

Luke 23:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they cried out all at once, saying, Away with this man, and release unto us Barabbas:

Analysis

The Crowd's Unanimous Rejection: This verse captures one of history's most tragic moments—the Jewish crowd's unified demand for Jesus's crucifixion. The Greek phrase "anekragon de pamplethei" (ἀνέκραγον δὲ παμπληθεὶ) means "they cried out all together" or "all at once," emphasizing the unanimous, mob-like nature of the outcry. The verb "anekragon" (ἀνέκραγον) suggests a violent, passionate shouting—not reasoned discourse but emotional frenzy. "Aire touton" (Αἴρε τοῦτον, "Away with this one") is a legal formula demanding execution, while "apoluson de hemin ton Barabban" (ἀπόλυσον δὲ ἡμῖν τὸν Βαραββᾶν) means "release to us Barabbas."

The Irony of Barabbas: The name Barabbas (Βαραββᾶς) comes from Aramaic "bar abba," meaning "son of the father." Some ancient manuscripts even give his first name as "Jesus Barabbas," creating a stark choice: Jesus Barabbas (son of an earthly father, a violent revolutionary) versus Jesus Christ (Son of the Heavenly Father, Prince of Peace). Barabbas was a "stasiastes" (στασιαστής)—an insurrectionist who had committed murder during a rebellion (Mark 15:7), exactly the kind of political messiah many Jews expected. The crowd chose violence over peace, rebellion over redemption, a murderer over the Author of Life.

Fulfillment of Prophecy and Typology: This exchange fulfills Isaiah 53:12: "he was numbered with the transgressors." Barabbas literally went free because Jesus took his place—a vivid picture of substitutionary atonement. Every guilty sinner is Barabbas, condemned to death, yet Christ dies in our place. The Greek "apoluson"

(ἀπόλυσον, "release") is the same word used for forgiveness and redemption elsewhere in the New Testament, underscoring the theological depth of this moment.

Historical Context

This event occurred during Passover week in AD 30 (or possibly AD 33), during Pontius Pilate's tenure as prefect of Judea (AD 26-36). The custom of releasing a prisoner during Passover (mentioned in Matthew 27:15, Mark 15:6, John 18:39) is not documented in Jewish or Roman sources outside the Gospels, but fits the pattern of Roman governors making conciliatory gestures during volatile religious festivals. With Jerusalem's population swelling from about 40,000 to over 200,000 during Passover, maintaining order was paramount.

Pilate's attempt to release Jesus by offering the crowd a choice reflects his recognition of Jesus's innocence (stated three times in Luke 23:4, 14, 22) yet his political cowardice in the face of the crowd's pressure. The crowd's preference for Barabbas over Jesus reveals the political tensions of first-century Judea. Barabbas represented armed resistance against Rome—the kind of messiah many expected. Jesus, who proclaimed a spiritual kingdom and taught "render unto Caesar," disappointed nationalist expectations.

The manipulation of the crowd by the chief priests and elders (Matthew 27:20) demonstrates the religious establishment's determination to eliminate Jesus, whom they saw as a threat to their authority and their accommodation with Rome. Their cry "Away with this man" echoes the later cry "We have no king but Caesar" (John 19:15), a shocking repudiation of Jewish monotheistic loyalty. Within a generation (AD 70), Rome would destroy Jerusalem and the Temple, ironically fulfilling Jesus's prophecies about judgment on that generation (Matthew 23:36-38, Luke 19:41-44).

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. What does the crowd's unanimous cry reveal about mob mentality and the danger of collective sin overwhelming individual conscience?
2. How does the choice between Jesus and Barabbas symbolize humanity's choice between God's way of peace and the world's way of violence?
3. In what ways does Barabbas serve as a type or picture of all sinners who go free because Christ takes their place?
4. What does Pilate's attempt to release Jesus while ultimately capitulating to the crowd teach about moral compromise and political cowardice?
5. How does this event fulfill Isaiah's prophecy that the Messiah would be "numbered with the transgressors" (Isaiah 53:12)?

Interlinear Text

ἀνέκραξαν δὲ παμπληθεὶ λέγοντες Αἴρε τοῦτον
they cried out And all at once saying Away with this
G349 G1161 G3826 G3004 G142 G5126

ἀπόλυσον δὲ ἡμῖν τὸν Βαραββᾶν·
release And unto us Barabbas
G630 G1161 G2254 G3588 G912

Additional Cross-References

Acts 3:14 (Parallel theme): But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you;

Acts 22:22 (Parallel theme): And they gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live.

Acts 21:36 (Parallel theme): For the multitude of the people followed after, crying,
Away with him.

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