

Luke 23:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

(For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast.)

Analysis

For of necessity he must release one unto them at the feast—This parenthetical note explains the custom underlying Pilate's strategy. The phrase **of necessity** (ἀνάγκην, anankēn) indicates established obligation, though no Roman law mandated this practice. The Passover amnesty custom (also mentioned in Matthew 27:15, Mark 15:6, John 18:39) allowed the people to choose one prisoner for release, likely a gesture to maintain peace during the volatile festival when Jerusalem swelled with Jewish pilgrims remembering liberation from Egypt.

This custom becomes the stage for humanity's archetypal choice: Christ or Barabbas, the Savior or the sinner, the Prince of Peace or the violent rebel. The Greek anankēn eichen apolýein (he had necessity to release) frames this as Pilate's perceived obligation—whether legal requirement or political necessity. God's sovereignty uses even pagan customs to illuminate spiritual truth: we all deserve Barabbas's fate (rebels against God's kingdom), but Christ took our place, released us, and bore our judgment.

Historical Context

No Roman or Jewish source outside the Gospels documents this Passover amnesty custom, though Pilate had authority to grant clemency. The practice parallels the *lectisternium* (releasing prisoners during Roman religious festivals) and fits Passover's liberation theme. Ancient governors often granted amnesty during major festivals to maintain goodwill with subject populations—pragmatic politics dressed as benevolence.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does the Passover amnesty custom (celebrating release from Egyptian bondage) ironically frame the people's rejection of their true Liberator?
2. What does the crowd's choice between Jesus and Barabbas reveal about humanity's natural preference when confronted with God's righteousness?

Interlinear Text

ἀνάγκην	δέ	εἰχεν	ἀπολύειν	αὐτοῖς	κατὰ	έορτὴν	ἔνα
of necessity	(For	he must	release	unto them	at	the feast	one
G318	G1161	G2192	G630	G846	G2596	G1859	G1520

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