

Barabbas's Dilemma

Barabbas sat at table in the local pub, nursing a cup of strong wine. The crowd had escorted him there, set him up with a wineskin of the pub's best and left... fixated on seeing the rabbi, Jeshua, crucified. Why? Why had they done that for him?

Though he felt relief at being released and spared crucifixion, he wondered why the mob had wanted Jeshua's death. What had *he* done? As far as he knew, the man had done nothing worthy of death, certainly less than he had.

For years, he had been a thorn in the foot of the Roman lion. When they finally caught and arrested him, it didn't come as a surprise. He had had a good go at it, stirred up a lot of trouble for the Romans and had his supporters among the rabble.

He had little respect for the Romans. They had conquered Israel and ruled with a rod of iron. He hadn't much more, however, for the so-called leaders in the Temple. He understood why the Romans did what they did, but the Pharisees and Sadducees purported to work for the betterment of the people and they all sought to further their own power and position, uncaring of the plight of the masses. That's how he had come to have a following. They would follow anyone who told them he would free them from the boot-on-the-neck of their Roman conquerors.

He had been accused of many crimes—robbery, insurrection, murder—all of which he had done, but he had never killed anyone but the despised Romans. What had Jeshua done? From what he had heard, the man went around preaching about the Kingdom—whatever that meant—healing the sick, lame and possessed, even raising the dead. When he insulted the Pharisees, something he, Barabbas, saw as a plus, that might have been the reason they wanted him dead, but the mob? How had those same Pharisees whipped them into such frenzy—the promise of money?

Just then, a busty serving wench came over and plopped her ample bottom into his lap. “Hey, handsome, congratulations on your release. Who'd you pay off?”

“I think you've been drinking too much of your own wine, for no one has ever accused me of being handsome and not one of my friends paid so much as a denarius toward my release.”

“Then why are you here?”

“I have no more of an idea than you. All I know is that they pulled me from that rat-infested cell and dragged me before Pilate. He asked the rabble who he should release, me or that itinerant rabbi, and they chose me. I was as surprised as anyone... maybe even more so.”

“Well, they seem to like you well enough, now.” She reached over and refilled Barabbas's cup from his skin. “Might as well enjoy it while you can.”

“How about I enjoy your company tonight, if you think I'm so handsome?” Barabbas asked, the wine making him bold. “It's been too long since I slept in a comfortable bed with an equally comfortable woman.”

She cast a sidelong glance his way, her lips twisting into a half-smile. “Oh, is that so?”

“Yes, indeed, but I'm afraid I'm without funds. You can share this skin of wine with me and, perhaps, when it's done, you'll see it as worth your while.”

Since few customers sat in the pub, the woman got another cup and poured herself a generous amount. She drank half of it and wiped her mouth with the back of her hand.

“I might just take you up on your offer. You seem to be good enough company.”

With high hopes, Barabbas raised his cup and knocked it against hers. “Here's to good wine and even better company.”

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Out on the road the next morning, Barabbas felt good about how his fortunes had changed. He and the wench finished off the wineskin and she *did* decide to share her bed with him that night. Before he left the next day, she slipped a few denarii into his hand.

“What’s this for?” he asked.

“Good company.”

“Shouldn’t I be paying you?”

She frowned. “Look, I shared my bed with you because I like you. This is just to get you started in your new life. Don’t make any more of it than it is.”

Barabbas’s eyebrows shot up. “I appreciate the gesture. Thanks.”

She kissed him. “Take care of yourself, handsome, and try to stay out of prison. If you’re ever here again, look me up, eh? I’ll buy you a drink.”

“I might just do that,” he said, smiling. “What’s your name, by the way?”

“It’s Rebecca.”

“Fare well, Rebecca and thanks for your generosity.”

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Barabbas’s good mood evaporated quickly in the heat of the risen sun and his troubled thoughts returned, along with a hangover. Every time he thought he knew a reason for his good fortune, he bumped up against a big, fat “*Why?*” Why had the mob called for his release? Why had they vented their anger on a poor rabbi? Determined to find out the reason, he headed back into town.

People crowded the streets. Curious, he worked his way to the center of the commotion. He saw the rabbi, Jeshua, dragging a cross. The man had been scourged, his robe sticking to his body from the raw flesh beneath. A thorn bush crown with two-inch thorns had been jammed onto his head and his scalp had bled, covering his face and hair in a crust of dried blood. How he could even move amazed Barabbas. The man obviously had unexpected strength.

He followed the crowd and saw Jeshua stumble and fall beneath the weight of the cross. A woman offered him a drink, but the Roman soldier pushed her away and forced a bystander to carry the cross. With that help, Jeshua continued his staggering walk. Barabbas shuddered when he realized that he could have been the one the crowd followed, his body abused and broken.

When they got to the place of execution outside the city, a hill they had named Golgotha, the place of the skull, the Romans stripped Jeshua and Barabbas winced at how his body had been so ravaged by the cruel scourge. Designed with strips of leather with bits of metal on the end, the whips not only created open wounds in the flesh, the metal tore out chunks. Blood covered his body and, when they pulled off his robe, fresh blood began to flow sluggishly. While some of the soldiers haggled over the dispossession of Jeshua’s one earthly possession, his robe, two others laid him naked on the rough-hewn cross. He didn’t resist.

They pulled him down onto a peg that went up between his legs, meant to hold him on the cross when raised*. One soldier stretched out his arm while the other soldiers held it so the first could drive a spike through the wrist** into the wood. Jeshua cried out loudly at that, but only once. They repeated the process with the other arm, but he didn’t cry out at all that time. They passed a rope around his waist to hold him fast to the cross’s upright beam and then crossed one foot over the other and drove a long spike through both of them. He screamed at that, but fell silent right after. *How is it possible he can be so silent while enduring such horrific treatment?*

They raised the cross along with two more, one on either side. Jeshua—the itinerant rabbi the mob chose instead of him—hung there naked to the world, silent in his agony as the sun beat down on the horribly abused bodies of the three men, drying the fresh blood they had shed.

Watching such heinous cruelty, Barabbas's hatred for the Romans surged up. How had it come to pass that his beloved Israel suffered under the boots of such barbarians, gentile dogs not worthy to lick the dust off Jeshua's feet. It made him sick.

The sight before Barabbas transfixed his gaze. For some reason, he couldn't look away and he shuddered more than once over the fact that it could have been him hanging there. For one long moment, Jeshua met his gaze and Barabbas felt as if those eyes penetrated straight into his soul. "*I know you,*" they seemed to say. "*I'm taking your place. Don't forget it.*"

Unbidden tears sprang from his eyes. He wanted to scream at the indifferent soldiers, punch them, knock them down to the ground, but for what? For years he had fought them, inflicting insignificant damage, fully expecting to die at some point. Yet, in a supreme gesture of irony, the religious leaders he despised asked for his release in exchange for a man who, as far as he knew, had done nothing worthy of death.

Had it been up to him, would he have offered himself? He knew that he wouldn't have, so he just stood there, shoulders slumped in helpless resignation, his thoughts seething as the sky darkened inexplicably, anger and hatred mingling with pity and sorrow, sweat snaking in rivulets down his back and sides, dripping on the ground from between his legs.

Watching the grizzly tableau, he heard the mockery of the crowd, that fickle mob that had called for his release so that Pilate would punish the man hanging in tortured ignominy before him. One of the two men being crucified asked in a mocking tone why, if Jeshua thought of himself as the Messiah, he didn't just save them all. To his amazement, the man on the other side rebuked him, telling him they deserved their cruel punishment, unlike their fellow sufferer, and asked that Jeshua remember him when he went to his Kingdom. He heard Jeshua say to the man, "Today, you will be in Paradise with me."

The words went through him like knives. The man to whom Jeshua spoke, a criminal, had earned a pardon, even though he would die along with his savior, yet he, Barabbas, having been spared the cross, stood with his soul in utter turmoil. *Why?*

Though the sun stood high at midday, it began to grow darker. A man and a woman walked to the foot of the Jeshua's cross. She leaned on her companion, crying softly onto his shoulder and he recognized the man as one of the rabbi's followers, a man named John. He heard Jeshua tell the man that the woman would now be his mother and to look after her. Barabbas's heart wrenched at the bizarre sight of a naked, ravaged man, hanging on a cross, his face and body barely recognizable, tenderly transferring his mother's care to another. Such self-possession in the teeth of unimaginable suffering left him weak in the knees. *Why, why, why?* echoed in his mind in a prayer to a God he barely knew.

Jeshua's words, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they're doing," snapped him back. Having almost silently endured the physical torture of crucifixion, he now began writhing on that cross, his muscles standing out sharply, his face contorted into a rictus of suffering far beyond merely the physical. Barabbas wondered why until the words, "Daddy... Father, why have you abandoned me?" escaped from Jeshua's lips in a low moan of despair.

His struggles ceased and he settled. He uttered the words, "I'm thirsty," and a Roman of some rank lifted a sponge to his lips. The sky darkened even more and Barabbas heard the words, "It is finished," uttered clearly and powerfully—not the sound of a dying man, but of a conqueror! Finally, he lowered his head and Barabbas knew he had died. No... the cross hadn't killed him, he had *willed* his death, orchestrated his departure, left this life on his own terms.

Barabbas saw a soldier jam a spear into Jeshua's side to release a torrent of blood and water. He wanted to run under it and let it wash away his guilt and confusion. Day turned to full night

and the ground shook. People shouted and cried out. Through all the confusion, Barabbas stood, transfixed, his gaze on the dead man hanging before him. He heard the same high-ranking Roman who had given Jeshua the water, say, “Truly, this man was innocent.” *How could a hated Roman know that? What did he know that he, a Jew, didn’t know? Was it something the leaders of the temple had missed? A new thought struck him. Did they know, but didn’t care? Was Jeshua’s message in conflict with their power over the people? Why do such answers elude me? Why, why... why?*

Just then, two men—one of them clothed in a fine robe, indicating wealth—approached the soldiers and bargained with them. Evidently, they succeeded and carried Jeshua’s body away. Curious, Barabbas followed, keeping at a safe distance to avoid detection.

Though they usually buried criminals—men unworthy of burial in the regular cemetery—outside the city, they took Jeshua’s body to a rich man’s tomb. Two women prepared the body, washing it and wrapping it in coarse, linen strips along with burial spices. The men then put the body in the tomb and rolled the stone across the entrance.

Later on, three Roman soldiers came and put a seal on the stone. Barabbas wondered at that. *Do they expect Jeshua’s followers to kidnap the body? Why would the Romans care? Did the religious leaders put them up to it?*

Barabbas sat on a nearby rock, elbows on knees, with his aching head resting on his hands. At one time, he had been so sure of things, but now, he realized he knew nothing. He had never considered himself a good man and his life reflected it. When he became an insurrectionist, it had been in attempt to redeem himself and, for a time, he had amassed a large group of followers, along with a small amount of fame. Yet, he didn’t have the soul of a leader and his time in the sun had only resulted in the murder of a Roman soldier, causing his steep descent into what people thought of him all along.

When Rome finally caught up with him, he fully expected to die on a cross, the culmination of a wasted life. Then, the crowd called for his release in favor of a man he had always seen as righteous. It threw him into a state of confusion and every time he sought an answer to a question it spawned two others.

He had no place to go, no possessions and no friends. Just two days previously, he had been destined to die and, now, through circumstances he still didn’t understand, an innocent rabbi, Jeshua, had died in his stead. From what he had heard, the man claimed to be the Messiah Israel had longed for, yet the leaders at the Temple rejected him. Another “Why?” to plague him.

He thought about going to the pub again to drown his sorrows as well as his confusion, but guilt prevented him. He wrapped himself in his cloak and settled down for the night, hoping that something he didn’t expect would happen.

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He awoke the next morning, wet with dew, but with no answers. The Roman guards still slept and the seal remained unbroken.

He got up, stretched until his joints cracked, and went to town for some breakfast, but what would he do next? Perhaps he should question one of the man’s followers. Yes, that’s what he would do. He would find some of Jeshua’s followers, perhaps the man to whom Jeshua had entrusted the care of his mother.

He asked around and found out where they had gathered to mourn their rabbi and, on the way to the place, he saw Jeshua’s mother. He raised the cowl of his robe to conceal his face somewhat before speaking with her.

“Excuse me, ma’am, but aren’t you Jeshua’s mother?”

“Yes, I’m Mary. May I ask who you are?”

“I, um... I... I’m one of your son’s followers,” he said, hoping the partial truth of the statement kept it from being an outright lie. “Please accept my most sincere condolences over your son’s crucifixion. He truly didn’t deserve it.”

Mary offered a wistful grin. “Thank you.”

“It must have broken your heart.”

“Oh, indeed it did, but I remember the words of the angel, Gabriel, when he told me I would be overshadowed by the Holy Spirit and the baby in my womb would be called the Son of Yahweh and to call him Jeshua, for he would save us from our sins.”

Mary’s mention of the angel, Gabriel, surprised Barabbas, but Mary didn’t act like a crazy woman. “You believed *that*?”

“Of course. Who am I to argue with an angel of the Lord?”

“But how could he save anyone if he was killed?”

“I don’t know how the Lord Jehovah will do it, but I believe the words of the angel, Gabriel.”

Barabbas’s heart went out to the brave woman who stood before him, no beauty for sure, but shining as if from an inner light. “You’re very brave.”

“I’m but a humble maidservant of Yahweh, the living God, *Barabbas*.”

“You know who I am?”

Mary’s face creased into a smile. “I’m old, now, but my eyes are still sharp. I saw you when Pilate brought you out before the crowd and I saw you at the foot of the cross.”

Barabbas’s shoulders slumped in resignation and he stared at the ground. Meeting Mary had a profound effect on him and, for some reason, he felt that he just *had* to please her. He felt a hand on his shoulder and looked up into Mary’s tear-wet face.

“You must ask yourself a question,” she said.

“And what is that, Mother?” *Why did I just call this holy woman Mother?*

“What will you do with the life you have been given?”

Unbidden tears sprang from his eyes. “I have no idea. All my life I’ve been so restless.”

“My son once asked Martha, Lazarus’s sister, if she believed that he was the resurrection and the life. That was before he raised Lazarus from the dead. Martha said she did. Do *you* believe?”

For the first time in his life, Barabbas found something in which to believe... the crucified son of the woman who stood before him. Her calm faith soothed his troubled spirit and he recalled Jeshua’s words to the thief beside him. “*Today you will be with me in Paradise.*” He dropped to his knees, took Mary’s hand and placed it on his head.

“Yes, I believe in your son, Jeshua. Please, give me a blessing... *his* blessing.”

“I cannot, for I’m not worthy of that, but I can kneel beside you and pray with you.”

And so, Barabbas—rabble-rouser, instigator, murderer, the man who, through an unexpected twist of fate, exchanged places with the Savior of his people and escaped the cross—became a new disciple, kneeling in prayer with his Savior’s mother to affirm his belief.

Mary graciously invited Barabbas to stay at her home, standing for him when he presented himself before Jeshua’s disciples, vouching for his sincerity. Two days later, he heard, along with her, the excited news that the tomb stood empty. Since John had joined the other disciples in their jubilation, he accompanied Mary to the tomb and, sure enough, found it empty! Jeshua had made good on his claim as Son of God and had conquered death!

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A week later, Barabbas walked into the pub he had once frequented. The wench, Rebecca, saw him and came over.

“Hello, handsome. Come to take me up on my offer of a drink?”

Barabbas smiled. “No, I didn’t. I came to offer *you* something.”

“Oh? And what might that be? A purse full of jewels, perhaps?”

“Something better, a chance to become a follower of the Messiah.”

“The Messiah? Who?”

“Jeshua, the Rabbi, the one they crucified and who came back from the dead.”

“I heard about him. Some say his disciples stole his body. What does that have to do with me?”

“If you will but believe in him, he will save you. It’s what he came to do.”

“And how do you know this?”

“He died in my place. I saw him die on a cross meant for me and then I saw the empty tomb. He’s alive!”

“You sound like one of his wild-eyed disciples, or like John the Baptizer.”

“He saw it before anyone.”

“Saw what?”

“That Jeshua was the Son of Yahweh, just like he said.”

“And that’s it?”

“Becca, when I saw him hanging on that cross, his body ravaged, he looked at me, into my soul, and I could get no rest until I spoke with his mother, Mary. She helped me see the truth.”

“And when you saw what you say was the empty tomb... that did it?”

“No, I believed even before that, when I knelt with Mary to tell him I believed.”

“It’s that simple, is it?”

“Look at me. Do I seem like the confused person who came in here a little over a week ago?”

Rebecca studied the man with whom she had shared her bed. “You do seem different, but it all seems too easy.”

“If you saw what I saw, you would know it wasn’t easy for him, but he makes it easy for *us*.” Barabbas could see Rebecca hovered on the edge of faith. “Tell you what. I’m the least of Jeshua’s followers. Come with me to see Mary, his mother. *She* will convince you.”

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Mary saw Barabbas approach her house with a pretty woman, by her dress probably a pub wench or a prostitute. She remembered how the religious condemned her son for deigning to sit at table with them. She also remembered their belief in his challenging-yet-tender words.

“Mother Mary,” Barabbas said. “This is Rebecca. Rebecca, Mary the mother of our Savior.”

Mary chuckled. “He makes it sound so formal. I’m just a simple, Jewish woman, honored and burdened with the blessing of being allowed to give birth to Yahweh’s son.”

“Wasn’t his father Joseph, your husband?”

“No, Yahweh made me pregnant before we married and Joseph was kind enough to marry me anyway, saving me from shame and a possible stoning.”

“How did you know you carried Yahweh’s son?”

“The angel, Gabriel, came to me and told me.”

“An *angel* visited you?”

“Yes, and he also visited Joseph, telling him to marry me.”

“That’s truly amazing.”

“Not nearly as amazing as the miracles my son, Jeshua, performed among the people.”

At that moment, John walked up to the trio. “Ah, Barabbas, good to see you again. Who is this with you?”

“Her name is Rebecca,” Mary said. “She’s Barabbas’s friend.”

“Pleased to make your acquaintance, Rebecca,” John said. “Come, Barabbas, we’re meeting with two men who claim to have seen the Messiah on the Emmaus Road.”

“Oh, my,” Mary said when they left, “where are my manners? Come inside. I’ll make tea and we can talk.”

“How do you know Barabbas?” Mary asked as she bustled around the small kitchen.

“I serve customers at a pub he frequents, er, *frequented*.”

“You must be more than a servant girl there if he brought you to see me.”

Rebecca blushed. “We were... um, intimate, but I assure you, I’m no woman of the streets.”

Mary smiled at her. “I’m not judging you, dear, but it seems to me he thinks a great deal of you, or he wouldn’t have brought you to see me. Are you a seeker?”

“A seeker of what?”

“Of the Messiah, my son.”

“Barabbas told me of his experience, but it all seems too easy, somehow.”

“When he first came to me, he was riddled with guilt and shame.”

“Yes, he told me how the mob chose him over your son and how it confused him.”

“Well, to get to the point, he ended up asking for my forgiveness and blessing and we knelt together to pray.”

“About what?”

About his belief in my son’s ability to save mankind.”

“You think your son can do all that?”

“I *know* he can. I once heard him say, ‘I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No man can come to the Father, but through me.’ By Father, he meant Yahweh, not Joseph.”

Rebecca didn’t reply, but remembered that Mary had told her that Yahweh had made her pregnant while still a virgin. *How can it be that a woman could carry a baby without a man’s planting the seed in her?*

“When Barabbas knelt with me,” Mary continued, “he became believer in my son and the fact that he did what he came to do... die on that cross to save all mankind. From that moment, he became a new man. When we went to the tomb where they placed my son and saw he was no longer there, it merely cemented his faith, *our* faith.”

“And you think that would be possible for me?”

“Of course, dear. All you need do is put your trust in Jeshua and believe that he came to die and save you from the sins you cannot save yourself from. Do you believe?”

“I can see the change in Barabbas. I suppose that’s good enough proof for me as well.”

“That’s all well and good, but do *you* believe... for yourself?”

Rebecca thought for a moment, on the cusp of a decision. “I grew up in a pub and have known no other life. I’ve tried to live a good life, but there are so many temptations. I’ve never felt worthy of Yahweh’s love.”

“Then give them over to Jeshua, let him make you worthy through the blood he shed. He can do what you can’t.”

Rebecca looked into Mary’s eyes and saw the peace there. She had seen her son crucified, had witnessed his suffering and it had to have broken her heart. Yet, she had, in faith, believed in his words, just as she had believed the angel when he told her Yahweh would make her pregnant.

Do I have that kind of faith? “It all sounds wonderful, but I’m not sure I believe.”

“You know, my son once told a man who brought his son for healing from an unclean spirit that all things are possible to one who believes. The man told him he believed, but asked help with his unbelief. I can see you are where that man was. Just do as he did. Jeshua healed his son and he can save you.”

Tears sprang from Rebecca’s eyes and she dropped to her knees. Mary joined her.

“Oh, Jeshua, take away my unbelief and save me!” Rebecca wailed.

She felt Mary’s hand on her shoulder and covered it with her own.

“Yahweh, I ask in your son, Jeshua’s name that you heal Rebecca’s broken heart just as you did mine when I watched our son die on that cross. Make her your child.”

Rebecca felt a bubble of guilt burst within her. *Thank you, Yahweh. Thank you, Jeshua*, she prayed, her first as a believer. She turned to Mary, embraced her and the two women wept tears of joy.

After they prayed, they worked together to prepare food for the midday meal.

“Mother Mary?” Rebecca asked as they worked, “Do you think Barabbas would consider marrying me, now that I’m a child of Yahweh like him?”

“You love him, then?”

“I’ve always liked him, from the first day he came into our pub. He has a ready wit, is strong and vital, but most of all, he’s always been courteous to me and is....”

“A good lover?”

Rebecca looked at Mary in shock and embarrassment. “Yes. To my shame, I’ve taken a few men to my bed, but he always treated me with respect.”

“You sense a connection... um, that way?”

“Yes, I do, *did*, but is that enough to base a marriage on?”

Mary looked deeply into Rebecca’s eyes. “Physical attraction is part of Yahweh’s plan. It’s why he made us man and woman from the beginning, but, more important, is there a spiritual attraction? You both believe in Jeshua, so leave it all in Yahweh’s hands. He knows our hearts and our desires. If you honor him, he will honor your wishes. Meanwhile, be an example of a godly woman to him.”

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Later, when Barabbas left the meeting and came to bring Rebecca back to the pub, he could see a new peace on her pretty face.

“How did your visit with Mother Mary go?”

She smiled. “It went as you had hoped. I’m now a believer in our Savior.”

“Oh, Rebecca, that’s wonderful news!” he said, hugging her. “I’m so happy! Bless Yahweh’s name and the name of our Savior, Jeshua!”

“Do you think I should go back to the pub?”

Barabbas’s brows knit into a frown. “It’s an honorable job that you do, but if you feel it unworthy of your new faith, we can look for another job for you. Perhaps you can work here to see to the needs of the disciples and Mother Mary?”

“I suppose I could do that.”

Barabbas stared at the ground and looked uncomfortable. “Um, now that you’ve come to faith, a thought just struck me.”

“Yes?”

“Do you think we’d be a good match... I mean for... marriage?”

Oh, Lord, thank you for answering my prayer so soon!

When he looked up, Rebecca thought the shy look on his face—so unlike the bold, brash man she once knew—adorable and her heart leaped.

“Oh, yes!” she cried out. “I do!” She threw herself into his arms and kissed him soundly. “Yahweh has just answered my prayer!”

“He did?”

“Oh, yes! Mother Mary and I had just discussed this very thing. Yahweh is *so* good!”

“Er, do you think we should be embracing in public like this?”

Rebecca stepped back and grinned from ear-to-ear. “If I ever needed proof of your new life in Jeshua, this would be it.”

“Why is this it?”

“The old Barabbas wouldn't have given a fig about what anyone thought,” Rebecca said, laughing and returning to his arms, uncaring of who saw. They had just become betrothed and *that* should allow some leeway.

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Two months later ~

“Well, I suppose that does it,” Barabbas said as he hitched up the load on one of their donkeys. Do you think we really need all this stuff?”

“Most of it is gifts,” Rebecca said, “and, besides, we’re starting a new life together, wherever we settle.”

“I can’t believe I’m going to be a father already.”

“I believe you planted that seed the night of your release.”

Barabbas turned and took both of Rebecca’s hands in his. “From the first day I visited that pub, I always thought you were something special.”

“You did?”

“Yes, but I was young and stupid and I thought you had a flock of admirers. You surprised me that day when you invited me to your bed.”

“Just so you know, I wasn’t in the habit of doing that. I may have fueled some hopes, but I worked on my feet, not my back.”

“Then I’m doubly honored ... and grateful.”

“Grateful for what?”

“Grateful to Yahweh for sparing me and for saving you to be my wife.”

“Sweetheart, what was it like, watching the Savior die like that?”

“It nearly tore my heart out. I mean, he hung there instead of me and, when he looked directly at me, his gaze told me so and demanded I not forget. I think it was at that moment I realized he was so much more than a simple rabbi.”

“I wish I could have seen it.”

“It’s not something you should wish for. My heart still aches at the memory. John told me that Jeshua once told Thomas, when he showed him the scars in his hands from the nails and that disciple cast aside his doubts and believed, it was a far greater blessing for those who had not seen and still believed. Yet, even having seen all that I had, it took mother Mary to show me the true way.”

“She did that for me as well.”

“Praise Yahweh for that. We’ll have to be sure to teach whatever children he grants us that very message. I don’t want any of them to go running after dreams as I did, ending up in prison like me because I couldn’t see the truth of things.”

“What are John and the other disciples going to do now?”

“They’re already preaching about Jeshua’s resurrection and some have made plans to leave Jerusalem to bring the Good News to the rest of the world.”

“Do you think they’ll succeed?”

“If Yahweh is in it, I’m sure they will.”

“Will we bring the Good News to those we meet?”

“Of course. Jeshua, himself, said as much. He said, ‘Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.’ That is what we should do.”

“I find the task before us frightening, but with you by my side, I’ll take comfort.”

Barabbas smiled at his pregnant, new wife. “Be that as it may, we can take the most comfort from Jeshua’s own words, ‘Know that I will always be with you, even to the ends of the Earth.’ It’s a promise we can rely on.”

Rebecca smiled back, absently circling her belly with her two hands. “It is indeed.”

* Instead of a cleat at the feet to hold up the body of a crucified person, allowing the body to bow away from the upright, some historians posit the theory that a peg went up between the legs at the crotch, a far more effective means of support. I took some authors’ license with the rope. The entire idea of crucifixion, as I see it, revolved around maximum, prolonged suffering, so the above method would accomplish that, providing enough support to postpone death for a long time. Some historians and theologians state that the Romans broke the legs of those still alive in order to have them slump down and suffocate, unable to support their weight any longer, which would seem to negate the use of a peg under the crotch, but I consider a heavy mallet breaking the long bones of the legs a massive enough trauma on its own, more than capable of killing an already weakened victim.

** They wouldn’t have driven the nails through the hands, since the flesh between the phalanges could tear through. Driving them between the bones of the wrist would prevent tearing.