



## [Luke 13:1-3](#)

Pilate mixes the blood of Galileans with that of sacrifices

**Date:** 1st CE

**Language:** Greek

**Category:** New Testament

**Title of work:** The Gospel According to Luke

**Reference:**

13:1-3

### **Commentary:**

This intriguing passage has members of a crowd ask Jesus about what seems to be a rather harrowing event involving Pilate, the Roman governor, and some unfortunate Galileans, who seem to have met a violent end, their blood being mixed in with sacrifices that they were making. We have no other ancient evidence for this event. Josephus, [Jewish Antiquities XVIII.55-59](#) and *Jewish War* II.169-177, mentions that Jews did experience violence under Pilate, but he does not refer to anything specific that could provide a parallel for Luke's story. Many scholars believe that what is referred to here is the slaughtering of Galilean Jewish pilgrims, who had come to Jerusalem to make sacrifices at a festival, possibly the Passover (see Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, p. 1006). Robert Tannehill (*Luke*, p. 216) argues that the crowd are perhaps looking to Jesus to condemn the evil actions of Pilate, and make a political statement against such tyranny. If this is the case, they are of course not satisfied, as Luke's Jesus does not engage in any political discussion here, despite the apparently horrific subject matter providing the perfect opportunity for a criticism of Roman oppression. Rather, Jesus uses the incident to make a theological point about sin and repentance, namely, that contrary to the crowd's apparent assumption, misfortune is not the direct result of sinful behaviour. The slaughtered Galileans were not murdered because they were more sinful than other Galileans! This passage can be seen to offer some support, therefore, for the argument that the Lukan author was not so concerned with making strong anti-imperial statements. This is hinted at by Philip Esler, *Community and Gospel*, p. 203, who points out that the Lukan author seems to want to distinguish between Pilate's questionable individual moral character, expressed through his murdering of the Galileans, and his official role as Roman governor, which is shown later in the Gospel at Jesus's trial before Pilate, where the Lukan author minimises Pilate's role much more than the other Gospel writers. Luke emphasises that it is the Jews who want Jesus to be executed, and has Pilate try to release him on more than one occasion (see Luke 23:1-25). The beating that the Roman soldiers give to Jesus in the praetorium after Pilate condemns him ([Mark 15:16-20](#)) is also omitted by Luke, and replaced with a beating by Herod Antipas's soldiers instead. It is reasonable to ask why Luke would include the episode with Pilate and the Galileans (which does not appear in the other Gospels) at all, if indeed he wished to avoid slandering the Roman government too much. However, perhaps by having Jesus refuse to take the bait when the crowd inform him of the Roman governor's cruelty, the Lukan author actually seeks to send the message that the Jews should be more concerned about their own sinful, misguided ways than propagating anti-establishment sentiments. After all, by the time Jesus's trial comes in Luke's narrative, it is the Jewish authorities and the Jewish crowd in Jerusalem, not Pilate, who are presented as the real enemies of Jesus.

**Bibliographical references:** Joseph A. Fitzmyer, [The Gospel According to Luke](#) (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1981)

Philip F. Esler, [Community and Gospel in Luke-Acts: The Social and Political Motivations of Lukan Theology](#) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987)

Mikeal C. Parsons, [Luke](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2015)

Pyung-Soo Seo, [Luke's Jesus in the Roman Empire and the Emperor in the Gospel of Luke](#) (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2015)

Robert C. Tannehill, [Luke](#) (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996)

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