

Mark 15:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Now at that feast he released unto them one prisoner, whomsoever they desired.

Analysis

Now at that feast he released unto them one prisoner (Κατὰ δὲ ἑορτὴν ἀπέλυεν αὐτοῖς ἓνα δέσμιον, *Kata de heortēn apelyen autois hena desmion*)—The phrase κατὰ ἑορτὴν (*kata heortēn*) means 'according to the feast,' establishing this as customary practice. The verb ἀπολύω (*apolyō*) means to release, set free. A δέσμιος (*desmios*) was a prisoner, literally 'bound one.' **Whomsoever they desired** (ὅνπερ ἤτοῦντο, *honper ētounto*)—the relative pronoun with strengthening particle (ὅνπερ, *honper*) emphasizes choice: 'whomever they might request.'

This Passover amnesty custom is not attested in extra-biblical sources, but the Gospels uniformly mention it. The practice aligned with Roman clemency traditions (Latin: *abolitio*, *indulgentia*) and would placate Jewish crowds during volatile festival periods. The bitter irony: the crowd would demand freedom for a murderer (Barabbas) and death for the Author of Life (Acts 3:14-15).

Historical Context

Passover was politically dangerous for Rome—Jerusalem's population swelled from ~50,000 to over 200,000 with pilgrims, many harboring anti-Roman sentiments. The feast commemorated liberation from Egypt, inflaming nationalist hopes. Releasing a prisoner was pragmatic crowd management. Pilate likely offered this choice expecting the crowd to choose Jesus, using it as a face-saving way to release a man he knew was innocent (v. 10).

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does the Passover amnesty custom create tragic irony regarding who is released and who is condemned?
2. Why would Pilate offer this choice, expecting the crowd to choose Jesus?
3. What does this custom reveal about Roman strategies for managing occupied territories during volatile times?

Interlinear Text

Κατὰ	δὲ	ἐορτὴν	ἀπέλυσεν	αὐτοῖς	ἓνα	δέσμιον	ὃνπερ
at	Now	that feast	he released	unto them	one	prisoner	whomsoever
G2596	G1161	G1859	G630	G846	G1520	G1198	G3746
ἤτοῦντο							
they desired							
G154							

Additional Cross-References

Acts 24:27 (Parallel theme): But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.

Acts 25:9 (Parallel theme): But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me?