

BARABBAS

The New Testament informs us that Pilate had a custom of releasing a prisoner, anybody they wanted, for the Jews at Passover time (Matthew 27:15). He invoked the custom during Jesus' trial in the hope that they would pick Jesus. He gave a choice between Jesus and Barabbas and they picked Barabbas. Barabbas was a thief and a murderer (John 18:40). Luke says Barabbas had caused a disturbance in Jerusalem shortly before (Luke 23:19,25). Barabbas was probably a zealot, a terrorist who worked to get Rome out of Palestine.

Look carefully at this. Pilate decided what choice they would have. He would not have offered them a monster who was a danger to Romans like Barabbas, and Jesus. It would have been Jesus and somebody who committed a capital crime that was not so serious or who was sentenced to life in jail. If he wanted to save Jesus what did he choose Barabbas for? He knew the Jews would choose him whether they liked him or not for they admired him for his crimes against the Empire.

In Luke we read that Pilate was going to release Jesus even after they had chosen Barabbas which indicates that Pilate was not afraid of a riot and could have refused to let them have their custom and refused to execute Jesus. Yet the gospels say he allowed himself to be bullied by the Jews to keep the peace. Pilate if he hoped the Jews would choose Jesus, would have chosen a prisoner they hated more than Jesus not one they looked up to like Barabbas. That Barabbas was chosen proves that Pilate did not make the offer in the hope that he could be allowed to free Jesus at all. It was a gospel lie. Also, would he really want to give Jesus back to the people who would tear him to pieces if they hated him as much as the gospels say? If Pilate offered the Jews a prisoner they hated as much as Jesus if not more then he was not afraid of a riot though tensions were high.

Christians say Pilate did not decide that Barabbas was an option for release under the custom but the people chose Barabbas. Matthew alone says that Pilate offered them a choice and stated that only Jesus and Barabbas were on the menu (27:17). Cross-referencing with the other gospels we are told that Pilate did this thinking he could get Jesus off.

It is a ridiculous custom and there is nothing outside the gospels to suggest that it existed. The horrible Romans were unlikely to establish such a custom. Why was the popular John the Baptist not saved this way? His execution contradicts the claim that the Jews could not kill Jesus themselves for they needed the Romans' permission. If Rome had decided John should die then John would have been crucified. Beheading was for Roman citizens.

John has it that Pilate thought that if he reminded the Jews of the custom he could have had a chance to have got Jesus freed. John says it was because he went and told them first that Jesus had committed no crime in the hope that they would relent on their plan to have Jesus destroyed and then he offered to let them keep their custom to try and get Jesus freed. First of all, Pilate could have appealed to the Emperor or people in high places to let him release Jesus and that would scare the people to let him have it his own way for if Jesus was put out of the way in exile they had no reason to complain and John says they were scared of Rome and that was the reason Jesus had to be vanquished. Pilate must have had friends who would have done him this favour.

Secondly, Pilate would not have reminded them of the custom or let them avail of it until he had found a way to persuade them not to reject Jesus.

Thirdly, Pilate could have said that Jesus was not a real prisoner but just somebody on trial so if they clamoured for Jesus to be the one to be condemned they had to be ignored. That is another reason why the Barabbas story as told in the gospels is an impossibility. Pilate would not have made Jesus an option for condemnation for the custom if he had really judged Jesus to be innocent. Fourthly, would it not have been a better idea to send Jesus to a cell and say Jesus hanged himself in the cell so that he could be exiled later? If Pilate wanted to save Jesus' life he had a strange way of going about it.

It is absurd that John (18:39) has Pilate reminding the Jews of the custom as if they could have forgotten. The fact that the Jews are said to have tried to get Jesus executed at the time of the custom is too much of a strain on credibility for they would not have wanted to risk Jesus ending up being offered up as one of the choices for freedom. It was stupid of Pilate to offer Barabbas and Jesus as a scheme through which he hoped to get Jesus off for he knew the people hated Jesus and Barabbas was a national hero to them and it was too stupid to have really happened.

Barabbas was a zealot or an insurrectionist (John 18:40) – an enemy of Rome – so there was no way he would have been offered. Also, the Sadducees were the main force behind Jesus' problem and they liked to kiss the backsides of the Romans for the sake of the land and the people. They could not have chosen Barabbas and done this. And Pilate would not have offered him. Did Pilate offer him because he thought Barabbas would not be accepted and Jesus would be? The thought is preposterous though it is suggested in the gospels (Matthew 27:18). In the eyes of Roman Law Barabbas was a zealot and a

terrorist but Jesus was worse, a self-styled Messiah. A king will do more harm than a lout.

Pilate knew that if the crowd chose Jesus, Jesus would be put through the whole thing all over again anyway and would not be so lucky the second time. He would continue to alienate the Jews and boast of kingship as before. Jesus had boasted even before Pilate and incited the High Priest and the council of the Jews at his trial. Pilate would have seen no sense in saving Jesus.

If the gospels are true when they say the crowd twisted Pilate's arm and Pilate tried to get Jesus off by offering them the choice then why did they let him make Jesus an option? It is very hard to predict what a crowd will choose. The risk was there especially if Jesus had the big reputation for making people change their ways the gospels say he had. Most ran after him without knowing him and obeyed him.

Luke states that the crowd said that Jesus stirs up (present tense) the people of Judea and (more surprisingly and importantly) Jerusalem (23:5). If Jesus had so many allies even then where were they now in his hour of desperate need? If Jerusalem was full of mates then we know what would have happened that day.

If you look up your Revised Standard Version footnotes on Matthew you will read that many ancients asserted that Jesus Barabbas was the name of the man in 27:16. Jesus Bar Abbas is Jesus, Son of the Father. Interesting. Was it really Jesus Christ who was released and are the gospels covering this up? When testimony about a miracle might be interpreted without recourse to the supernatural even if it is only a vague hint that testimony is invalidated for a miracle can only be accepted when one's back is to the wall. In this case, the return of Jesus to life would be invalidated. It would be explained by holding that Jesus was released and that it was Barabbas who was nailed and mistaken for Jesus and Jesus later pretended to be raised from the dead.