to die, because it is part of God's plan. Furthermore, there are several indications in this Chapter that remind the reader of this perspective, for example microsequence B (where Judas' suicide emphasises the fact that Jesus is indeed innocent), the narrator's comments at the end of microsequence B explaining that things happened in order to fulfil God's plan,

microsequence E (Pilate's wife had a dream confirming Jesus' innocence), microsequence M (the eschatological events accompanying the death of Jesus confirm that Jesus is indeed the Son of God). Although these events are not kernels in the strict sense of the word, they enable the reader to understand that what may seem like a process of deterioration, in fact, forms part of a much greater divine plan in the Gospel according to Matthew where Jesus, though innocent, has to die.

3. With regard to the theme of this study, it is significant to note the role Pilate plays in the development of the plot. This may be summarised as follows: although Pilate plays a vital role in the progression of the plot, the underlying logic of the plot makes it clear that he does not actually determine the flow of events; but rather *reacts* to events as they unfold, *unwillingly doing something he is forced to do*. Take note of the following:

- 3.1 The beginning of the plot is initiated by the acts of the chief priests and the elders who confer against Jesus in order to bring about his death (microsequence A). Here Pilate acts merely as the recipient of events (A4).
- 3.2 In microsequence C Pilate initiates events by beginning with a question (C1), but as the events progress in the rest of this microsequence, his role changes: he reacts to what the other characters do (C5, C7).
- 3.3 In microsequence D Pilate takes the initiative, devising a plan to free Jesus. In D3 the narrator informs the implied reader why Pilate devises this plan (he realises that the religious leaders are jealous of Jesus). The events in microsequence E seem to interrupt the flow of events, but play a very important role, namely confirming Jesus' innocence. Although the narrator does



not inform the reader how Pilate reacts when he receives this news from his wife, he/she can assume that Pilate would agree that Jesus is innocent, since he has just tried (microsequence D) to free Jesus.

- 3.4 In microsequence F things take a bad turn for Pilate: the religious leaders manipulate the crowd (F1) to choose Barabbas instead of Jesus (F3). Although Pilate tries to convince them to free Jesus (F4, F6), he does not succeed.
- 3.5 Microsequence G indicates most clearly that Pilate is fulfilling a role he does not want to play. He even says: "I am innocent of this man's blood". However, unwillingly, he has to hand Jesus over to be crucified (G6).
- 3.6 In the last two microsequences Pilate's role is again restricted to reacting: In N2 he orders that Jesus' body should be given to Joseph of Arimathea; and in N4 he gives to the religious leaders the guard of soldiers they want.

## **6.2 The characterisation of Pontius Pilate in Matthew 27-28**

The narrator begins this part of the narrative by narrating how the chief priests and the elders of the people conferred together. He emphasises the fact that their aim was to bring about Jesus' death. In verse 2 Pilate is mentioned for the first time. He is *identified* as Pilate the governor. The fact that this identification is used indicates that the narrator wishes to emphasise Pilate's official role. Furthermore, the fact that no more is said about Pilate at this stage indicates that the narrator assumes that this character is known to the readers.

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After a narrative aside relating the suicide of Judas, the narrator again focuses the reader's attention on Jesus, standing before Pilate (verse 11), once again identified as the governor. In verse 11 Pilate is portrayed as asking Jesus: "Are you the King of the Jews?". In doing so, Pilate is characterised as acting like a judge, namely trying to ascertain whether the charge laid against Jesus is indeed true. In this regard, it is important to point out that Pilate was in all probability only interested in the political overtone in the charge laid against Jesus. Pilate's actions thus illustrate the trait *trying to be just*.

In verse 12 the narrator again shifts the attention to the chief priests and elders who are portrayed as accusing Jesus. In verse 13 the attention shifts back to Pilate. He is now identified as "Pilate" and not as "governor". He is portrayed as asking: "Do you not hear how many accusations they make against you?" In doing so, Pilate is again showing the trait *attempting to be just*, since it is obvious that he wants to make certain that the charge laid against Jesus is indeed true.

In the next verse the narrator emphasises the fact that Jesus did not give Pilate an answer, "not even to a single charge". The effect of this on Pilate is described as that he was "greatly amazed". This is best interpreted as an indication of Pilate's awe for Jesus (see, for example, Bond 1998:130). Bond points out that the word "amazed" is used seven times in Matthew (8:10, 27; 9:33; 15:31; 21:20; 22:22 and 27:14), of which four definitely have religious overtones (8:27; 9:33; 15:31; 21:20) and two (8:10 and 22:22) do not. She concludes that in this case (27:14) there are no religious overtones, but this merely seems to indicate Pilate's awe about what he perceives to be strange behaviour by Jesus. This interpretation seems to be correct and therefore the trait that the narrator wishes to convey to the reader may be summarised as *perplexed by Jesus*.

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Matthew

In verses 15-18 the narrator introduces another trait, namely *shrewdness*. If this is compared to the way in which the same incident is narrated in Mark's Gospel, more or less the same happens, but here there is more emphasis on the trait, since the narrator in Matthew illustrates Pilate's shrewdness in three ways: First, Pilate is portrayed as *initiating* the episode. He confronts them with the choice: "Whom do you want me to release for you, Jesus Barabbas or Jesus who is called the Messiah?" He is thus portrayed as taking the initiative shrewdly. Secondly, Pilate identifies Jesus as "Jesus who is called the Messiah". By using the title "Messiah" - a title that has profound religious connotations within this particular context - Pilate is portrayed as someone who has a shrewd insight in the underlying religious dimension in Jewish attempts to get rid of Jesus. Thirdly, the narrator directly draws attention to the fact that Pilate "realised that it was out of jealousy that they had handed Him over."

The narrator then continues: the events are suddenly interrupted by a message that Pilate receives from his wife: "Have nothing to do with that innocent man, for today I have suffered a great deal because of a dream about him." In terms of the underlying narrative logic the narrator's primary purpose in narrating this is to emphasise the fact that Jesus is indeed innocent, thereby highlighting the reproachable behaviour of the Jewish religious leaders. However, one should also note other important aspects. First, the way in which Pilate's wife is characterised should be noted. As Brown (1994:806) indicates, the characterisation of Pilate's wife should be viewed against the tendency in Jewish circles to portray noble Roman Gentile women as women who were favourable to Judaism. For example, Josephus notes that in Nero's time the Gentile men of Damascus were extremely anti-Jewish, but many of their wives had converted to Judaism. Furthermore, Josephus also portrays Poppaea, Nero's wife, as fearing God, pleading on

behalf of the Jews. For our purposes, however, one should ask how this event relates to the characterisation of Pilate. In this regard two aspects should be highlighted:

First, it is obvious that the narrator wishes the reader to understand that Pilate's wife's dream came from God. In Matthew's Gospel dreams are used four times by God in the infancy narratives. Besides the three dreams of Joseph, there is the divine revelation via a dream to the magi, a group of Gentiles. In all these cases, it is made clear to the readers that the dream conveyed vital information from God. In this case, however, it is not Pilate who receives the dream, but his wife. The reader may infer from the trait that Pilate is regarded as *unfit to receive divine revelation*.

Secondly, in the case of the dreams narrated in the infancy narratives, the people - even the Gentile magi - immediately acted in accordance with the divine guidelines they received. In this case, Pilate's wife, the noble Roman woman, passed on information directly received from God to Pilate. However, as becomes clear from the rest of the event, Pilate did not act in a way befitting the information conveyed by the dream, namely to acquit Jesus immediately. Thus the trait which the narrator illustrates is *unwillingness to act as God wants him to* (See Davies & Allison 1977:587)

In verse 21 the narrator continues: Pilate - again identified in his official capacity as "the governor" - asks the crowd: "Which of the two do you want me to release for you?" At this stage Pilate knows that Jesus is innocent - not only because he realised that the religious authorities handed Jesus over due to jealousy, but also because of the divine revelation which his wife communicated to him. The fact that he asks the crowd to choose between Jesus and Barabbas instead of merely telling the crowd that Jesus is indeed innocent, illustrates a trait that can be summarised as *weakness*. After they had chosen Barabbas, Pilate's response (Pilate said to them, "Then what

should I do with Jesus who is called the Messiah?") should be viewed as a feeble attempt to get the crowd to reconsider their decision, thus once again illustrating the trait of weakness. In verse 24 the narrator indicates the reason why Pilate in the end decides to act both against his own knowledge and the divine revelation he received: "So when Pilate saw that he could do nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning..." The narrator wishes to convey the picture of a man succumbing to pressure. Thus characterisation of Pilate develops as follows: *weak >> succumbing to pressure*.

In verse 21 the narrator illustrates a last new trait to be associated with Pilate: "... he took some water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, 'I am innocent of this man's blood; see to it yourselves.'" The significance of this action should be understood against Old Testament passages such as 2 Samuel 3:28 and Psalm 26:6 where the washing of hands indicates one's innocence. What does Pilate wish to achieve by washing his hands? First, he wishes to proclaim his own innocence. He is portrayed as saying: "I am *innocent* of this man's blood". Secondly, he wishes to blame the crowd, as he continues: "... see to it yourselves." Thus the trait that the narrator wishes to convey to the reader can be summarised as *trying to shift the blame*. Ironically, Pilate never explicitly pronounces Jesus innocent. Instead, he focuses primarily on his own innocence: "*I am innocent* of this man's blood; see to it yourselves." Nevertheless, the reader will not be convinced that Pilate is innocent. He knew that Jesus was innocent and even received a divine revelation to this effect, but still handed Jesus over to be crucified. The reader will conclude that Pilate is just as guilty as the Jewish authorities and the Jewish crowd.

The last time Pilate is mentioned by the narrator, is in verse 58: Joseph of Arimathea went to Pilate and asked him for the body of Jesus; then Pilate

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ordered it to be given to him. In this case there is no amazement (as in Mark). Pilate just acts in his official capacity and releases the body of Jesus.

In 28:14 Pilate is mentioned for the last time in the narrative by the religious leaders. What they say about Pilate, confirms his official capacity.

To summarise: the characterisation of Pilate in the Gospel according to Matthew is rather complex as a relatively large number of traits are revealed. However, these traits are not all on the same level. The way in which the narrator reveals these traits indicates that some are viewed as more important than others, namely "attempting to be just", "unwillingness to act as God wants him to", "weak >> succumbing to pressure" and "(unsuccessfully) trying to shift the blame". Thus the characterisation of Pilate in the Gospel according to Matthew may be summarised as follows:

- Identification:
  - The governor (emphasising his official capacity)
  - Pilate
- **Attempting to be just**
  - Perplexed by Jesus
  - Shrewdness
  - Unfit to receive divine revelation
- **Unwillingness to act as God wants him to**
- **Weak >> succumbing to pressure**
- **(Unsuccessfully) trying to shift the blame**

The last aspect to be considered with regard to the characterisation of Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Matthew is the way in which he could be classified in terms of the various approaches outlined in Chapter 1:

In terms of the approach of *E. M. Forster*, Pilate should be classified as somewhere between a "flat" and a "round" character, since the number of

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character traits associated with him are relatively large, yet not enough to classify him as a "round character" in the full sense of the word.

In terms of *Harvey's* approach, Jesus Christ, the high priests and Pontius Pilate should be classified as *protagonists*. The crowd and Barabbas can be identified as *ficelles*. Simon of Cyrene, the soldiers, the centurion and Joseph of Arimathea can be identified as background characters.

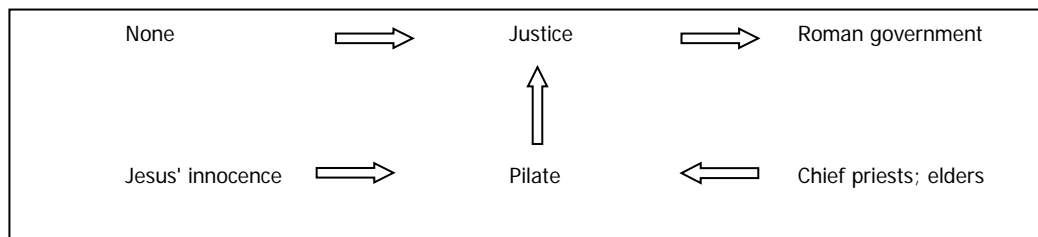
In terms *Ewen's* approach, the characterisation of Pontius Pilate in Matthew could be described as follows:

- Complexity: A relatively large number.
- Development: None at all.
- Penetration into inner life: Only a little (verse 14: he was greatly amazed; verse 18: he realised that the chief priests had handed Jesus over out of jealousy). Furthermore, Pilate's washing of his hands could be interpreted as indicative of some emotional turmoil.

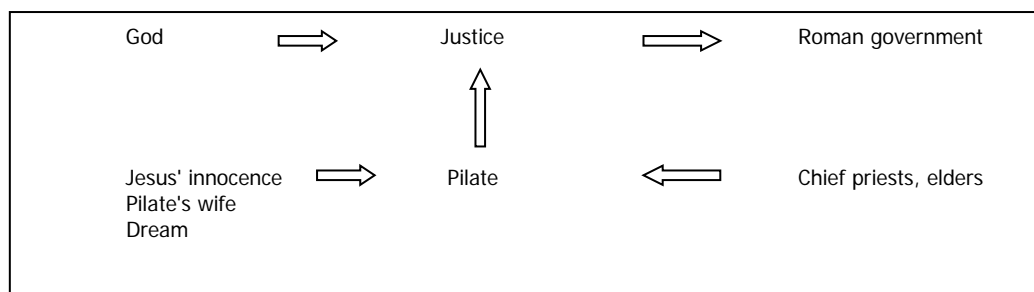
If *Greimas's* actantial system is used one can organise the underlying actants in several ways in terms of the object (that is, the goal or destination of action) of the various actants.

If one views the actantial system from the perspective of Pilate, one can draw the following two systems:

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Matthew



This illustrates the situation at the outset of the plot in Matthew 27: as Roman governor Pilate attempts to do justice (*object*) as the Roman government (*receiver*) would want it to be done. Jesus' innocence functions as *helper*, but the chief priests act as the *opponent*. As the plot unfolds, the situation changes as follows:

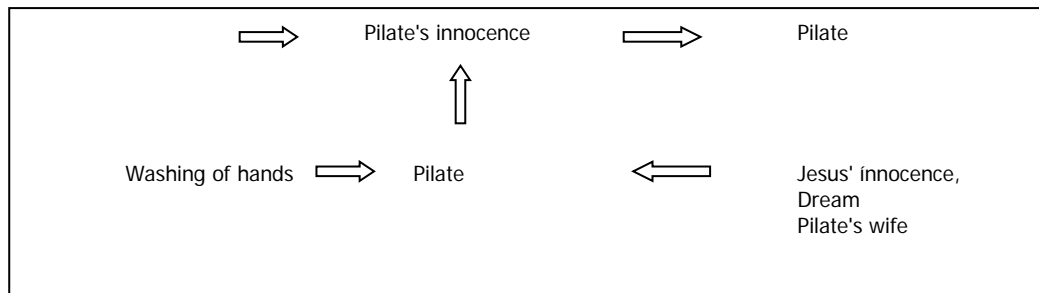


This illustrates the underlying logic approximately half way through the narrative. Pilate's object is still justice, but now the helper element has developed significantly. Apart from the innocence, two other elements have been added, namely Pilate's wife and the dream she has received. The other actants remain the same.

Towards the end of the narrative the actantial system (viewed from Pilate's perspective) changes as follows:

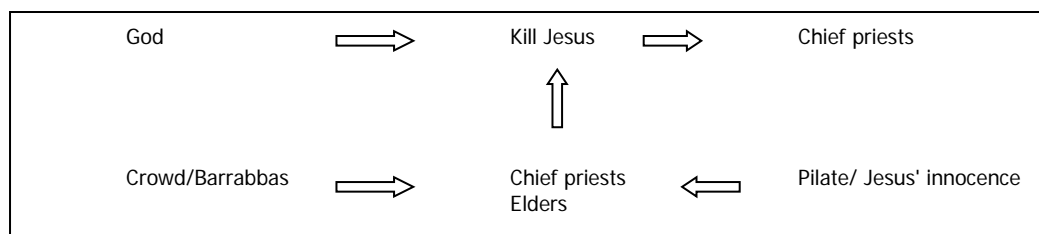


## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Matthew



Pilate attempts to show his innocence (object/receiver) and uses the washing of his hands (sender), but this is not possible since the opponent element is too strong (Jesus' innocence, his wife and the dream). The fact that there is no sender element indicates that Pilate fails to achieve his object.

If one views the underlying actants from the perspective of the chief priests, the actantial system can be drawn as follows:



This indicates the system from the point of view of the chief priests and the elders: they function as the *subject* with the *object* of having Jesus killed. The *receiver* of this process is the chief priests as they want Jesus to be killed in order to safeguard their own position ("out of jealousy" as the narrator indicates). The crowd and Barabbas function as the *helper* since they are used by the chief priests in order to achieve their object. Pilate and Jesus' innocence function as the *opponent* in this actantial system, since they pose a

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Matthew

threat to the chief priests as they try to achieve their object. In the end, the chief priests and the elders succeed in achieving their object. However, as the narrator has already revealed to the reader, this is not due to their own actions, but to the fact that this is part of God's plan. Therefore God is identified as the subject in this actantial scheme.

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# **CHAPTER 5**

## **THE CHARACTERISATION OF PONTIUS PILATE IN THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO LUKE**

Before the characterisation of Pilate in the Gospel of Luke is discussed, some other issues are examined first.

### **1. Author**

The actual text of the Third Gospel has no indication of authorship. However, this does not mean that it was an anonymous work. The fact that it has a dedicatory preface (cf. Luke 1:1–4) may suggest that the addressee would be aware of who was addressing him. A review of the ancient practice of dedication supports this view, as wherever one is in a position to check, ancient works with dedications were not in fact anonymous (Nolland 1989:5–12).

The earliest surviving attributions to the Third Gospel are found in the late second and early third centuries. At the end of the text of the oldest extant copy of the Gospel, P<sup>75</sup>, (to be dated 175–225 A.D.) one finds "The Gospel according to Luke". The second most ancient witness to Lukan authorship is found in the Muratorian Canon, which dated to approximately 170–180 A.D.

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke

In this case, the author is also identified as a physician, as one who had not himself seen the Lord, and as a companion of Paul. From the end of the second century there is also the testimony of Irenaeus (*Adversus haereses* 3.1.1) according to which the author is Luke, the companion of Paul, who set out in a book the gospel as preached by Paul (Nolland 1989:xxxv).

Modern scholars evaluate this tradition in different ways. Some, for example, Hobart, tried to prove that the perspective and language used by the author of Luke can be ascribed to a physician. However, other scholars do not agree with Hobart. For example, Cadbury has shown that Hobart's thesis is untenable, since most of the so-called medical expressions Hobart found in Luke are to be found in other books which are known not to have been written by physicians, for example the LXX, Josephus, Plutarch and Lucian (Kümmel 1975:149).

Scholars also tried to prove that the author of Luke shows a striking affinity with the theology of Paul and that he thus must have been a pupil of Paul. Examples often cited in this regard are universalism in Luke, the emphasis on faith, God's love for sinners, the gospel of joy, and concepts such as justification and salvation. However, as other scholars have pointed out, all these involve general Gentile-Christian concepts and words, and as a rule the author of Luke does not even use the same words that Paul normally uses (Kümmel 1975:150).

Therefore many scholars (for example, Marxsen 1968:161 and Klijn 1967:40-41) find it best not to accept the tradition that the Gospel according to Luke was written by Luke, the companion of Paul. This implies that one should accept that we do not know who the author of this Gospel was. From

the Gospel itself, one may nevertheless deduce the following with regard to the author:

- He was a Gentile Christian.
- He did not know Palestinian geography very well.
- He was not an eyewitness, yet he used reliable sources to compile his Gospel.
- His knowledge and usage of Greek was excellent.

## **2. Date of writing**

Some scholars assume that the Gospel was written at the end of the sixties A.D. However, this is not compatible with Luke 1:1ff. since "many" gospel writings could not have been in circulation at that time. Furthermore, such an early dating of the Gospel is unlikely as the author looks back on the fall of Jerusalem (70 A.D.). Luke 13:35a ("your house is abandoned" - addressed to Jerusalem) almost certainly refers to the destruction of Jerusalem. Furthermore, Jesus' judgement about the temple (Mark 13:2; cf. Luke 21:5) and His announcement about its desecration by the "abomination of desolation" (Mark 13:14) become in the Lukan version a saying about "Jerusalem surrounded by camps" (Luke 21:20). For these reasons the dating of Luke (and Acts) must be after Mark and also after the destruction of Jerusalem. Due to the fact that the author of Luke does not seem to be acquainted with the letters of Paul, one should assume that the book should be dated before the formation and/or circulation of the Pauline corpus. The

best solution would be to assume a date somewhere between 80 and 85 A.D. (Fitzmyer 1981:57).

With regard to the place of composition, it is impossible to argue a particular choice. Even ancient tradition regarding the place of composition varies greatly: Rome, Boeotia, Achaia. Modern scholars have suggested various places, for example H. Klein proposes Caesarea, R. Koh Decapolis and K. Löning Asia Minor. However, these are mere guesses. One should assume that the place of composition is unknown to us. It can be stated with reasonable certainty that it was not written in Palestine (Fitzmyer 1981:57).

### **3. Occasion for writing**

In the prologue to the Gospel (1:1-4) the author explains the purpose of his Gospel. In this prologue he seeks to stress and demonstrate that he wrote the Gospel (and Acts) as a good historian would. For example, he refers to "eyewitnesses" and the fact that he has "carefully studied all these matters from the beginning" in order to write "an orderly account". In the last verse Luke states his purpose explicitly: "so that you (Theophilus) will know the full truth about everything which has been taught". It can be inferred from this that his aim was, in the first place, to confirm for Theophilus that what he has heard, is correct, and that he wishes to demonstrate the authenticity of the good news by means of the narrative that follows. Thus, broadly speaking, the author of Luke wishes to assure his readers of the historical facts and of their religious and theological significance. Therefore it would not suffice to describe the work as a biography of Jesus and a mere account of his work. It would be better to describe it as a witness to the

temporal and eternal salvation that has appeared in Jesus of Nazareth because of God's mercy, a good news which must always be announced anew, to turn people to God and to afford them true felicity (Brown 1997:232).

With regard to the intended readers, scholars are divided on the issue whether Theophilus should be viewed as a concrete, historical person or whether the use of his name should be viewed as having mere symbolic significance. Whatever the decision may be, it is also clear that the author of Luke had a broader readership in mind, most probably Gentile Christians.

#### **4. The narrator in Luke**

As indicated above, many scholars believe that the real author of Luke was an anonymous Christian who lived towards the end of the first century A.D. However, it is possible to get some image of the real author from the work itself. This is usually called the implied author. In turn, the voice telling the reader or hearer the story of Luke-Acts is called the narrator. With regard to the narrator used by the implied author in Luke-Acts, the following important aspects as indicated by Kingsbury (1991:9-10), Dawsey (1986:15-30) and Du Plessis (1995:11-12) may be pointed out:

- The narrator used by the implied author in Luke-Acts may be described as *reliable* as he never misleads the hearer/reader.
- The "*place*" where the narrator situates himself within the story world of Luke-Acts is beyond the end of Acts, at a time between Paul's ministry in Rome and the Parousia of Jesus, the exalted Lord (Luke

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1:1-4). From this "place" the narrator looks back to the history of the early church and Jesus, and narrates the story of Jesus in the past time, for example:

"Now it happened when all the people had been baptised and when Jesus had been baptised and was praying, the heaven was opened and the Spirit descended" (Luke 3:21-22).

- From the way in which the story is narrated in Luke-Acts one can also deduce that the narrator is *omniscient* because he knows everything that needs to be known about the characters and events. Furthermore, he is free to move as he chooses in time and place. He can shift from character to character at will, reporting (or concealing) what he chooses of their actions, speech, motives, because he has privileged access to their thoughts and feelings.

- The narrator may also be described as *authoritative* because he presents the story in such a way that his perspective and interpretation without doubt represent the best way of viewing the events and, in particular, their significance for humankind.

- Of particular importance is the relationship between the narrator and Jesus, the most important character in the story world. This is apparent from the way in which the narrator uses the name "Jesus" and the title "Lord" in the story. The name "Jesus" appears approximately 90 times in the story, but only in eight cases is it used



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by a character other than the narrator himself. The narrator thus effectively aligns himself with Jesus, not only temporally and spatially, but most importantly, also theologically. By continually using Jesus' name, the narrator ensures that Jesus remains the focus of attention throughout the story. By constantly casting Jesus in a favourable light, he effectively suggests that Jesus should always be considered as truthful and right.

With regard to the use of the title "Lord", something similar may be indicated. The narrator, as opposed to any other character in the story world, speaks of God as "Lord" fourteen times, but never after Luke 5:17. Similarly, the narrator refers fourteen times to Jesus as "Lord", but only after Chapter 5. Thus, by first stressing that God is "Lord" and then subsequently by calling Jesus "Lord", the narrator succeeds in indicating that Jesus was that unique individual through whom God exercises his divine authority in this world. One could say that the narrator who is presented as authoritative in the story, in turn, portrays Jesus as authoritative.

- Lastly, it is very interesting to point out that the narrator seems to distinguish between various characters in the story by giving each of them a different kind of language. This suggests a natural and perhaps unconscious tendency on the part of the narrator to present the characters of the story as they actually would have spoken. The author of Luke wrote as if he was listening to the actual conversation between the characters of his narrative. For example, this is evident in the way

in which the "voice" differs between 1:1-4 and the ensuing section. The opening sentence of Luke (1:1-4) is of unusual artistic construction. It is composed as a single unit consisting of six clauses. The sentence reveals balance and symmetry. Besides the sentence's balanced structure, it employs a select vocabulary and is characterised by the stringing together of co-ordinate clauses by means of a periodic construction of the opening sentence. In contrast, the voice of the narrator in Luke 1:5ff. can be characterised as an oral type. Most of ancient literature was intended to be read aloud. It is therefore helpful to think of the narration more in terms of the spoken word and less in terms of the written word. Luke's narrative is characterised not only by orality, but also by several formulaic constructions found frequently in the narration of the gospel but rarely in the direct speech of the characters of the story.

## **5. A brief overview of the narrative of Luke**

Before considering the sections in which Pontius Pilate plays a role in the Gospel according to Luke a brief overview of the narrative is provided as background for the rest of the analysis. (This overview is based on the more detailed works of Kingsbury 1991; Dawsey 1986 and Du Plessis 1995:11-12.)

In Luke 1:1-2:52 the narrator introduces the reader to the Baptist and to Jesus, the two protagonists who are characterised by being compared with one another. By means of prophecy the reader is informed that the Baptist will be the great prophet of God (1:15, 75) and that Jesus will be the Messiah-King from the line of David, the royal Son of God, who is also Saviour and Lord (1:31-35; 2:10-11). This indicates that the narrator characterises

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Jesus as an eschatological figure. As Messiah, Jesus is the long-awaited Davidic king whom God will anoint with the Spirit for a ministry of salvation; as Son of God, Jesus enjoys a unique relationship with God by virtue of which He will fulfil God's purposes; and as Saviour, Jesus is presented as the One through whom God will proffer salvation first to Israel and then to the Gentiles.

At human level, the religious authorities function as the antagonists in the story. One could state that they function as a single character encompassing a wide range of individuals and groups such as Sadducees, Pharisees, the high priest, chief priests, elders, scribes, rulers of the people, and officers of the temple police. The narrator describes them both in terms of their attitude towards Jesus and in contrast to Him. In terms of the first aspect, he portrays them as the prime example of those in Israel who are spiritually blind and therefore do not wish to recognise Jesus for what He really is. In terms of the second aspect, the narrator draws a sharp contrast between Jesus and the religious authorities: Jesus, the protagonist, is righteous and does what God wants Him to do, but the authorities, the antagonist, are self-righteous and reject the purposes of God.

Jesus first meets the antagonist in the beginning of the Gospel (2:41-52). Though only twelve years old, He is aware that He is the Son of God and the Servant of God. In the temple He engages in conversation with the teachers. That this happens in the temple, is fitting, since the temple is portrayed in the Gospel both as the place of God's presence and as the seat of the religious leaders' power. In their conversation with the boy, the teachers are "astonished" (perplexed) by Jesus' excellent understanding of

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the law. This aspect is used by the narrator to create dramatic suspense: how will the authorities later receive Jesus during His public ministry?

Jesus' public ministry is narrated in the middle of Luke's narrative (Chapters 3-19). Jesus soon confronts the religious authorities. This confrontation occurs at the precise moment when the religious authorities make their major debut (5:17). Apparently, the narrator wishes to point out that conflict breaks out as soon as Jesus and the authorities meet. This conflict persists through a cycle of five controversies (5:17-6:11). Several important features characterise Jesus' conflict with the authorities:

1. In essence, the conflict is about the important question of who rightfully rules Israel. Is it the authorities or Jesus, Israel's Messiah-King. In this regard the narrator portrays Jesus as a figure of authority: He both teaches and has the power to heal. In contrast, the Pharisees and teachers are also portrayed as people with authority; they are often indicated as "sitting" - a position indicative of honour and authority.
2. The issues that create the conflict are weighty by nature and address the question how God's people should be ruled. For example, the following create conflict:
  - Does Jesus possess the divine authority to forgive sins?
  - If Jesus' disciples dine with tax collectors and sinners, do they not thereby break the "laws of purity"?
  - What right do Jesus' disciples have not to comply with the rules for fasting?

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- How should the Sabbath rest be observed?

3. In this phase the narrator still softens the intensity of Jesus' conflict with the religious authorities. It never becomes acutely confrontational. They only rarely challenge Jesus to his face because of something that He says or does. For example, when Jesus forgives the paralytic person his sins, the Pharisees and scribes accuse Jesus of blasphemy, but this happens "in their hearts" (5:21-22). In order to answer them Jesus has to "perceive" their thoughts.
4. The fourth feature is closely related to the previous one: in essence, until the third phase of Jesus' ministry in Jerusalem, the form of the conflict takes on the nature of protracted, intermittent conversation. In this regard, it is helpful to compare Luke's narrative with that of Mark. In the case of Mark's narrative, the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees becomes "mortal" as early as Mark 3:6 when Mark tells that the Pharisees go out and immediately conspire with the Herodians against Jesus as to how to destroy Him. In contrast, Luke narrates this as follows in Luke 6:11: "But the Pharisees and the scribes were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus". The difference is that, according to Luke, the authorities do not yet conspire to destroy Jesus. The intention to destroy Jesus is only apparent in Luke 19:47-48 after Jesus has entered Jerusalem. Thus, whereas the struggle between Jesus and the authorities becomes a struggle for life and death very early in Mark's narrative,

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it happens relatively late in Luke's narrative, i.e. after Jesus has entered Jerusalem.

The events that signal the end of Jesus' "conversation" with the religious leaders come at the end of Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, namely his entry into Jerusalem (19:28-44) and the cleansing of the temple (19:45-46). As Jesus approaches Jerusalem the multitude of his disciples begin to praise God by shouting aloud "Blessed is the Coming One, the King, in the name of the Lord...". Jesus is thus hailed openly as Israel's Messiah-King. Hearing this, some Pharisees object to it and call on Jesus to rebuke his followers. In this way the Pharisees openly repudiate Jesus as Israel's Messiah-King. The second event that signals the end of Jesus' conversation with the religious authorities follows immediately. Jesus, hailed by his disciples as Israel's Messiah-King, goes to the temple, cleanses it, and takes possession of it in preparation for his ministry there. In so doing Jesus directly challenges the right of the authorities, for whom the temple is their seat of power.

In the third phase of Jesus' public ministry (Luke 19:47-21:38), Jesus discharges his ministry of teaching in the temple. After having cleansed the temple, He now clashes with the religious authorities for the last time before his passion (20:1-40). In this confrontation Jesus' conflict with the religious authorities increases dramatically. The narrator of Luke uses various devices to point this out to the reader. First, as indicated above, he remarks for the first time that the chief priests, the scribes and the leaders of the people intend to "destroy" Jesus (Luke 19:47). Secondly, this conflict takes place in the temple - a setting that points to the intensification of the ill will of Jesus'

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opponents. Thirdly, the controversies between Jesus and the religious authorities in the temple are all extremely confrontational. In each case Jesus is challenged directly by the authorities (20:2, 20-22, 27-33). Fourthly, the issues that give rise to the controversy between Jesus and the authorities are of critical significance as it concerns the question of what it means to rule Israel: the "authority" whereby Jesus ministers in the temple, and the way in which He interprets the Mosaic law. Lastly, the atmosphere in which Jesus' conflicts with the authorities within the temple becomes one of heightened hostility (see Luke 20:19).

The passion account (Luke 22:1-24:53) constitutes the end of Luke's narrative. Because the three phases of Jesus' public ministry have ended (the outreach to Israel from Galilee, journey to Jerusalem, ministry in Jerusalem), the narrator now sets the stage for his suffering, death, resurrection and ascension.

In the opening scenes of the passion account (Luke 22:1-6) the narrator depicts the "gathering of the coalition of darkness". He indicates that "Satan entered into Judas" and that Judas therefore went to confer with the chief priests and officers of the temple police as to how to betray Jesus to them. Later, when the religious authorities arrest Jesus, He declares: "But this is your hour, and the power of darkness" (Luke 22:53). This indicates that the narrator wishes the reader to understand that Satan and the religious authorities are responsible for Jesus' death, and that those who help, namely Judas, Pilate, and the Jewish people, function merely as their pawns.

In the plot of Luke's story of conflict, the most interesting scene in the passion account is the one where the religious authorities confront the earthly Jesus for the last time. This is narrated in 23:35 where they ridicule Him as He hangs on the cross. As part of their mockery they refer to Him as the "chosen Messiah of God", mocking Him that He who possessed so much

authority during his ministry and could heal and rescue other people, cannot save Himself from death on the cross. Thus, they reject Him once again as Israel's Messiah-King and view Him as someone bereft of all authority and doomed for destruction. They are utterly convinced that they have gained victory and have been vindicated by God as the real leaders of Israel. Ironically, what they do not perceive is that Jesus has willingly given Himself to be crucified in accordance with God's plan of salvation. As a result of this, God raises Him to live again and, in the ascension, exalts Him to the right hand of power (Luke 22:69; 24:5-7). Thus, in the end, unknown to the religious authorities, the opposite happens: Jesus is vindicated by God, He is the Messiah-King of Israel, endowed with authority to rule all, victorious.

The story of Luke's Gospel has its sequel in Act. There the narrator tells how the news of Jesus' reign of salvation is carried from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. He also tells how the religious authorities, the chief antagonists in the Gospel, receive a second chance to repent of their ignorance and to receive Jesus, this time as Israel's resurrected and exalted Messiah.

## **6. The characterisation of Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke**

### **6.1 The role of Pilate in terms of the plot of the Gospel of Luke**

In the Gospel of Luke Pontius Pilate is mentioned in three parts of the Gospel, namely in 3:1; 13:1 and 23:1ff. In 3:1-3 Pilate is mentioned by the narrator when he relates the activity of John the Baptist:



## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governing Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee and Philip his brother tetrarch of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanius was tetrarch of Abilene, while Annas was high priest, and Caiaphas, the word of God came upon John the son of Zechariah, in the wilderness; and he moved into the region all around the Jordan preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

In this Chapter Pilate does not play a role, but is mentioned merely as part of situating the events. His function is indicated as "governor".

In 13:1-5 Pilate is mentioned again:

Some were present at that time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate mingled with [the blood of] their sacrifices. In response he said to them, "Do you think that these Galileans were greater sinners than all the [other] Galileans, because they suffered these things? I tell you, no! But unless you repent you will all perish in a similar manner. Or those eighteen on whom the tower fell at Siloam and killed them—do you think that they were greater debtors than all the other people living in Jerusalem? I tell you no! But unless you repent you will all perish just as they did."

As in 3:1-3 Pilate is only mentioned in passing by other characters and not characterised extensively.

In 23:1ff. Pilate appears as a character in the narrative for the first time as part of the events that form part of Jesus' passion.

Before providing my own analysis of the characterisation of Pontius Pilate in the Gospel of Luke, the way in which other scholars view this issue will be discussed briefly. Luke 13:1-5 will be discussed first.

**Green** (1997:21-23) points out that the report concerning the maltreatment of some Galatians seems to alter the direction of Jesus'

sermon, since Luke links this last interchange between Jesus and the crowds to the lengthy dialogue and discourse unit that began in 12:1ff. Green also states that the report of the demise of this group of Galileans is possibly an attempt to test Jesus, to ascertain in a public way whether he has pro-Roman or pro-revolutionary sympathies. Furthermore, Green points out that the scenario of Pilate executing the Jewish pilgrims from Galilee whilst in the act of offering sacrifices, is consistent with what is more generally known of Pilate according to Jewish sources. The progression of the argument is that judgement will overtake people, whether they are from Galilee, Jerusalem or any other origin, unless they repent.

**Nolland** (1993:716-720) points out that scholars have tried to identify the present event with other instances of Pilate's hostility towards some of the Jewish or Samaritan subjects, for example Blinzler and Fitzmyer. Nolland also points out that scholars tend to accept that the report in 13:1 ff. conforms with what is known from other sources about the harsh and insensitive nature of Pilate's rule. However, Nolland believes, that one finds in 23:1-5 that the image of cruelty and injustice formed of Pilate by the Jewish sources is greatly overdrawn.

**Bond** (1998:150-162) points out that the Galileans mentioned by the narrator in Luke 13:1-3 appear to be pilgrims from Galilee offering their sacrifices in the Jerusalem Temple. The slaughter suggests that the sacrificial victims themselves have just been killed in a barbaric way. In this pericope the intention of the scribes and chief priests was to force

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke

Jesus to take a stand on a political issue, which they would use as evidence against him before the Roman Governor.

According to **Du Plessis** (1995:447-450), what is said about the cruelty of Pilate against the Galileans is an undertone of the happenings that extend to Luke 13:9. The predominant question is whether these people were killed because of their sins. The people whom Pilate had killed came from the Northern Province for the Passion Week. However, this incident is not mentioned in any of the sources, not even by Josephus who wrote so much about Pilate. It could also be that Pilate wanted to use the temple funds to pay the water accounts. This act led to a bloody battle.

**Tannehill** (1996:215-216) states that the people who brought the report about Pilate are not a new group. i.e. they are members of the crowd. The question whether there is a connection between the degree of sin and suffering in such cases. Furthermore, the catastrophe of the Roman-Jewish war was hovering in the background. At that time, both Galileans and Jerusalemites suffered and perished in the attacks by the Roman troops (as in 13:1), and on account of the collapse of walls and buildings (as in 13:4), the destruction of Jerusalem will not leave "one stone upon another" (according to 19:44 and 21:6). Tannehill maintains that two reports of deaths in Jerusalem were developed into a twofold warning that follows a repetitive pattern.

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke

With regard to the way in which other scholars view the development of the plot in Luke 23:1ff. and the characterisation of Pontius Pilate in this part of the narrative, the following scholars should be mentioned:

**Kurz** (1993:45-72) emphasises the fact that the death of Jesus is placed in the context of a new covenant based on the previous covenantal promises to God's people. It places Jesus' death in an Eucharistic setting. For example, the crowds in Luke do not have weapons, and he does not tell of the actual arrest or the flight of the disciples. In Luke's narrative the Sanhedrin led Jesus to Pilate and who laid three political charges against Him:

- He was misleading the nation.
- He was forbidding tribute to be given to Caesar.
- He claimed that he was the Messiah.

Kurz also emphasises the fact that, in Luke's narrative, Pilate finds Jesus not guilty after questioning Him. The reference to Galilee spurs Pilate to send Jesus to Herod. Herod, in turn, sends Jesus back to Pilate. This action has a parallel in Acts, where the governor Festus brings Paul to trial before King Agrippa. Herod's implied verdict underscores Jesus' innocence - a major motif of the Lukan passion account. In Luke the narrator even numbers the times Pilate declared Jesus not guilty. Furthermore, Luke does not mention the crowning of thorns, but, instead, moves rapidly to Calvary.

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke

**Bond** (1998:150-162) emphasises the fact that Jesus is not silent in Pilate's court, according to the narrative of Luke, but answers Pilate's questions. Pilate finds Jesus innocent despite the accusations by the Jews. According to Luke's presentation, Jesus is unknown to Pilate, hence he asked if He is a Galilean. Pilate is characterised as being too weak to pass judgement, and therefore hands Jesus to Herod. Herod, in turn, sends Jesus back to Pilate. From that day Herod and Pilate became friends. Bond also emphasises the fact that, according to Luke's narrative the Passover amnesty is not mentioned. Hence Pilate summons the people together and declares Jesus innocent.

According to Bond, the narrative of Luke indicates that the judge of Jesus is not Pilate alone, but the chief Priests, the rulers and the Jewish crowd. They do not accept Pilate's judgement. They shout "away with this man". Each time Pilate tries to release Jesus, the crowds shout against him. Pilate then delivers sentence to meet their demands. Bond also points out that in Luke's narrative Barabbas' fate has nothing to do with that of Jesus. Bond concludes that Luke's major purpose in Chapter 23 is to use Pilate as the official witness to Jesus' innocence and blame the Chief Priests for Jesus' crucifixion. In this regard Bond quotes Talbert who claims that Pilate is presented as an advocate rather than a judge in the trial of Jesus. Pilate's most important function is to provide an official Roman proclamation of Jesus' innocence.

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke

In his study **Tannehill** (1986:164-199) points out that the narrative in 23:13-25 strongly emphasises that both the leaders and the people are responsible for the death of Jesus. The narrator emphasises that “they cry all together”. The participation of the people in the rejection and death of Jesus is understood as a tragic error by a group which has, in part, been presented sympathetically. Furthermore, the people are presented not only at the trial but also at the crucifixion. The narrator elicits sympathetic sorrow by the time-tested device of emphasising the suffering of women and children. The narrator also reports the responses of the centurion and the crowds to Jesus' death. The centurion is portrayed as being aware of Jesus' innocence.

With regard to the Pharisees and the Sanhedrin, Tannehill (1986:164-199) emphasises the fact that the rejection of Jesus as King voiced by the Pharisees is repeated by the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin is also portrayed as being unable to act against Jesus as He is too popular with the people. They wanted to entrap Him when they asked Him whether it is lawful to pay tribute to Caesar. They are afraid of the people; hence they plan their actions carefully. The suspense and movement of the plot is based on what the Sanhedrin plans to do. However, ultimately, both in Acts and in Luke, God's purpose is realised in the death and resurrection of Jesus. The trial and crucifixion scenes are the climax of the fateful rejection of Israel's Messiah by the Jewish authorities. Tannehill also states that the God of Acts and Luke is a God who works by irony, using human rejection to realise a saving purpose to which humans are blind.

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Tannehill also discusses the scene in which Jesus is examined by Herod. This is unique to Luke. The scene of Jesus before Herod is presented as the fulfilment of Herod's long-standing desire to see Jesus. By sending Jesus back to Pilate, he joins the other witnesses who consider Jesus as innocent. Pilate mentions Herod as witness to his findings and conclusion that Jesus had done nothing worthy of death. However, eventually, Pilate yields to pressure from the crowds and hands Jesus over to them. Tannehill states that this does not absolve Pilate of his responsibility, as he yields to mob pressure. He releases a murderer and rebel which is not an act of justice.

The above survey indicates that the plot of Luke 23ff. can be analysed in various ways. I will now present my own analysis of this section of Luke's narrative in terms of the approach outlined in Chapter 1. The diagram below represents the results of the following procedures: a) the paraphrasing of the events; b) the classification of the events; c) an indication of the kernels (*italics*); d) a short summary of each microsequence (**bold print**)

### **A. The religious leaders accuse Jesus before Pilate**

- |  |                         |
|--|-------------------------|
| 1. The assembly rises as a body.   | Physical act.           |
| 2. <i>They bring Jesus before Pilate.</i>  | Physical act.           |
| 3. They accuse Jesus: He perverts the nation, forbids people to pay taxes, and claims to be the Messiah, a king. | Verbal act: accusation. |
| 4. <i>Pilate asks Jesus whether He is the King of the Jews.</i>  | Verbal act: question.   |
| 5. <i>Jesus responds that this is the opinion of Pilate.</i>   | Verbal act: response.   |
| 6. Pilate says to the chief priests and the crowds that he finds no basis for an accusation against Jesus.       | Verbal act: acquittal.  |

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7. The chief priests insist that Jesus stirs up the people by teaching throughout all Judea, from Galilee where He began to Jerusalem. Verbal act: accusation.
8. *Pilate asks whether Jesus was a Galilean.* Verbal act: question.
9. *Pilate learns that Jesus is a Galilean.* Mental act.
10. *Pilate sends Jesus to Herod.* Verbal act: order.  
[Narrator: Herod is in Jerusalem.]

### B. Herod questions Jesus

1. When Herod sees Jesus, he is glad. Mental act.  
[Narrator: Herod has been wanting to see Jesus for a long time, because he has heard about Him and was hoping to see Him perform some sign.]
2. *Herod questions Jesus.* Verbal act: question.
3. *Jesus gives Herod no answer.* Non-verbal act.
4. The chief priests and scribes accuse Jesus vehemently. Verbal act: accusation.
5. Herod and his soldiers mock Jesus. Verbal act: mocking.
6. Herod puts an elegant robe on Jesus. Physical act.
7. *Herod sends Jesus back to Pilate.* Verbal act: order.
8. Herod and Pilate become friends. Mental act.  
[Narrator: Before Herod and Pilate had been enemies.]

### C. Pilate sentences Jesus to death

1. Pilate calls together the chief priests, the leaders and the people. Verbal act: order.
2. *Pilate tells them that he has examined Jesus and has find Him not guilty, neither Herod, and that Jesus has done nothing to deserve death.* Verbal act: information.
3. *Pilate tells them that he will have Jesus flogged.* Verbal act: information.
4. *They all shout "Away with Jesus! Release Barabbas for us".* Verbal act: demand.  
[Narrator: Barabbas has been put in prison for an insurrection that has taken place in the city, and for murder.]
5. Pilate wants to release Jesus. Mental act.
6. Pilates addresses them again. Verbal act.



## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke

7. *They keep on shouting that Jesus should be crucified.* Verbal act: demand.
8. Pilate tells them for a third time that Jesus has done no evil and that he will have Him flogged and then release Him. Verbal act: information.
9. They keep on shouting that Jesus should be crucified. Verbal act: demand.
10. *Pilate gives the verdict that their demand should be granted.* Verbal act: order.
11. Pilate releases Barabbas. Verbal act: order.
12. Pilate hands Jesus over. Verbal act: order.

### D. The soldiers lead Jesus off to be crucified

1. *The soldiers lead Jesus away.* Physical act.
2. The soldiers seize Simon of Cyrene, lay the cross on him and make him carry it behind Jesus. Physical act.
3. A great number of people follow Jesus. Physical act.
4. Some women wail for Jesus. Verbal act: mourning.
5. Jesus tells them to weep for themselves and their children  
Instead, for days are coming when people will say 'Bless are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and the breasts that never nursed.' Then they will begin to say to the mountains, 'Fall on us'; and to the hills, 'Cover us.'" Verbal act: prophesy.
6. Jesus asks: "For if they do this when the wood is green, what will happen when it is dry?" Verbal act: question.

### E. The soldiers crucify Jesus

1. The soldiers lead two criminals to be crucified. Physical act.
2. *The soldiers crucify Jesus together with the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.* Physical act.
3. Jesus asks the Father to forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing. Verbal act: request.
4. The soldiers cast lots to divide Jesus' clothing. Physical act.
5. The people stand and watch. Physical act.

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke

### **F. The religious leaders, the soldiers and one of the criminals mock Jesus**

1. The leaders scoff at Jesus and says that He saved others, and should save Himself if He is the Messiah of God, the Chosen One. Verbal act: mocking.
2. The soldiers mock Jesus. Verbal act: mocking.
3. The soldiers offer Jesus sour wine. Physical act.
4. The soldiers tell Jesus that He should save Himself if He is the King of the Jews. Verbal act: mocking.  
[Narrator: There is an inscription over Jesus: "This is the King of the Jews".]
5. One of the criminals keeps on mocking Jesus Verbal act: mocking

### **G. Jesus promises one of the criminals that he will be with Him in paradise on that day**

1. The other criminal rebukes the first criminal: "Do you not fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed have been condemned justly, for we are getting what we deserve for our deeds, but this man has done nothing wrong". Verbal act: rebuke.
2. He asks Jesus to remember him when He comes into his Kingdom. Verbal act: request.
3. Jesus promises him that he will be with Him in Paradise that day. Verbal act: promise.

### **H. The curtain in the temple is torn in two**

[Narrator: It is about noon.]

1. Darkness comes upon the whole land until three in the afternoon. Physical act.
2. The curtain of the temple is torn in two. Physical act.

### **I. Jesus dies**

1. *Jesus cries out with a loud voice: "Father into your hands I*

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke

- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| <i>commend my Spirit".</i>   | Verbal act: prayer.      |
| 2. <i>Jesus breathes his last.</i>   | Physical act.            |
| 3. The centurion sees what happens.  | Physical act.            |
| 4. The centurion praises God.  | Verbal act: praise.      |
| 5. The centurion says Jesus was innocent.  | Verbal act: information. |
| 6. The crowds see what is happening.   | Physical act.            |
| 7. The crowds return home.   | Physical act.            |
| 8. The crowds beat their breast.   | Physical act.            |
| 9. Jesus' acquaintances (including the women from Galilee)<br>stand at a distance, see the events. | Physical act.            |

### J. Jesus is buried

[The narrator provides background information: Joseph is a good and righteous man, though he is a member of the council. He did not agree to their plan and action. He comes from the Jewish town of Arimathea, and is waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God.]

- |  |                      |
|--|----------------------|
| 1. <i>Joseph goes to Pilate.</i>                     | Physical act.        |
| 2. <i>Joseph asks Pilate for the body of Jesus.</i>  | Verbal act: request. |
| 3. Joseph takes Jesus' body down.                    | Physical act.        |
| 4. Joseph wraps Jesus' body in a linen cloth.        | Physical act.        |
| 5. <i>Joseph lays Jesus' body in rock-hewn tomb.</i> | Physical act.        |

[Narrator: It is a new tomb where no one has ever been laid.]

[Narrator: It is the day of preparation, and the Sabbath is beginning.]

- |  |               |
|--|---------------|
| 6. The women who have come with Jesus from Galilee<br>follow Joseph. | Physical act. |
| 7. They see the tomb and how Jesus' body is laid.                    | Physical act. |
| 8. They return home and prepare spices and ointments.                | Physical act. |

The main group of events in this section may thus be summarised as follows:

- A. The religious leaders accuse Jesus before Pilate.
- B. Herod questions Jesus.

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke

- C. Pilate sentences Jesus to death.
- D. The soldiers lead Jesus off to be crucified.
- E. The soldiers crucify Jesus.
- F. The religious leaders, the soldiers and one of the criminals mock Jesus.
- G. Jesus promises one of the criminals that he will be with Him in paradise on that day.
- H. The curtain in the temple is torn in two.
- I. Jesus dies.
- J. Jesus is buried.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the above outline:

1. With regard to the principles used for combining events into microsequences, the following is important:
  - 1.1 Time: The microsequences are narrated by the narrator strictly in chronological order. In fact, there is not even a single event that is narrated out of order. There are two examples where events that are narrated point to something that will happen in the future, namely D5 where Jesus prophesies that a day will come when people will say "Blessed are the barren" and G3 where Jesus promises one of the other criminals crucified with Him that he will be with Him in Paradise that day.
  - 1.2 Causality: A second principle used in combining microsequences to form the plot is causality, in the sense that each microsequence or sometimes a single event in a microsequence leads to the following microsequence. Examples: In A9 Pilate learns that Jesus is a Galilean and this leads to the next microsequence ("Herod questions Jesus"); in C9 the religious

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke

leaders and the crowd keep on shouting that Jesus should be crucified and this leads to the ensuing microsequences.

- 1.3 Space: This principle also plays an important role in combining the events. The way in which this principle is used can be summarised as follows: movement from the assembly to Pilate to Herod to Pilate to the place of crucifixion to the grave.

2. If one focuses merely on the plot as summarised above, it should be described as a process of deterioration, as the events seem to develop in a continuous negative direction. This is obvious if one concentrates on the kernels (indicated in italics above). However, as the reader has been informed in the previous sections of the narrative of what would happen, s/he will be able to interpret the events not as strictly negative. Furthermore, the narrator includes events in this part of the plot, thus providing a broader framework. The most important of these are D5 and G3. In D5 Jesus tells the women not to weep form Him, but for themselves. This points to future events beyond those in this part of the plot, indicating that this should not be regarded as a mere process of deterioration. Furthermore, in G2 Jesus is portrayed as promising to the criminal that he will be with Jesus in Paradise that same day. This introduces a totally different perspective in the narrative, namely that Jesus is on his way to God.

3. With regard to the issue that is the theme of this study, the role of Pontius Pilate in the development of events should be highlighted. In general, the underlying logic of the plot explains that he is not the one who determines the flow of events; rather (as was the case

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke

in the narratives in Mark and Matthew), he reacts to events as they unfold. As in Mark and Matthew, he is unwillingly taking part in a series of events. However, unlike the narratives in Mark and Matthew, he is portrayed as even more desperate in his attempts to free Jesus. One could even say that, in a sense, he becomes an "advocate" for Jesus. Take note of the following:

- 3.1 The beginning of the series of events is initiated by the religious leaders (A1) who rise as a body and bring Jesus before Pilate. They are portrayed throughout as forcing Pilate to do what they want him to do.
- 3.2 Pilate's immediate reaction to the accusations is to tell the religious leaders directly that he finds no basis for an accusation against Jesus (A6).
- 3.3 Pilate's actions in A8-A10 may be viewed as an attempt to change the flow of events drastically - primarily as an attempt to limit his own involvement in the events.
- 3.4 If this does not work, he again tells the religious leaders that he finds no fault in Jesus (C2). In this case, he also refers to the decision of Herod.
- 3.5 He then again tries to steer events in another direction by telling them that he will have Jesus flogged (C3). If this does not work, he again tells them that Jesus is not guilty (C8). It is significant that the narrator specifically draws the reader's attention to the fact that Pilate thereby declares Jesus' innocence for a third time.
- 3.6 However, in the end, Pilate is portrayed as having no choice. The way in which the narrator portrays the events, indicates

that the people are to be blamed for this. C10: Pilate gives the verdict that their demand should be granted.

## 6.2 The characterisation of Pontius Pilate in Luke 23

As pointed out earlier, Pilate is mentioned in Chapters 3 and 13. In Chapter 3 he is identified as "Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea", thereby stressing his official capacity. In Chapter 13:1 he is merely identified as Pilate, possibly because the narrator knows that this character is known to the readers. In 13:1 Pilate is also characterised indirectly by some of the other characters in the narrative:

At that very time there were some present who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

The trait that is thus revealed may be summarised as *cruelty*. It is important to note that, although this trait is presented to the implied reader by means of other characters, it is not contradicted in any way by any of the other characters (including Jesus to whom the question is addressed) or the narrator. Therefore the implied reader has no reason to doubt this characterisation of Pilate.

In Chapter 20:20 Pilate is also mentioned indirectly. Although he is not named, he is referred to indirectly:

So they watched Him and sent spies who pretended to be honest, in order to trap Him by what He said, so as to hand Him over to the jurisdiction and authority of the governor.

In this verse the narrator gives the implied reader a view into the hearts and minds of the scribes and chief priests. With regard to the characterisation of Pilate, this emphasises the trait of *authority*. This may be viewed as a further development of the identification of Pilate as governor earlier in the narrative.

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke

Thus, when Pilate is mentioned again at the beginning of Chapter 23, the implied reader has associated the following paradigm of traits with Pontius Pilate:

- Identification:
  - Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea
  - Pilate
- Authority
- Cruelty

In Chapter 23 this paradigm of traits is expanded and, as will be apparent, the notion of Pilate's cruelty no longer plays a role.

In verse 1 Pilate is once again identified by the narrator merely as "Pilate", since he has been introduced to the implied reader previously. In verse 2 the narrator describes the vehement way in which the religious leaders accuse Jesus. The charge against Jesus is primarily political: "We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is the Messiah, a king." In verse 3 Pilate is portrayed as interrogating Jesus himself: "Are you the king of the Jews?" Jesus answers: "You say so." This response by Jesus has caused considerable debate among scholars, but the best way to understand this is to interpret "you" as emphatic and to seek a reason for such emphasis in the context. Within the context the best way to interpret it seems to be a qualified response, meaning something such as "This is your way of putting it" (Tannehill 1996:135; Brown 1994:741). From the next verse it is obvious that Pilate understands this as a denial, because he says to the chief priests and the crowds: "I find no basis for an accusation against this man." With regard to the characterisation of Pilate two aspects are very important:



## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke

- First, it is significant that Pilate is portrayed as almost immediately realising that Jesus is innocent. He only asks a single question and then reaches the conclusion that Jesus is innocent. The implied reader who has followed the narrative up to this point will of course know that Jesus is innocent, but s/he will also realise that Pilate must have been exceptionally shrewd to realise almost immediately that Jesus is innocent - in particular, as people accused of treason were regarded as potentially extremely dangerous for the Roman government. The trait that is conveyed to the implied reader in this way can be summarised as *shrewdness*.

- Secondly, it is clear at this stage that the dominant notion which the implied reader wishes to convey through the character of Pilate at this stage is that he becomes a *witness to the innocence of Jesus*. The way in which this trait is related to the two traits already revealed to the implied reader is also very important. (See the summary earlier in this section.) Pilate has already been characterised in terms of his authority. Chapter 23 now indicates that Pilate, the highest judicial authority in Palestine, found Jesus innocent. On the other hand, Pilate has also been characterised as "cruel". In Chapter 23 this "cruel" person now finds Jesus innocent. The implied reader may thus safely deduce: if a person who was prone to be cruel to the people under his authority found Jesus innocent, Jesus must really have been innocent. This may be summarised as follows:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identification:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea</li><li>- Pilate</li></ul></li><li>• Authority</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Witness to Jesus' innocence</li></ul> |
|---|---|

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke

- |              |                               |
|--------------|-------------------------------|
| • Cruelty    | • Witness to Jesus' innocence |
| • Shrewdness | • Witness to Jesus' innocence |

In verses 6-7 the narrator reports that Pilate realises that Jesus is a Galilean and then uses it as an excuse for sending Jesus to Herod. In terms of the characterisation of Pilate, this reveals two traits. One trait was revealed earlier in the section, but is now stressed again, namely *shrewdness*. This trait is revealed by the fact that Pilate is portrayed as immediately realising that the fact that Jesus is a Galilean might be a way of getting out of the situation. However, Pilate's actions also reveal another trait, namely that of *weakness*. The fact that he wishes to get out of the situation despite the fact that he knows that Jesus is innocent indicates that he is too weak to handle the situation. In Chapter 13 Pilate was portrayed as not hesitating to shed the blood of other Galileans. The reader will thus realise that Pilate only uses this as a pretext to get out of a difficult situation.

Verse 12 reveals another trait of Pilate, namely that he was an *enemy of Herod*. Together with Pilate's cruelty revealed in Chapter 13, this gives the implied reader the impression that Pilate is not a kind person. In this instance, however, there is a development in the characterisation of both Pilate and Herod who have become friends, ironically as a result of Jesus Christ!

In verses 13ff. Pilate is portrayed as sentencing Jesus to death. In this part of the narrative, the narrator does not introduce new traits, but emphasises two of the traits revealed earlier.

- The most important one is the fact that Pilate again witnesses to Jesus' innocence. He is portrayed as saying: "You brought me this man as one who was perverting the people; and here I have examined him in your presence and have not found this man guilty of any of your charges against him. Neither has Herod, for he sent him back to us.

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke

Indeed, he has done nothing to deserve death. I will therefore have him flogged and release him." When they respond by shouting "Away with Jesus", the narrator tells the implied reader explicitly that Pilate wants to release Jesus. The narrator also tells the reader that Pilate tells them *for a third time*: "Why, what evil has he done? I have found in him no ground for the sentence of death; I will therefore have him flogged and then release him." This is a very graphic representation of the trait *witness to Jesus' innocence*.

- However, this trait ultimately yields way to the trait of *weakness*. The narrator portrays Pilate as giving in to the demands: "So Pilate gave his verdict that their demand should be granted." Thus he is portrayed as succumbing to the pressure of the crowd. In verse 25 his weakness is reiterated: "...and he handed Jesus over as they wished."

Pilate is mentioned for the last time in verse 24, but only briefly. He does not act himself, but is merely mentioned: "This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus." The trait revealed here is again that of *authority*.

The final paradigm of traits associated with Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke may thus be summarised as follows:

- |                                       |   |            |
|---------------------------------------|---|------------|
| • Identification:                     |   |            |
| - Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea   |   |            |
| - Pilate                              |   |            |
| • Authority                           | • <i><b>Witness to Jesus' Innocence</b></i> | • Weakness |
| • Cruelty                             | • <i><b>Witness to Jesus' Innocence</b></i> | • Weakness |
| • Shrewdness                          | • <i><b>Witness to Jesus' Innocence</b></i> | • Weakness |
| • Enemy of Herod >>>> Friend of Herod |   |            |

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke

The most important aspect in Luke's characterisation of Pontius Pilate is the frequent emphasis on the fact that he is a witness to Jesus' innocence. As indicated earlier, the traits of authority, cruelty and shrewdness are used to support this trait. However, this trait is ultimately replaced by that of Pilate's weakness. However, the frequent emphasis on the fact that Pilate is a witness to Jesus' innocence implies that to the implied reader this impression of Pilate will dominate Pilate's portrayal.

The last aspect to be considered with regard to the characterisation of Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke is the way in which he could be classified in terms of the various approaches outlined in Chapter 1:

In terms of the approach of *E. M. Forster*, Pilate should be classified as somewhere between a "flat" and a "round" character, since the number of character traits associated with him are relatively large, yet not sufficient to classify him as a "round character" in the full sense of the word.

In terms of *Harvey's* approach, Jesus Christ, the high priests and Pontius Pilate should be classified as *protagonists*. The crowd, Herod and Barabbas can be identified as *ficelles*. Simon of Cyrene, the soldiers, the centurion and Joseph of Arimathea can be identified as background characters.

In terms of *Ewen's* approach, the characterisation of Pontius Pilate in Luke could be described as follows:

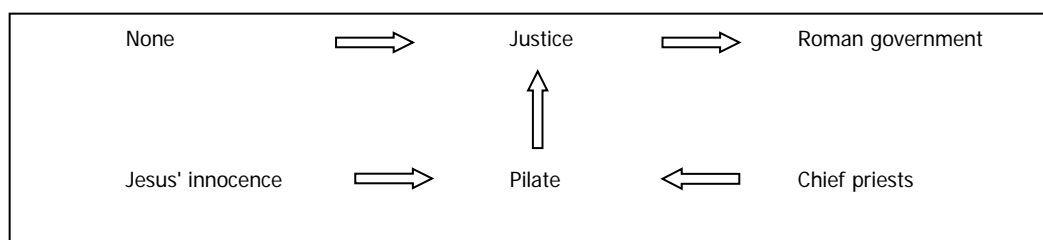
- Complexity: A relatively large number.
- Development: Only in a limited sense, since he changed from being an enemy of Herod to being a friend of Herod. However, this was not due to himself, but ironically to Jesus.

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke

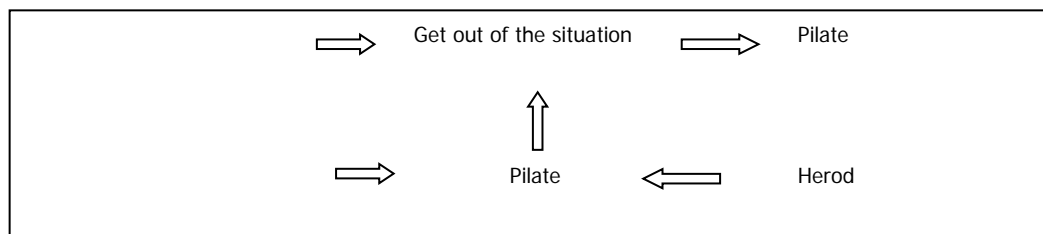
- Penetration into inner life: Only once (verse 20: Pilate wanted to release Jesus).

If *Greimas'* actantial system is used one can organise the underlying actants in several ways in terms of the object (that is, the goal or destination of action) of the various actants.

Viewing the actantial system from the perspective of Pilate, one can draw the following two systems:

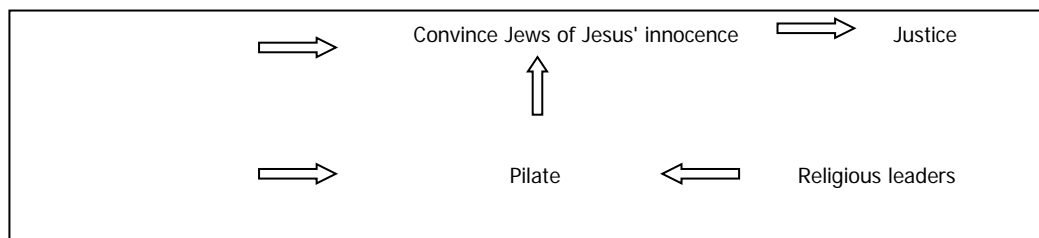


This reflects the situation at the outset of the plot in Luke 23: as Roman governor Pilate attempts to do justice (*object*) as the Roman government (*receiver*) would want it to be done. Jesus' innocence functions as *helper*, but the chief priests act as the *opponent*. As the plot unfolds, the situation changes as follows:



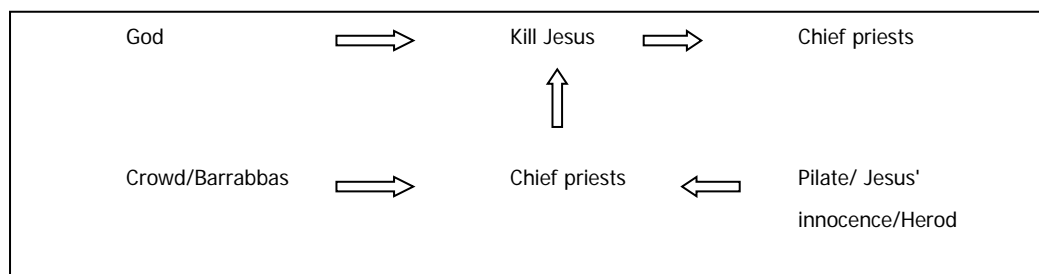
## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke

This reflects the situation after Pilate has realised that Jesus is a Galilean. He (*sender* and *receiver*) tries to get out of situation (*object*) by sending Jesus to Herod. However, this does not work, since Herod eventually functions as the opponent. Then the underlying logic changes as follows:



Pilate (*sender*) tries to convince the religious leaders and the crowd of Jesus' innocence (*object*) in order that justice may be done (*receiver*), but his three attempts fail, because the religious leaders (*opponents*) effectively succeed in preventing him from reaching this object.

Viewing the underlying actants from the perspective of the chief priests, the actantial system can be drawn as follows:



## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke

This system indicates the system from the point of view of the chief priests: they function as the *subject* with the *object* of having Jesus killed. The *receiver* of this process is the chief priests as they want Jesus to be killed in order to safeguard their own position. The crowd and Barabbas function as the *helper* since they are used by the chief priests in order to achieve their object. Pilate, Jesus' innocence and Herod function as the *opponent* in this actantial system, since they pose a threat to the chief priest as they try to achieve their object. The chief priests ultimately succeed in achieving their object. However, as the narrator has revealed to the reader, this is in fact not due to their own actions, but to the fact that this is part of God's plan. Therefore God is identified as the sender in this actantial scheme.

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# CHAPTER 6

## THE CHARACTERISATION OF PONTIUS PILATE IN THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JOHN

### 1. Author

Du Rand (1991:75) summarises the options with regard to the question of the authorship of the Fourth Gospel aptly as follows:

- *John, the son of Zebedee, as author and writer.* This option is favoured by the tradition. Ireneus (180 A.D.) declared in his *Adversus Haereses* III that John, the disciple of the Lord who rested on his breast, also wrote the gospel during his stay in Ephesus. The *Canon of Muratori* (around 200 A.D.), the Latin anti-Marcionitic Prologue (around 200 A.D.) and Clement of Alexandria (quoted by Euseb) also name John as author. Ireneus' testimony is based on what he heard as a child when the issue was discussed by John and Policarp. This tradition cannot be accepted on face value due to the fact that it may be apologetic as a result of the problems with Montanus.



## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to John

- *John the Elder*: Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, mentions two lists of names he received from the elders, according to which John the apostle had already died, but John the Elder was still alive in Ephesus at the time when Papias wrote. According to Dyonisius of Alexandria (around 265 A.D.) there were two graves in Ephesus in which "John" was buried. Perhaps one was the grave of John the apostle and the other that of John the Elder.

- *John Mark* is sometimes associated with the "other John" who was believed to live in Ephesus (see 2 Timothy 4:11). Although early church tradition confused John Mark with John, son of Zebedee, the authorship of the Fourth Gospel has never been linked successfully with John Mark.

- *John, the son of Zebedee, as creator of the Johannine tradition*: This would mean that the source of the Fourth Gospel is linked to an apostle, an eyewitness. Someone else later wrote down the eyewitness reports, but the Gospel was linked to John, because he was the source of the tradition.

Du Rand (1991:75) points out that the authorship of the Fourth Gospel is linked to the question of the identity of the Beloved Disciple, that mysterious anonymous figure who is mentioned several times in the Gospel. Scholars have identified him as Lazarus, John Mark, and John the Son of Zebedee. However, as Du Rand (1991:77ff.) correctly points out, this cannot be

accepted (see also Brown 1997:369 ff. in this regard) due to the following reasons:

1. It is hypothetical to deduce from the Synoptic Gospels that the Beloved Disciple was one of the twelve.
2. The identification "Beloved Disciple" is only found from John 13 onwards. Why not before?
3. If John, the Son of Zebedee, were the author of the Fourth Gospel, why are so many events found in the Synoptic Gospels not mentioned in the Fourth Gospel?
4. It is not impossible that John, the Son of Zebedee, died the death of a martyr rather early in the history of the church.

Therefore it must be assumed together with scholars such as Du Rand (1991:75ff.) and Brown (1997:369ff.) that the author of the Fourth Gospel cannot be linked to John the Son of Zebedee. However, the Gospel is based on the eyewitness account of a follower of Jesus. Although he was not one of the twelve disciples and only played a minor role during Jesus' ministry, he later played a significant role in a specific community.

## **2. Date of writing**

Most Johannine scholars accept that the Fourth Gospel originated within a group of congregations, the so-called Johannine community. The history of this community may be reconstructed as follows (see Brown 1997:375-375):

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- During the first phase, a phase preceding the writing of the Gospel, (up to 70, 80 A.D.) a group of Jews formed a Christian congregation somewhere in Palestine. They accepted Jesus as the Davidic Messiah, as the fulfiller of the prophecies of the Old Testament. Among them was the Beloved Disciple who had been one of Jesus' followers during his ministry. This congregation probably also included Jews with an anti-temple bias and Samaritans who understood Jesus primarily against a Mosaic background. During this phase, the Johannine Christians were probably also expelled from the Jewish synagogues because the Jews did not like the idea that the Johannine Christians confessed Jesus as the Son of God, equal to God.
- During the second phase (85-95 A.D.) the evangelist wrote the basic Gospel. At this time the community possibly moved to the Diaspora (probably Ephesus). This would explain the Hellenistic atmosphere of the Gospel and the need to explain Aramaic names.
- During the third phase (95-100 A.D.) the three Johannine Epistles were written. The community had split into two: some adhered to the views represented by the author of the three Johannine Letters, but many seceded; they had exaggerated Jesus' divinity to such an extent that they did not deem his human career important.

### **3. Occasion for writing**

Scholars explain the purpose of the Fourth Gospel in various ways. Du Rand (1991:49ff.) provides an extensive list of all the possible options suggested by scholars thus far. These are as follows:

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1. According to Clement of Alexandria, John had written a spiritual Gospel - a more mature theological interpretation than the other three Gospels.
2. Some scholars maintain that it was written for use in the liturgy of the church. Du Rand mentions Guilding in this regard, according to whom the Gospel had been written to indicate that Jesus is the fulfilment of the Jewish feasts, for example to the Christians who were banned from the synagogues.
3. Some scholars (for example Cullman) maintain that the Gospel was written to draw greater attention to the teaching about sacraments, namely baptism and communion. For example, the symbolism of communion and baptism is mentioned in various ways: the changing of water into wine (2:1-11) and the multiplication of the loaves (6:1-15, 22-40).
4. Some scholars maintain that the Gospel according to John was written to convey a message of realised eschatology instead of a sudden or future eschatology and that it stressed that the eschatology had already dawned in Christ.
5. Scholars such as Meeks associate John's Gospel with a Samaritan purpose and environment. According to them, the so-called Johannine community comprised people recruited from among the Samaritans. Hence, they believe that the aim of the writing of the Gospel was to convince the Samaritans that Jesus was the true Messiah.
6. One of the aspects noted by nearly all scholars who study the Gospel is the fact that the writer criticises Judaism. Jesus is presented as greater than the Jewish institutions, such as ritual washings, the temple and the

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worship in Jerusalem (2-4). Furthermore, the Jews are portrayed as constantly rejecting Jesus.

7. Some scholars claim that the Gospel according to John was written to refute the claims of the adherents of John the Baptist. Bultmann, for example, thought that the Prologue (1:1-18) was originally a hymn in honour of John the Baptist. John the Baptist is merely portrayed as a witness - to some this is evidence that the Gospel was written against adherents of John the Baptist.
8. However, the best answer to the question as to the purpose of the Fourth Gospel is to view it as an encouragement to Christians - both Jewish and Gentile Christians. This is the best way to interpret John 20:31: "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name". Thus the Gospel is not exclusively Jewish, but universally Christian. Its purpose was that the Christians as first historical readers should be encouraged to continue to believe that Jesus, the Messiah, is the Son of God. Hence, the Fourth Gospel was not primarily a missionary writing intended to bring people to faith, but the intention was to strengthen the faith of people who already believed in Christ. While the Christians had to be strengthened in their struggle in the synagogue, the secret Christians had to be convinced to confess openly that Jesus is the Messiah. Furthermore, the Samaritans, the Gentiles and the followers of John the Baptist had to be persuaded to accept Jesus as the only Messiah.

#### **4. The narrator in the Gospel according to John**

For an understanding of the way in which the narrator in the Gospel according to John functions, the following aspects are the most important:

- The implied author of John uses the narrator as his voice in order to communicate the Jesus events to the implied reader. He does not identify himself or give the name of the author. Du Rand (1991:88) states that the question is not so much who he is, but what he does according to the text. He/she lays down perspectives of faith by means of which the reader has to orientate himself/herself towards Jesus who is being narrated. Du Rand also points out that, from a historical perspective, the voice of the author could possibly be that of the evangelist who projects the perspective of the Beloved Disciple in the story. The idea of the Beloved Disciple supports the authority of the tradition of the implied author whom the evangelist created literarily and simultaneously to be the intended reader.
- In terms of the temporal link between narration and story, the act of narration in the Gospel according to John can be described as ulterior narration, implying that the act of narration takes place after the events narrated took place (Tolmie 1995:197).
- With regard to the narrative level on which the narrator functions and the extent of participation of the narrator in the story that is narrated, the narrator in the Gospel according to John could be classified as extradiegetic and heterodiegetic. "Extradiegetic" means that the narrator always functions on a higher level than the rest of the narrative and never becomes a character within the narrative itself.

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"Heterodiegetic" refers to the fact that the narrator did not participate in any of the events narrated in the narrative (Tolmie 1995:198).

- The narrator in the Gospel according to John also has an omnipresent narrator's perspective with regard to locality and space. For example, the narrator is present when Jesus has a conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well (Chapter 4). The narrator is also present when the woman relates the story to the Samaritans in the village (4:28-29). The narrator is also there when the disciples converse at the well 4:31ff. Du Rand (1991:90) also maintains that the narrator is part of a group or community who does not necessarily always form part of the twelve disciples (1:14, 16; 21:24-25)

- In terms of perceptibility, the narrator may be classified as being highly perceptible within the narrative - even "obtrusive" (Culpepper 1983:17). For example:

In John 19:35-42 the presence of the narrator is indicated by means of the following techniques:

Describing the setting : 1:35;

Summarising the events: 1:37-38a, 1:39b;

Translating words used by the characters which may be unknown to the implied reader: 1:38c; 1:41b and 1:41c.

However, it should also be pointed out that in the discourse material the narrator's presence becomes less prominent.

- Lastly, it is very important to take note of the ideological perspective of the narrator. This is summarised in 20:31: "But these are written

that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name". This ideological perspective is aimed at strengthening faith in the identity of Jesus, the pre-existent Logos and the glorified Son of the Father. The effect of this perspective implies life or death. If one has faith in the origin and destiny of Jesus, it implies life. If one rejects Jesus, it implies death (Du Rand 1991:92ff.).

## **5. A brief overview of the narrative of the Gospel according to John**

Before considering the sections in which Pontius Pilate plays a role in the Gospel according to John a brief overview of the narrative is provided as background for the rest of the analysis. (This overview is based on the more detailed works of Culpepper 1983:90–98 and Stibbe 1992:96–20).

### **5.1 John 1: Jesus' origins**

The Prologue provides the implied reader with an initial, reliable introduction to the identity of Jesus: He is the Word, the true light, the Word that became flesh and the only Son from the Father. Verses 9-13 serve as a brief summary of the plot: the true light comes into the world, but the world does not recognise it, but those who believe in his name are empowered to become children of God.

The rest of Chapter 1 confirms the information given to the implied reader in the Prologue. It contains three recognition scenes: John the Baptist, Andrew and Nathanael. The narrative begins with the question posed to John



the Baptist: "Who are you?" (1:19). In the verses that follow the Baptist claims that Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. The second recognition scene begins when the Baptist points to Jesus and again announces Him as the Lamb of God. It culminates with one of the two disciples saying "We have found the Messiah" (1:41). In the third recognition scene Philip reports to Nathanael: "We have found Him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote" (1:45). Nathanael at first doubts whether this is true, because he does not believe that anything good can come from Nazareth. However, in the end he confesses: "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel" (1:49).

## **5.2 John 2-12: Jesus' public ministry**

A first journey cycle begins in John 1:43 where Jesus goes to Galilee. In John 2 the narrator tells the first of Jesus' signs when Jesus changes water into wine. The narrator explains to the implied reader that the sign revealed Jesus' glory, which led to the disciples believing in Him (2:11). The sign thus confirms the truths revealed in the Prologue.

The first journey to Jerusalem is narrated in 2:13, during the first Passover mentioned in the narrative. The first challenge to Jesus' activity occurs in Jerusalem when Jesus confronts the money changers and the authorities fail to recognise Him. The narrator also reports that many others believed in Jesus, but that He did not "entrust" Himself to them.

In Chapter 3 the meeting between Jesus and Nicodemus is narrated. Nicodemus represents those who believe because of the signs but who do not recognise Jesus as the Revealer sent by God. Thus, the conversation with Nicodemus represents an instance of failed recognition of Jesus. However, the narrator uses this to lead the implied reader deeper into the mystery of faith

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in Jesus Christ. The rest of Chapter 3 completes John's testimony about Jesus and focuses on issues such as Jesus as the only Son, the light, the bridegroom and the One from above. It thus complements what was said about Jesus in the Prologue.

The second journey to Galilee initiates Jesus' conversation with the Samaritan woman (4:1-42) as well as the second sign, the healing of the official's son (4:46-54). The conversation with the Samaritan woman also functions as a recognition scene. In the course of the conversation the woman moves step by step - from "you are a Jew" (4:9) to "He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" (4:29). Eventually the other Samaritans confess Jesus as the Saviour of the world (4:42). In the narration of the second sign the narrator emphasises the recognition that takes place, as he explicitly mentions the fact that the father realised that the son was cured at the same time as Jesus had told him "Your son will live" (4:53). This led to their belief in Jesus.

Jesus' second journey to Jerusalem (John 5) is the setting for the first real opposition to Jesus. The healing of the man at the pool of Bethesda does not lead to any recognition of Jesus' true identity. Instead, opposition to Jesus increases because He healed the man on a Sabbath, and, furthermore He equated Himself to God.

The third and final journey to Jerusalem occurs during the second Passover in the narrative. At the beginning of John 6 the crowds are depicted as following Jesus because of the signs He performed. When they witness the multiplication of the loaves they identify Jesus as the "prophet who is to come into the world" (6:14). However, the narrator indicates that this is only a partial recognition of Jesus' identity, because they wish to make Him king by

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force. The epiphany on the sea and the dialogue that follows further clarify Jesus' identity. However, the reaction is mostly negative: the crowds "murmur", and most of the disciples leave Him so that Jesus is left only with the Twelve.

In Chapter 7 the Jews are portrayed as trying to kill Jesus. In Jerusalem the people debate about his identity and become divided. In Chapter 8 the opposition against Jesus continues. The Jews claim that Abraham is their father, but Jesus insists that Satan is their father. Thus, another failed recognition scene.

In Chapter 9 the narrator emphasises the fact that Jesus is the light of the world by narrating how Jesus gave physical and spiritual sight to a man born blind. Eventually Jesus challenges the man to believe in the Son of Man and he accepts Jesus' self-identification. However, the Pharisees remain blind because they fail to realise who Jesus really is.

In Chapter 10 Jesus explains his role and identity further by means of the allegory of the shepherd and the sheep. His opponents are characterised as hirelings, robbers and wolves. In contrast, Jesus is depicted as the Good Shepherd, calling his sheep by name and willing to lay down his life for the sheep. The Jews are divided even further: some oppose Him whereas others believe that his works cannot be that of someone possessed by a demon. However, the scene is one of failed recognition of Jesus, since the Jews try to arrest Him.

In Chapters 11 and 12 the mighty works of Jesus are brought to a climax and the scene is set for his death. At the request of Mary and Martha Jesus returns to Bethany in Judea and raises Lazarus from the grave. This part of the narrative becomes another successful recognition scene: Jesus

claims: "I am the resurrection and the life" and Martha answers: "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the One coming into the world." The raising of Lazarus led many Jews to believe in Jesus, but some go to the Pharisees and report what Jesus had done. The raising of Lazarus becomes the impetus for the death of Jesus.

Jesus withdraws to Ephraim (11:54) and the Jews begin to search for Him in order to arrest Him. When Jesus enters Jerusalem, the crowd calls Him "King of Israel" (12:13). After Mary has anointed Jesus, He speaks of being lifted up - an indication of his impending death. When the Greeks come to see Jesus, He interprets it as a sign that his hour has come.

### **5.3 John 13-17: The Footwashing and the Farewell Discourses**

As Tolmie (1995:181ff.) has shown, the narrator primarily uses the Footwashing and the Farewell Discourses to focus the attention of the implied reader on the importance of discipleship. Situated on the Thursday evening before the crucifixion the Footwashing and the Farewell Discourses are used to highlight the following five aspects of discipleship:

- The radical difference between being a disciple of Jesus and being part of the world.
- The vital importance of Jesus for constituting discipleship: without being in Jesus it is impossible to be a disciple of Jesus and to know the Father.

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- The fact that disciples are expected to live in a certain way, for example they have to remain in the love of Jesus, bear fruit, keep the love commandment, be holy, and be united.
- The hardships that disciples can expect: anyone who becomes a true follower of Jesus should expect to be rejected in the same way that Jesus has been rejected by the world - even to the point of death.
- The benefits associated with discipleship: if one becomes a disciple of Jesus, one is drawn into the unity between Father and Son, receives the Holy Spirit, has understanding of the spiritual nature of things, receives joy as well as the prospect of final glorification and being with Jesus.

### **5.4 John 18-21: Jesus' death and resurrection**

The revelatory motif continues to dominate in the narrator's account of the arrest, trial and death of Jesus. The soldiers who come to arrest Jesus do not know him. If Jesus identifies Himself with "I am" they all fall on the ground - twice (18:4-6). Then Peter denies Jesus three times, saying "I am not".

Jesus is brought to Pilate as an "evildoer" (18:30). In the seven scenes of the Johannine trial narrative, Pilate pronounces Jesus innocent three times and presents Him to the crowd wearing a crown of thorns and a purple robe. At the end Pilate says "Here is your King!" (19:14) and writes an inscription that may not be changed: "The King of the Jews" (19:19-22). The trial and the inscription represent another failed recognition scene in the narrative.

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The narrator also tells the events surrounding Jesus' death in such a way that Jesus' identity as the Word that came from God is apparent. Jesus is also portrayed as providing care for his mother and the Beloved Disciple, and Scripture is fulfilled when the soldiers cast lots for Jesus' clothes, and when his side is pierced.

In the last two chapters of the Gospel the narrator tells four recognition scenes: The Beloved Disciple (20:3-10), Mary Magdalene (20:1-2, 11-18); Thomas (20:24-29) and the Beloved Disciple (21:1-14). In the first recognition scene the narrator tells the implied reader how the Beloved Disciple "saw and believed" (20:8) - an implication that the Beloved Disciple believed that Jesus was raised from the dead. In the second recognition scene Mary Magdalene only recognises Jesus when he calls her by name. In the third recognition scene Thomas is portrayed as recognising Jesus, confessing "My Lord and my God". This confession affirms Jesus' Lordship and divinity. The story of the great catch of fish (Chapter 21) is also constructed as a recognition scene. The disciples have returned to fishing but catch nothing. When they follow Jesus' instructions and get a great catch of fish, the Beloved Disciple tells Peter: "It is the Lord!" (21:7). Eventually Peter is appointed as Shepherd who, like Jesus, will lay down his life, and the Beloved Disciple bears witness to the things written in the Gospel (21:24).

## 6. The characterisation of Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to John

### 6.1 The role of Pilate in terms of the plot of John 18-19

Scholars describe the plot of John 18-19 in various ways. Before providing my own analysis of the plot of these two chapters in the Gospel according to John some of the ways in which other scholars outline its plot will be indicated first:

- **De Klerk and Schnell** (1987:51) emphasise the fact that the plot of the Gospel according to John is a "plot of revelation", focusing on the identity of Jesus. This is also true of Chapters 19-20. According to them, the events in these two Chapters pick up earlier important notions found in the Gospel, in particular that Jesus is the Living Bread who came from heaven and who gave His body (6:51); that no one has greater love than he who lays down his life for his friends (15:13); that it is better that one man dies instead of the whole nation (11:49); and that, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit (12:24).

- According to **Stibbe** (1992:96–120), it is very important to note the fact that the trial is presented in a series of scenes which are laid out alternately outside and inside the praetorium. The seven scenes are structured as follows:

A1 18:28-32: Outside: the Jews demand Jesus' death.

B1 18:33-38a: Inside: Pilate questions Jesus about his kingship.

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C1: 18:38b-40: Outside: Pilate finds Jesus innocent. Barabbas is chosen.

D 19:1-3: Inside: the soldiers humiliate Jesus.

C2 19:4-8: Outside: Pilate finds Jesus innocent. "Behold the man!".

B2 19:9-11 Inside: Pilate talks with Jesus about authority.

A2 19:12-16a: Outside: the Jews secure the death sentence.

With regard to John 19:16b-42 Stibbe emphasises the contrasts in the narrative: the request by the chief priests in 19:21 is not granted, but in 19:38 the request by Joseph of Arimathea is granted; secondly, the four male soldiers, representatives of an unbelieving world, are contrasted with the four female believers who represent the believing community; and, thirdly, the soldiers both take something from Jesus (his clothes) and give something to Him (a drink).

- In his analysis of the plot of John 18-19, **Moloney** (1999:137-156) emphasises the following aspects: The implied author creates close links between the first and the final scenes (18:1-11; 19:38-42) where the use of a garden location emphasises the significant reversal that took place. Furthermore, the second scene ("Jesus' interrogation by the Jews") is framed by Peter's denials (18:12-27). This points to the future community of the disciples, who have heard what Jesus has said, as the place where Jesus' teaching could now be found. Moloney also emphasises the way in which the plot is shaped by a particular understanding of the death of Jesus, namely as a royal moment of lifting up, and also as the foundation of a community of faith and love. When Jesus dies, He perfects all that He was sent to do, giving the Spirit and the blood and water that flowed from his side. Lastly,



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Moloney points out how the implied author adapts the plot in this section of the narrative in order to "fulfil" certain prolepses from the first part of the narrative, for example the "gathering" of all people around the One lifted up from the earth (10:16), that the believers are cleansed by the word of Jesus (13:10), and that they are chosen and sent (13:18-20).

**Thompson** (1988:101-110) emphasises the importance of the themes of victory and triumph in the plot of this section of the narrative. The fact that these themes play such an important role point to the consummation of the work of God through the obedience and actions of Jesus. According to Thompson, the passion narrative seeks to establish the ultimate identity of Jesus: He is the glorious Son of God who brings the eschatological blessings of salvation. Jesus, the man of Nazareth who died on a Roman cross, is King of the Jews. He offers cleansing and the promised Holy Spirit to the world and the meaning of his death (as well as his origin) demands the answer of faith. Without faith the implied reader will only see a dead man on a cross; with faith the implied reader will recognise Him as the King who brings life to the world.

Against this background I will now outline my own understanding of the plot of this section of the Gospel. The diagram below represents the results of the following procedures: a) the paraphrasing of the events; b) the classification of the events; c) an indication of the kernels (*italics*); d) a short summary of each microsequence (**bold print**):

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to John

### A. The "Jews" bring Jesus to Pilate (outside)

1. *The Jews take Jesus from Caiaphas to Pilate's headquarters* Physical action.  
[Background information: It is early in the morning.]  
[Background information: The Jews do not enter the headquarters, because they want to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover.]
2. Pilate goes out to the Jews. Physical action.
3. *Pilate asks them: "What accusation do you bring against this man?"*. Verbal act: question.
4. The Jews answer: "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." Verbal act: accusation.
5. Pilate tells them: "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law." Verbal act: response.
6. The Jews answer Pilate: "We are not permitted to put anyone to death." Verbal act: response.  
[Narrator interprets events: This was to fulfil what Jesus had said when He indicated the kind of death He was to die.]

### B. Pilate questions Jesus (inside)

1. Pilate enters the headquarters. Physical action.
2. Pilate summons Jesus. Verbal act: order.
3. *Pilate asks Jesus whether He is the King of the Jews.* Verbal act: question.
4. Jesus answers: "Do you ask this on your own, or did others tell you about me?" Verbal act: question.
5. Pilate responds that he is not a Jew; Jesus' own nation and the chief priests have handed Him over. Verbal act: dismissal.
6. Pilate asks Jesus what He has done. Verbal act: question.
7. *Jesus answers: "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."* Verbal act: information.
8. *Pilate accepts that Jesus is a King.* Verbal act: response.
9. Jesus responds: "You say that I am a king." Verbal act: response.

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10. Jesus tells Pilate: "For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." Verbal act: information.
11. Pilate responds: "What is truth?" Verbal act: dismissal.

### C. Pilate declares Jesus innocent (outside)

1. Pilate goes out to the Jews. Physical act.
2. *Pilate tells the Jews that he finds no case against Jesus.* Verbal act: declaration.
3. *Pilate reminds the Jews of the custom to release someone for them at the Passover.* Verbal act: reminder
4. Pilate asks the Jews if he should release the King of the Jews for them. Verbal act: question.
5. *The Jews shouted that they want him to release Barabbas.* Verbal act: response.
- [Narrator provides background information: Barabbas is a bandit.]

### D. The soldiers humiliate Jesus (inside)

1. Pilate has Jesus flogged. Physical act.
2. The soldiers weave a crown of thorns and put it on Jesus' head. Physical act.
3. The soldiers dress Jesus in a purple robe. Physical act.
4. The soldiers keep on coming to Jesus, saying "Hail, King of the Jews". Verbal act: mockery.
5. The soldiers strike Jesus in the face. Physical act.

### E. Pilate declares Jesus innocent again (outside)

1. Pilate goes outside. Physical act.
2. *Pilate tells the Jews that he brings Jesus outside to let them know that he finds no case against Jesus.* Verbal act: declaration.
3. Jesus comes out, wearing the crown of thorns and the purple robe. Physical act.

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- |  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| 4. Pilate tells the Jews: "Here is the man!"   | Verbal act: declaration. |
| 5. The chief priests and the police see Jesus.   | Physical act.            |
| 6. <i>They shout: "Crucify Him!"</i>   | Verbal act: demand.      |
| 7. Pilate tells them to take Jesus themselves and crucify Him themselves; he does not find any case against Him.     | Verbal act: response.    |
| 8. <i>The Jews answer that Jesus has to die according to the Jewish law, because He claims to be the Son of God.</i> | Verbal act: response.    |
| 9. Pilate becomes more afraid than ever.   | Non-verbal act: fear.    |

### F. Pilate questions Jesus again (inside)

- |   |                          |
|---|--------------------------|
| 1. Pilate goes inside.  | Physical act.            |
| 2. <i>Pilate asks Jesus where He comes from.</i>  | Verbal act: question.    |
| 3. Jesus does not answer Pilate.  | Non-verbal act.          |
| 4. Pilate asks Jesus why He does refuses to speak to him.   | Verbal act: warning.     |
| 5. Pilate tells Jesus that he has power to release Him or to crucify Him.   | Verbal act: warning.     |
| 6. <i>Jesus tells Pilate that he would have had no authority if it had not been given from above.</i>   | Verbal act: information. |
| 7. <i>Pilate tries to release Jesus.</i>  | Non-verbal act.          |
| 8. <i>The Jews warn him that if he releases Jesus he will not be a friend of the emperor, because Jesus claims to be a king and sets himself against the emperor.</i> | Verbal act: warning.     |

### G. Pilate sentences Jesus to death (outside)

- |  |                             |
|--|-----------------------------|
| 1. Pilate goes outside.  | Physical act.               |
| 2. <i>Pilate sits on the judge's bench.</i>  | Physical act.               |
| [Narrator provides background information: The place is called the Stone Pavement or in Hebrew Gabbatha.]  |                             |
| [Narrator provides background information: It is the day of the Preparation for the Passover, about noon.] |                             |
| 3. Pilate tells the Jews: "Here is your King!"   | Verbal act: identification. |
| 4. <i>The Jews cry out: "Away with Him! Crucify Him!"</i>  | Verbal act: command         |

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|---|-----------------------|
| 5. Pilate asks them if he should crucify their king.                        | Verbal act: question. |
| 6. The chief priests tell Pilate that they have only one king, the Emperor. | Verbal act: response. |
| 7. <i>Pilate hands Jesus over to be crucified.</i>                          | Verbal act: order.    |

### H. Jesus is crucified

- |  |               |
|--|---------------|
| 1. Jesus carries the cross by Himself.   | Physical act. |
| 2. They go to the Place of the Skull.  | Physical act. |
| [Narrator provides background information: In Hebrew it is called Golgotha.]                                       |               |
| 3. <i>They crucify Jesus.</i>  | Physical act. |
| 4. They crucify two other men with Jesus, one on either side with Jesus between them.                              | Physical act. |
| 5. Pilate has an inscription written and puts it on the cross; it reads "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews". | Physical act. |
| 6. Many of the Jews read the inscription.  | Physical act. |
| [Narrator provides background information: The inscription was written in Hebrew, Latin and Greek.]                |               |

### I. Pilate refuses to change the words on the inscription

- |   |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| 1. The chief priests asks Pilate to change the words on the inscription to "This man said 'I am the King of the Jews'". | Verbal act: request. |
| 2. Pilate answers: "What I have written, I have written."   | Verbal act: refusal. |

### J. The soldiers divide Jesus' clothes among them

- |   |                       |
|---|-----------------------|
| 1. The soldiers divides Jesus' clothes into four parts.                             | Physical act.         |
| 2. They take his tunic.   | Physical act.         |
| [Background information: The tunic is seamless, woven into one piece from the top.] |                       |
| 3. The soldiers decide not to tear it, but to cast lots to see who will get it.     | Verbal act: decision. |
| [Narrator interprets the events: This happens in order to fulfil the Scripture.]    |                       |

### **K. Jesus speaks to the Beloved Disciple and his mother**

[Narrator provides background information: the mother of Jesus, her sister, Mary, the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene stand near the cross.]

1. Jesus sees his mother and the Beloved Disciple with her.      Physical act.
2. Jesus tells his mother: "Woman, here is your son".      Verbal act: promise.
3. Jesus tells the Beloved Disciple: "Here is your mother".      Verbal act: promise.
4. The Beloved Disciple takes Jesus' mother into his home.      Physical act.

### **L. Jesus dies**

1. Jesus knows that all is finished.      Mental act.
  2. Jesus says: "I am thirsty".      Verbal act: agony.
- [Narrator interprets events: happened in order to fulfil the Scripture.]
- [Narrator provides background information: a jar full of sour wine is standing there.]
3. They put a sponge full of the wine on a branch of hyssop. Physical act.
  4. They hold it out to Jesus' mouth.      Physical act.
  5. Jesus drinks it.      Physical act.
  6. *Jesus says: "It is finished".*      Verbal act: confirmation.
  7. *Jesus bows his head and gives up his spirit.*      Physical act.

### **M. One of the soldiers pierces Jesus' side**

[Narrator provides background information: It is the day of Preparation and the Jews do not want the bodies left on the cross during the Sabbath, because that Sabbath is a day of solemnity.]

1. *The Jews ask Pilate to have the legs of the crucified men broken and the bodies removed.*      Verbal act: request.
2. The soldiers break the legs of the two other men.      Physical act.

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to John

3. They see that Jesus is already dead. Physical act.
4. They do not break Jesus' legs Physical act
5. One of the soldiers pierces Jesus' side with a spear. Physical act.
6. Blood and water come out of Jesus' side. Physical act.

[Narrator provides information: The person who saw this has testified about it so that the implied readers may believe; his testimony is true and he knows that he tells the truth.]

[Narrator interprets events: These things occurred so that the Scripture may be fulfilled.]

### N. Jesus is buried

[Narrator provides background information: Joseph of Arimathea is a disciple of Jesus, secretly, because of his fear of the Jews.]

1. *Joseph asks Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus.* Verbal act: request.
2. *Pilate gives permission.* Verbal act: permission.

[Narrator provides background information: Nicodemus has at first come to Jesus by night.]

3. Nicodemus brings a mixture of myrrh and aloes,  
weighing about a hundred pounds. Physical act
4. They take the body of Jesus and wrap it with the spices  
in linen cloths Physical act

[Narrator provides background information: There was a garden in the place where Jesus was crucified and in the garden was a new tomb in which no one has ever been laid.]

5. *They lay Jesus in the tomb.* Physical act.

The outline of the plot may thus be summarised as follows:

- A. The "Jews" bring Jesus to Pilate (outside).
- B. Pilate questions Jesus (inside).
- C. Pilate declares Jesus innocent (outside).

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to John

- D. The soldiers humiliate Jesus (inside).
- E. Pilate declares Jesus innocent again (outside).
- F. Pilate questions Jesus again (inside).
- G. Pilate sentences Jesus to death (outside).
- H. Jesus is crucified.
- I. Pilate refuses to change the words on the inscription.
- J. The soldiers divide Jesus' clothes among them.
- K. Jesus speaks to the Beloved Disciple and his mother.
- L. Jesus dies.
- M. One of the soldiers pierces Jesus' side.
- N. Jesus is buried.

In the light of the above analysis, the following may now be pointed out:

1. Technically the plot should be described as a process of deterioration. However, there are several clues to the implied reader that this is not in fact what is happening. The most important clue is the way in which Jesus acts during the events. He is depicted as being in control throughout. Although He is the accused, His actions before Pilate indicate that He is in full control of the situation. Another important clue to the implied reader is the important information provided by the narrator by means of asides to the implied reader. See, for example, the way in which the narrator interprets the events in A (That the words of Jesus are fulfilled by what happens); in J (that the soldiers cast lots over Jesus' tunic so that Scripture may be fulfilled); and in L (that Jesus says that He is thirsty in order to fulfil the Scripture). Lastly, even the way in which Jesus dies indicates that He remains in control.



2. With regard to the principles of combination used by the narrator to connect the individual macrosequences to form a plot, the following principles should be pointed out:

- Chronology: all the events are narrated in chronological order.
- Causality: the events are so arranged that one event leads to the next. There are a few exceptions where events do not appear to be caused by prior events. See, for example, microsequence K (Jesus speaks to the Beloved Disciple and his mother). Although these events are not caused by prior events, they are important for the theological perspective which the narrator wishes to convey.
- Geography: all the events happen in one of two geographical areas: either Pilate's headquarters or the place of crucifixion. In the case of the first microsequence, the narrator also alternates between inside/outside Pilate's headquarters.
- Theological: the dominant theological issue in the combination of the separate microsequences into a plot is the nature of Jesus' kingship. In B3 Pilate asks Jesus whether He is a king. Jesus responds in B7 by explaining the nature of his kingship in terms of a witness to the truth. In C4 Pilate asks the Jews if he should release their king for them. In microsequence D the soldiers humiliate Jesus by pretending that He is a king. In F8 the Jews accuse Jesus of claiming to be a king. In G3 and G5 Pilate again calls Jesus the king of the Jews. In H5 Pilate has an inscription written: "Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews" and in microsequence I Pilate refuses to change the wording on the inscription. Thus, the dominating issue is the nature of Jesus' kingship. The narrator indicates how the Jews and Pilate misunderstand Jesus'

kingship. They think of Jesus' kingship in terms of earthly kingship whereas Jesus' kingship is related to the bringing of the truth, salvation to mankind.

## 6.2 The characterisation of Pontius Pilate in John 18-19

Pilate is mentioned for the first time in the narrative in John 18:28. The narrator identifies him merely as "Pilate" - apparently expecting the implied reader to know to whom he is referring. In this verse the Jews are depicted as not willing to enter the headquarters of Pilate so as to avoid ritual defilement and to be able to eat the Passover. In the next verse the narrator then relates that Pilate "went out to them". This reveals an interesting trait of Pilate, namely that of *respecting the religious feelings of the Jews*: he is aware that the Jews do not wish to come into his headquarters and therefore he goes out to them.

In verse 29 Pilate asks the Jews: "What accusation do you bring against this man?" The Jews answer: "If this man were not a criminal, we would not have handed him over to you." The Jews' answer is rather impolite and this elicits the following response by Pilate: "Take him yourselves and judge him according to your law". The trait revealed by this response of Pilate can be described as *irritable* - in the sense of being quick to anger. The Jews then reply that they are not permitted to put anyone to death. This response emphasises the powerlessness of the Jewish nation, and, in contrast, highlights the trait of *being powerful* that is thus indirectly associated with Pilate.

In the next scene (verses 33-38) the narrator tells how Pilate questioned Jesus. The narrator highlights three traits of Pontius Pilate. In verse 33 Pilate begins to question Jesus: "Are you the king of the Jews?"

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to John

Jesus responds: "Do you ask this on your own behalf, or did others tell this about me?" To this Pilate then replies: "I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests have handed you over to me. What have you done?" The way in which Pilate acts, illustrates the trait revealed in the previous section, namely that he is *irritable*. Jesus then responds as follows: "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Pilate then asks: "So you are a king?" To the implied reader it will be clear that this is another case of the typical Johannine technique of misunderstanding. Jesus is referring to his spiritual kingship whereas Pilate interprets it in the sense of the political kingship. The trait revealed by this response of Pilate may thus be summarised as *unable to understand Jesus' identity*. This trait is confirmed by what happens next. To Pilate's question whether He is a king, Jesus responds: "You say that I am a king. For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice." By his response Jesus again explains that his kingship is of an entirely different nature. However, Pilate again misunderstands it, thus illustrating the trait "inability to understand the identity of Jesus". Pilate's response ("What is truth?") also reveals a new trait that should be added to the paradigm of traits. Pilate does not ask the question because he is really interested in the truth of what Jesus is saying. The fact that he immediately leaves the room after he has asked the question shows that his answer is meant as a cynical response to what Jesus has just said. Thus one could add the trait "*cynical*" to the paradigm of traits.

In the next scene (verses 38-40) Pilate again speaks to the Jews. He tells them: "I find no case against him. But you have a custom that I release

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to John

someone for you at the Passover. Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" This incident reveals a new trait of Pilate, namely that he *attempts to be just*. The narrator shows that Pilate realises that Jesus is innocent and therefore he acts in the correct way by announcing that he finds no case against Jesus.

In John 19:4-7 the trait just revealed is reiterated. Twice Pilate declares that Jesus is innocent, thereby attempting to be just. In verse 4 he tells the Jews: "Look, I am bringing him out to you to let you know that I find no case against him." When the Jews respond by calling for Jesus to be crucified Pilate responds by saying: "Take him yourselves and crucify him; I find no case against him." The Jews respond to this by saying: "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has claimed to be the Son of God." The narrator then provides the implied reader with an inside view of Pilate's emotional situation: "Now when Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever." Why is Pilate afraid? Apparently because of what the Jews have just revealed to him, namely the fact that Jesus claims to be the Son of God. The trait could thus be summarised as *afraid of Jesus*. This trait contrasts with the one revealed earlier, namely the fact that Pilate is *powerful* and is rather ironical: the most powerful man in Judea, the governor of the powerful Roman government, is afraid of the accused handed over to him!

In the next scene (verses 9-12) Pilate attempts to establish whether Jesus is indeed the Son of God. He begins by asking Jesus: "Where are you from?" When Jesus does not respond, Pilate again reveals the trait of being irritable. He tells Jesus: "Do you refuse to speak to me? Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?" However, this trait is soon replaced by the other trait just revealed in the previous scene, namely that of fear of Jesus when He replies: "You would have no power over me

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to John

unless it had been given you from above; therefore the one who handed me over to you is guilty of a greater sin." By means of his answer Jesus shows Pilate that his power and authority is in fact by the power of a Higher Power. Therefore he tries to release Jesus (verse 12).

However, Pilate's attempts to release Jesus do not succeed, because the Jews put pressure on him by warning him: "If you release this man, you are no friend of the emperor. Everyone who claims to be a king sets himself against the emperor." The narrator then tells the implied reader that these words were enough to make Pilate change his mind: "When Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus outside and sat on the judge's bench at a place called The Stone Pavement, or in Hebrew Gabbatha." The trait revealed by this action of Pilate can be called *weakness*, because he succumbs to the pressure of the Jews. However, this section also reveals another trait of Pilate. Although Pilate gives the Jews what they want, he does it in a way that he knows they will not like. He tells them: "Here is your King!" When they respond: "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!", Pilate continues along this line and asks them: "Shall I crucify your King?" The trait revealed by this action of Pilate can be described as *wilfulness*. Pilate's actions reveal the same trait the next time he is mentioned. In verses 19ff. the narrator tells the implied reader about the inscription Pilate had written and put on the cross: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." When the chief priests ask him to change it to "This man said, I am King of the Jews.", Pilate refuses. Although he is aware of the fact that the religious leaders do not like the inscription, he nevertheless does not change it. This action reiterates the trait of wilfulness.

Pilate is mentioned again in verses 31 and 38. In both cases he merely gives permission. In verse 31 the Jews ask him to have the legs of the

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to John

crucified men broken and the bodies removed and this is then done by the soldiers. In verse 38 Joseph of Arimathea asks Pilate to let him take away the body of Jesus and Pilate gives him permission to do so. In both cases the trait of authority (already revealed earlier in the narrative) is illustrated again.

Thus the paradigm of traits associated with Pontius Pilate in John 18-19 may be summarised as follows:

- Identification: Pilate
- Respecting the religious feelings of the Jews
- Irritable
- *Powerful* *Afraid of Jesus*
- *Unable to understand the identity of Jesus*
- Cynical
- Attempting to be just
- Shrewd
- Weak
- Wilful

In terms of the approach of *E. M. Forster*, Pilate could be classified as being between a flat and a round character, since the number of traits associated with him are relatively numerous (compared to the other Gospels)

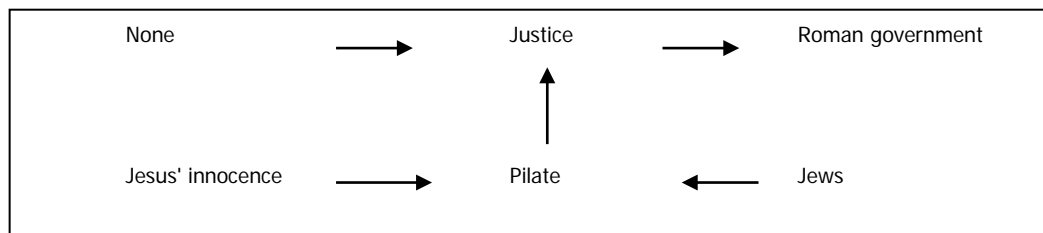
In terms of the *Harvey's* approach, Jesus Christ, the Jews and Pontius Pilate could be classified as protagonists. Barabbas and the soldiers could be identified as ficelles. Joseph of Armathea, Mary wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene and the disciple whom Jesus loved should be identified as background characters.

In terms of *Ewen's* approach, the characterisation of Pontius Pilate in John could be described as follows:

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to John

- ➔ Complexity: A relatively large number of traits.
- ➔ Development: No real development can be perceived in terms of Pilate in this section. A relatively large number of traits are associated with Pilate, but no real development in Pilate's character as such can be indicated. Additional traits are added to the paradigm but they do not replace or change the traits revealed earlier in the narrative.
- ➔ Penetration into inner life: There is only one instance of penetration into inner life. This happens when the narrator reveals that Pilate becomes more afraid than ever. Another instance that could be added to this is when Pilate asks Jesus "What is truth", since this reveals some of Pilate's thoughts in an indirect way.

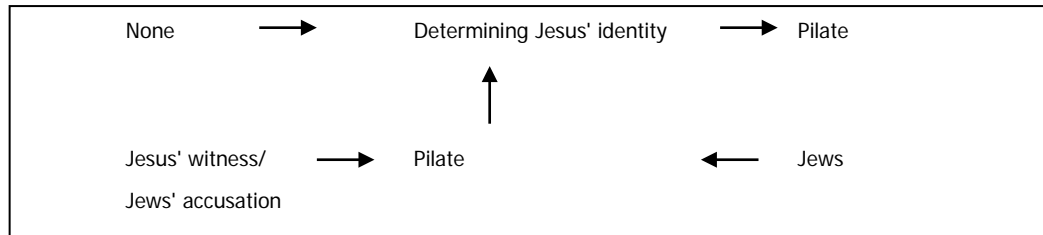
If *Greimas'* actantial system is used to indicate the way in which Pilate functions in this section of the narrative, one can indicate the development as follows:



At the beginning of the narrative Pilate's object is still to act in a just way - as is expected in the Roman legal system (receiver). That is why he asks the question: "What accusation do you bring against this man?". However, the Jews act as the opponent. They are not interested in justice being done, but in having Jesus executed.

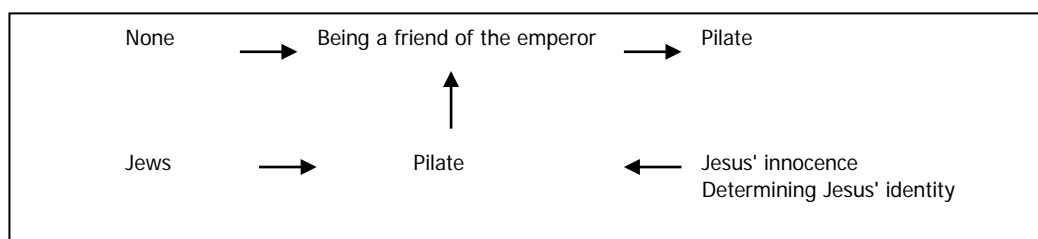
As the events progress, Pilate's object changes as follows:

## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to John



Pilate's object changes to determining the identity of Jesus. In this process two aspects that serve as helper may be identified. On the one hand Jesus' witness as to his true identity (that He is a King in the sense that He came to testify to the truth). On the other hand, the accusation of the Jews that Jesus claims to be the Son of God also functions as helper. Although they do not believe it themselves what they say serves as an impetus to Pilate to determine Jesus' identity. However, the Jews also act as opponent since they are not really interested in helping Pilate determine Jesus' identity. They are only interested in having Jesus executed.

As the narrative unfolds further, the actantial system changes as follows:



This depicts the events when Pilate decides to have Jesus crucified. Now Pilate's object has changed to "being a friend of the emperor" in order to serve his own purpose (Pilate is also the receiver). The Jews act as helper because they use the object of "being a friend of the emperor" for their own



## Pontius Pilate in the Gospel according to John

object (having Jesus executed). With regard to the opponent two issues can be identified, namely Jesus' innocence and Pilate's interest in Jesus' identity. However, Pilate ultimately disregards these two aspects for what he regards as a more important object, namely "being a friend of the emperor".

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# CHAPTER 7

## CONCLUSION

In Chapter 1 the aim of this study was described as follows: "The absence of a consistent narratological analysis of Pontius Pilate may be indicated as a gap in the research on this interesting figure. The aim of this study is to rectify this by presenting a detailed study of the portrayal of Pontius Pilate in terms of a narratological approach, in particular in terms of a narratological approach to characterisation in texts. The findings of this study will now be summarised briefly and then integrated.

The first issue being investigated was the role that Pilate plays in terms of the plots of the various passion narratives. The plots were summarised as follows:

<b>Mark</b>	<b>Matthew</b>	<b>Luke</b>	<b>John</b>
A. The religious leaders bring Jesus to Pilate. B. Pilate questions Jesus who answers only one question and then remains silent. C. The crowd asks Pilate to free Barabbas and hand Jesus over to be crucified. D. The soldiers mock Jesus as King of the Jews. E. The soldiers lead Jesus off to be crucified. F. The soldiers crucify Jesus. G. The people mock	A. The religious leaders bring Jesus to Pilate. B. Judas commits suicide. C. Pilate questions Jesus who answers only one question and then remains silent. D. Pilate tries to free Jesus. E. Pilate's wife warns him that Jesus is innocent. F. The chief priests and elders persuade the crowd to ask Pilate to set Barabbas free, and Jesus to be put to death.	A. The religious leaders accuse Jesus before Pilate. B. Herod questions Jesus. C. Pilate sentences Jesus to death. D. The soldiers lead Jesus off to be crucified. E. The soldiers crucify Jesus. F. The religious leaders, the soldiers and one of the criminals mock Jesus. G. Jesus promises one of the criminals that he will be with Him in	A. The "Jews" bring Jesus to Pilate (outside). B. Pilate questions Jesus (inside). C. Pilate declares Jesus innocent (outside). D. The soldiers humiliate Jesus (inside). E. Pilate declares Jesus innocent again (outside). F. Pilate questions Jesus again (inside). G. Pilate sentences Jesus to death (outside). H. Jesus is crucified.

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Jesus while He hangs on the cross. H. Jesus suffers and dies. I. The curtain in the temple tears. J. Jesus is buried.	G. The crowd as a whole invoke Jesus' blood upon themselves. H. The soldiers mock Jesus as King of the Jews. I. The soldiers lead Jesus off to be crucified. J. The soldiers crucify Jesus. K. The people mock Jesus while He hangs on the cross. L. Jesus suffers and dies. M. Eschatological events accompany the death of Jesus. N. Jesus is buried. O. The chief priests and the Pharisees ask Pilate to secure the tomb of Jesus.	paradise that day. H. The curtain in the temple is torn in two. I. Jesus dies. J. Jesus is buried.	I. Pilate refuses to change the words on the inscription. J. The soldiers divide Jesus' clothes among themselves. K. Jesus speaks to the Beloved Disciple and his mother. L. Jesus dies. M. One of the soldiers pierces Jesus' side. N. Jesus is buried.
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In the case of the *Gospel according to Mark* the role Pilate plays in terms of the plot of the passion narrative may be summarised as follows: *although Pilate plays a vital role in the progression of the plot, the underlying logic of the plot makes it clear that he is not actually the one who determines the flow of events; rather he reacts to events as they unfold.* This is seen in the fact that the development of the events as a whole begins as a result of the decision of the religious leaders to bring Jesus to Pilate (microsequence A), and in particular in microsequence B where Pilate takes the initiative by asking Jesus whether He is the King of the Jews, yet Jesus' response leaves him with no answer. Then the chief priests take over the initiative by laying charges against Jesus, with Pilate seemingly being the onlooker. Pilate then takes over and asks Jesus why He does not respond to the accusations, but once again Jesus' response is extraordinary: He remains silent. The microsequence ends with Pilate's passive reaction: he is amazed. In

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microsequence C one can detect a more or less similar pattern. In this case it is the crowd that takes the initiative by asking Pilate to free one prisoner according to his custom. Pilate who realises what is going on, tries to take the initiative by asking them if he could free "the King of the Jews" for them, but this is neutralised by the chief priests who instigate the crowd to ask for Barabbas. The extent to which Pilate is actually manipulated by events is clear from the fact that he even asks the crowd what to do with the "King of the Jews"! By explicitly indicating in this microsequence that Pilate wants to please the crowd, the narrator also indicates that Pilate's final acts in this microsequence are not really his own independent decisions, but a result of the actions of the crowds (and, of course, the chief priests!). Even in the final microsequence in this chapter (J: Jesus is buried) Pilate is portrayed as one who reacts. Joseph of Aramathea is the one whose actions initiate this microsequence: he is bold enough to go to Pilate to ask him for the body of Jesus (J1). Pilate again reacts: (again!) by being amazed, but this time due to the news that Jesus has already died. He then summons an army officer to make sure that Jesus is indeed dead before giving Joseph permission to take Jesus' body from the cross.

In the case of the *Gospel according to Matthew* Pilate's role in terms of the plot is more or less similar to that in the Gospel according to Mark, namely *reacting to events as they unfold*. One difference, however, which emphasises the fact is that he is *unwillingly doing something he is forced to do and shows more resistance* than in the Gospel according to Mark. For example, in microsequence D Pilate takes the initiative, devising a plan to free Jesus, because he realises that the religious leaders are jealous of Jesus. Microsequence G indicates most clearly that Pilate is fulfilling a role he does not want to play, because he washes his hands symbolically and even says: "I

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am innocent of this man's blood". However, unwillingly, he has to hand Jesus over to be crucified.

In the case of the *Gospel according to Luke* Pilate's role in terms of the underlying logic is more or less similar to that of Mark and Matthew. One important difference, however, is that he is portrayed as even *more desperate in his attempts to free Jesus*. One could even say that, in a sense, he becomes an "advocate" for Jesus. Take note of the following: In microsequence A Pilate's immediate reaction to the accusations is to tell the religious leaders that he finds no basis for an accusation against Jesus. In microsequence C he again tells the religious leaders that he finds no fault in Jesus and also refers to the decision of Herod in this regard. It is significant that the narrator draws the reader's attention specifically to the fact that Pilate thereby declares Jesus' innocence for a third time.

In the case of the *Gospel according to John* Pilate's role is linked to the issue that dominates the passion narrative, namely *the kingship of Jesus Christ, the Son of God*. In microsequence B Pilate asks Jesus whether He is a king and Jesus responds by explaining the nature of his kingship in terms of a witness to the truth. In microsequence C Pilate asks the Jews if he should release their king for them. In microsequence D the soldiers humiliate Jesus by pretending that He is a king. In microsequence F the Jews accuse Jesus of claiming to be a king. In microsequence G Pilate again calls Jesus the king of the Jews. In microsequence H Pilate has an inscription written: "Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews" and in microsequence I Pilate refuses to change the wording on the inscription. Pilate's role in terms of the plot of the passion in the Gospel according to John is that of someone ironically misunderstanding Jesus' kingship. He thinks of Jesus' kingship in terms of

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earthly kingship whereas Jesus' kingship is related to the bringing of the truth, salvation to mankind.

The second issue being investigated was the reconstruction of the various paradigms of traits associated with Pilate in each of the Gospels (in terms of the approach of *Seymour Chatman*). The results may be summarised as follows:

Mark	Matthew	Luke	John
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification: Pilate</li> <li>• <i>Attempting to be just</i></li> <li>• Unable to understand Jesus</li> <li>• Shrewdness</li> <li>• <i>Weak &gt;&gt; Wanting to please people</i></li> <li>• Thorough</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification: governor/Pilate</li> <li>• <i>Attempting to be just</i></li> <li>• Perplexed by Jesus</li> <li>• Shrewdness</li> <li>• Unfit to receive divine revelation</li> <li>• <i>Unwilling to act as God wants him to</i></li> <li>• <i>Weak &gt;&gt; succumb to pressure</i></li> <li>• <i>(Unsuccessfully) trying to shift the blame</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification: Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea</li> <li>• Authority</li> <li>• Cruelty</li> <li>• Shrewd</li> <li>• Attempting to be just</li> <li>• <i>Witness to Jesus' innocence</i></li> <li>• Weak</li> <li>• Enemy of Herod &gt;&gt; friend of Herod</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identification: Pilate</li> <li>• Respecting the religious feelings of the Jews</li> <li>• Irritability</li> <li>• <i>Powerful &lt;&gt; Afraid of Jesus</i></li> <li>• <i>Unable to understand the identity of Jesus</i></li> <li>• Cynical</li> <li>• Attempting to be just</li> <li>• Shrewdness</li> <li>• Weakness</li> <li>• Wilfulness</li> </ul>

The following findings may be highlighted:

1. With regard to the *identification* of Pilate, the narrators in the Gospels according to Mark and John only use "Pilate" whereas the narrators in the Gospels according to Matthew and Luke also use "governor" with Luke only using the identification "Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea".
2. The characterisation of Pilate in the Gospel according to Mark is the most limited in terms of the number of traits used since only five traits can be identified. In contrast, the narrators in the other three

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Gospels reveal more traits, the most traits being associated with Pilate in the Gospel according to John.

3. Three traits are found in all the paradigms. In all the Gospels Pilate is portrayed as "attempting to be just", "shrewd" and "weak". In three of the Gospels Pilate is portrayed as having problems with the identity of Jesus. In the Gospel according to Mark the trait was identified as "unable to understand Jesus", in the Gospel according to Matthew as "perplexed by Jesus" and in the Gospel according to John as "unable to understand the identity of Jesus".
4. Some traits are only found in a particular Gospel. The trait of being "thorough" is only found in the Gospel according to Mark. The traits "unfit to receive divine revelation", "unwilling to act as God wants him to" and "trying to shift the blame" are only found in the Gospel according to Matthew. The traits "authority", "cruelty", "witness to Jesus' innocence" and "enemy of Herod >> friend of Herod" are found only in the Gospel according to Luke. The traits "respecting the religious feelings of the Jews", "irritable", "powerful <> afraid of Jesus", "cynical" and "wilful" are found only in the Gospel according John. In this way the narrator of each Gospel succeeds in portraying Pilate in a unique way.
5. In each Gospel different traits dominate the characterisation of Pilate. In the case of the *Gospel according to Mark* the characterisation of Pilate is dominated by two traits namely "attempting to be just" and "weak >> wanting to please people". In this Gospel the characterisation of Pilate may be summarised as the conflict between these two traits. Although Pilate tries to be

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just, this trait is undermined by his weakness and by the fact that he wants to please people. Ultimately the last trait becomes the dominant one, as this picture is what the implied reader will take with him/her at the end of Mark 15.

In the *Gospel according to Matthew* four traits dominate. The two traits dominating Mark's portrayal of Pilate, namely "attempting to be just" and "weak >> succumb to pressure" also play an important role, but two other traits are equally important, namely that of Pilate being "unwilling to do what God wants him to" and "trying to shift the blame". The importance of these two traits in Matthew's portrayal of Pilate results in Matthew's picture of Pilate being more negative than that of Mark. In fact, it is the most negative of all four Gospels.

In the case of the *Gospel according to Luke*, the most important aspect in the characterisation of Pilate is the frequent emphasis on his being a witness to Jesus' innocence. The narrator use three other traits ("authority", "cruelty" and "shrewdness") to support this trait. This trait is ultimately replaced by that of Pilate's weakness. However, the frequent emphasis on the fact that Pilate is a witness to Jesus' innocence implies that to the implied reader this impression of Pilate will dominate Pilate's portrayal.

In the case of the *Gospel according to John* two traits dominate, namely "unable to understand the identity of Jesus" and "powerful <> afraid of Jesus". In this regard the portrayal of Pilate fits a pattern that can be discerned in the characterisation of all other characters in the Gospel according to John. All characters in this



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Gospel are portrayed in terms of their reaction to Jesus - either positive or negative. In the case of Pilate he is portrayed as unable to understand the identity of Jesus. Jesus is portrayed as the Son of God, and the Spiritual King who brings salvation to mankind. Pilate cannot understand this. However, even though he cannot understand this, he, the most powerful man in Palestine, is portrayed as fearing Jesus. Although he does not realise who Jesus is, his fear reflects awe of Jesus.

The third issue being investigated was the way in which Pilate could be classified in terms of the various systems developed by scholars. In terms of the approach of *Forster*, only one difference could be detected, namely the fact that Pilate could be classified in the Gospel according to Mark as a flat character, whereas he was classified in the other three gospels as lying somewhere between a flat and a round character. In terms of the approach of *Harvey*, no difference was detectable between the various Gospels, since in all four gospels Pilate is portrayed as one of the protagonists. In terms of *Ewen's* approach the difference between the four gospels may be summarised as follows:

	<b>Mark</b>	<b>Matthew</b>	<b>Luke</b>	<b>John</b>
Complexity:	Only a few traits	A relatively large number of traits	A relatively large number of traits	A relatively large number of traits
Development:	None at all	None at all	Limited: from enemy of Herod to friend of Herod	No development
Penetration into inner life	Only a few (verses 5: being amazed, and 10: realising that the chief priests handed Jesus over out of	Only a few (verses 14: being amazed, and 18: realising that the chief priests handed Jesus over out of jealousy; washing	Once (verse 20: wanted to release Jesus)	Once (more afraid than ever)

## Conclusion

	jealousy)	of hands)		
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In terms of *Greimas'* approach is followed, the way in which Pilate's *objective* changes as the plot unfolds, may be summarised as follows:

Mark	Justice >> Please people
Matthew	Justice >> Innocence of himself
Luke	Justice >> Get out of the situation >> Convince Jewish leaders of Jesus' innocence
John	Justice >> Determining the identity of Jesus >> Being a friend of the emperor

If all these perspectives are integrated, the following picture emerges in each case:

In the *Gospel according to Mark*, Pilate is portrayed as one of the protagonists. Furthermore he can be described as a flat character since only a few traits are revealed. His character does not show any development and relatively little is revealed of his inner life. In terms of the plot of the Gospel Pilate is portrayed as having two objectives: first, he tries to see that justice prevails, but in the end he is forced to replace this objective by another one, namely that of pleasing the people, thus knowing that justice does not prevail. He is also portrayed throughout as reacting to events as they unfold instead of taking the initiative. The narrator characterises Pilate as a flat character and therefore only a few traits are revealed to the implied reader. They are "attempting to be just", "weak >> wanting to please people", "unable to understand Jesus", "shrewd", and "thorough". Of these, the first two are the most important - to such an extent that one can say that the characterisation of Pilate in the Gospel according to Mark is dominated by the

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conflict between these two traits. Pilate tries to be just, but eventually this trait is overcome by the fact that he wants to please the people.

Why does the narrator portray Pilate in this way in the Gospel according to Mark? In my opinion, there are two reasons for this. First, the narrator portrays Jesus in the passion narrative as the Suffering Righteous One who is sent to his death despite his innocence. The fact that Jesus' innocence is so important for the narrator is reflected in the importance of the trait "trying to be just" in the characterisation of Pilate. Secondly, one of the important aspects which the narrator of this Gospel tries to convey to the implied reader is the fact that Christians will suffer - just as Jesus has suffered. In the characterisation of Pontius Pilate the trait "trying to be just" is eventually replaced by "trying to please the people". The effect this has on Jesus is that He has to suffer innocently. In a sense, He becomes a victim of the indifference of an official of the Roman government. The readers of this gospel may face the same situation. See, for example, Mark 13:9: "... and you will stand before governors and kings because of me". The way in which Pilate is characterised serves as a warning to them not to expect too much of the Roman government.

In the *Gospel according to Matthew*, Pilate is portrayed as one of the protagonists. Furthermore he can be described as being somewhere between a flat and a round character as a relatively great number of traits are revealed. His character does not show any development and relatively little is revealed of his inner life. In terms of the plot of the Gospel Pilate is portrayed as having two objectives: first, he tries to see that justice prevails, but in the end he is forced to replace this objective by another one, namely that of (unsuccessfully!) trying to convince the crowd that he is innocent of Jesus' blood. This is best seen in the way in which he washes his hands symbolically.

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Pilate is also portrayed throughout as unwillingly doing something he is forced to do and shows more resistance than the Pilate of the Gospel according to Mark. In terms of the traits associated with this character the following four dominate: "attempting to be just", "unwilling to act as God wants him to", "weak >> succumb to pressure", and "trying to shift the blame" - thus leaving the implied reader with a very negative picture of Pilate. Three other traits are also revealed, namely "perplexed by Jesus", "shrewd" and "unfit to receive divine revelation". However, they play a less significant role in the characterisation of Pilate.

Why is Pilate portrayed in this way in the Gospel according to Matthew? One of the important notions that the narrator tries to convey to the implied reader in the passion narrative is that the primary guilt for the death of Jesus rests with the Jewish authorities. The characterisation of Pilate is also influenced by this notion. On the one hand it is true that he is definitely not exonerated, since one of the dominant traits associated with him is "unwilling to act as God wants him to". However, the other three traits that dominate ("attempting to be just", "weak >> succumb to pressure", and "trying to shift the blame") all reflect in one way or another the guilt of the Jewish people: they prevent him from seeing to it that justice prevails; they use his weakness to force him to succumb to their pressure; and the way in which they act necessitates him to try to shift the blame.

In the *Gospel according to Luke*, Pilate is portrayed as one of the protagonists. Furthermore he can be described as being somewhere between a flat and a round character since a relatively large number of traits are revealed. His character shows some development, as he develops from an enemy of Herod to a friend of Herod. Almost nothing is revealed of his inner life: his inner thoughts are revealed only once when the narrator tells that he

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wants to release Jesus. In terms of the plot of the Gospel Pilate is portrayed as having three objectives: first, he tries to see to it that justice prevails. This is followed by a second objective, namely getting out of the situation by sending Jesus to Herod. He fails in meeting this objective and then pursues another objective, namely convincing the Jewish leaders of Jesus' innocence. However, he also fails in meeting this objective. With regard to the traits associated with Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke, quite a number of traits were identified, namely "authority", "cruelty", "shrewd", "attempting to be just", "witness to Jesus' innocence", "weak", and "enemy of Herod >> friend of Herod". The narrator portrays Pilate in such a way that only one trait dominates his characterisation, namely "witness to Jesus' innocence". In this regard the skilful way in which the narrator links this trait to other traits should be pointed out. For example, it is significant that Pilate is portrayed as almost immediately realising that Jesus is innocent. The implied reader will realise that Pilate must have been exceptionally shrewd to realise almost immediately that Jesus is innocent. In this way the trait "shrewd" is used as a basis for the trait "witness to Jesus' innocence". Furthermore, the traits "authority" and "cruelty" are used as a basis for the trait "witness to Jesus' innocence". This happens as follows: "Authority": Pilate, the highest judicial authority in Palestine, found Jesus innocent. "Cruelty": In Chapter 23 this "cruel" person finds Jesus innocent. The implied reader may thus safely deduce: if a person who was prone to be cruel to the people under his authority found Jesus innocent, Jesus must have been innocent. Thus the dominant picture of Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke is that of an authoritative Roman official who found Jesus not guilty.

Why is Pontious Pilate portrayed in this way in the Gospel according to Luke? One of the aims of the narrator in the Gospel according to Luke is to

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show the implied reader that there is nothing subversive in the origins of Christianity that would cause them to be in conflict with Roman governance. Faith in Christ and allegiance to Rome were not mutually inconsistent (Brown 1996:271). The way in which the narrator portrays Pilate corresponds with this notion in two ways. On the one hand it indicates that Jesus was indeed innocent. Jesus' innocence was proclaimed by the highest ranking Roman official in Palestine. On the other hand, the picture of a government official who knows what is right, yet who does wrong, must have been experienced as a very realistic picture of the way in which many Christians themselves experienced government officials themselves in the past. In this case, Pilate knows that Jesus is innocent; he even declares Him innocent; yet, in the end, he succumbs to the trait of weakness.

In the *Gospel according to John*, Pilate is portrayed as one of the protagonists. Furthermore he can be described as being somewhere between a flat and a round character as a relatively large number of traits are revealed. His character shows no development and almost nothing is revealed of his inner life: his inner thoughts are revealed only once, when the narrator tells that he became more afraid than ever. In terms of the plot of the Gospel Pilate is portrayed as having three objectives: first, he tries to see to it that justice prevails. In doing so his objective shifts to something new, namely that of determining the identity of Jesus. However, he fails in this objective, as he is not able to grasp the real nature of Jesus' kingship. In the end both objectives (seeing to it that justice prevails, and determining the identity of Jesus) yield to a final objective, namely being a friend of the emperor. The only way in which Pilate could reach this objective was by failing to reach the other two objectives. A fairly large number of traits are associated with this character in the Gospel according to John: "respecting the religious feelings of

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the Jews", "irritable", "cynical", "attempting to be just", "shrewd", "weak", "wilful", "unable to understand the identity of Jesus" and "powerful <> afraid of Jesus". The last two dominate the characterisation of Pilate in the Gospel according to John. The reason for this is that the portrayal of Pilate coincides with the general aim of the Gospel, namely to reassure/convince the implied reader of the identity of Jesus and to show how the characters in the narrative react to his identity. In this case Jesus' identity is described in terms of his kingship, in particular the fact that He as the Son of God is a spiritual king who brings "truth" (salvation) for mankind. The characterisation of Pilate fits this pattern in that it shows a negative reaction to the identity of Jesus: although Pilate is shrewd and attempts to be just, he is unable to understand the identity of Jesus. Furthermore, the narrator also uses the well-known Johannine device of irony when he juxtaposes Pilate's authority with his fear of Jesus. In this regard verse 8 ("When Pilate heard this, he was more afraid than ever") is very ironical.

Lastly, it should be pointed out that the narrator succeeds in creating a fairly complex picture of Pilate by revealing some interesting traits that are not found in the other Gospels. The following four traits should be mentioned in this regard: "respecting the religious feelings of the Jews", "irritable", "cynical" and "wilful". Although these traits do not affect the portrayal of Pilate to a great extent, the fact that they are added to the paradigm of traits leaves the implied reader with a fairly complex picture of this character. In fact, the Pilate of the Gospel according to John should be classified as the most complex of the four Pilates in the New Testament.

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## SUMMARY

The absence of a consistent narratological analysis of Pontius Pilate may be indicated as a gap in the research on this interesting figure. The aim of this study is to rectify this by presenting a detailed study of the portrayal of Pontius Pilate in terms of a narratological approach, in particular in terms of a narratological approach to characterisation in texts. This is achieved by means of a detailed narratological analysis of the characterisation of Pontius Pilate in each of the Four Gospels. The results are as follow.

In the *Gospel according to Mark* Pilate is portrayed as a flat character since only a few traits are revealed. His character does not show any development and relatively little of his inner life is revealed. In terms of the plot of the Gospel Pilate is portrayed as having two objectives: first he tries to see that justice prevails, but in the end he is forced to replace this objective by another one, namely that of pleasing the people, thus knowing that justice does not prevail. He is also portrayed throughout as reacting to events as they unfold instead of taking the initiative. The narrator characterises Pilate as a flat character and therefore only a few traits are revealed to the implied reader, namely "attempting to be just", "weak >> wanting to please people", "unable to understand Jesus", "shrewd", and "thorough". Of these, the first two are the most important to such an extent that it can be said that the characterisation of Pilate in the Gospel according to Mark is dominated by the conflict between these two traits.

In the *Gospel according to Matthew*, Pilate is portrayed as being somewhere between a flat and a round character since a relatively large number of traits are revealed. His character does not show any development

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and relatively little is revealed of his inner life. In terms of the plot of the Gospel Pilate is portrayed as having two objectives: first, he tries to see that justice prevails, but in the end he is forced to replace this objective by another one, namely that of (unsuccessfully!) trying to convince the crowd that he is innocent of Jesus' blood. Pilate is also portrayed throughout as unwillingly doing something he is forced to do and shows more resistance than the Pilate of the Gospel according to Mark. In terms of the traits associated with this character the following four dominate: "attempting to be just", "unwilling to act as God wants him to", "weak >> succumb to pressure", and "trying to shift the blame". The implied reader thus has a very negative picture of Pilate.

In the *Gospel according to Luke*, Pilate is portrayed as somewhere between a flat and a round character since a relatively large number of traits are revealed. His character shows some development, as he develops from an enemy of Herod to a friend of Herod. Almost nothing is revealed of his inner life: his inner thoughts are revealed only once when the narrator tells that he wants to release Jesus. In terms of the plot of the Gospel Pilate is portrayed as having three objectives: first, he tries to see that justice prevails. This is followed by the second objective, namely getting out of the situation by sending Jesus to Herod. Lastly, he attempts to convince the crowd of Jesus' innocence. With regard to the traits associated with Pilate in the Gospel according to Luke, a number of these were identified, namely "authority", "cruelty", "shrewd", "attempting to be just", "witness to Jesus' innocence", "weak", and "enemy of Herod >> friend of Herod". The narrator portrays Pilate in such a way that only one trait dominates his characterisation, namely "witness to Jesus' innocence".

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In the *Gospel according to John*, Pilate can be described as being somewhere between a flat and a round character since a relatively large number of traits are revealed. His character shows no development and almost nothing is revealed of his inner life: his inner thoughts are revealed only once when the narrator tells that he became more afraid than ever. In terms of the plot of the Gospel Pilate is portrayed as having three objectives: first, he tries to see that justice prevails. In doing so, his objective shifts to something new, namely that of determining the identity of Jesus. However, he fails in this objective, as he is unable to grasp the real nature of Jesus' kingship. In the end both objectives (seeing that justice prevails, and determining the identity of Jesus) give way to a final objective, namely being a friend of the emperor. The only way in which Pilate could reach this objective was by failing to reach the other two objectives. A fairly large number of traits are associated with this character in the Gospel according to John. Two of these traits dominate, namely "unable to understand the identity of Jesus" and "powerful < > afraid of Jesus". The characterisation of Pilate fits a general pattern in the gospel in that it shows a negative reaction to the identity of Jesus: although Pilate is shrewd and attempts to be just, he is unable to understand the identity of Jesus. It should also be pointed out that the narrator succeeds in creating a fairly complex picture of Pilate by revealing some interesting traits not found in the other Gospels, namely "respecting the religious feelings of the Jews", "irritable", "cynical" and "wilful".

## OPSOMMING

Die feit dat daar geen volledige narratologiese analise van Pontius Pilatus bestaan nie, kan as 'n leemte in die huidige navorsing oor dié interessante figuur aangedui word. Die doel van hierdie studie was om dié leemte te vul deur 'n gedetailleerde studie van die wyse waarop Pontius Pilatus in die vier Evangelies uitgebeeld word. Dit is gedoen deur 'n volledige narratologiese analise van die karakterisering van Pilatus in elkeen van die vier Evangelies. Die resultate is as volg:

In die *Evangelie volgens Markus* word Pilatus as 'n plat karakter uitgebeeld aangesien slegs 'n paar eienskappe van die karakter geopenbaar word. Daar is verder geen ontwikkeling en min innerlike karakterisering. In terme van die plot van die Evangelie word Pilatus uitgebeeld as iemand met twee doelstellings: aanvanklik poog hy om geregtigheid te laat seëvier, maar later probeer hy net om die mense hulle sin te gee. Slegs 'n paar eienskappe van Pilatus word aan die implisiete leser geopenbaar, naamlik "poog om regverdig te wees", "swak", "kan nie vir Jesus verstaan nie", "slim" en "deeglik". Van hierdie eienskappe is die eerste twee die belangrikste.

In die *Evangelie volgens Matteus* kan Pilatus iewers tussen 'n plat en 'n ronde karakter geplaas word. Daar is geen ontwikkeling in sy karakter nie en feitlik geen innerlike karakterisering nie. Hy word uitgebeeld as iemand met twee doelstellings: aanvanklik poog hy om geregtigheid te laat geskied en later probeer hy om die skare te oortuig dat hy onskuldig is aan die bloed van Jesus. In terme van karaktereienskappe is daar vier dominante eienskappe: "poog om regverdig te wees", "onwillig om op te tree soos God wil hê",

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"swak" en "probeer om die skuld op ander te pak". Die implisiete leser word dus uiteindelik gelaat met 'n baie negatiewe prentjie van Pilatus.

In die *Evangelie volgens Lukas* kan Pilatus ook as iewers tussen 'n plat en 'n ronde karakter geplaas word. Daar is wel 'n mate van ontwikkeling in sy karakter aangesien hy van 'n vyand van Herodes tot 'n vriend van Herodes verander. In terme van die plot word Pilatus het Pilatus drie doelstellings: aanvanklik poog hy om geregtigheid te laat seëvier; later probeer hy uit die moeilike situasie kom, en uiteindelik probeer hy die skare oortuig dat Jesus onskuldig is. Ten opsigte van karaktereienskappe is 'n hele aantal geïdentifiseer, naamlik "gesag", "wreedheid", "slim", "poog om regverdig te wees", "getuie van Jesus se onskuld", "swak" en "vyand van Herodes". Daar is egter slegs een eienskap wat domineer, naamlik "getuie van Jesus se onskuld".

In die *Evangelie volgens Johannes* kan Pilatus iewers tussen 'n plat en 'n ronde karakter geplaas word. Daar is geen ontwikkeling in sy karakter en feitlik geen innerlike karakterisering nie. In terme van die plot word Pilatus uitgebeeld as iemand met drie doelstellings: aanvanklik poog hy om geregtigheid te laat geskied, maar later word sy primêre doelstelling die bepaling van Jesus se identiteit. Hy misluk egter in beide doelstellings, maar slaag uiteindelik in 'n derde doelstelling, naamlik om 'n vriend van die keiser te bly. Ten opsigte van karaktereienskappe is 'n hele aantal geïdentifiseer, maar slegs twee domineer, naamlik "kan nie die identiteit van Jesus begryp nie" en "magtig <> bang vir Jesus".



## Summary

### **Keywords**

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### **Sleutelbegrippe**

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