

# **BARABBAS**

*Ron Roberts*

When the Jews brought Jesus to Pilate for permission to execute Him we were introduced to **Barabbas**. Mark 15:7 says, *And there was one named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection.* We learn three things about the man in this verse. 1. He was guilty of insurrection. That means he caused a riot in rebellion against the Roman government. 2. He committed murder during the riot. 3. He had been caught and was in prison at that time.

Matt 27:16 records, " *And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas.*" "Notable" indicates that he was well known among the Jews. They were well aware of his identity and his crimes. He was likely the person who was supposed to be nailed to the middle cross between the other two thieves. John 18:40 tells us he was also a robber.

The Romans had granted a favor to the Jews by releasing one prisoner during the Passover. In Luke 23:17 we read, *(For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.)* Matthew's account records that Pilate made the choice of the two available prisoners. Barabbas was picked because he was the worst that they had. Pilate wanted to release Jesus, whom he found to be innocent. The choice proposed should have resulted in Jesus' release. But the priests persuaded the people to make the wrong decision. They would rather have a murderer walking their streets instead of the innocent Jesus.

Luke 23:18-19 tells us, *And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas: (Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison.)*

Barabbas was the guilty one, but he went free. Jesus was the innocent one, but He was punished on the cross. This parallels what happens to the whole world. We have been found guilty of sin. We are awaiting our condemnation by a righteous God. But God, in His love, sent Jesus to the cross to save us from our sins.

I have envisioned in my mind what Barabbas must have experienced that day. A hefty Roman soldier opened his rusty cell door. The expected announcement would be, "it's time, your penalty awaits." Instead he was told he was free. His chains were removed. The door remained open. The soldier stepped aside. If Barabbas asked why he would have been told that someone else was dying for him today.

We would like to think that this criminal in appreciation for Christ and the second chance he was given changed his life. But we have no Gospel record of the future of him. He could have returned to his life of crime. He was free to do what he pleased, just like we are. No one is forced to love God, obey the Gospel, or appreciate Jesus. No one needs to take advantage of the second chance that God has afforded us.

The "*bar*" in Barabbas' name means "son". You will recall that Barnabas means "*son of consolation*" (Acts 4:36). The "*abba*" in his name means "father". When Jesus prayed in the garden we read, "*And he said, **Abba**, Father, all things are possible unto thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what thou wilt*" (Mark 14:36). So, the name "*Barabbas*" means "*son of the father*". This is exactly who Jesus was, the Son of the Father.

Jesus death on the cross may not have changed Barabbas. It may not have changed you. The Lord's sacrifice does not automatically remove our sins as some religions teach. Although Jesus died for all men, only those who obey the Gospel will be benefitted by His death. The grace is offered at the cross, but it is only received by an obedient faith.

There was one thief on the cross who will be eternally grateful for Barabbas' release. Because this *notable* prisoner was set free, Jesus ended up on the cross next to him. He understood Jesus was innocent. He knew He had a kingdom that was beyond this life. He asked if he could be a part of that kingdom and was guaranteed Paradise after death.

The other thief did not profit from Jesus' death. He hurled accusations like the populace. But unlike the other people, he was going to die before sunset. He would not live to the day of Pentecost when many of those Jews heard the Gospel and repented of their deeds. He exited this world with sin on his soul. He was the only man in history who could have been "*saved like the thief on the cross*" but he refused.