

Barabbas Study Guide

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Plot Summary

The story opens with Barabbas at the edge of those who gathered to be with Jesus as he was crucified. Barabbas was himself condemned to die but because of the Passover, the people were allowed to set someone free. Given the choice between Barabbas and Jesus, the people allowed Barabbas to go free. He would later be called "Barabbas, the acquitted," and would be condemned by many of Jesus' followers. When Barabbas is unshackled and told to go, he somehow finds himself following the three men who are to be crucified up the hill to Golgotha. He knows one of the thieves being executed, but says that he doesn't look at that man, only at Jesus.

After Jesus is dead, Barabbas notes that he's taken away carefully and entombed. Barabbas then heads to Jerusalem where he meets the Hare-Lipped Woman, a witness to Jesus' resurrection who will later be stoned for sharing her Christianity. After her death, Barabbas carries her lifeless body many miles to entomb her in a grave with her stillborn child. As it happens, the woman had once taken care of Barabbas when he was injured.

When Barabbas enters Jerusalem after witnessing Jesus' death, he is immediately caught up with friends who are amazed that he is alive. They are skeptical of Barabbas' claims of a holy glow about Jesus before he was taken to his death and about the darkness on Golgotha at the moment of his death. Barabbas eventually buys into their explanations and decides that it must have been tricks of his eyes because of his recent time in the dark dungeon.

Barabbas spends days shadowing the Christians, seemingly thirsting for knowledge, but never quite accepting. He has become an indifferent thief and eventually leaves the band.

He's later enslaved and spends years in a copper mine, shackled to a Christian man named Sahak. Sahak shows Barabbas that he has the mark of Christ on the back of his slaves' medallion and scratches the marks into Barabbas' medallion as well. Barabbas prays with Sahak at first, then unaccountably stops. An overseer questions Sahak about his religion and eventually arranges for Sahak to leave the mines and work in the fields. Sahak refuses to go without Barabbas and the two men are moved.

There comes a time when another slave notes Sahak praying and questions him about his religion. Sahak shows the mark of Christ and the slave apparently informs the overseers. The Roman governor calls for Sahak and Barabbas and questions them about the mark of Christ on their medallions. The governor points to the front of the medallion that proves the two men are property of the state. Sahak insists that he belongs to Christ and Christ alone. Barabbas says that he allowed the inscription because he wants to believe. Sahak is executed but Barabbas is moved into the governor's home as a slave. When the governor moves to Rome, Barabbas is taken along.



In the slaves' basement quarters of the Roman home, he sees the sign of the fish and begins looking for the slave who might be a Christian. He overhears two talking about a meeting of the brotherhood and slips out to watch. He doesn't find the meeting but returns to the city to find houses being burned all over town. Thinking that the Christians have started the fires, Barabbas joins in and claims to be working for Jesus. He's captured and imprisoned with true Christians who are guiltless but are to be crucified anyway. Barabbas is crucified alone and his dying words are, "To thee I deliver up my soul."



Pages 1 through 21

Pages 1 through 21 Summary

Barabbas is standing at the edge of those gathered at the cross where Jesus hangs. He's not one of the group, but is standing away from the others. He admits that he didn't want to come at all, that he would ordinarily have avoided the place as unclean and as a place of death.

Barabbas is described as about thirty years old with a reddish beard, black hair and a scar on his cheek. He was in prison awaiting his own execution when Jesus was arrested. Because the people were celebrating the Passover, they were given the opportunity to excuse one person who was to be executed. Given the choice of Barabbas and Jesus, the people elect to set Barabbas free. Barabbas stands and watches as Jesus begins the trek up the hill and then follows the procession. Barabbas says that there's a strange power prompting him to attend the crucifixion. He says that Jesus doesn't look like a powerful person, but acknowledges that it must be so.

As Barabbas watches the impending death, he pays attention to the mourners. A woman Barabbas believes to be Jesus' mother is at the foot of the cross and is not able to show the full depths of her grief. As she passes by Barabbas, she stops and gives him a look of "helplessness and reproach."

Barabbas notes that Jesus has a halo of light about him as he prepares to go up the hill. In the moments before his death, the hill goes dark, prompting the soldiers to jump to their feet and grab their weapons.

Barabbas heads to Jerusalem where he meets the "girl with the hare-lip." She's dressed in rags and is obviously hungry. She seems surprised that Barabbas talks to her, and he thinks she might have believed that he'd been crucified. He asks if she's received news from Gilgal, indicating that they could have something in common. As they walk down the street, Barabbas is greeted by friends. He and the girl go into a building where several are anxious to share his good fortune at having escaped the cross. One of the women says she saw Jesus once and that he was performing miracles. She says that since many are doing that, he must have been guilty of something else that warranted crucifixion. When the fat woman says that it doesn't matter who was crucified as long as Barabbas was saved, the hare-lipped girl is appalled. Soon after, Barabbas gives the girl most of his meal; she eats then leaves. Barabbas then turns his attention to the woman who'd been talking about Jesus. He asks what kinds of miracles Jesus performed and what he preached about. One woman says that Jesus was believed to be the Messiah. Barabbas says that he couldn't be the Messiah because he didn't save himself.

Barabbas tells his friends about the light that shone around Jesus just before he was led to his death, but they believed it to be simply a trick of his eyes after having been in the



dungeon for so long. He then asks what they think of the darkness and they say that it didn't grow dark in Jerusalem. They also attribute that claim to his eyes adjusting to daylight.

The men occasionally slip off with the women, returning after a short time to eat and talk more. The men eventually leave, fully drunk, and the women retire to their sleeping mats, leaving Barabbas and the fat woman alone. She invites him to her bed and they spend the night together. Barabbas lays in bed, unable to sleep, and finds himself thinking again of the man on the cross and the darkness. He doesn't believe that he was mistaken, but has no explanation.

Pages 1 through 21 Analysis

Barabbas does not know Jesus, only that he's the man who was arrested and was crucified in Barabbas' place. He talks at length about Jesus, but never by name.

Barabbas notes that there's "something different" about Jesus. He says that it's obvious that the man is innocent of any crime and that he can't understand why the people agreed to release Barabbas to have Jesus crucified. Barabbas also says that he was "drawn" to the scene of the execution. He would ordinarily not have gone there because he considers the location unclean.

Barabbas notes that the thief who was executed next to Jesus deserved to die, though not for the crimes he'd been sentenced for. This indicates that Barabbas knows this thief quite well and seems to know that the man is guilty of crimes that the justice system knows nothing about. The men who talk to Barabbas at the fat woman's place are likely the thieves he's recently associated with. All this goes to prove that Barabbas has had a less-than-perfect past himself and that he was guilty of the crimes he'd been accused of. There are times he alludes to the fact that he was acquitted of his guilt while an innocent man died. Barabbas at one point says that he can't be forgiven of his own sins because he hasn't paid for them.

It seems that Barabbas is spending a lot of time puzzling over the events surrounding the crucifixion of Jesus. When one woman says that she saw him once, Barabbas asks about Jesus' miracles and his preaching. The woman's answers are somewhat jumbled but Barabbas continues searching for answers. He goes on that night to wonder about the light around Jesus and the darkness upon Jesus' death. He seems on the verge of believing in Jesus but is swayed by his friends' comments.



Pages 22 through 41

Pages 22 through 41 Summary

As Barabbas walks around the city on the following day, noticing that some people are staring at him. He soon overhears some men talking, though they are trying to be quiet, and is certain they are talking about Jesus. When one of them mentions the darkness at the moment of Jesus' death, Barabbas leans closer, trying to hear, and they all fall quiet. One man, a large red-headed Galilean, is left alone after the others leave. Barabbas initiates a conversation and the man confides that the "Master" had been crucified at Golgotha. Barabbas says that he knows nothing about it and the large man says that it had been ordained to happen. Barabbas asks what was the point of the crucifixion and the man says that "he must suffer and die for us." Barabbas continues to ask questions and the man says that Jesus had beckoned and that the man had followed. He says that it's impossible not to follow once the Master calls.

The man then says that he believes Jesus will return from the dead on the third day. The man explains that Jesus is the Son of Man and the Son of God, though Barabbas says that he doesn't understand. Barabbas also says that if the Son of God were to come to earth, he wouldn't likely be spending his time preaching in Jerusalem. The man asks why it couldn't happen, that one place was just as likely to be host to that preaching as another. The man then asks how Barabbas explains the miracles, the darkness on Golgotha, and the earthquake. Barabbas doesn't admit that he was present when the darkness occurred and accuses the man of lying about the quake. The man says that he's ashamed that he wasn't with the Master, that he had denied him. He asks Barabbas if he believes that such a deed could be forgiven and Barabbas says he does. Just then, a group of men pass by the place where Barabbas and the man are talking and tell the man that Barabbas is the one who was destined to die on Golgotha, the man who was acquitted and whose place was taken by Jesus. Barabbas walks away without looking back.

The hare-lipped girl lives at the Dung Gate with other beggars and homeless people. She believes that Jesus will arise from the dead the following morning at sunrise. With that event, she believes the sick will be healed and the hungry will be fed. She is surrounded by the deformed and hungry people of the city and thinks with longing of the miracle of the coming event. She then thinks back to the time she met Jesus. She didn't ask him to heal her deformed lip but he'd told her that she would "bear witness," that she has been selected as the person who would witness the resurrection. She endures the night which seems to stretch out longer than normal.

Just before sunrise, Barabbas is hidden near the tomb. He says that he knows the dead don't rise, but remains there just the same. He thinks he's alone, then sees the hare-lipped girl. When daylight is upon them, he realizes that the tomb is empty and he believes the Christians have taken Jesus away. The girl saw the resurrection and describes it to Barabbas in detail - an angel with a mantle of fire rushed downward with



a spear which pried open the tomb. They return to the city together and Barabbas again asks the girl about the doctrine preached by the Christians. She reminds him that it's to "love one another."

Pages 22 through 41 Analysis

It seems likely that the man who talks to Barabbas is Peter, one of Jesus' followers. Peter denied that he was a Christian on the day of Jesus' death and this man tells Barabbas that he wasn't with his Master at Golgotha because he had denied his Master.

It's interesting to note that Barabbas is closely questioning the man about his faith, his Master and the miracles. As has been the case before, it seems that Barabbas is seeking answers and that he is actually looking for something to make him believe in Christianity. It could be that Peter is on the verge of helping Barabbas on that score when the men arrive. One recognizes Barabbas, calls him a "reprobate" and tells him to leave, which Barabbas does. It seems that the newcomer has again hurt the chances that Barabbas will become a believer.

The girl believes that Jesus will be resurrected, but also seems to think that he's going to fulfill the other prophecies immediately - healing the sick and feeding the hungry. It's unclear whether she's a true believer or is holding to the hope that someone is going to ease her earthly suffering until she's stoned later in the story. At that point, she'll reach to Jesus and will claim to see him. Barabbas says that he's amazed that none of Jesus' followers are there to witness his resurrection, unless they knew that it wasn't going to happen. Though the viewpoint of the Christians isn't explored in this text, they remain fearful for all Jesus' followers are being persecuted.

There's no real explanation as to why Barabbas is at the tomb except that he's hoping to see a miracle or confirm that he's not seeing miracles. He says that he would make up some story of simply being in the neighborhood if he thought it believable, but admits that the hare-lipped girl would see through the lie. As they walk back to Jerusalem, he asks her again about the Christian doctrine. It seems that Barabbas is on the verge of conversion and is seeking answers that would help him on the course.



Pages 42 through 63

Pages 42 through 63 Summary

Barabbas hangs around Jerusalem though he has no business there. The fat woman thinks that he's staying to be with her, but admits that it's not true. She claims to be relieved that he doesn't seem to care for her, but at other times cries for the fact that she knows he doesn't care.

Barabbas continues to bump into followers of Jesus and says that he likes them, though he doesn't really know or understand them. He continues to seek out the Christians and pretends that he wants to understand their doctrine in order to become like them. He says that he expects them to be glad that he's a potential convert, but that they don't appear glad, and that he knows why.

Barabbas reasons that Jesus can't be the Son of God because he was crucified. If he were the Son of God he could have prevented it, which means that as the Son of God, he'd chosen to die. Barabbas decides there's something "weird" about that, but then the argument goes full circle and Barabbas decides that there's no way the man was the Son of God anyway, making the argument a moot point. While Barabbas listens to their statements that Jesus had "died for them," he knows that he has a stronger bond with the man who was crucified than anyone else - for Jesus truly died for Barabbas. Because Barabbas truly didn't want to die, the man - if he were the Son of God - knew that and had spared Barabbas. The Christians are open in their dislike of Barabbas and he determines not to go near them anymore, but soon finds himself returning to the places they work and trade.

Finally, one asks if Barabbas would like to meet a man who was resurrected from the dead. Barabbas agrees and is taken to the man's house. He's described as having a "parched" look about him, with "lack-luster eyes" and he spoke in a "flat tone." The man tells Barabbas that he was dead and was raised to be a witness for Jesus. Barabbas asks about the "realm of the dead" and the man says that it exists but is "nothing." He then says it's odd that Barabbas should ask that since no one else has. Barabbas reluctantly shares a meal with the man then returns to the fat woman and takes her violently. When he again sees the Christians, he tells them that he believes the man was raised from the dead but that Jesus had no right to do so. Then someone recognizes him as the one who was released on the day Jesus was crucified and they call him "Barabbas the acquitted."

Barabbas spends his days inside the fat woman's place and she finally reasons that he's been spending too much time with the "lunatics" associated with the crucified man. She then wonders if perhaps the crucified man breathed his spirit into Barabbas before he died, meaning that Barabbas is now possessed. She admits that she knows little about Barabbas, but that she loves him.



On one of the rare days Barabbas is out in the city, he happens upon a low-vaulted room in which Christians are gathered. The red-haired man Barabbas had talked to before Jesus' resurrection spoke of the possibility of persecution and the need to be strong through it. The hare-lipped girl spoke next and Barabbas notes that those present were rather embarrassed for the girl. Barabbas slips out before the meeting is ended.

Pages 42 through 63 Analysis

Barabbas says that the Christians have their "brotherhoods and love fests," and that he doesn't want to be part of that. However, it does seem to bother him that he's not accepted among their numbers. Though Barabbas says he knows why he's not accepted, he doesn't reveal his understanding. It's unlikely that the Christians know Barabbas was released and that Jesus was crucified on the cross meant for Barabbas because someone recognizes him later and the Christians openly yell at him.

Barabbas is appalled by the man who was risen from the dead. From the description, it seems that the man has an unnatural appearance and Barabbas is almost unable to eat the bread after the man's yellowed fingers tore it apart. It's probably the appearance, the man's monotone and his eyes that prompt Barabbas to say that Jesus had no right to raise the man from the dead. Barabbas says he knows he's offended the Christians with this point of view, but doesn't seem to care.

There's no explanation for Barabbas' attendance at the meeting of the Christians. He simply shows up at an abandoned building and sits in on the meeting. He notes that people are somewhat disappointed in the two who spoke out, but those are Barabbas' notations. There could be other explanations, including that the

Christians are in prayer, but it should also be noted that the Christians may very well have been uncomfortable and uncertain. Remember that the red-haired man admitted to having denied his Lord before the crucifixion and is now preaching the need to stand firm on their convictions.



Pages 64 through 81

Pages 64 through 81 Summary

The Christians begin facing persecution and many rush to tell on their neighbors and friends. Among them is the blind man who sleeps at the Dung Gate near the hare-lipped girl. He says that she's spreading the story that the current world is to be destroyed and another formed. He says that she's saying that the sick will be healed, even the lepers, and that it's surely heresy to spread such tales. He says that the girl doesn't claim to be able to perform these miracles herself, but that her Lord - the Son of God - can do anything. The blind man says that there are many who listen to her stories. Outside, there's a youth who is waiting for the man and they return "home" to the Dung Gate together.

In the next scene, the girl is in the stoning pit, surrounded by people and waiting for death. The blind man, as her accuser, is ordered to cast the first stone but he hurls several rocks that miss the girl. Finally, another man identified as the "true believer" throws a stone, striking the girl squarely and prompting the barrage of rocks from those standing around the pit. Barabbas is standing in the mob and uses his knife to kill the man who cast the first stone. His body is not discovered until the girl is dead.

Just before her death, the hare-lipped girl steps forward with her hand raised and says, "He has come!" She falls to her knees, reaches out as though to hold the hem of a garment, and says, "Lord, how can I witness for thee? Please forgive ..."

In the dead of night, Barabbas slips back to the stoning pit and retrieves the girl's body. Barabbas thinks back to a time when he told the girl that he loved her. He admits that it wasn't true, but that the girl's face lit up because she was unaccustomed to hearing those words. His leg had been injured and the woman had cared for him during that time.

He carries the girl across the Desert of Judah to the land of the Moabites following a camel and mule track. He walks more than half the night and wonders if he'll be able to find the site he seeks to entomb the girl or if he'll have to ask "the old man." He does find it and removes the slab of rock to reveal the corpse of a child, completely withered. He arranges the girl beside the child and covers them.

Barabbas then returns to "his people," a band of thieves and outlaws who have depended on him for leadership in the past, but Barabbas is changed. He had been daring but now hardly seems to care whether the group was involved in a new scheme to rob and plunder. On one occasion, he loses his temper and desecrates the body of the temple guards escorting a wagon. His fellow thieves are amazed at the needless ferocity of the attack. Afterward, Barabbas returns to his indifferent self until his friends wish he would leave. No one has the courage to demand that he go so he continues to live among them, half-hearted at best.



Barabbas and his friends know little about his past. The friends say that he wasn't really a man until Eliahu attacked Barabbas. It was Eliahu's knife that left the scar on Barabbas' cheek. What none of them ever knew was that Eliahu is Barabbas' father. His mother was a Moabite captive sold into prostitution and kicked out of that dubious livelihood when she became pregnant. Barabbas was born on a street and his mother died. Barabbas never knew his parents and gave them no thought, but on a particular night he is thinking about Jesus' mother as she stood at the foot of the cross and watched her son die, then as she looked reproachfully at Barabbas on her way away from the place.

Pages 64 through 81 Analysis

The blind man who tells on the hare-lipped girl isn't content with simply telling what the girl is saying about Jesus, he throws in that he's heard that she killed her own child. He says that there's nothing wrong with his hearing, but only his eyesight that's a problem, and that it's a "great misfortune" to be blinded so. There's no indication of the identity of the youth who is waiting for the blind man.

Barabbas is at the stoning pit when the hare-lipped girl is sentenced to die. Up to this point, there's been only a slight indication that the two know each other, and it seems that they've met in passing. It will soon be revealed that they have a history. That gives some explanation to Barabbas' reaction to the man who threw the first stone. There's really nothing to explain the author's choice of words, that the man who cast the first stone was the "true believer."

Barabbas is honest enough to admit that he used the hare-lipped girl when he was injured, but tries to dismiss any wrongdoing in leaving her once he'd healed. He says there was nothing else to do, but his reaction to the girl in her living conditions in Jerusalem seems to indicate that he feels something for her. As he carries her body away for burial, he considers that his action might have earned her approval. He argues that it really doesn't matter, but he continues on his quest just the same. It seems possible that the "old man" Barabbas refers to could be Eliahu, the man who sired Barabbas and who cut Barabbas' cheek. There are no additional details about the old man at this point and no additional clues to his identity. Later, it's said that the thieves had once found Eliahu's "battered body" at the bottom of a cliff, but it's not revealed if the man was killed.

The lack of enthusiasm Barabbas now has for the thievery could be the result of seeing the miracles and being on the verge of making a commitment to Christ. It seems possible that Barabbas, through witnessing the miracles and spending time with the Christians in Jerusalem, is feeling the pull of Jesus' call. It's a statement of the man Barabbas once was that his thieving friends want him gone but don't have the courage to kick him out of the band.



Pages 82 through 102

Pages 82 through 102 Summary

One morning, the thieves wake to find that Barabbas is gone. They search briefly for his body, in case he's jumped from a cliff to his death. They consider that it could have been Eliahu's spirit that invaded Barabbas and changed him. They don't find his body and return to their business. The author points out that there is no indication of where he spends the next years. He might have been a robber in Lebanon, showing cruelty to any Christians who fell into his hands. Some say he was seen sacrificing a lamb on the Passover at Gerizim. Others think he joined the Samaritans who hated the Jerusalem temple, priests and scribes. He says it is known that Barabbas was well into his fifties when he became a slave in a Roman governor's house, and that before that he'd been in the copper mines.

In the copper mine, Barabbas was shackled to a man named Sahak - a Christian who had already received a miracle from God. Those who worked at the furnaces lived only a short time and Sahak had been assigned that duty until one day the overseer decided there were too many men at that job and moved Sahak into the mine. Though the conditions there were also deplorable and all died, the life span was longer than those at the smelters.

Sahak and Barabbas are chained together, meaning they are never separated. They never leave the mines, even sleeping in the underground at night, side-by-side. At first, they talk little about themselves and both seem to have something to hide. Then Barabbas mentions that he's a Hebrew and Sahak wants to know if Barabbas knows of a "great prophet" in whom many believed. Barabbas knows Sahak speaks of Jesus and he admits that he'd seen him, though doesn't say where. Sahak realizes that he's chained to a man who'd seen God and he's amazed. Sahak stops working at this information and the overseer whips him. When he can again talk, he questions Barabbas about Jesus and Barabbas says that he saw Jesus at Golgotha, the site of the crucifixion. He wants to hear everything Barabbas knows about Jesus but Barabbas doesn't tell him how he happened to be there when Jesus was crucified. Barabbas tells of the resurrection, inserting the hare-lipped girl's testimony for his own. It's then that Sahak shows Barabbas his slave's medallion. On the front is the inscription indicating the Sahak belongs to Rome. On the back, Sahak has had someone inscribe that he belongs to Jesus. Sahak then inscribes the same symbols onto Barabbas' medallion. While they're working on that, the overseer again catches them and whip them. The author notes that this is the first time Barabbas suffers for the sake of the man who was crucified in his place.

Immediately after Sahak completes the inscription, he and Barabbas pray together. After only a few of these shared moments of prayer, Barabbas stops praying and Sahak doesn't know why. Barabbas stands guard, shielding Sahak from the view of others while he prays and watching for the overseer.



One day, a new overseer notes the pair and asks what Sahak is doing. Sahak expects to be whipped but tells the overseer that he's praying to his god. When the overseer asks, "Which god?" Sahak says that it's the one true God. The overseer continues on his way but stops back by to talk to Sahak over the next days. Sahak tries to explain about God, Jesus and the Christian faith. The overseer is interested and continues to ask questions. Sahak says that the only requirement for salvation is to "sacrifice oneself," though he doesn't really understand himself and the overseer is also confused by the idea. The overseer points out that the safest way to worship is to worship all the gods, so that one is certain to be worshiping the correct god. Sahak says those who worship Jesus are not to worship any others.

After days of talking together in this manner, the overseer tells Sahak that he's arranged for his release from the mines. Sahak is to work above ground in the fields. Sahak refuses to go without Barabbas, saying that it's Barabbas who saw Jesus crucified and resurrected and that Barabbas opened Sahak's eyes to God's glory. The overseer agrees to have both men moved. When they step into the daylight, Sahak kneels and praises God.

Pages 82 through 102 Analysis

It seems that once Barabbas has told Sahak that he'd seen Jesus in person a greater bond is forged between the two men. It's likely that Barabbas needs to be close to another human and that's the reason he tells Sahak about the resurrection as well. Though Barabbas didn't see the angel, he heard the hare-lipped girl tell the story twice and he now uses the words from her vision to describe the scene to Sahak.

As Barabbas looks at Sahak's medallion, they think that the overseer is approaching and that they've again been caught not working. If that happens, they'll be whipped. When they realize it isn't the overseer, they lean on each other for support. This seems symbolic of the relationship between Barabbas and Sahak. Sahak, in his quest for knowledge about Jesus, needs to hear what Barabbas knows. Barabbas needs a strong believer to understand the true Christian faith.

When Barabbas stops praying, he also stops talking to Sahak about Jesus. Sahak feels that loss deeply. He'd never seen Jesus and had taken great pleasure in hearing Barabbas' accounts of the times he'd seen Jesus. Sahak believes that Jesus will return, though he occasionally considers that anything could have happened on the surface and that he wouldn't know of the change. While he considers that, he believes that Jesus would not forget those who labored in the mines, and that all would be called home.

It seems that Sahak has only a tenuous grasp of what's expected of a Christian. He notes that one is to "sacrifice oneself," but doesn't know what that means. Sahak likens it to being sacrificed in a great smelting furnace and says he got the information from a Greek slave. Though he doesn't give the overseer the information the man wants, the overseer seems to thirst for more knowledge. There's never an indication of what



becomes of the overseer, though Sahak and Barabbas seem convinced that he's not an ordinary man and is certainly not an ordinary overseer.

The overseer tells Sahak that he's to be released from the mines and that he will now work above ground - the equivalent of commuting Sahak's death sentence. Sahak refuses to go unless Barabbas accompanies him. When the overseer says that it's obvious that Barabbas is not a believer, Sahak disagrees, saying that Barabbas is different, but that he's seen Jesus. It's important to remember that an overseer would have never given a slave such a gift as the chance to work above ground, and that Sahak was willing to give it up in order to stay with Barabbas is amazing.



Pages 103 through 122

Pages 103 through 122 Summary

Barabbas and Sahak do well together working in the fields. They have been shackled together for so long that they fall into the routine of being harnessed together to pull a plow. Though they still work hard, they're happy to be out in the air together. They are no longer chained together but remain near each other and seldom mix with other slaves. Though they don't make other friends, they aren't nearly as close as they were in the mines. In fact, they become somewhat awkward with each other.

Barabbas wants to break the imaginary binding that keeps him near Sahak, but Sahak is saddened by the fact that the two men are no longer close as they were in the mines. For the first few days, they talk of their "miraculous" escape from the mine, but never mention it again. Sahak credits God for their deliverance but Barabbas credits only Sahak. Barabbas thanks Sahak, but Sahak wonders if Barabbas thanks God. Sahak is genuinely happy. Barabbas is quiet and no one knows what he's thinking.

After the spring plowing is complete, the two are sent to turn the water wheels and they meet the one-eyed man, a slave who had one of his eyes gouged out as a punishment for theft. The man can make his presence felt and others seem wary of him. The slaves are all naked except the one-eyed man. There's no explanation for the fact that he has a loin cloth. He also wears a wooden frame around his neck intended to keep him from eating any of the flour, though it is said that he managed to eat anyway. The one-eyed slave guesses that Sahak and Barabbas must be serious criminals, otherwise they wouldn't have been sentenced to work in the mine. He wonders who might have helped them escape, but thinks that it's nothing to him. The one-eyed man notices Sahak praying and questions him. Sahak, believing that he's doing the right thing, begins to explain Christianity. Sahak tells the man that God will return and that all slaves will be freed. He shows the one-eyed man his own slave medallion with the sign of Jesus on the back and says that Barabbas has the same symbol. Sahak believes he's grown close to the one-eyed man, never suspecting that the man will tell those in power about the claims of Christianity.

Sahak and Barabbas are called to the Roman governor's palace. Once there, the governor asks the overseer how Barabbas and Sahak conduct themselves. The overseer says he has no problems with either but that he treats them severely.

The governor asks to see Sahak's medallion, pointing out that the front of the disk indicates that the man belongs to Rome and that the back of the disk - the handmade inscription - has the name "Christos Iesus." He asks Sahak what that means and Sahak says it's an indication that he belongs to Jesus Christ. The governor speaks quietly and tells Sahak that he must be very clear on this point. He asks again who Sahak belongs to and the slave says again that he belongs only to Jesus. The governor then turns to Barabbas and asks if he also belongs to Jesus. Barabbas shakes his head, indicating



that he doesn't. The governor asks why Barabbas has "Christos Iesus" inscribed on his own disk and Barabbas says it's because he wants to believe, but that he doesn't.

The governor then says that anyone who "belongs" to Jesus will be killed and gives Sahak the opportunity to renounce his faith. Sahak refuses and is taken away. Barabbas allows the governor to scratch through the name on the back of his medallion. As Sahak is being taken away, he looks at Barabbas "with an expression that seared through him like fire." Sahak is then taken away by guards and Barabbas is told that he'll be assigned a new position within the governor's household, meaning easier work for him.

Barabbas watches as Sahak is first tortured and then crucified. The soldiers note that they have no orders to torture Sahak, but think that the governor simply forgot to issue the command. The governor didn't intend for Sahak to be tortured, though there's no indication as to why. Sahak is branded but his slave's disk is removed so that the metal can be reused. Barabbas notes that it's spring, just as it was when the two came up from the mines. Barabbas has more freedom now as a member of the governor's household and takes time to watch the entire proceedings. He never wavers, watching with his mouth "half open at the other's pain." When Sahak dies, Barabbas falls to his knees. He knows that Sahak would be happy to see Barabbas on his knees, taking it as a sign of prayer. In fact, Barabbas has no one to pray to. The soldiers suddenly realize the prisoner is dead and hurriedly leave the hill.

Pages 103 through 122 Analysis

Though Barabbas and Sahak are out of the mines, they still live as slaves. They are still whipped though Sahak is punished more often than Barabbas because he's not as strong. They note that "God's kingdom had not yet come," but feel blessed just the same. It's noteworthy that Barabbas seems to share this feeling, but says that it's Sahak who saved him rather than God. Barabbas can't see God's hand in shackling him to a believer and then delivering the believer from the mines. Barabbas seems set on taking things literally at face value.

Though Barabbas and Sahak are now free to be away from each other, when they awake they are always in momentary fear until they're certain the other is near. The need Barabbas has for contact with this fellow slave could be symbolic of his need for a fellowship with God. Because Barabbas can't quite bring himself to fully believe in God, he's holding on to the closest thing he can find - a Christian.

The overseer tells the governor that he treats the slaves severely and waits to see if this pleases the governor. When the overseer is dismissed, he's so anxious to leave that he forgets to walk out backwards - a serious slight to the governor when the overseer turns his back. However, there are no words of either encouragement or retribution to the governor. It's likely that the leader has other things on his mind.



As Sahak and Barabbas are being questioned by the governor, they're bound to know what standing up for Jesus means. While Sahak is adamant about his faith, Barabbas is not. It's Sahak who says that he "cannot" renounce Jesus, even though he is saying that he'll accept execution. It could be that Barabbas is afraid of death - he admitted such shortly after Jesus' crucifixion; but it seems more likely that he's simply being honest. He says that he allowed the inscription because he wanted to believe, but that he doesn't. With that explanation, it seems that Sahak perhaps realizes that Barabbas was never a Christian but that the prayer time they shared meant nothing to Barabbas.

Barabbas notes that Sahak would have been happy to see Barabbas on his knees at the crucifixion site, but that Sahak was already dead. It's important to note that Barabbas may have seemed to be praying but that he in fact had no god to pray to. Barabbas seems to feel some remaining connection to Sahak and remains throughout the ordeal. Barabbas notes that he knows the other man so well that he could tell what he's thinking at a given moment. Barabbas, who had been shackled to this Christian for years and has spent more years toiling beside him, is now completely alone. The support Sahak had offered all those years is now gone and Barabbas is once again completely adrift.



Pages 123 through 144

Pages 123 through 144 Summary

The governor retires and moves back to Rome, taking members of his household with him. Barabbas is among them, though he's old and not really a useful person. The governor instead includes Barabbas in the move out of "sentiment," because Barabbas had allowed Jesus' name to be scratched off the back of his medallion. The governor takes that as a sign of loyalty that should be rewarded. The author notes that "no one could believe that Barabbas' master was so considerate and forgetful."

Barabbas lives in the basement with the other slaves but knows that the house is grand. Though others are amazed at the mass of people, Barabbas hates the throngs and sees everything through a mist. He sees religious processions to the various gods. At a temple door one day, Barabbas asks someone about one of the processions and is turned out of the temple. Barabbas runs through the streets and gets lost. He finally finds his way home and is reprimanded but not in serious trouble because the overseers can believe that the old man became lost in the sprawling city.

That same night, Barabbas has a dream in which he was shackled to a prisoner who lay praying. When Barabbas asks the slave what he's praying for, he answers, "I'm praying for you." When Barabbas awakes, he feels for the chain that would have fettered him to another. Finding none, he begins to cry.

One day, Barabbas finds the sign of the fish on a basement wall and he begins to wonder if there's a Christian slave living in the basement. He starts watching for a sign that it's true but doesn't ask anyone. He eventually hears two slaves whispering about a secret meeting of the Christians at Marcus Lucius' vineyard on the Appian Way. The brethren were to meet in the Jewish catacombs.

Barabbas has known of other meetings and has not attended, so there's no indication as to why he chose to attend this particular meeting. He slips out of the house though he knows that if he is caught it will mean severe punishment. When he arrives at the catacombs, he can't find anyone. He thinks he sees a light down a particular tunnel, then another. He becomes lost among the dead in the catacombs and will only later discover that the authorities discovered the location of the meeting, prompting the Christians to change the meeting place.

As he heads back toward the city, Barabbas feels very much alone. He notes that "Once and only once had he been united with another and that was with an iron chain." Barabbas is still afraid of death, even though he's now old and will surely face it soon. He's envious of the Christians who are not afraid.

As he returns to the city, he discovers that many buildings are on fire. People are yelling, "The Christians," and Barabbas suddenly thinks he understands that the



Christians are burning the city. Barabbas believes that Jesus has returned. Barabbas vows that he won't fail this time. He grabs a "brand" and rushes to throw it into another house, immediately setting a blaze.

Barabbas is rounded up with the Christians who are wrongly accused and they are all imprisoned together. The Christians assert their innocence but accept that the fire was merely an excuse to imprison them. They realize that the mob accusing the Christians was probably hired to do so. The Christians sing hymns and pray while Barabbas stays to himself. A guard points out that Barabbas is a part of the Christian group and that he was caught setting a fire. The guard points out Barabbas' slave disk with the Christian insignia on the back. The Christians immediately begin to question Barabbas, asking about his brotherhood, whether he really did start a fire, and why the insignia was crossed out.

Barabbas doesn't answer until an old man approaches. The man says that he knows Barabbas and asks about his life. Though it's not Barabbas' normal way, he tells the old man about many aspects of his life over the years. The old man tells Barabbas that it wasn't the Christians who set the fires, but that it was Caesar. He points out that in this final act, Barabbas helped his earthly ruler. "Without knowing it, you served your rightful lord." The old man leaves Barabbas alone, knowing that he alone must bear the weight of his actions. The other Christians gather around the man, questioning him about Barabbas. He finally tells them the man is "Barabbas, he who was acquitted in the Master's stead." The old man tells the Christians that Barabbas is an unhappy man and says that the Christians have no right to pass judgment.

Barabbas wonders about the faith these Christians have. They believe in life after death and Barabbas realizes that he has no idea what will come after. The old man is actually the same man Barabbas met in Jerusalem soon after Jesus' crucifixion. It was the man who told Barabbas that once the Master said, "Follow me," a believer had no choice but to follow.

Barabbas and the others are shackled in pairs as they're led to their deaths. There are an odd number of prisoners and Barabbas walks alone. The Christians encourage each other and Barabbas hangs slightly apart, able to watch their suffering through his own. When all the spectators have gone, the Christians are all dead, leaving Barabbas as the only one clinging to life. "When he felt death approaching, that which he had always been so afraid of, he said out into the darkness, as though he were speaking to it: To thee I deliver up my soul. And then he gave up the ghost."

Pages 123 through 144 Analysis

The governor admits that he's had a successful reign as governor and that it's largely because he had cruel overseers who drove the slaves hard. He seems to look for a way to excuse it, saying that he was not been closely involved with any part of the mines or fields and that he'd not been the one to wield the whips. As the governor is preparing to



leave, those in the mines and in the fields applaud his departure. In their "simplicity," they believe the next ruler will be better and that their lives will improve.

The Christians who live in Rome are hated. People believe the Christians are practicing witchcraft. There are many who have a "secret sign" meant to ward off the evil of the Christians - fingers spaced out after them. The superstitions are rampant among the non-believers and practices to hide from the various evils are well-known.

Barabbas is envious of those in the brotherhood of Christ. It seems that he wants desperately to belong to something. There's no real explanation for the many years he kept to himself, blocking out the affections and friendships of others. It is likely that it was simply part of his personality - the tendency to want to be alone. With that in mind, it seems strange that he would cry in loneliness when he wakes from the dream to discover that he's not shackled to anyone. That is likely symbolic for his walk through life without Jesus.

When Barabbas sees that the city is on fire and hears that the Christians are being blamed for it, he immediately decides that Jesus must have returned. There are some important aspects to be considered. First, Barabbas obviously still believes - or at least holds to the hope - that Jesus will return. He may profess that he's not a Christian, but he has obviously given the matter serious thought. Another point is that Barabbas vows that he won't fail Jesus again. It seems that Barabbas still holds to the idea that he should have been killed at Golgotha instead of Jesus. Perhaps he thinks that it would have made a difference if he had stood up to the soldiers and offered to trade places with Jesus. There almost seems to be guilt involved on this particular point. Another aspect to consider is that Barabbas believes that the Christians are setting the city ablaze. Even after all the time he's spent trying to learn about Christianity, he doesn't understand that this kind of destruction is not what Jesus preached.

The man Barabbas talks with in prison is the red-haired man from Galilee who Barabbas met soon after Jesus' death. At that time, the red-haired man - who is likely Peter but isn't named within this text - says that a person who is called to follow the Master has no choice in the matter. Now the man recognizes that Barabbas has made his own choices and no longer has a say. He notes that the slave disk, worn by Barabbas with Jesus' name crossed out, is for Barabbas to bear.

It's important to note that again, Barabbas is walking alone while the others are chained in pairs. Barabbas is forced to endure his fate alone. It's again likely that this is symbolic of Barabbas' lonely life without a fellowship with Christ.

Barabbas' final words are something of a mystery. He says that he gives his soul "to thee," but there have been no indications that Barabbas has ever truly accepted Jesus or that he's now to be welcomed into Jesus' fold.



Characters

Barabbas

Barabbas was in prison awaiting his execution when Jesus was arrested. Because of the Passover, the people were given the option to release one prisoner - Jesus or Barabbas. They allowed Barabbas to go free. As he gets his first look at Jesus, Barabbas sees a holy glow, but puts it attributes it to the fact that he'd been dazzled by the light after spending days in the dark prison. He spends the next hours watching Jesus die on the cross. When it's over, he heads toward Jerusalem to the comfort of friends. Once there, they're amazed that he's not dead but he isn't quite himself. The friends - including a woman who seems to be little more than a prostitute - eventually put it down to the fact that he'd survived when he had been scheduled for execution.

He spends his days talking to those who walked with Jesus, seeming to seek information. Though he's witnessed to by believers, he refuses to give his life to Christ. He eventually returns to a band of robbers but his will seems to be gone. He doesn't particularly care what happens and eventually walks away from the group of thieves. He's later enslaved and finds himself in a copper mine, shackled to a Christian. As they begin to get to know each other, Barabbas admits that he's seen Jesus - a fact that delights the Christian. Barabbas has the sign of Jesus inscribed on the back of his slave's medallion but is later called upon to profess his faith and does not, prompting a Roman governor to cross out the words. Barabbas seems to search for the faith that others are touting. It appears that he wants to belong to that brotherhood of Christians but is unable or unwilling to reach the point of surrender. It also seems likely that Barabbas might have found his way had he not been living with overt sinners during the days after the crucifixion.

In the copper mine, Barabbas seems to have found Christ briefly, but then stops praying with no explanation. He never again professes his faith until there's a great fire in Rome. Then, Barabbas sets fire to houses, claiming that he's doing it in the name of Jesus. In his final moment of life, from his position on the cross, he says, "To thee I deliver my soul," which could be interpreted to mean that he'd accepted Jesus at the end of his life.

Sahak

Sahak is the Armenian slave who worked in the copper mines, chained to Barabbas. Sahak tells Barabbas about his god and wants to hear Barabbas tell the stories of seeing Jesus again and again. Sahak is a Christian. Though he doesn't have a full grasp of the Christian doctrine, he is faithful. Like some of the other believers of this time, Sahak is holding to the promises that the hungry will be fed and the slaves will toil no longer upon Jesus' triumphant return. Sahak, like the hare-lipped girl, hopes that return will happen soon and expects it any day.



While Barabbas tells of seeing Jesus, Sahak shows Barabbas his slave medallion worn by all slaves. On the front are symbols that indicate the person wearing the medallion is a slave of Rome. An inscription on the back of Barabbas' medallion says, "Christo Iesus," which means that Sahak belongs to Jesus. Sahak scratches the inscription on the back of Barabbas' medallion and the two pray together several times of the coming days. It almost seems that Sahak has accomplished what witnessing the miracles of Jesus could not -brought Barabbas to Christ. However, after a few days, Barabbas simply stops praying without giving any indication as to why. Sahak is saddened, but doesn't understand that Barabbas was never a believer.

When Sahak gains the approval of an overseer, he's granted permission to leave the mines but won't go without Barabbas. The two work in the fields, then in the mills where someone tells that Sahak's slave medallion has Jesus' name inscribed on the back. Sahak is taken to the governor where he refuses to say he belongs to Caesar, not to God, and is crucified. Barabbas denies Jesus, saying he wants to believe but can't.

The Red-Bearded Man of Galilee

Barabbas meets this man on the second day after Jesus' death. The man is first talking with others, but Barabbas initiates a conversation and the man talks of Jesus, his ministry and his death. Barabbas meets the man again in the Roman prison just before they are all executed.

The Fat Woman

The woman seems to run a house of entertainment of sorts. She provides drink and food for Barabbas and for others who stop there. Men slip away with women for a short time and rejoin the eating, apparently indicating that the fat woman runs a house of prostitution.

The Hare-Lipped Girl

Barabbas meets the girl on the walk back from Galgotha after Christ is crucified. They have no connection but she slips into the fat woman's place with Barabbas and eats what he leaves. She lives on the streets and has met Jesus, though she didn't ask Jesus to cure her deformity. When Barabbas goes to the tomb where Jesus was buried on the morning of the resurrection, the girl is there. She swears that she saw Jesus resurrected though Barabbas thinks the believers simply took his body away. She witnesses for Christ and is soon stoned to death for her outspoken belief. It's later revealed that she had nursed Barabbas once when he was seriously injured and that he had told her he loved her in order to retain her services. When the girl is stoned to death, Barabbas takes her body away from the pit for burial.



The Resurrected Man

Barabbas is taken to the home of the man who was resurrected after he tells other believers that he doesn't believe in resurrection. The man's eyes are vacant and his skin yellow, according to Barabbas' description. He tells Barabbas that the death world was "nothing," and that Barabbas was the first person to ever ask him about that. He swears to the miracle and Barabbas doesn't say that he thinks the man lies, but that he thinks Jesus had no right to raise the man from the dead.

Eliahu

Barabbas' father and the man who knifed Barabbas, leaving a scar on this face.

The Blind Man

A beggar who lives near the Dung Gate and knows that the Hare-Lipped Girl has been spreading stories of Jesus and his miracles. The man calls on the prosecutors to stone the girl.

The True Believer

A man standing at the stoning pit when the Hare-Lipped Girl is about to be stoned. The blind man who accused the girl is to cast the first stone, but he misses repeatedly until the True Believer throws the first stone to strike the girl. Barabbas is watching and quietly walks over the man and kills him with a knife, leaving him dead in the mob of people. His body isn't discovered until the stoning is complete.

Mary, the Mother

Mother of Jesus and one of those gathered at the foot of the cross while Jesus died. Barabbas describes her as a peasant woman who was unable to truly express the grief she must have felt at seeing her son on the cross. Barabbas will later think back on Mary, the woman who watched her son die. Barabbas himself doesn't know his mother who died in childbirth, and he seems very interested in the bond between Mary and her own son.

The Roman Governor

The man who is notified that Sahak and Barabbas have Jesus' name on the back of their slave medallions. He asks Sahak to deny Jesus and when the slave refuses, the governor orders his crucifixion.



The One-Eyed Slave

A man working in the mill with Sahak and Barabbas. He has only one eye, having had one gouged out for theft. It's this man who talks to Sahak about Jesus and who likely turns him in for his faith.



Objects/Places

Golgotha

The place where Jesus was crucified. The sun went dark at Golgotha at the moment of Jesus' death, while Barabbas watched from nearby.

The Dung Gate

A place in Jerusalem where many of the homeless live. Some believe the mud will cure them and they all dig through the nearby garbage piles for scraps of food.

The Stoning Pit

A large pit where people are taken to be stoned to death. The Hare-Lipped Girl is taken there and just before she dies declares that she sees Jesus.

Jerusalem

The city where Barabbas stays after the crucifixion of Jesus.

The Desert of Judah

The desert outside Jerusalem. Barabbas crosses the arid land carrying the Hare-Lipped Girl's body for burial beside her stillborn child.

Cyperian Copper Mines

Where Barabbas was held as a slave after leaving his band of robbers behind.

Paphos

Where Barabbas worked as a slave in the Roman governor's house.

Ostia

The port city of Rome where Barabbas arrives with the governor. Barabbas is at this time an elderly slave who is taken along because the governor believes him to be level-headed.

Via Appia

The place Barabbas believes the Christians are to meet, based on an overheard conversation. He enters the catacombs of burial chambers but is unable to find the meeting and becomes lost. He is panicked by the time he finds his way out.

The Roman Prison

Where Barabbas is held after officials arrest him for burning houses in Rome. From there, Barabbas and a group of Christians also accused of the crime are crucified.



Themes

The Quest for Faith

Barabbas notes from his first meeting with Jesus that there's something different about Him. As Barabbas notes, it's evident that Jesus is innocent of any crime and that he doesn't deserve his sentence. When Barabbas leaves Galgotha and goes into Jerusalem, he's quiet and his friends note that he's not himself. First, he talks to the hare-lipped girl. She's surprised that he stoops to talk to her. Then, he gives her part of his food and is reserved with his friends. He eventually tells them that he saw a glow around Jesus before he was taken to be crucified and the friends say that it was a trick of the light because Barabbas had been in the dark dungeon so long. He says that it turned dark on Galgotha and they again put it down to his eyes.

It seems that Barabbas is changed - more than just from his near-death experience. It's possible that he's actually on the verge of a conversion to Christianity, but he allows his friends to talk him out of his notions. A similar event happens when Barabbas is in the copper mine with Sahak. When Sahak inscribes the Christian symbols on the back of Barabbas' slave medallion, they fall to their knees and pray together. Barabbas continues to pray for some time, but stops without explaining himself. When the Roman governor asks why he'd allow the inscription if he didn't believe in Jesus, Barabbas says simply that he wanted to believe. It seems that Barabbas often wants to believe. It's unclear whether he's simply unable to fully give his heart to Jesus or if he's unwilling.

Faith in Jesus

Though Barabbas himself never gives his life totally to Christianity, he does come in contact with a number of people who have faith that Jesus will care for them throughout eternity. It's important to note that some of these people are confused during the early teachings. The hare-lipped girl, for instance, seems to believe that Jesus is going to provide food for the hungry on earth during their current lives. Whether she truly believes that or has simply been passing on the parables that she's heard is unclear, but she's eventually taken to task for her remarks. When she's being stoned in the pit, the girl reaches out to Jesus. Barabbas, who is watching, seems to believe that the girl sees Jesus, but is angry that Jesus didn't do something to help her. The girl has faith that she'll spend eternity with her Christ while Barabbas sees only the needs of today.

There's a similar situation when Barabbas and Sahak are called to the Roman governor's palace. He asks them if they recognize that they belong to the state. Sahak says that he belongs only to Jesus. The governor points out that the man is to be crucified for his statement but he stands firm. Barabbas says that he wishes for that kind of belief, but that he doesn't have it. Sahak has faith that Jesus will care for him throughout eternity and that death will simply be an end to his suffering.



Coming of Age

Though the novel can be classified as a coming of age story, Barabbas never completes the journey. He spends his life working at becoming something more and at finding answers - just as heroes are bound to do. In this case, however, the answers seem to be always just out of Barabbas' grasp.

This journey apparently begins when Barabbas is pardoned for his crimes. Though his deeds before that moment are never detailed in this story, it's known that he was part of a band of thieves and that likely played a role in his death sentence. When Barabbas is set free, he could have run away. Most people would have immediately turned for their homes and left Jerusalem far behind. Barabbas finds himself following Jesus up the hill to be crucified. He then waits throughout the entire ordeal, watching Jesus and Jesus' family. Barabbas then stays in Jerusalem for weeks, often seeking out the Christians and asking questions about Jesus and his teachings. When he's recognized as "Barabbas the acquitted," he runs away, apparently ashamed of the fact.

Barabbas wonders at length about the events that led to his release. He wavers between deciding that Jesus was crazy for wanting to die and that Jesus realized that Barabbas was afraid of death and took his place purposefully. Barabbas seems to be desperately seeking answers but is unable to accept any explanation. He believes that he saw the glow around Jesus and then that he saw the darkness at Golgotha, but gives in to his friends' insistence that his eyes were playing tricks on him. He doesn't see the avenging angel release Jesus from the tomb but later claims that memory as his own. He prays and has his slave medallion inscribed with Jesus' name, but later stops praying and recants his Christianity. It seems that Barabbas simply can't make up his mind what he should believe and what he will believe, but spends his time wavering on the brink of self-discovery.

Style

Point of View

The story is written in third person from a semi-omniscient point of view. It's the only way for the reader to fully understand the story and the plot without having too much knowledge that would give the story away. For the most part, the book is written from Barabbas' point of view, but that point of view changes to those characters with whom Barabbas interacts. For example, when Barabbas is staying with the fat woman, there are looks into her thoughts about Barabbas. That's necessary for the story because the reader then has a chance to compare what the fat woman knew of Barabbas before his sentence was commuted and how Barabbas acts afterward. Without that balance, the reader would be confused and would never understand how the experience changed Barabbas. There are other times when this is also necessary for understanding - when Barabbas is interacting with his fellow slave, Sahak, for example.

Too much understanding would also be less effective. Sahak casts a searing look at Barabbas as Barabbas tells the Roman governor that he doesn't believe in Jesus but that he'd wanted to believe. It's up to the reader to decide what that "searing look" means. It could be disappointment or anger, but it could also be that Sahak is trying to see into Barabbas' soul to determine why he'd pretended to be a Christian. It could also be that Sahak suddenly doubts the stories Barabbas told regarding Jesus.

Setting

The story begins in Jerusalem on the date of Jesus' death and spans nearby cities and towns, ending in Rome years later as the Christian persecution is underway. There are facts of the story as related in the Biblical accounts of Jesus' crucifixion. The crucifixions occur of Golgotha as confirmed in this account. The man, Barabbas, was pardoned and allowed to leave, though there is little else mentioned about him in the Biblical accounts. In this account, the author sets Barabbas back to the date of his pardon and creates a fictional account of his life that could have occurred based on the historical facts of life in that time frame.

The places are real and the lifestyles are historically correct. The Christians were persecuted with many imprisoned or executed. The stoning pits existed and many who were judged immoral or guilty of some crime met their deaths in this manner. Many were crucified and it's entirely possible that Barabbas - as a thief himself - would have known the thief who was crucified at the same time as Jesus.

This method of using a real character in a true setting but weaving in a fictional life is effective. The truth of the matter lends credence to the other parts of the story, making it believable.



Language and Meaning

The book was not originally written in English and the version read today is transcribed from another language. Though this version is fairly easy to read and understand, there are some quirks that some readers may find distracting. For example, there are no quotation marks used. When a character is talking, the words are preceded by a dash (-) and the character's statement simply follows. For the most part, the quotation is alone in a paragraph, making it somewhat easier to discern the beginning and ending of the quote.

Characters' thoughts are treated much the same way but without the dash. The words "said" and "thought" are almost never used, meaning the reader may be well into a lengthy thought process before it's evident that's what's happening. While this is sometimes disconcerting, most readers will soon fall into the rhythm of the writing style and will be able to adequately understand the writing. Another factor to the understanding of the book is the identification of the characters. With the exception of Barabbas and Sahak, none are named. They are simply referred to as "the fat woman," "the hare-lipped girl," and so on. Even Jesus is seldom named, though he is sometimes called "the Master." For the most part, the identifications are not a problem and the story is typically easy to follow without names.

The language is typically easily understood with only a few words that are outdated. In most cases, the reader will find it a simple matter to decide what the word means by attending the context. For example, Barabbas picks up a "brand" and throws it into a house in Rome, starting a fire. It's evident from the context that the "brand" is a flaming timber of some sort so that the reader can attain the concept without a full understanding of the word.

Structure

The book is divided into fifteen chapters of widely varying lengths. Some chapters have as few as two pages while others have more than a dozen pages. None of the chapters are named or numbered which is somewhat confusing. The book is written roughly in chronological order with occasional variations. For example, the author tells that Barabbas is a slave in the governor's palace and then goes back to explain how Barabbas came to be in that position.

The book begins rather abruptly with Barabbas' release from prison and his unconscious decision to follow Jesus up the hill to be crucified. There are brief expositions discussing the life of Barabbas before he was released from prison, but those are few and offer only slight insights.

The book ends with Barabbas' death on a cross. The reader is left to decide whether Barabbas ever made a decision to believe in Christ.



Quotes

"He didn't remember ever having seen anyone like him before. Though it must have been because he came straight from the dungeon and his eyes were still unused to the glare. That is why at first glance the man seemed to be surrounded by a dazzling light."
Page 5

"Then the man had been led out to be crucified - and he himself had been unshackled and told he was free. It was none of his doing. It was their business. They were quite at liberty to choose whomever they liked, and it just turned out that way. They had both been sentenced to death, but one of them was to be released. He was amazed himself at their choice."
Page 5

"But all at once the whole hill grew dark, as though the light had gone out of the sun; it was almost pitch-dark, and in the darkness above, the crucified man cried out in a loud voice - My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? It sounded horrible."
Page 8

"At last they began asking what was the matter with him, why he was like that. But the large fat woman put her arm around his neck and said that it wasn't any wonder he seemed a bit queer after lying chained up in the dungeon for so long, very nearly dead; if a man is sentenced to death, then he's dead, and if he's let out and reprieved he's still dead, because that's what he has been and he's only risen again from the dead, and that's not the same as living and being like the rest of us."
Page 13

"You see ... I was not with my Master when he suffered and died. By then I had taken to my heels. Forsaken him and fled. And before that I had even denied him. That is the very worst of all - that I denied him. How can he forgive me, if he returns?"
- The red-haired Galilean, Page 30

"Barabbas had no wish to take part in such a love fest, not in the slightest; he was put off by the very thought of such a thing, of being tied to others in that way. He always wanted to be himself and nothing else. But he sought them out all the same."
Page 45

"But at last it came to her that in actual fact she knew nothing at all about Barabbas. Neither what was wrong with him nor whether he was possessed by the crucified man's spirit or not. Nothing at all. All she knew was that he took no notice of her and that she



was foolish enough to love him."
- The Fat Woman, Page 59

"He himself had heard her say that her Lord would save all people, even the lepers. He would heal them and make them just as clean as the rest of us. But what would happen if the lepers because like other people? If they went about all over the place - perhaps even without having to carry bells any longer - so that no one would know where they were, at least no one who was blind."
- The Blind Man, Page 65

"Was he the right one? The saviour of the world? The saviour of all mankind? Then why did he let her be stoned for his sake? If he was a saviour, why didn't he save!"
- Barabbas, Page 73

"The slaves were shackled together in twos and then the same pair always worked together side by side in the depths of the mine. Neither was ever separated from his fellow-prisoner, and these twin slaves did everything in common and grew to know one another inside out, sometimes to the point of frenzied hatred. They had been known to hurl themselves at each other in savage fury for no reason other than that they were welded together like this in hell."
Page 87

"Sahak lowered his pick and stood deep in thought, stood there completely absorbed by what had happened to him. Everything had become so different for him; he could scarcely realize it. The whole mineshaft was transfigured and nothing was the same as before. He was chained together with one who has seen God."
Page 88

"Sahak has said then that they had been rescued by the son of God, everyone's Saviour. Yes they had ... Of course they had ... Though in actual fact it was Sahak who had been rescued by his Saviour, by the Son of God, but Barabbas had been rescued by Sahak."
Page 106

"But I don't understand, he said. Why then do you bear this 'Christos Iesus' carved on your disk? Because I want to believe, Barabbas said, without looking up at either of them."
- The Roman governor and Barabbas, Page 116

"He crouched in his corner in the slave-cellar and as he lay there in the darkness he felt



the crossed-out 'Christos Iesus' burn like fire against his heaving chest."
Page 127

"They were not afraid of death; they had vanquished it. Gathered for their fraternal meetings, their love feasts ..."
Page 133

"It was this worldly leader you helped, he said, him to whom your slave's disk says you belong, not the Lord whose name is crossed out on it. Without knowing it, you served your rightful lord."
- The Red-Bearded Man of Galilee, Page 142

"And so they were led out to be crucified. They were chained together in pairs, and, as they were not an even number, Barabbas came last in the procession, not chained to anyone. It just turned out like that. In this way, too, it happened that he hung further out in the rows of crosses."
Page 144



Topics for Discussion

What does Barabbas do when he's released from prison? How does he spend the next few days? What is his apparent fascination with those who followed Jesus?

Barabbas sees the crucifixion of Jesus. What does he say about those gathered around the cross? What about the others who were crucified? Barabbas sees two indications that Jesus is the Saviour. What were they? How does he explain them?

When Barabbas returns to his former life among the thieves, they say that he's changed. What's different? What do you believe caused the change?

In the copper mine, Barabbas is suddenly chained to another human and spends all his time with that person. Who is that man? What bond do they form?

Describe Barabbas' apparent conversion while in the copper mine. Does it seem genuine? What does Barabbas later say about his belief in Jesus? Was he saved in the mine?

When Barabbas and Sahak are questioned about their Christianity, Sahak stands firm. What is Barabbas' response to the Roman governor's questioning? What fate befalls each of the men because of their answers? What does Sahak say to Barabbas about their answers?

When Barabbas is in Rome, he overhears two slaves talking about a meeting of the Christians. Why does Barabbas try to find the meeting? What prompts him to throw his efforts into burning the buildings in Rome?

In the prison, Barabbas is soon identified as the man who was acquitted on the day Jesus was crucified. Who makes that identification? What does he say about Barabbas?

As the prisoners are being led to their deaths, they are shackled in pairs with only Barabbas walking alone. What's the significance? How do the Christians react to their imminent deaths? What are Barabbas' final words? Does that signify that he's given himself to Jesus?