



Limestone block, now known as the Pilate Inscription, uncovered in 1961 in Caesarea, Israel, and containing four lines of writing bearing mention of Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea.

***Archaeological Spotlight:* The Pilate Inscription**

The Pilate Inscription. Pontius Pilate was the fifth Roman procurator (or prefect) of Judea, ruling from 26 AD - 36 AD). He was appointed by Tiberius in AD 26, and his territory of governance took in roughly the southern half of Palestine, including Samaria. The Roman historian Tacitus confirms that Jesus was executed under Pilate's direction: "*Christ, while Tiberius was emperor, was capitally executed by the procurator Pontius Pilate*" (**Annals 15:44**). By far our greatest amount of information regarding Pilate comes from the Jewish writer Flavius Josephus who composed his two great works, **The Antiquities of the Jews** and **the Jewish War** towards the end of the first century.

Philo, the Alexandrian Jewish philosopher, who lived from 20 BC to AD 50 and thus was also a contemporary of Christ's, described him as "*a man of a very inflexible disposition, and very merciless as well as very obstinate,*" characterizing his rule as being filled with "*corruption...insolence, cruelty... a most grievous inhumanity.*"¹ The gospels unanimously affirm that it was Pilate who issued the official order sentencing Jesus to death by crucifixion (see all of **Matthew 27**, **Mark 15:1**, **Luke 23:1**, and **John 18:1-19:42**).

Significance of the Find: For centuries, Pilate was known primarily from historical records such as the writings of Josephus and Philo, Tacitus' history, and the four gospels. No direct physical evidence of Pilate's existence had ever been found. Then in 1961, a stone plaque engraved with Pilate's name and title was discovered in Caesarea, the Roman port and the capital of Judea in Jesus' day. It was here that Pilate housed his military forces. The inscription was part of a larger dedication to Tiberius Caesar, which clearly states that it was from "*Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea.*"

This two-foot by three-foot limestone slab, now known as the Pilate inscription, contains only four lines of text, only a portion of which is still visible on the block itself. Still, the basic reconstruction is easy to arrive at: "*(This) Tiberium, Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea, had dedicated.*" From the inscription, it can be readily concluded that the monument was written to commemorate Pilate's dedication of a Tiberium, a temple used in the worship of Tiberias Caesar, the Roman emperor during the period of Pilate's term over Judea.

¹ The Works of Philo, translated by C.D. Yonge, "*On the Road to Gaius,*" p. 301-302.

The Latin inscription of four lines gives his title as “*Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea,*” a title very similar to that given to him in the Gospels: “*In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar – when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea...*” (**Luke 3:1, NIV**). This was the first significant archaeological discovery to mention Pilate, although the past few decades have also seen the recovery of several bronze coins struck between 29-32 AD that were minted under Pontius Pilate. The Pilate Inscription itself is currently housed in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

Coming Next Issue: The Prism of Sennacherib