

<sup>1</sup> Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, reached a decision. They bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate. <sup>2</sup> "Are you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate. "Yes, it is as you say," Jesus replied.

<sup>3</sup> The chief priests accused him of many things.

<sup>4</sup> So again Pilate asked him, "Aren't you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of." <sup>5</sup> But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

<sup>6</sup> Now it was the custom at the Feast to release a prisoner whom the people requested. <sup>7</sup> A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising.

<sup>8</sup> The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. <sup>9</sup> "Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?" asked Pilate, <sup>10</sup> knowing it was out of envy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. <sup>11</sup> But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead.

<sup>12</sup> "What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?" Pilate asked them. <sup>13</sup> "Crucify him!" they shouted. <sup>14</sup> "Why? What crime has he committed?" asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, "Crucify him!" <sup>15</sup> Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

Jesus was crucified through the hatred of the Jews, the blood-lust of the crowd, the moral indifference of Pilate and the savage cruelty of the Roman soldiers. What about this guy, Barabbas? Was he just a lucky bloke that was at the right place at the right time and got away with his life? Was he merely a footnote in the story, or possibly a tool to show the mindless passion of the crowd and expose Roman "justice" for the injustice it was? From a secular point of view these explanations for Barabbas' role make sense. However, there is little in Scripture that is not intentionally placed there for our edification, and in particular, for our enlightenment as to the nature of God.

A hint may be seen in the man's name itself. Barabbas literally means "son of the father." Are we to understand that this murderous rebel was also a son of the Father? If so, then the Son of the Father dies in the place of the son of the Father; the innocent Son is sacrificed so the guilty son might be delivered from death. This may not be that much of a stretch when one thinks about the custom of releasing a prisoner at the Passover. According to some of the rabbinical writings, the Passover lamb might be sacrificed 'for one whom they promise to bring out of prison' (Mishnah *Pesahim* 8.6).

Might you and I be Barabbas? We have rebelled against God and are deserving of death. But for us the Lamb of God was condemned, flogged and crucified. We are the recipients of the promise of release from the prison of sin and the sentence of eternal death. We are no longer sons of death, but now are sons of hope.

**Thank you Jesus, that as my Passover Lamb you stepped into my place so I might be reconciled to God. It is far too great a debt for me to pay, so with the help of the Holy Spirit I will show my love by trying to live in obedience to your will. Amen.**