

AN ASTONISHING CHOICE

by Tom Wacaster

"Now at the feast the governor was wont to release unto the multitude one prisoner, whom they would. And they had then a notable prisoner, called Barabbas. When therefore they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" (Matt. 27:15-17). I don't know where the "custom" originated that allowed the Jews to select some prisoner for release, but likely it had to do with Rome's attempt to appease the Jews by granting liberty to some political prisoner. After all, Israel was almost at constant odds with Rome politically. Little did Pilate imagine that this Jewish mob would, when given the choice, prefer a cold-blooded killer over a man Who went about doing good, and against Whom no charge of wrong could be levied. Oh yes, Barabbas was a "notable" prisoner. No doubt a seditionist, a zealot who hated Rome and Rome's occupation of the Promised Land. Somewhere in the recesses of the not-too-distant past this man had taken someone's life. Arrested, tried, and convicted he was confined to a prison in Jerusalem to await his execution by crucifixion. Here was a murderer, a seditionist, deserving of the death that awaited him along with the two thieves who would eventually be crucified with Christ. Little did Barabbas imagine that in the early hours of the very day of his scheduled execution he would be granted not only a stay of execution, but a full release from prison. In an attempt to appease the angry mob, Pilate offered the Jews a choice. Knowing the Jews had delivered up Jesus out of jealousy, he asked, "Who shall I release to you? Jesus, or Barabbas." It is rather ironic that the name "Barabbas" means "son of father" ("Bar" meaning "son of," and "abba" meaning "father"). That dark night in Jerusalem, Israel was given the choice between two men as to whom they would accept, and whom they would reject. Jesus was the Son of the Father of all men; Barabbas the son of some unnamed man. Was Barabbas' earthly father still alive? Did he live in Jerusalem? Was he aware of the fate of his son, and the turn of events that would set this man free? No information is provided. But this we know about the "father" of each of these men. The father of one, if alive, or even aware of his son's life, must have hung his head in shame. The Father of the Other was "well pleased" with the love and obedience demonstrated by His short thirty-three year earthly tenor.

The governor must have been shocked to hear that the people preferred this vile, wicked murderer to Jesus. But that is the choice they made. And their choice echoes through the halls of history revealing the extreme to which men will go when they are determined to rid their lives of Jesus. The atheist selects Barabbas over Jesus when he rejects the abundant evidence of the existence of God and deity of Jesus. He plays the fool (Psa. 14:1) and willfully closes his eyes to the abundant "proofs" that declare the glory of God and shows His wonderful

handiwork (Psa. 19:1). In exchange he offers nothing to the world but a bleak outlook on life and an eternity filled with hopeless non existence. The profligate likewise selects Barabbas over Jesus when he follows in the footsteps of that notorious criminal who had little respect for life and no respect for authority. The unethical abortionist, unloving mother, and uncaring society select Barabbas over Jesus every time a baby is torn from his mother's womb. The homosexual selects Barabbas over Jesus for an unholy, perverted life style. The religious leaders and foolish followers who perpetrate, perpetuate, or participate in religious error have selected Barabbas over Jesus. The child of God that turns back to the filth of the world has made a bad choice. Every lukewarm, indifferent, undedicated, uncommitted child of God who allow pleasure to come between them and their God, have selected Barabbas over Jesus. Cowardly elders who choose to appease rebellious members rather than have the whole counsel of God preached, have likewise selected Barabbas over Jesus.

Yes, the choice those Jews made on that fateful day has been repeated by untold millions. When men choose a person, philosophy or policy over Christ, have they not called for the release of Barabbas over the Christ? "Not this man, but Barabbas!" Whether in person, principle, or way of life, when men choose to "crucify" Christ afresh they are asking for Barabbas over Christ. Every time someone rejects the authority of Christ for tradition, family religion, or a moral life style contrary to the teaching of the New Testament, they have asked for Barabbas over Jesus. When we turn away from Christ and give in to anger, selfishness, envy, jealousy, hatred, evil speaking, we have chosen Barabbas instead of Jesus. Dear friend, what choice will you make? Barabbas or Jesus?