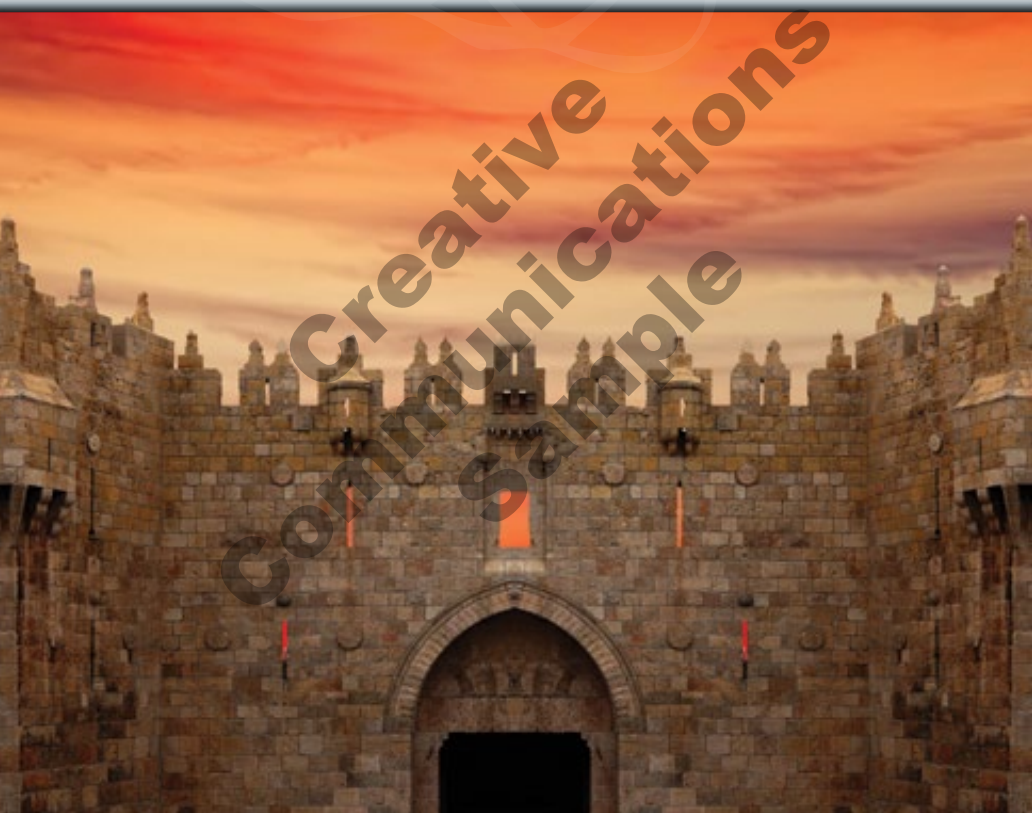


FAITHFUL FACTS FOR LENT



PAUL L. MAIER



INTRODUCTION

This devotional series, which could be subtitled “Personalities of the Passion,” will focus on the men and women involved in the culmination of Jesus’ ministry in Jerusalem, his arrest, trial, suffering and death, followed by the triumph of his resurrection. Divided into eight groups, this cast of characters acted in the greatest drama ever staged—clueless political leaders, bewildered followers, blind religious authorities and even a traitor who in this story betrayed the lone hero, who has changed the world.

But this is far more than a story. It is, in fact, His story. Another way of pronouncing that is “history.” Unlike a myth or tale, this account deals with real people who lived at real places, at real times, and took part in real events recorded in both sacred and secular history. Readers should have no trouble identifying with these characters and their glowing faults or proclivity to doubt.

Most of the personality sketches in these pages appear in the chronological order of their historical appearance in the Gospels, although there are a few exceptions for thematic reasons. Even then, however, there are no anachronisms. As “faithful facts for Lent,” these devotions will, I hope, offer fresh insights into “the greatest story ever told” by unveiling aspects of that story that still need telling.

Paul L. Maier

PART 1: THE RULERS

ASH WEDNESDAY

TIBERIUS

In the fifteenth year of Tiberius Caesar ... the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah.

LUKE 3:1-2

Many might regard this as a boring Bible verse, since Luke provides the names of nine people and five locations. These two verses are of intense interest to historians of the ancient world. By citing the ruling authorities at the time, Luke provided a clear temporal framework for the start of John the Baptist’s ministry and the ministry of Jesus.

Luke’s best reference was the first—to the Roman emperor Tiberius, who ruled from A.D. 14 to 37. His fifteenth year in office would thus be A.D. 28/29. Tiberius Caesar (Roman emperors included the name “Caesar” in their titles to honor Julius Caesar) ruled the Roman Empire during the entire adult ministry of Jesus and four years beyond.

In the Gospels, Tiberius has only cameo appearances. Geographically, he appears (with adjusted spelling) as one of the four names for the Sea of Galilee, the Sea of Tiberias, and the same-named capital of Galilee on its shores. When Jesus’ opponents challenged him on the



question of the Roman tribute, Jesus asked for a coin with Tiberius's image on it and answered, "Render unto Caesar, the things that are Caesar's, but unto God, the things that are God's."

Tiberius could never know that an unknown subject of his, born in Bethlehem, would become infinitely greater than his own imperial self.

As this day we begin the season of Lent, O Lord, help us to appreciate the care with which Luke sets the stage for the One who would eclipse the power of an emperor—Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. AMEN.

THURSDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY PONTIUS PILATE

... when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea ... the word of God came to John, the son of Zechariah. LUKE 3:1-2

When we recite the Creed, we mention his name. The clause "suffered under Pontius Pilate" was included by the early church for historical documentation. Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea from A.D. 26 to 36, covering Jesus' ministry with a three-year overlap at both ends. Archaeologists at Caesarea discovered a cornerstone Pilate placed there in honor of Tiberius, so we now know that his official title was "Prefect of Judea," not "procurator."

Far more is known about Pilate from non-biblical sources such as the Roman historians Tacitus, Suetonius and Pliny, as well as Jewish authors such as Josephus and Philo. These secular sources agree perfectly with what we know of Pilate from the New Testament. He had the same problems with his Jewish subjects as did all Roman governors in Judea—it was heretical for them even to rule there (Deuteronomy 17:15).

So far as Rome was concerned, Pilate did a fine job in governing Judea, removing offensive Roman military standards and building an aqueduct to improve Jerusalem's water supply. He lasted ten years as governor, the second-longest tenure of any Roman governor in Judea, and we know his crucial role on Good Friday.

That you permitted an earthly judge to adjudicate the case of your Son, O Judge of the Universe, is testimony to the lengths you would go to save us by his sacrifice. Lord, have mercy! AMEN.

FRIDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY HEROD ANTIPAS

... when Herod was tetrarch of Galilee ... LUKE 3:1

There was divided authority in the Roman land of Syria-Palestina. Herod the Great ruled the entire territory, but at his death (4 B.C.), Emperor Augustus had less confidence in Herod's sons and divided the kingdom: Archelaus was made *ethnarch* (Greek for "ruler of a nation") of Samaria and Judea. Herod Antipas, called *tetrarch* ("ruler of a quarter"), received



Galilee and Perea (the Trans-Jordan) and his brother Philip, also a tetrarch, received Iturea and Trachonitis, areas north and east of the Sea of Galilee.

This arrangement lasted ten years, until Archelaus proved incompetent and was exiled. In his place, Rome sent governors to administer Judea and Samaria, the most recent of whom was Pontius Pilate. Jesus lived under the jurisdiction of Herod Antipas in Galilee, under Pilate in Judea and, northeast of the Sea of Galilee, under Herod Philip.

The ambitious and successful Antipas had a blemish on his record—the execution of John the Baptist, a plan instigated by his second wife, Herodias, and her daughter Salome. The Jewish historian Josephus tells us the location of John’s beheading—the fortress Machaerus at the northeastern corner of the Dead Sea—and the name of the Herodias’ daughter Salome. Antipas also played a significant role on Good Friday, as we shall see.

You, O Sovereign Savior, placed yourself under the jurisdiction of earthly kings and governors to achieve our salvation. We thank you for this temporary humiliation, and rejoice at your present exaltation. AMEN.

SATURDAY AFTER ASH WEDNESDAY HEROD PHILIP

... when his [Antipas’] brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Iturea and Trachonitis. LUKE 3:1

Philip was the half brother of Antipas. Herod the Great was their father, but they had different mothers—two of Herod’s ten wives! In Augustus’ settlement, Philip ruled northeast of the Sea of Galilee, areas with names that sound like diseases: Trachonitis, Auranitis and Gaulonitis. But those names persist—today Gaulonitis is called the Golan Heights.

Neither the Bible nor Josephus tells us much about Philip. Most scholars conclude that his reign was peaceful, even prosperous. He built his capital near the headwaters of the Jordan, naming it Caesarea-Philippi, distinguishing it from the Roman capital of Judea, Caesarea (Caesarea Maritima, or Caesarea on the Sea). Philip married his half-niece Salome, who danced before Antipas and asked for the head of John the Baptist. When Philip died (A.D. 34), Rome added his territories to Syria, but later returned them to the jurisdiction of Herod Agrippa I, grandson of Herod the Great, who temporarily replaced the Roman governors of Judea.

It was in Philip’s territory that Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do people say that I am?” After hearing the mistaken responses, Jesus asked, “But who do you say that I am?” Peter replied correctly, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”

However odd their names, you traveled to real places, Lord, not mythological locations, as in the holy books of other world religions. We are grateful that even geography confirms the biblical record. AMEN.



FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

LYSANIAS

... and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene ... LUKE 3:1

Who is the least known figure in the New Testament? Lysanias has my vote. This is the only time he is mentioned in the Gospels, and his territory, Abilene, is as obscure as his name. Forget the Abilenes of Kansas or Texas, this Abilene was a picturesque enclave located northeast of Mount Hermon—the highest point in the Holy Land—about sixteen miles west of Damascus. Because records on this Lysanias are so scanty, critics claim that Luke is mistaken here. Yet Lysanias and Abilene show up in the writings of Josephus as well as in archaeological inscriptions.

But was Lysanias or his Abilene important enough for Luke to mention among the other potentates previously cited? Not really. Why, then, did Luke even mention him? Scholars have not provided satisfactory answers to that query, yet I shall offer one. Abilene was originally part of the kingdom of Herod the Great. Upon his death, that kingdom was split between Archelaus, Antipas and Philip, three of Herod's sons. Yet *tetrarch* (ruler of a quarter) implies four rulers. Lysanias was the fourth.

A very careful historian, Luke wanted secure evidence, even if that evidence would seem trivial. Bravo, Luke!

We thank You, Lord God, that Your revelation in the Gospels, Luke's in particular, is so very reliable as history—not myth, fantasy or fable, as is the case with all humanly invented religions.
AMEN.

MONDAY, THE FIRST WEEK OF LENT

ANNAS

... in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas ... LUKE 3:2

Setting the stage for Jesus' ministry, Luke turns from political to religious leadership. Critics attack Luke's record for claiming a joint high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas. John's Gospel is a similar target, reporting Jesus' first hearing on Maundy Thursday evening at the house of Annas, "the high priest." Since Annas was high priest in Jerusalem from A.D. 7 to 15, and his son-in-law Caiaphas from A.D. 18 to 36, they could not have been high priests at the same time.

This is not an error on the part of Luke and John. First, important officials are regularly addressed by their previous titles long after they leave office, as is the case with American presidents. Second, Annas was an extremely powerful man, controlling most of the Sadduceean aristocracy that managed the Temple. Josephus reports that he had unparalleled success at nepotism: five of his sons became high priest, and the present incumbent, Caiaphas, was his son-in-law, something that had not happened before or since in Jewish history. It would have been insulting to Annas had he not been accorded the honorific title of high priest.



Go back to the time of Christ with expert historian and theologian Paul L. Maier as he explores the personalities of the Passion in these daily devotions for the season of Lent. Drawing upon archaeological findings, empirical data and writing of the ancient world, Maier makes the events of Christ's Passion more real for us and reveals the effect the suffering, death and resurrection of our Lord had on the faith of people then and on our faith today.



PAUL L. MAIER, PH.D., served as a professor of Ancient History at Western Michigan University before retiring in 2011. He has authored scholarly works on Christianity, historical fiction on biblical events and eras, novels about Christian archaeologists, and popular non-fiction research about the writings of past historians.

This book, along with many other Creative Communications for the Parish products, is available on [amazonkindle](#) and [nook](#)

By Paul L. Maier. Art and design by Jamie Wyatt. © Copyright 2016 Paul Maier. Published by Creative Communications for the Parish, 1564 Fencorp Dr., Fenton, MO 63026. 1-800-325-9414. www.creativecommunications.com. All rights reserved. Printed in the USA.

FF1