

Selected Excerpts from The Barabbas Legacy

From Chapter 1, from the perspective of Cornelius

641 words

Emperor Nero sat in the first chair to his right, furthest from the audience. Manius had reported on a recent visit that Nero was becoming more paranoid by the day—not just of the people, but of the senators, the Praetorian Guard, his generals, and most of the Roman nobility. Cornelius pitied him sometimes. Thrust into the role of emperor at sixteen by his mother’s murderous machinations, he had probably never coveted the position. What right-minded man would? The knives were always out. Always.

Many of those knives were aimed at Cornelius now. He sighed deeply, just as Nero left his chair and took a position a few feet in front of Cornelius, facing the audience. It was commonly known that a younger Nero had aspired to be a thespian and perform on stage, especially in such a grand theater as the Marcellus. That innocent youth had likely never envisioned this scenario.

“Fellow Romans,” he began in a rich, dramatic baritone. He was nearly thirty, no longer young. He had married at least twice, and one of his wives was dead. So was his mother, on his orders. The apostle Paul had connected with a piece of Nero’s soul, but Paul was not here. Nor was Peter, who had sacrificed himself for the Church. Nor was Barabbas, as far as Cornelius could tell. If he had arrived, he would have announced himself immediately at the home where Cornelius had been loosely confined.

“We have proven our mettle through fire and rebirth. Rome is strong, and will become greater still. But to do so, we must have order. We must have loyalty. We must all do our duty to the empire.”

It had the beginnings of a fine political speech. Nero’s oratory skills probably comprised a large part of the reason he still lived.

“This man”—he twisted to his left and gestured elaborately toward Cornelius—“was once a decorated, highly respected centurion, a man of resolve and action, a soldier true to the laws of Rome and her people.” As he squared himself again to the crowd, he spread both arms wide. “Now he favors strange gods above Rome, above her emperor, and above her true gods. He has helped Paul of Tarsus escape justice, and he has sought to weaken the influence of Rome across the world.”

Nero offered no facts to support his last claim, but because Cornelius had publicly admitted to helping Paul escape—and also because Nero was emperor—nobody would challenge the assertion.

“The question,” continued Nero, “isn’t whether Cornelius of the Italian band has betrayed Rome, but to what extent, and what his punishment should be. I will withhold that judgment until we have heard a few words in his defense.”

Cornelius watched in mild surprise as Senator Aviola rose from the front row and ascended the stage. Nero returned to his seat. Cornelius had expected someone else to be assigned to his defense—someone who couldn’t truly represent him, and wouldn’t care to. One of the occupants of the other nine chairs, none of which held him in any regard. Having Manius speak would be a boon ... unless they had somehow gotten to him. A steely knot of dread formed in the pit of his stomach.

Senator Aviola didn't look at Cornelius as he took his place and faced the people. The knot tightened and grew cold.

"Wise Roman citizens," he began, "I am not here to spin fanciful tales, or to rob justice of her full due." Cornelius nearly groaned aloud. "I will speak truth to you, in honor of all that is good and noble in your hearts and minds."

He paused a moment, gripping the front of his rich, senatorial robes, trimmed in purple and red. He could be almost as dramatic as Nero, which had served *him* well, too.

From Chapter 3, from the perspective of the apostle Paul

794 words

Paul stopped, raising his arms partway to calm Morech and Antonius, then waiting tranquilly for the men to skid to a halt a few yards in front of them.

"You're here to rob us, I presume," said Paul, taking the initiative.

The man in the middle, who seemed to be the leader, blinked, then snorted. "And maybe kill you, too. What's to stop us?"

"God, who is Christ Jesus, who sends us along this path," replied Paul serenely. He clasped his hands in front of him, standing comfortably. He had been robbed before, and beaten, and nearly killed. He knew what it felt like. But he experienced no fear of such in that moment.

"Ha ha!" yelled the man with exaggerated energy, looking at his companions. By all appearances, none of them had bathed in weeks. Fortunately, they were downwind. "He claims a god is going to protect him. This might be funner than we thought!" He laughed loudly, squeezing his eyes shut for emphasis as the other two joined in.

"For whom?" responded Paul, raising his voice slightly to be heard over the three guffawing ruffians. He could feel his own companions tensing beside him, especially Antonius, who constantly exhibited a boundless loyalty and love for Paul—and for Barabbas, given their first encounter on Melita, which had eventually led to his freedom. "Why did you leave your hiding place? You are only three, and we are three. You don't even know if we are armed. And I might be smaller and older, but that doesn't mean I'm not dangerous." He said it matter-of-factly, as if he had just described the weather on a mild day.

"We're experienced fighters," said the leader boastfully, straightening to his full height and sticking out his chest, which was covered in a simple, hide-based armor.

"And I am a friend of Nero," replied Paul, "though, admittedly, I am not in his best graces at the moment."

"Ha! Then we'll take your head and show it to him!" announced the leader.

Paul raised an eyebrow. "Even if you could take it, it wouldn't survive the journey to Rome before becoming unrecognizable. Then he would have you hanged. Or crucified."

That gave the man serious pause. "Then we'll kidnap you, and take you to Rome alive," he concluded. "I'm sure Nero will pay us a handsome fee."

Paul chuckled, grateful he still felt so calm. "Have you met Nero?" He knew the humor in his eyes made the man uncomfortable. He would be recalling that Nero had a well-earned reputation for capriciousness and ruthlessness. Those stories were almost always exaggerated, lending them epic impact across the provinces.

"We'll just kill you, then," the leader sneered, "so you can't never tell your 'friend' Nero you ever saw us. How about *that*?"

Paul's calm grew deeper, and then his spiritual eyes were suddenly opened. "You have no idea what's behind you, do you?"

"Aaaahhh haaahhh, you ain't fooling us with that old trick. We're smarter than your average, hard-working bandit folk."

"Morech, Antonius, do you see them?"

He didn't glance at his companions, but he sensed both shaking their heads. "No," they said in unison.

Paul gazed briefly heavenward. "Father, open their eyes, that they may see." He closed his own as a gentle breeze rustled his robes, then grew slightly in intensity. When he opened his eyes, Morech and Antonius had both fallen to their knees, staring at the area directly behind the bandits. Paul looked at each of his friends in turn.

"As Elisha said, 'Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.'"

"Well, I've had enough of this nonsense," said the leader, raising his rusty dagger before him. He got into an attacking stance and was about to rush them when he pitched forward, landing awkwardly on his face. He leaped to his feet, whirling to face his companions.

"Which of you did that?" he asked angrily, following up his question with a creative curse and a shower of flying spittle.

Both men looked stunned, eyes wide, faces painted thick with outlaw innocence. "We didn't do anything," said one of them. "You just fell."

The leader growled. He was so angry he didn't seem to care that his back was to Paul and the others. "I didn't 'just fall,' you moron. Somebody pushed me!" He stepped menacingly toward them. "Now which of you louts was it, and why?"

Shrugging, they both backed up a step in perfect unison. The leader wheeled toward Paul and pointed his quivering dagger. "Stay there while I get this sorted." It was such a ridiculous request Paul almost laughed. He grinned, grabbing each of his companions by the arm to urge them to their feet.

From Chapter 11, from the perspective of Marian, daughter of Barabbas and Chanah 673 words

"Fourteen today? Again?" Terisa, the amazingly gracious woman who, with her farmer husband Paerin, had kindly offered to give Marian a place to stay, admired the harvest gathered in Marian's apron. She stared at Marian, shaking her head and smiling. "Those chickens really like you. They've never produced this much for *me*."

Marian didn't know quite what to say. "Oh, I don't know. I think they've just had a couple of good days."

Terisa clearly didn't believe that. "Well, keep letting them see you a few times a day. The community could use the extra eggs. And we may have to increase the flock." She winked, then turned to find a bowl in which to place the eggs. When she located one, Marian helped her unload, then smoothed her apron.

"Is there any mending I can do this morning? I'd start on some new children's clothes, but I'm waiting on material."

Terisa thought a moment. "No, I don't think so. You can check with Catherine, though, when she gets back from visiting some farms a few miles north with her husband. You have time

to do some writing. I know you enjoy it, and you're good at it. I've already heard people talking about the stories you've completed. You have quite an imagination, grounded in faith."

Marian lowered her eyes, embarrassed at the compliment. "I'm trying to follow my mother's example. She inspired a lot of what I write. The apostle Paul, too."

"I'd love to meet Paul," said Terisa wistfully. "I doubt he'll ever come here, but that's okay. Apostles and sister leaders have visited before, and I'm sure more will in the future. We saw Joanna give a sermon once but didn't get to talk to her. She was breathtaking. What a powerful woman she was ... well, still is, on the other side now."

Marian nodded agreement as she sat on a stool at their small table in the kitchen. Unsure of how Terisa would handle the revelation, she didn't mention she had met Joanna, too. Terisa was preparing to make a stew, but Marian wouldn't be much help at this point, as most everything was ready. It would simmer most of the day.

"Thank you for being so kind to me."

Terisa looked up from the pot she was filling with ingredients. "You can quit thanking us so often. You're a blessing. We're happy to have you. And even if you want to wait a while to get married, that's fine with us."

Marian blushed. "It's not that I don't want to get married ... well, maybe it is a little. I don't know if I'm ready yet, and frankly, it frightens me to contemplate how I should go about finding a good husband."

Terisa nodded knowingly. "Well, the really good ones are hard to find. I got lucky, I suppose. The Lord helped, too, I'm sure of that, even though we weren't Christians yet. Just keep praying and doing good things. He'll help you figure it out." She started humming as she continued chopping up vegetables for the stew.

"Yes, I'm sure he will ... but part of me wishes I knew the timing, while the other part is afraid to find out."

Terisa gave her a kind smile. "Don't overthink it. I know you writers tend to do that sometimes. Be happy, and let it come." She winked, then turned back to humming and filling her pot.

"Thank you," said Marian, rising. "You've just given me a couple of ideas. I need to write them down."

Terisa laughed as Marian left the kitchen and headed for her room, where she had a small desk and a chair. Ink and parchment were a little harder to come by in Nazaretum than she was accustomed to, but she was making do. She sat down and began taking a few notes in tiny script. Overthinking things. She would write a story about a young woman who did that in humorously exaggerated ways ... a young woman very much like herself.

From Chapter 14, from the perspective of a Roman soldier

1,011 words

Josephus settled himself underneath the narrow window with the view of the city, Corun leaning against the perpendicular outer wall on the south side. "You are not a coward," the strangely influential Jew began, perceptively. He looked to be about thirty, but acted older.

Corun shook his head. It had been a long day. "No. I am a ... conscientious objector." There was another term for it, but his mind was fuzzy.

"Hmmm ..." Josephus nodded sagely. He had clearly seen a great many things in his life,

including horrific events. Corun could tell from his eyes. He wondered if his own eyes now reflected the same thinly suppressed horror at the cruelty of mankind. “You realize that won’t matter to Titus.”

Corun shrugged. “I suppose not. But we all die someday.”

“Indeed, we do. But why hasten it? I believe there is an opportunity for you to redeem yourself. You are a good soldier, and a valuable asset, unless ...” He paused, and Corun finished his sentence.

“Unless my mind isn’t right. Or my heart.”

“Yes. You have many skills. I have questioned several of your comrades. You are from a noble family?”

Corun shrugged again. “Minor nobles, north of Italy.”

Josephus scratched his chin with a fleshy finger. *He* was certainly well fed. “Still. You have value. Titus and his father appreciate value.”

Corun grunted. “What value do you provide?” He was curious.

“Well, as I said, I’m a former leader among the Jewish zealots. I know many of the other leaders. I understand their training regimen and tactics. I’m also a skilled observer and recorder. I would like to be known as a great historian someday, recording the events playing out before us for future generations. As a lesson.” He flashed Corun a broad smile, eyes glistening. “Titus has recently given me permission to gather all the Jewish records from the temple once the city is taken, which makes God’s purpose for me even clearer.”

“I’m not as useful as you,” said Corun. “At best, sparing me would only bring Vespasian a minor ally in my family. Besides, I am studying to be a Christian.”

He wasn’t sure why he had admitted that. Was it true? Josephus cocked his head, looking intensely curious.

“A Christian, you say?”

Corun lifted his chin slightly. “Yes. I met a girl in Britannia who is Christian, and I spent some time in Rome at their temple, and in their library. All that doesn’t matter much now. Well, I guess on the other side it might. I don’t really know yet.”

“The other side ...” Josephus pondered that, his eyes wandering for a moment until they settled again on Corun. “I’ve interviewed several Christians regarding their views on salvation, about what happens after this life, and how they know it. They seem quite convinced of how it will work. I should make a visit to their library. I’m not sure why I haven’t done so yet. By the way, do you know almost all the Christians left Jerusalem many months ago? It’s been nearly two years, I think. Their leader ... what is his name? ... ah, yes, Philip. He led them out. They went many places, but especially Pella. A few Jews followed their example, recognizing as the Christians did that something like this was coming.”

Corun felt a strange, joyful surge in his heart. The Christians had left? Was that why he had been so revolted by the nature of the siege, because so many Christians would die? But no, he felt for the innocent Jews as well. God did, too; he was sure of it. The surge retreated, and the glumness returned.

“Why are you here again?”

Josephus gave him a considering look. “You care for my countrymen. So do I. It was foolish of me to become part of the rebel forces. I’ve seen nothing but death and destruction among my people. I’m seeking to heal the rifts.”

“How did you gain the favor of Vespasian?”

Josephus shrugged. “I’m not quite sure. But he is a smart man, and generally not a

wasteful one. He finds, develops, and leverages advantages. That's why he's emperor now. If I can serve him well, I can create advantages for myself and my people in the future."

"But not here," said Corun, shaking his head sadly. "Your people will be slaughtered here. They *are* being slaughtered. Every day it's worse. Why doesn't Titus just attack? He has *four legions*."

Josephus's lips had drawn into a tight line. He was clearly pained. After a moment, he replied, "He will, soon. I must be careful what advice I give him, though. Otherwise, he will throw me over the walls in a catapult. I say that only partly in jest."

Corun stared at him blankly. So, Josephus was protecting himself. It was still odd he had come to visit Corun. Was he bored?

"Well, thank you for coming. It was good to talk to someone before I die. I don't care if you're Jew or Roman, or something in between."

Josephus studied him for long moments. "You are brave and wise. And you are studying to be a Christian. Titus has a favorable view of the Christians. His father, too. The Jewish Christians were among the few in Judea to show true appreciation for Roman law, properly administered. They did not rebel. They didn't spy much for the Romans, either, but they didn't rebel. There is hope for you. I will speak with Titus when the siege is over. Perhaps he will let you accompany me in recovering the records from the temple. I could use the help, from a sincerely God-fearing man."

Corun wasn't sure what to think about the invitation, or Josephus's compliment. Was he truly a 'God-fearing man' now? Would it make any difference in the end? It was too difficult to comprehend, especially in his current state, so he would continue doing the small tasks assigned him, eat his remaining few meals, and die bravely. It was the best he could do.

From Chapter 15, Barabbas and Philip meeting with Emperor Vespasian in Rome

737 words

Vespasian leaned back, bringing a hand to his chin. His smile neared the borders of sinister. "Are you here to offer me eternal salvation? Do you believe I cannot achieve such a thing on my own?" I didn't sense anger or hostility in his voice, but his pride clearly had a sharp edge when unsheathed.

"Only Christ can offer that, and you are free to choose it or not. He will not force anyone, for of such comes evil and sorrow."

"Evil and sorrow," repeated Vespasian, melancholy suddenly and surprisingly in his voice. The pride was gone. "I have seen much of that in my life. Galba, Otho, and Vitellius were evil, and they brought much sorrow." He switched his attention to me. "I left Nero off that list, as I know you were friends, of a sort." His gaze returned to Philip. "Do not worry, Master Philip. I will not follow in their foolish footsteps."

The fact he had addressed Philip as 'Master' seemed significant. I could sense respect there, astoundingly. As I pondered, I was caught off guard when his eyes snapped back to me. "What can you tell me of your friend Nero, Barabbas? I personally avoided him as much as possible."

I noted he hadn't used the term 'Master' before *my* name, but I certainly wouldn't have expected it. "He was a tortured young man," I answered, carefully but honestly.

"I understand you were witness as Nero executed the previous Christian leader."

“Yes,” I said sadly. “I sat right next to him.”

“Fascinating.” Vespasian shook his head slightly. “How can you say Nero’s name without loathing?”

I shrugged, maintaining his gaze. “He was a man. He had strengths and weaknesses, as we all do. He was a son of God, too, just as I am and you are. Being emperor crushed his soul. You are stronger in that regard, I believe.” I wasn’t trying to be obsequious or flattering. I felt it was true.

Vespasian’s eyebrows rose, and he smiled mirthfully. “You put yourself on the same level as emperors of Rome.”

I cast a nervous glance at Philip. “No, I do not. But God loves us as his children, equally.”

Now he chuckled. “Love? Have any of the gods truly loved mortals? Some say yes, others no. I’m not sure it matters.”

“It matters a great deal,” interjected Philip. “To know you are a son of God, and that he loves you unconditionally, is one of the greatest anchors your soul can possess. It brings both joy and wisdom, without measure. Our enemy, Lucifer, also called Satan, who is as real as you or I, desires to hide that knowledge from us, by any means necessary. Without it, we can never find God and come to know him. And without God, we can never know true, lasting peace.”

Vespasian took a slow breath, his face becoming serious. “You speak beautifully, Master Philip, and you teach your people to be peaceful and obedient under the law. If this is because of your god’s teachings, then I admire your god. However”—he raised a finger—“there are many in the empire who resent you. Some of the Jews may despise you more than they did before. I will endeavor to make sure Roman law is upheld across the empire, but I cannot promise protection from certain governors or particular circumstances. I must rule wisely, and sometimes that means making trade-offs.”

“It is enough,” said Philip, bowing again. “God will make up the rest. We thank you, Emperor Vespasian.”

I expected Vespasian to dismiss us, but instead he asked another question of Philip.

“Some say you are a prophet. Will I die peacefully?” It was a logical question following the recent year of four emperors, the other three suffering violent deaths.

Philip took only a moment to answer, which would have surprised me had I not seen and felt the Spirit shining so strongly from his countenance. “Yes, you will. You will make some mistakes, as all mortals do, but you will reign wisely, and then you will return peacefully to stand before God, who gave you breath.”

Vespasian blinked once, then again. He seemed shocked. “I believe you,” he finally said. “And it is a great comfort. Most remarkable. Tell my steward to take you to my palace, where you may eat and be refreshed. That will let many know you have my favor.”