

The Prevalent Factor of Fear

General reaction to miracles was fear	Mt 9:8; Lk 5:26; 7:16; 8:37; Jn 6:19
Herod Antipas feared John the Baptist	Mk 6:20
Herod Antipas feared the people	Mt 14:5
Joseph of Arimathaea feared the Jews	Jn 19:38
The apostles fled from Gethsemane	Mk 14:50
Peter denied Jesus outside Caiaphas's house	Mt 26:69–70; Jn 18:26–27
Chief Priests feared retribution from the Romans	Jn 11:48
Chief Priests feared the people	Mt 21:46
Chief Priests feared Jesus	Mk 11:18
Pilate feared exceedingly	Jn 19:8
One robber on the cross feared God	Lk 23:40
Soldiers at Golgatha feared greatly	Mt 27:54
All the people left Golgatha fearful	Lk 23:48
The tomb guards feared the angel	Mt 28:4
The women at the tomb were afraid	Mk 16:8
The apostles met in fear on the first day	Jn 20:19
The apostles were terrified seeing the Lord	Lk 24:37
Initial reaction to angels was fear	Lk 1:12; 1:30; 2:10

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Explanation

Although the factor of fear is rarely mentioned by New Testament commentators, fear may well provide the consistent driving undercurrent that best explains all the irregularities and vagaries of the so-called trials of Jesus. Powerful and pervasive, this consistent factor runs through the story as an underlying emotion (even though all people were not afraid of the same thing). Consequently, the legal proceedings before the Jewish council and Pontius Pilate should not be viewed as wholly rational affairs. As chart 10-12 shows, many people arrayed around Jesus were afraid of one thing or another. Most often, they were deeply afraid of the supernatural. Jesus' healings and control of physical elements were open and impressive. They must have been the cause of profound concern to anyone who took these miracles seriously and did not believe that he was the Son of God. The only other option was to reject him as an evil wonder-worker or deceiving magician.

Reference

John W. Welch, "The Factor of Fear in the Trial of Jesus," in *Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior*, ed. Paul H. Peterson, Gary L. Hatch, Laure D. Card (Provo, Utah: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2002), chap. 13.