



I
WAS
The Barabbas
CALLED
Companion
BARABBAS

Volume I

M.D.

HOUSE

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Contents

INTRODUCTION	2
CHAPTER 1 – WHO WAS BARABBAS?.....	4
CHAPTER 2 – THE ESSENTIAL MYSTERY OF CHRIST’S GRACE	8
CHAPTER 3 – THE SORROW OF THE WORLD	13
CHAPTER 4 – THE ARROGANCE OF THE WORLD	19
CHAPTER 5 – THE EFFECTS OF DISCOVERING CHRIST.....	22
CHAPTER 6 – WHO IS JUDAS ISCARIOT?	28
CHAPTER 7 – THE WEAKNESS OF THE WORLD	32
CHAPTER 8 – MARY’S TESTIMONY.....	35
CHAPTER 9 – DECIDING TO SEEK THE LORD	39
CHAPTER 10 – TRUTH AND FREEDOM.....	44
CHAPTER 11 – SPREADING THE GOOD NEWS.....	47
CHAPTER 12 – A GOD OF MIRACLES	50

INTRODUCTION

After extracting immense joy from the research and writing of “I Was Called Barabbas,” it made sense to embark on putting together a companion study guide. I’m glad I did. It gave me extended occasion to reflect on the power of Christ’s message in the lives of people who lived 2,000 years ago, and who were just like us in every meaningful way.

We don’t know, of course, if the man called Barabbas in the Bible, who may also have been named Jesus, recognized and accepted the redeeming love of his Savior in this life. There are many other possibilities. He may have consciously rejected Christ; he may have been driven mad by the torture and harsh confinement of a Roman prison; he may have gone on to live a normal life; or, he may have returned to his murderous ways, perhaps as a Jewish rebel. Maybe he ended up in prison again, or threw himself off a cliff, similar to the swine possessed by demons—there were no shortage of those (demons and cliffs) in the area.

The fictional existence I created for Barabbas follows a long and painful road toward redemption through Christ. He had mentors along the way, primarily his wife Chanah (who I made up), and the apostle Paul (who I most certainly did not, and who is so amazing to study). In the book, Barabbas and Chanah have children as well, some of whom die early, which wasn’t uncommon. Together, they discover the amazing peace, promise, challenge, and opportunity of the Christian life sincerely lived.

Cornelius, the notable Roman centurion, comes into the story as well, and what a fascinating conversion tale he had. We know very little about how his life progressed after his baptism by Peter (and the baptisms of his entire, numerous household!), but what an asset to the early Saints he must have been.

We are all commanded—for our benefit and that of our families, friends, and neighbors throughout the world—to live our lives in shining testimony of Christ, confessing his name, doing his works, and spreading his message of love, hope, and peace. In no other way can we rightly claim to be his disciples and participate fully in his grace.

Before we begin, I leave you with a pair of quotes from martyred German Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, which I take from the well-known biography by Eric Metaxas.

“Being a Christian is less about cautiously avoiding sin than about courageously and actively doing God’s will.” (p. 486)

“In Jesus Christ the reality of God has entered into the reality of this world. The place where the questions about the reality of God and about the reality of the world are answered at the same time is characterized solely by the name: Jesus Christ. God and the world are enclosed in this name . . . we cannot speak rightly of either God or the world without speaking of Jesus Christ. All concepts of reality that ignore Jesus Christ are abstractions.” (p. 469)

The world is truly a better place when we acknowledge its loving Creator and willing Savior, Jesus the Christ. He can heal all wounds . . . even those of a man like Barabbas.

CHAPTER 1 – WHO WAS BARABBAS?

Picture the Famous Scene

Two Notable Prisoners ...

- One a proven criminal, the other a political enemy
- One a rebel with an imperfect cause, the other a true revolutionary offering perfect deliverance
- One a failed champion of the Jews, one the true champion of *all* the children of God
- One despised by the Romans, the other despised by the Jewish leaders
- One the son of Abbas, meaning “father,” the other the Only Begotten Son of the Father
- One powerless to change his fate, one possessing all power to do the will of the Father
- One hopeless, one the fountain of all hope
- Both, perhaps, named Jesus

Who was the man called Barabbas? *Likely a Jewish rebel who had murdered Romans, who also committed robberies to help finance the rebellion.*

<p>Matthew 27 “A notable prisoner, called Barabbas”</p>	<p>Mark 15 “One named Barabbas, which lay bound with them that had made insurrection with him, who had committed murder in the insurrection”</p>
<p>Luke 23 “Who for a certain sedition made in the city, and for murder, was cast into prison”</p>	<p>John 18 “A robber”</p>

Try to See Through Barabbas's Eyes

Had Barabbas heard of Jesus of Nazareth? *Most likely.*

Had he met Jesus of Nazareth before, or heard him preach? *Perhaps, but we can't place a probability.*

Had he resigned himself to die, and come to uneasy terms with it? Deliverance must have seemed impossible, even though, ironically, he stood near the man who could offer him eternal deliverance.

How did he feel when he was suddenly, unexpectedly a free man? Shocked? Confused? Afraid? (Was it a trick?) Lost? Ashamed? Relieved? Elated?

I shivered suddenly, and then it struck me like a bolt of lightning out of a clear sky. Jesus of Nazareth was to be executed in my place. My place. I was a murderer and a thief. I had abandoned my family. Jesus was a teacher, and, if the rumors were true, a healer. He had never harmed anyone. He had never shed blood. And yet his would be spilled while mine would be spared. To what purpose? Why would God countenance such a thing? And why would my people demand it? (p. 12, "I Was Called Barabbas")

Think about how he might have viewed the Jewish leaders, who worked themselves into a frenzy, shouting "Crucify him!" (Mark 15:13,14, Luke 23:21) and "His blood be on us, and on our children." (Matt. 27:25)

What did many, perhaps most, Jewish people—particularly the zealots—believe regarding the coming of the Messiah and the restoration of the Jewish kingdom? *That Messiah would physically overthrow the oppressors of the Jewish people and make the Jewish nation the most powerful on Earth.*

Was Barabbas in the zealot camp? *More likely than not.*

Consider the chapter heading from the Prologue of "I Was Called Barabbas":

*Which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it,
they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.*

– 1 Cor. 2:8, KJV

What does it mean to KNOW the mysteries of God?

Verses 1-4 – When Paul first came to the Corinthians, he was not a powerful preacher, but he testified with single-minded focus of Christ and his completed mission—not the wisdom of the world which had made him so proud when he studied under the highly-acclaimed Gamaliel. He sought the Spirit to help him teach, not the erudition of the “great ones” of the Earth.

Verse 5 – Our faith should not stand in the wisdom of the world, but in the power of God.

Verse 9 (famous verse) – *But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.*

Verse 14 – The “natural man” doesn’t receive the things of the Spirit, for they appear as foolishness; they call good evil, and evil good, as Isaiah recorded in Isaiah 5:20-24. Note the natural consequences in vs 24: their roots will be rotten, their blossoms unfruitful.

Verse 16 – We have the mind of Christ ... what does that mean? *He is willing to share EVERYTHING with us, as we are prepared to receive it.*

How does PRIDE prevent us from discovering (and leveraging) those mysteries?

The “well-educated” can be just as mob-like as any other group of people ... and more stubbornly persistent in fallacy, even when the proof seems overwhelming.

As the old saying goes, “You can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make it drink.” One of the unique characteristics of being human (and having agency) is that we can talk ourselves into just about anything, with multiple levels of justification. The more “learned” we are, the more layers of sophistry we can add to arguments that separate us from the presence of God’s pure wisdom.

Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.

– Proverbs 16:18

Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

– 1 Peter 5:5

CHAPTER 2 – THE ESSENTIAL MYSTERY OF CHRIST’S GRACE

Barabbas, perhaps, didn’t believe he “fit” in the scene with Jesus, Pilate, and the Jewish leaders. But surely he recognized he had a hand in making it real, as do we all, as sinners in need of our Savior’s Grace.

How essential is Christ’s Grace?

For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God. – Romans 3:23

For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

– Ephesians 5:5

Despite how often we worry about (or pine for) Christ’s Second Coming, which will indeed be magnificent, his First Coming was more important. Without his voluntary sacrifice for us here, nothing we could do would make any difference. We would forever fall short of the glory of God and remain separated from his presence.

Our eternal worth is tied to Christ’s grace. Not only do we require it to achieve our potential, but his love for us and his understanding of our worth is why he made his voluntary sacrifice (see Hebrews 12:1-2). Only by cooperating with Jesus, by accepting his invitation and diligently following him in thought, word, and deed, thereby allowing him to make us new creatures, revealing and refining our true personalities, can we return to live in God’s presence.

Here is how C.S. Lewis so beautifully and insightfully put it (highlights added):

The more we get what we now call 'ourselves' out of the way and let Him take us over, the more truly ourselves we become ... It is no good trying to 'be myself' without Him. The more I resist Him and try to live on my own, the more I become dominated by my own heredity and upbringing and surroundings and natural desires. In fact, what I so proudly call 'Myself' becomes merely the meeting place for trains of events which I never started and which I cannot stop. What I call 'My wishes' become merely the desires thrown up by my physical organism or pumped into me by other men's thoughts or even suggested to me by devils ... I am not, in my natural state, nearly so much of a person as I like to believe: most of what I call 'me' can be very easily explained. It is when I turn to Christ, when I give myself up to His Personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own ... Sameness is to be found most among the most 'natural' men, not among those who surrender to Christ. How monotonously alike all the great tyrants and conquerors have been: how gloriously different are the saints ... Give up yourself, and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to death, death of your ambitions and favourite wishes every day and death of your whole body in the end: submit with every fibre of your being, and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will be really yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look for yourself, and you will find in the long run only hatred, loneliness, despair, rage, ruin, and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him, and with Him everything else thrown in. – “Mere Christianity”, pp. 225-27

How big is Christ's Grace?

- We are literal sons and daughters of God, powerful beings with unlimited potential (see Acts 17:28-9); so, saying we are “saved” simply for believing in Jesus Christ vastly underestimates the depth and breadth of his **enabling, ennobling, and enlightening** Grace.
- Christ recognizes our potential and **respects** our agency; he will **not** force us to follow him.
- We progress **from grace to grace** as we accept his help, seeking to follow in the footsteps of his progression (link Matthew 5:48 with Luke 2:52).

- James 2:17 says, “*Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.*” If we courageously **embrace the challenge** of proving and developing our faith by our works, limitless blessings are promised.
- Satan is desperate to suffocate our **divine heritage** and **potential**, to confuse our perceptions of **worth** (our own and that of others), and to utterly abolish the firm foundations of **family, faith, and freedom**.

Satan’s <u>False</u> Promises <i>(for forced obedience)</i>	Christ’s <u>Sure</u> Promises <i>(for voluntary obedience)</i>
Perfect physical safety	Difficult challenges to help us learn humility
Perfect equity of Earthly things	Opportunities to sacrifice for others
Easy/automatic absolution	Earned forgiveness of (and sanctification from) sin
Uninterrupted personal happiness	Comfort, guidance, and instruction from the Holy Spirit in any circumstance
Minimal choices to reduce “uncertainty”	Freedom to choose in all things (but not to escape natural consequences)
No need for “difficult” personal responsibility or individual initiative	Direct access to Heavenly Father through prayer to help us follow His Son’s perfect example

Why did he do it?

Christ's love for us fuels his Grace; we are “the joy that was set before him” (Hebrews 12:2), motivating him to endure the cross and despise the shame of his mistreatment (even today!)

He could have declined the “bitter cup” and destroyed his enemies, leaving us bereft of the possibility of redemption, but he didn't, and **the heavens rejoiced at his choice!**

He sees the end from the beginning, maintaining perfect eternal perspective. His mission was so much larger than throwing off Roman oppression—it pierced the veil to see beyond this Earth life to our joy and growth in the next. His “chosen” people includes *anyone* who accepts his invitation to earnestly follow him.

To those chosen, he promises not only peace in the next life, but comfort in this life as well. Many who have been persecuted, like Pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer in Germany during WWII, have testified to the comfort and peace they received during intense trials as they stood firmly for truth and righteousness. We often break our promises to God (or bend them as far as we dare), but he is **always faithful** to his promises.

But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.

– John 14:26-7

The Yoke of Christ

At times it may seem counterintuitive, but fully accepting Christ, which means taking up our cross and following his example and teachings, is far easier than

ignoring or rejecting him. Life is filled with suffering and malevolence, but if we choose Christ as our guide, he will provide peace and strength in astounding and limitless ways through the Comforter, and even at times with his own presence. He understands us perfectly, because he has experienced our struggles. Satan does not, because he has not, and he doesn't care about our welfare, anyway.

Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

(Matthew 11:28-30)

We can do this! Christ has told us we can do it, and he will help us! We truly are sons and daughters of God with incredible eternal potential, no matter what our current physical limitations might be.

"I fear sometimes that I have neither the capacity nor the strength, but I will not allow my faith to fail. My lamp will not go out." (Barabbas's wife Chanah, p. 135, "I Was Called Barabbas")

CHAPTER 3 – THE SORROW OF THE WORLD

For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of: but the sorrow of the world worketh death. – 2 Cor. 7:10

For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. – James 1:20

GODLY SORROW	SELFISH EMBARRASSMENT
Desire to provide restitution, even if not mandated or publicly recognized	Comparisons of relative entitlement to rationalize lack of restitution
Acknowledgment to God of the violation of his commandments	Little or no attempt to admit to God or counsel with him about it
Confession to those impacted, and to ecclesiastical authority, if necessary	“Qualified” admission (once caught) to reduce embarrassment or responsibility; even to “appear” brave / conscientious
Willingness to accept consequences and work toward redemption	Active minimizing or avoidance of consequences
Determination to prevent a repeat of the mistake, and to accept help from others	Determination not to get caught again

Barabbas the Jewish Rebel Didn't Understand Jesus

It's fairly safe to say that by the end of Jesus's ministry, all Jews in Judea and surrounding areas had at least heard of him and had some idea of what he was preaching and doing. That would have included Barabbas, of course. What might he have thought of this strange rabbi?

In Lachish, some few miles inland from Agrippias, I started to hear rumors about another great rabbi, who had arisen in Galilee of all places. Similar to what the merchant Barnabas had described, some believed this rabbi was the long-promised Messiah, come to save Israel. I dismissed the claims without a flicker of hope, knowing it was just the fevered imaginations of a beaten populace with no backbone to stand up on their own and forcefully throw off the Roman oppression.

Besides, I was a man without a people or a god, a murderer of Jew and Roman alike. If the Messiah came, he would not save me. And so I maintained my existence by the sweat of my brow, turning my mind toward the happy and miserable day I would die. How long would it be? And who would care? (p. 39, "I Was Called Barabbas")

The Influence of the Roman Decapolis on the Region

What was the purpose of the semi-autonomous cities of the Roman Decapolis? *To promote culture, which is upstream from politics.* In this case, Hellenistic and Roman culture. Jewish religious leaders pushed back hard on these cultures, to their credit.

Because of his universal message, Christ drew many followers from the largely “Gentile” cities of the Decapolis, which may have numbered significantly more than just the ten sites shown in black text here.

That success should have made it clear to his disciples that his mission was to all people, not just the Jews or the broader House of Israel. Today, we might ask:



- What are the “Roman Decapolis” cities of our day?
- Do these nexuses of society accurately define what is just? What is desirable and acceptable? What is useful? What is truly *progressive*?
- Who runs them?
- What are their real purposes?
- How helpful or dangerous can they be?
- How do good people defend themselves against the adversary’s aggressive, anti-Christian **cancel culture**?
- How can we be bolder in promoting the benefits of obeying God’s clear commandments, loving the sinner (which includes us all) but not the sin?
- How can we exercise greater faith to invite God’s miracles, even in areas that seem impossibly corrupted?

Here is a partial list of the manifestations of modern “Decapolis” cities today.

Manifestation	Overt Purpose	Implicit Purpose
Encouraging children to hide actions or problems from their parents	To protect a child’s right to choose his or her own path in life	To hide perversion from those who love the child most; also to weaken or sever the parent-child bond, transferring it to the state and its “caring experts”
Shutting down debate through censorship of certain viewpoints	To promote healthy discussions in non-threatening environments	To threaten opponents of certain orthodoxies with communal cancellation or targeted law enforcement to achieve compliance (classic authoritarianism)
Promoting all forms of family life as equally desirable and effective	To embrace others whose family circumstances are different than our own or “traditional” societal norms	To erase the desire to form familial arrangements scientifically proven to be the most effective ideal to strive for <u>across all societies throughout history</u>
Restricting the teaching of religion in all public spaces, including schools	To prevent violent, anti-social behaviors driven by clashes of religious ideology	To eliminate religious feelings entirely and replace them with implicit trust in secular institutions
Allowing men to claim womanhood and compete against them in sports	To honor the honest expression of “true self” for each individual	To blur all physiological gender distinctions and sever the son or daughter relationship with God

Grouping people, including young children, by race or skin color and assigning generalized “oppressor” and “victim” groups	To root out racism by certain groups against other groups	To enact vengeance for a narrow historical subset of past sins against certain racial groupings, while enhancing the wealth and social status of those orchestrating a selfish, guilt-driven agenda

Chanah, Barabbas's Future Wife, Steers Him from Self-Loathing

There are times we all need someone to remind us we are not hopeless.

"We are all broken vessels, Jesse, but we can be remade. This world is cruel and difficult, but we can overcome it. You have proved that to me. You came back and endured your shame, when most would not have. You take care of your mother and sisters, and you deny yourself much ... of what you could have."

... "That is the past, Jesse, and your future is different. I have seen it." (p. 39, "I Was Called Barabbas")