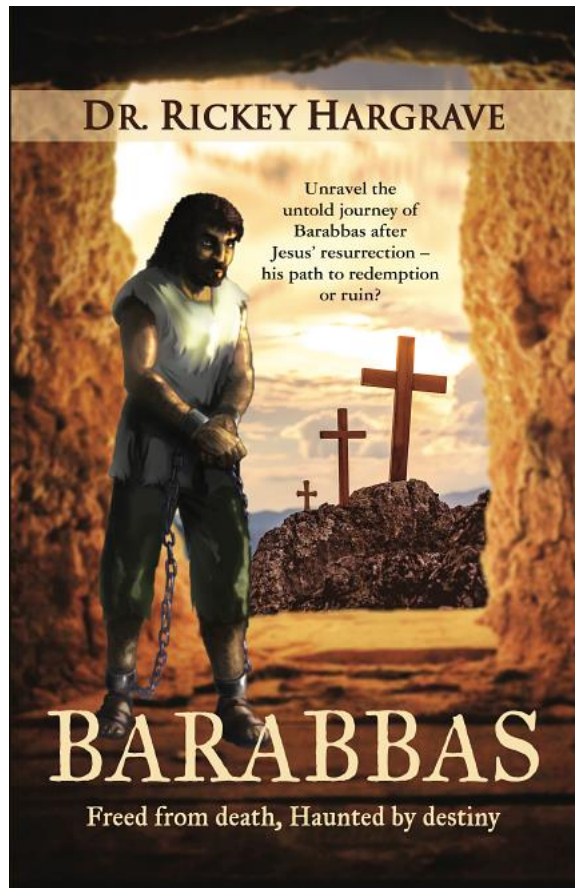




When Barabbas is freed in place of Jesus, he must choose between two paths: redemption through grace or vengeance through the sword. A meditation on second chances and the cost of true freedom.

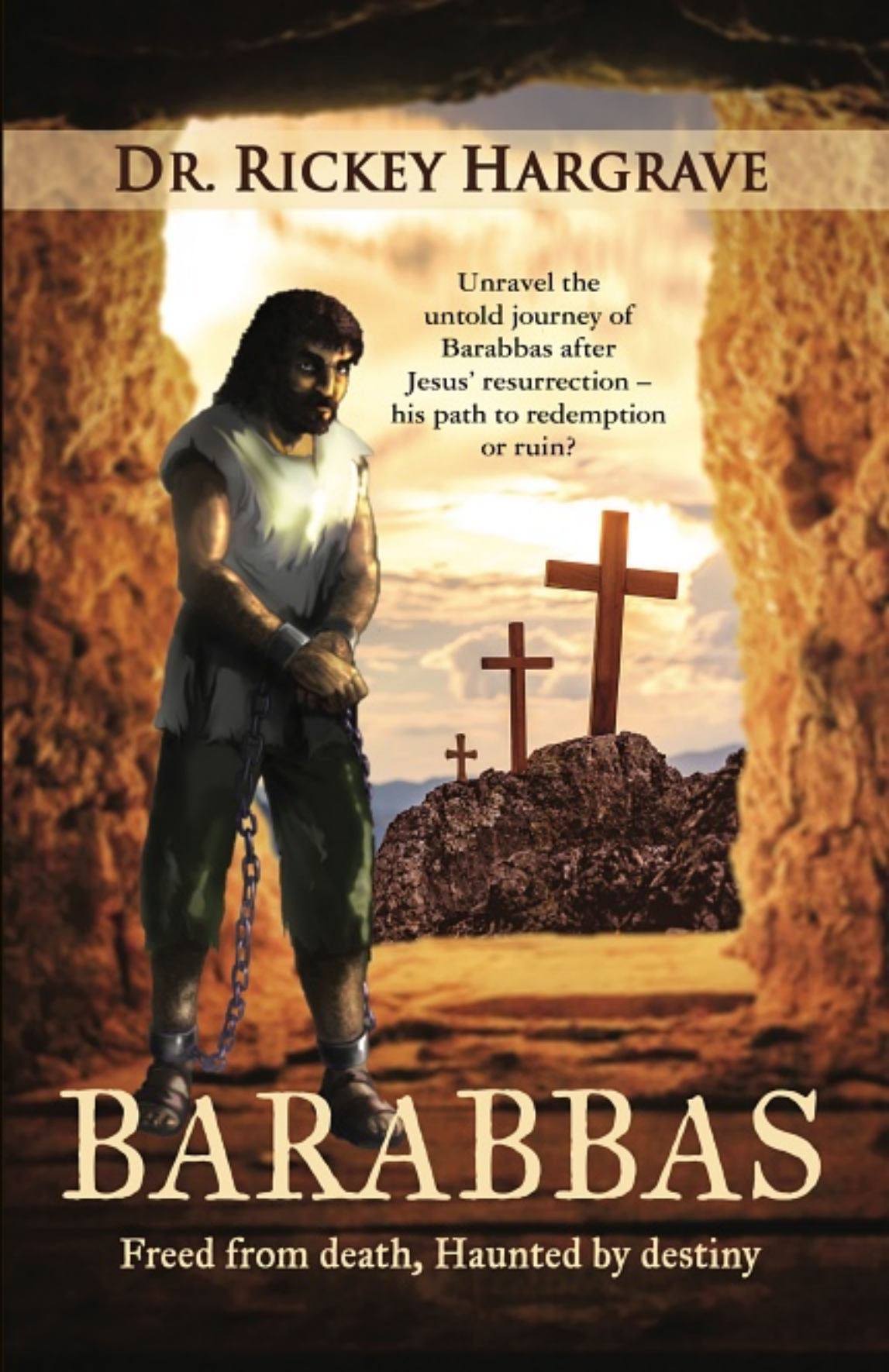
Barabbas: Freed from Death, Haunted by Destiny

By Dr. Rickey Hargrave

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DR. RICKEY HARGRAVE

Unravel the
untold journey of
Barabbas after
Jesus' resurrection –
his path to redemption
or ruin?

BARABBAS

Freed from death, Haunted by destiny

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Dedication

For Julie,
my lifelong companion in faith and in the calling God has
sown,
whose steadfast love has been the clearest picture of grace
I have ever known.

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THE CAVE

By Asher Ben-David

DISCOVERY

The Cave

Something else lies here, Asher Ben-David thought, adjusting his pack.

Mount Hermon loomed behind him. The wind howled down the slope like a downdraft from a storm cloud, kicking fine dust against the sides of his boots. He squinted against the late-afternoon sun. Ridgetop was still visible through a scrim of air: chalk-white limestone like bleached bones heaped against the blue-gray sky.

The archaeological dig behind him was quiet with disappointment. Five weeks into the project, and not a single major discovery. Most of his colleagues had already begun breaking down their tools. Packing up.

Asher couldn't tear himself away.

There was something here. He had to know.

He picked his way up the narrow goat trail cutting between waist-high scrub brush. His guide alone had refused to follow him any farther.

"It is too close to the old shrines," the man had insisted. "There are more mysteries on this mountain that we do not understand. One of them is walking too close to those shrines."

Asher snorted at the old superstition, but he would admit the air had smelled different up here. Thin. Old. Like anticipation.



He'd stopped dead when his rock hammer clinked hollow against the cliff face. Kneeling down, he brushed aside pebbles to find the crack between two stones, narrower than his hand. Asher leaned forward. Inhaled. The stone dust was unmistakable. Musty, like sealed rooms. Like something long undisturbed.

His heart leaped.

Carefully, he widened the fissure using a brush, a pick bar, and a flat chisel. Gray dust poured down like water. Smooth stones skittered after. Asher flipped on his flashlight.

A crack of pure darkness opened between the stones at his fingertips. He hesitated only long enough to shake excess dust from his palms before aiming the beam inside.

Darkness ingested the light.

He took a deep breath. "It's a cavity," he murmured to the silent stone around him.

Asher wriggled into the space between the rocks. It wasn't so bad—he could free-climb out if need be. His fingers slid past the stone slick with dust, and he kicked his legs inside, sprawling haphazardly across a floor he hoped was level.

The cavity itself was enormous: a cavern, really, perhaps twenty feet across with the ceiling roughly domed overhead. A tunnel of trembling blue-white danced across the walls, where shallow etchings were sketched over limestone—Greek? Latin? No. Older. Definitely Aramaic, though he couldn't confirm just yet.



The protocol would dictate that he wait for backup. They would then study the findings through third-party verification.

Asher knew the drill. His pride knew better than to expose the discovery to hasty academia.

But his curiosity had hungry eyes. Asher prayed, My God, let it speak.

He brushed away dust carefully until something pure white broke the surrounding stone. It looked exactly like—Asher paused, controlling his breath. Kneeling before him was a seal stamped into rock: a seven-pointed star surrounded by Hebrew lettering, called a heptagram.

For an instant, he sat perfectly still, letting the truth soak into his bones. He swallowed. Began clearing the rock around it, brushing carefully until he exposed the entire seal.

He'd dreamed about this. Heptagrams littered every archaeological text for years. Some sixty years ago. Seven-pointed stars are enclosed by a divine proclamation. But to see it in person? With his own two hands? It was perfect.

He snapped photos. Plotted coordinates. Pulled out his shaking hands to brush away the last of the clinging dust.

Asher slid his fingertips under the edge of the stone jar's lid, tucked carefully into clay-caked sediment.

The lid popped free with a soft click. He peeled it back, horrified and riveted by what he saw inside.

Wrapped like mummies in aged linen, these scrolls of parchment were objects, tied neatly together in clean stacks. Time had gnawed at the edges but preserved the documents in remarkable condition. He licked his cracked lips. Too stunned to even breathe.

Asher pulled one of the scroll bundles free. Black ink swam against animal-skinned parchment. The calligraphy was exquisite, letters small and meticulous, shaped by an assured hand. At the top of the page, he could just make out two words: "inscribed more deeply than the rest."

"Sefer zikkaron," Aramaic and Hebrew for "book of record," or in English, "Diary."



Night on the Mountain

The campfire burned low, a dull red eye in the chilly wind. Asher sat beside it, journal open but untouched. The others had gone to their tents hours earlier, leaving the mountain wrapped in deep silence except for the occasional sigh of canvas in the breeze.

The sealed jar lay near his pack, wrapped in the same parchment he had found around the scrolls. Every glance toward it stirred something more than curiosity—perhaps reverence or dread. That single name, Barabbas, pulsed through his thoughts, carrying questions he wasn't yet ready to face.

For years, his life had been built on evidence—fragments, inscriptions, and datelines. Yet, staring into the embers, he felt the presence of a living story, a heartbeat preserved in ink and dust.

What kind of man leaves behind a witness to his own deliverance?

What kind of mercy allows such a story to survive?

The stars above Hermon shimmered like unblinking eyes. Asher whispered a prayer—a simple, unpolished request for truth and courage to face whatever truth he might uncover. Then he banked the coals, stepped into his tent, and lay awake long after the fire had faded.

The First Translation

The letters were darker in the morning light; the ink had sunk deep into ancient fibers. Asher steadied his recorder and shifted his weight. In this moment, Asher knew the 'Official' requirements as well as he knew any liturgy or protocol and had adhered to them throughout his career. But beneath the rigid facade of his obedience, something else was growing, something sharp and ambitious. For he suddenly saw that what he faced was not simply an obstacle to overcome but an abyss. For he could follow the dead security of procedure, or he could leap into the gap and make his mark, no matter how it was spoken of.



"First day after my release," the text began—abrupt and uneven, the handwriting tense with emotion.

He continued:

"They called my name before dawn. Barabbas. I thought it was for the cross. I braced for the guards, for the rough rope and laughter. But instead, they unbound me. The crowd outside shouted my name—not in hatred this time, but in demand. 'Release Barabbas!' The sound was madness, like the roar of beasts. And over it all, Pilate's voice—weary, hollow—announcing their choice."

The ink strokes bore pressure, fierce and irregular. Asher could almost see the trembling hand behind them.

"I walked out into the sun, a free man. Freedom is freedom, even when you don't understand it. The soldiers laughed as they shoved me aside. One said, 'Thank the prophet from Galilee. You live because he dies.'" I looked toward the hill and saw three timbers already standing against the sky.

Asher's voice wavered. The tent around him felt suddenly sacred—not a workspace, but an altar of remembrance. He read on:

"He did not look at me when they led Him past. His eyes were elsewhere—beyond us all. I wished He had cursed me, shouted, anything. But He carried the cross in silence. The crowd cheered my release, but I could not join them. My freedom tasted of ashes."

The final lines grew faint, trailing as though the writer's strength had failed.

"Some call Him Yeshua; others, Teacher. I only know this: my life is no longer my own."

Asher lowered the scroll, pulse racing. Morning light spilled through the tent flap onto the parchment like a benediction.

For the first time, archeology had stopped being about fragments of stone. He wasn't uncovering history anymore. He was overhearing repentance.

RESURRECTION AND REDEMPTION

What Resurrection Means

Barabbas returned to Bethany in the late afternoon, when the shadows stretched along the road, and the sun's rays hung over the Mount of Olives. Behind me was Jerusalem. The town was quiet, although in its own particular way.

The festivities were over, but now it seemed to be held in its thrall by extreme gossip.

It was in whispers behind closed shutters and in courtyards that men talked of the tomb being empty, of the testimony of the women, of the fearful disciples who had fled, and of the rumors that Jesus of Nazareth was alive.

I had tried to avoid thinking about that during these past few days. I walked around the city and wandered through the markets without spending too much time there, overhearing conversations. And yet I had heard, so often, rumors again and again.

From workers preparing to leave Jerusalem.

From a man drawing water from a cistern.

Even once, from a servant of the priests who lowered his voice as he saw me coming closer.

Could it be true that Christ rose from the dead?

And if it was not, why were they spreading this news?

I found no comfort in either possibility.

Bethany was quieter than the city of Jerusalem, but no less laden with the events of the last few days. The village

that remembered Lazarus's raising became for some as much a part of the soil as the garden and the olive trees here. People came here not only for Lazarus's sake, but out of simple curiosity about what was going on in Bethany right now. I noticed they asked about Christ more and more often, mentioning Him alongside Lazarus.

Lazarus and Jesus,
tomb and life,
mourning and power,
death and remembering.

As soon as I arrived in Bethany, I saw Lazarus sitting in the courtyard near the fig tree, as he had several days before. Near him, lit by the rays of a nearby lamp, stood a gardener holding a lantern. The usual sounds of life in the evening came from the houses: clattering dishes, the low murmur of dinner being prepared, the creak of a door, and the shuffle of sandals on packed soil.

Lazarus turned his face to meet me.

"You've returned," he said.

"Yes, still hearing the rumors."

"What rumors?"

"That He has risen from the dead."

Lazarus did not reply immediately. Instead, he beckoned me to sit next to him. We both sat down without uttering a word for a few moments. The night grew chilly, and it smelled strongly of olive-wood smoke from a nearby courtyard.

Finally, I said quietly, "I don't know what to make of it."

Lazarus turned towards me, fixing me with his gaze. "What?"

"These rumors. These stories. Jerusalem seems caught between fear and hope." I shrugged. "I feel no better equipped than before."

"Are you seeking an answer?" Lazarus put on the same thoughtful tone.

I scoffed. "To prove whether it is true, at least. What resurrection means, if it means anything other than confusion."

"I understood it differently," Lazarus said quietly. "When Jesus called me out of that tomb, thoughts of theology and definitions did not cross my mind when he reached out his fingers to tear aside the cover of the coffin. I felt only that I had died, that I heard my Master's voice... and that my Master was stronger than death."

I said nothing.

Lazarus leaned over to me. "A little later, I made myself realize that resurrection goes farther than mere resuscitation. For death strips a person of his life in this world, but resurrection is not just a return unchanged."

"When you wake up," Lazarus said, "you return to yourself. But death is not sleep, and neither is the grave a bed from which you just awake. Resurrection is rising to life not out of sleep, but from the abyss... passing through judgment..."

His gaze went off somewhere beyond the dusty road leading down from Bethany to Bethphage, and Lazarus

continued, turning to me again, "Or maybe even from the Lord who gave you your life in the first place."

I did not know what to say.

Lazarus drew himself closer. "When I emerged from the tomb, I realized I was not the same man anymore. I was Lazarus who had died, and I was Lazarus who now walked with a Master who had conquered the tomb..."

"But why did He come to you specifically?" I asked.

"That is the question."

Lazarus shifted restlessly on the bench. "Was He not a teacher, a prophet, a righteous man? A Messenger."

"And what did He preach?"

"A lesson in understanding." Lazarus's voice was gentle. "Some called Him a prophet. Some Teacher. Others said He was the Son of God."

I snorted. "Blasphemous, criminal, false King, Messiah, rebel..."

"He could say many things in Rome." Lazarus's tone softened even further. "But resurrection means that none of these names are his last."

I was silent.

"He was dead for three days," Lazarus said quietly. "And now He lives. He answered many questions at once.

He answered the question of death,

He answered the question of justice,

He answered the question of power."

"If the rumors prove true, Lazarus continued, "God answered the questions of death, and of who truly possesses power over man." He paused. "God proved He is

the Lord. God showed His mercy. God spoke of His justice and of His power."

"You sound like any teacher would," I said.

"You sound like a man who has been with death, has been in the grip of death... and returned from his tomb to the embrace of Life."

I lowered my head, folding my hands in my lap. I had seen men die under the punishment inflicted on them by the Romans. I had seen men beaten to death with whips.

I have seen crucifixions...

the torture of the cross,

the mockery,

the humiliation,

The slow process of suffocation.

I knew the process well.

I knew the public humiliation of the cross.

I knew the slow agony of thirst.

I knew the cries of tortured muscles.

I knew death's smile that comes just before dying...

Crucifixion was Rome's sermon proclaimed with the help of wood and nails, death's cruel sermon. And the resurrection of Christ meant the cross had lost its climax.

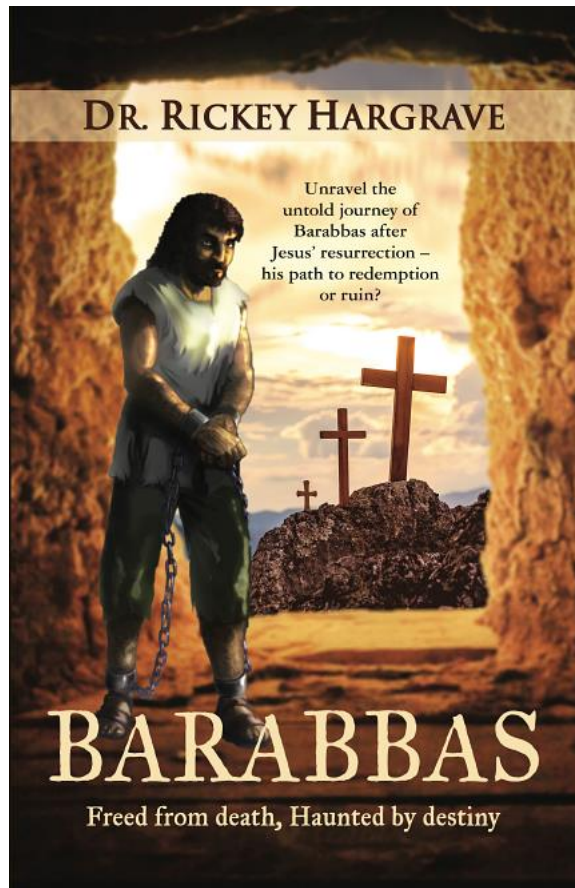
That thought made me shiver.

Part of me triumphed.

Part of me trembled in dread.

"Do you know what crucifixion means?" I asked Lazarus abruptly.

Lazarus inclined his head. "It means death. It means the end."



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