

Christ in Prophecy
Bible Times 6: Greenwold on Lazarus & Barabbas

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Opening

Dr. Reagan: One of the most important principles of biblical interpretation is to keep in mind the context of what you're trying to interpret. But often this results only in attention being given to the grammatical context. We tend to overlook the cultural context, the historical context, and the geographical context, among other forms. For a fascinating discussion of the overall biblical context as it relates to the stories of Lazarus and Barabbas, stay tuned.

Part 1

Dr. Reagan: Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Blessed Hope, and welcome to Christ in Prophecy. My colleague, Nathan Jones, and I have a special guest with us today. His name is Doug Greenwold. He is a down-to-earth Bible scholar who serves as the senior teaching Fellow for a ministry called Preserving Bible Times. Welcome to Christ in Prophecy, Doug.

Doug Greenwold: Thank you, David.

Dr. Reagan: Always good to have you on here.

Nathan Jones: Well, folks, the last time Doug was with us he focused his amazing contextual insights on a passage about the very beginning of Jesus' ministry. And now, as we prepare for the celebration of Resurrection Sunday, we are going to ask him to supply us with some contextual insights from the last days of Jesus' ministry. Now, Doug, it is my understanding that you can teach us about the Crucifixion and the Resurrection from Bible stories such as Lazarus and Barabbas. I'm fascinated to learn about that. Can you share with us? Let's start with Lazarus particularly from John 11.

Doug Greenwold: Well, I love Lazarus.

Nathan Jones: Yeah, great story.

Doug Greenwold: He sort of kicks off the last 40 days of the life of Jesus. That whole passion of Jesus which I like to call the greatest story never completely told.

Nathan Jones: Because the story of Lazarus happens just before Jesus' crucifixion.

Doug Greenwold: And I'll give you a peak, Lazarus seals the deal that Jesus is going to die. Okay.

Nathan Jones: Okay.

Doug Greenwold: But let's back the story up.

Nathan Jones: Yeah back it up.

Doug Greenwold: When we discover it in John 11 Lazarus is deteriorating. He is pretty sick. And Jesus is off in Perea which is in the Jordan Valley. Why do we know he's there? Because it's winter. If you got an itinerant out door ministry, you've got to be where it's warm. It's a thousand feet below sea level, and that means it's like Palm Springs in the winter time. Jerusalem's got snow. So, they know where He is. I won't take you through the arithmetic here but He's two days away from walking, you walk 16-18 miles a days. Okay. So, Mary and Martha see that Lazarus is deteriorating and now a messenger enters this scenario that's never mentioned. And they say, "Go find Yeshua, and tell Him that the one He loves," as if Jesus doesn't know this. Right? A little manipulation here. I mean we don't manipulate Jesus in our prayers do we? "Go find Yeshua and tell Him that Lazarus is quickly about to die." So, the messenger travels for two days, and gets to Jesus. And he informs Jesus of this. And this is what's fascinating; when Jesus heard this He says in John 11:4, "Jesus said, 'This is a sickness that will not end in death.'" Now, notice exactly the very first thing that Jesus does, He gives this messenger a promise. And this is what Jesus often does when He's going to stress somebody's faith He gives them a promise. So, He gives him a promise, and then He gives them the reason why what's about to happen is going to happen. "It will not end in death, no it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it." And then we are told that Jesus loves Mary and Martha by Luke. Why? Because what Jesus is about to do, you'd think He didn't. And then Jesus stays two more days where He was in Perea. Now, did that ever catch your attention?

Nathan Jones: Yeah.

Dr. Reagan: It caught my attention.

Nathan Jones: Yeah, He didn't leave right away.

Doug Greenwold: Absolutely. So, if your best friend was in hospice and you got a phone call at 8 o'clock at night saying, "They're probably not going to make it through midnight." Would you wait two days before you went to hospice?

Nathan Jones: Go right there. Go right there.

Doug Greenwold: So, you know there's something puzzling here.

Nathan Jones: Yeah.

Doug Greenwold: But, yet, everything Jesus does is strategic and for a reason. This is deliberate delay so that God can be glorified. Right? So, now, let's ask a few questions: Where are we? Well, Mary and Martha and Lazarus, you know we're just at the backside of the Mount of Olives, two miles from Jerusalem. Jesus is two days away over across the Jordan, north a little bit in Perea. What's happened before? Another good question to ask. Well, we know two things from the Gospel record, two people have been brought back to life on the pages of Gospels, Jairus' twelve year old daughter. And the only son of the widow of Nain, Luke 7. So, if you are Mary and Martha this is your paradigm, yes, Jesus can bring somebody back to life, but only if it's the first day. And only if He's on site. That's there expectation. So, a couple of other things we have to bear in mind here contextually now; the Hebrew view of death is that when you die for the first three days, your nephesh, the Hebrew word for soul hovers over your body. In fact by the beginning of the fourth day the body is already in such a rapid state of decomposition its stinks to the high heavens, and the nephesh flees. And upshot is for the first three days your dead, but from the fourth day on you're dead-dead.

Nathan Jones: So, as Miracle Max said in the *Princess Bride* you're only mostly dead.

Dr. Reagan: Really dead.

Doug Greenwold: Now, why does this matter? Because the rabbis have taught that when Messiah comes this is how we'll know it. It's so difficult to bring someone back from the dead, it will only happen when Messiah comes.

Nathan Jones: Okay. Only the Messiah can bring people back from the dead.

Doug Greenwold: Yes, so the establishment in Jerusalem has not got a problem with the first day bringing back to life of Jairus, and the only son of the widow of Nain. Because if He really is Messiah they've got a problem because the Rabbis have taught that when Messiah comes He goes straight to the Temple, sets up His throne and reigns. Now, Temple Incorporated is the biggest cash cow in antiquity, run by the Sadducees and the Sanhedrin. It is the combination of Wall Street and Walmart. It is really something. And if Messiah really comes and sets up His Temple--throne in the Temple the gig is over.

Nathan Jones: They are out of work.

Doug Greenwold: Yeah, so you need to understand the backdrop here. If He really is Messiah they really have to kill Him. But there is this ambiguity they are trying to create is first day bringing them back, well, they were just in a coma. The nephesh really hadn't fled yet. Okay. That's backdrop to this story. Okay.

Nathan Jones: And they use that to discredit Jesus' miracles.

Doug Greenwold: Absolutely. That's so, He can't be Messiah because that is too many problems.

Nathan Jones: Okay.

Doug Greenwold: So, we read the text Lazarus is falling away. He dies. The messenger goes to find Jesus. Jesus tarries two days. By the time He gets to Bethany it's the fourth day. Right? Well, if He left at once it would have been the second day. So, He never would have made it on the first day. So, freeze these thoughts. Now, become Mary and Martha. Right. Lazarus deteriorates. Lazarus dies. No problem, Jesus will be here before the day ends. Well, He didn't.

Nathan Jones: On purpose.

Doug Greenwold: Are you disappointed if you're Mary and Martha?

Dr. Reagan: Yes.

Doug Greenwold: Are you disillusioned? Are you angry? Absolutely.

Nathan Jones: They were angry.

Doug Greenwold: Consternation. Well, it's the second day. Now the messenger finally arrives on the scene. "Boy, do I have good news. This is an illness that will not end in death." Umm. Got news for you.

Nathan Jones: He's already dead.

Doug Greenwold: "He's dead. Are you sure that's what Yeshua said?" "Oh, I heard it. I know it was so important I memorized it word by word." "Well, it can't be He's dead." Now, get this. They heard the promise. They couldn't believe it. Ever been there? Yeah, we can relate to this. So, now, the second day ends. No Jesus. Now, it's the third day. And I'm in my intuition here it's about noontime, I don't know whether Mary did it or Martha did it. "Ah, I got it figured out. Yeshua is going to bring Him back from the dead, but just before the end of the third day before the nephesh flees. This is going to be special. Really, I mean get Bret Baier and Wolf Blitzer on the line. Get the crews out here. This is going to be something. I knew it. I knew we'd be special. He really does love us." And the third day comes to an end. And there's no Jesus. Now, what do you do if you are Mary and Martha? How do you process this? You have been let down, right? He didn't deliver. I don't get it. But anyway all hope is now gone. Then word comes early in the afternoon on the fourth day, "Jesus is coming. He's approaching." So, Martha goes down to the well at Ein Shemesh a place you can still go today where they met. Right. Says, "Oh, Lord if you'd only been here he wouldn't have died." Jesus says, "No, he is not going to die."

Nathan Jones: Mary, didn't even go out right? She's--

Doug Greenwold: Then they switch roles, okay, and they both say the same thing to Jesus it's like it's been rehearsed. Right. "If you had been here Lord he wouldn't have died. He will rise again." So, then they get to the tomb. And basically Jesus said, "Remove the stone." And then He goes, "Lazarus, come forth." And out of the tomb wrapped in the cloths is Lazarus. Now, we've got to put this into our contemporary setting here. Say the mayor of whatever city your viewers are listening to, Dallas, New York, whatever. Say, the mayor dies and he's loved by everyone. And he lies in state for three days, and everyone comes and views him. In the beginning of the fourth day his will specified that he's to be cremated, right, so he is cremated. Now, in this example Jesus walks into the crematorium, says, "Um, which chamber was the mayor in?" "Well, the fourth one." "Open it up." So, they open it up and he looks down into this chamber and there is a remnant of ashes six foot, two inches long. Right. Weighs about two pounds, still a little moist, and a little wet and heated. And He says, "Mayor, come forth." And out of the crematorium comes the mayor. I mean this is the significance of the fourth day. This is intentional. This is deliberate. There is no question now that Jesus is Messiah. The argument about three days and the nephesh and the other two were in a coma it's gone. Lazarus is Exhibit A that Jesus is Messiah. By the way Lazarus is now a wanted man. He is Exhibit A they've got to get rid of him. Now, they know they have to get rid of Jesus.

Nathan Jones: He was better off dead.

Doug Greenwold: Yeah. Right. So, they flee to Ephraim city of refuge and then they go back in to the Judean Valley until the last week of Jesus' life. Okay. Now, what's just happened? Lazarus is the Good Year Blimp flying over Jerusalem saying, "Yeshua is Messiah. Yeshua is Messiah." And they know it. There is no more argument. And they convened a meeting and said, "It's Him or us. And He's got to die." Lazarus, the raising of Lazarus seals the deal for Jesus He's going to die. At the same time the whole Lazarus scenario foreshadows the empty tomb, and the risen Christ. Okay. That's the beauty of this passage. It completely foreshadows Bad Friday, and Good Sunday.

Dr. Reagan: Beautiful story.

Doug Greenwold: It is. Now, pause here for a moment. Okay. What have we learned? My goodness God is unpredictable. Right. And you know what? His followers can't manage Him.

Can't manipulate Him. And it's all about His glory. This word glory means to accurately reveal and portray. That's exactly what Jesus is doing. I'm accurately revealing and portraying what I'm about and what I'm about to do. That's the word glorify in that verse 4, it is the Hebrew understanding of the word glorify. So, some other things here. If we're dead centered in God's will like Mary, Martha, and Lazarus were here it doesn't mean life is easy. You know because you come to Jesus it isn't tip toe through the tulips, everything's convenient and easy. It's about His glory. Not our convenience.

Nathan Jones: So, Lazarus had to make the ultimate sacrifice to prove Jesus is the Messiah.

Doug Greenwold: Yeah, and think about it Lazarus has to now die again.

Nathan Jones: That's true, he didn't stay alive forever.

Doug Greenwold: Mary and Martha have to grieve again. I mean, you see what I'm saying here. This is about God's glory, not so much about our convenience.

Dr. Reagan: Let's pause at this point. In a few minutes we'll come back and I want to take a look at--want you to take a look at the story of Barabbas and how that relates to the resurrection.

Part 2

Nathan Jones: Welcome back to Christ in Prophecy and our interview with Doug Greenwold the Senior Teaching Fellow for a ministry called "Preserving Bible Times."

Dr. Reagan: Doug, lets shift gears for a moment and take a look at the story of Barabbas as it relates to the resurrection of Jesus. How in the world can you relate Pilate's release of a criminal to the resurrection of Jesus?

Nathan Jones: It must be important right? It's in all four Gospels.

Doug Greenwold: Great question. And you wouldn't be surprised if context mattered would you?

Dr. Reagan: Go for it.

Doug Greenwold: Alright. Alright, let's consider Barabbas. Some things we know about him. Nathan, you already mentioned he's mentioned in four Gospels.

Nathan Jones: Four Gospels.

Doug Greenwold: Very rare that somebody is mentioned in all four Gospels.

Dr. Reagan: Yes.

Doug Greenwold: He also gets more ink than Judas Iscariot does. More words, more copy.

Dr. Reagan: I never thought of that.

Doug Greenwold: Yes. Now, the first thing that jumps out here is a linguistic kind of thing. His name. Where is his first name? Simon Barjona. Simon son of Jonah. Okay. Bar is son of and

then whatever it is. This starts with Bar and its son of Abba or Abbas, Aramaic or Hebrew. Well, we've run across this word before, right? Abba.

Nathan Jones: Father, right?

Doug Greenwold: Yeah.

Nathan Jones: Son of the Father.

Doug Greenwold: Son of Father, let's put a plural on this. Maybe he represents the sons of all the fathers? Now, in a theological sense they have a notion called the federated person, the federated man. Adam is considered to be the federated man; he was the best possible man to stand for us and when he fell we fell. And I want to suggest to you that Barabbas is the federated man for the passion of Jesus. He is our best possible representative for the passion of Jesus. He is us.

Nathan Jones: Wow.

Doug Greenwold: So, he's probably so well known that no one needs to mention his first name. Just Barabbas is all you need to say because he's well known. He's a seditionist. He's a murderer. And He's a thief. And he's been tried in a Roman court of law and found guilty, a perfectly fair verdict. So, now he's in a cell, either in a Praetorium or in the basement of Herod's Palace where Pilate is holding forth, it is one of these two sites where this unfolds here. And he's awaiting his execution. Because of sedition it will be crucifixion. Rome cannot tolerate sedition. The role of Israel is a special role actually in the Roman Empire; it is to be the buffer between the Parthians the Persians in the north, and the Egyptians and all the grain production in the south. Can't ever let the Parthians steal the grain. 95% of the whole Roman Empire is run on Egyptian grain. So, that is why they can't tolerate sedition in Israel, it's just too strategic. Alright. So, I want you to be Barabbas. You are sitting in a dank cell. You're shackled. The rats are nipping your feet. It's pitch dark. And you are awaiting your death. And you have no complaint whatsoever. You're guilty and you know the consequences. Alright. Now, I want to pause here. There's another theologian who once said this, "When the holiness of God is the yardstick, the difference between you and I and Adolf Hitler gets lost in the rounding." Okay.

Nathan Jones: Good point.

Doug Greenwold: See, we don't ever want to think too highly of ourselves. That's why I think we need to identify with Barabbas during Passion Week. So, there he sits. Meanwhile outside here unbeknownst to Barabbas there is this chess game going on with Pilate, and the Sanhedrin, and the Jewish authorities on what to do with Jesus. And Pilate doesn't want anything to do with having the blood of Yeshua on his hands. And so he sends Him to Herod Antipas. And Antipas who is the ruler of the Galilean district recognizes the political treachery of this and doesn't want to touch Him even though Jesus is in his jurisdiction sends Him back to Pilate. And Pilate says, "Oh, I got a good idea. This is my master stroke. There is this tradition that the Jews have that at Passover we always release a prisoner. So, administrative staff find the worst possible prisoner in the system that you can. And I want to offer him. And of course the crowd will say, 'We can't do that swap.' So, you know save Jesus. This will save Jesus and I'm out of this political tightrope." Well, if you are going to give a crowd an offer you better understand your crowd. This crowd is not the crowd that said, "Hosanna" on Sunday morning, Palm Sunday. They loved Jesus; 90% of the people have loved Jesus ever since Jesus said,

"Blessed are the poor." No one ever said blessed are the poor. The crowd that's in Pilate's courtyard of Herod's Palace is 200 or 300 handpicked people who have been coached by the aristocracy to say a certain thing at a certain time. When you get into the word meanings here, for crowd the underlining word means gathering of people. So, it's not the same crowd and that distinction is often lost but it's important to note here.

Nathan Jones: They were paid protesters?

Doug Greenwold: Yeah, exactly. And coached, and trained. Alright. So, Pilate says, "Okay, here's my new idea. We have this tradition and I'm going to give it your choice. We can actually crucify Barabbas, or we can crucify Yeshua and set the other one free." And he expects everyone say, "Well, save Jesus." And the crowd says, "Give us Barabbas! Give us Barabbas!" Meanwhile in this pit, the cell Barabbas hears, "Give us Barabbas! Give us Barabbas!" And he has no context for that phrase. And he takes it personal. Man, they are so worked up they want to kill me as fast as they can. And then a couple minutes later he hears, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" Not knowing that is directed to Jesus by the crowd. He takes it personally. "Crucify him! Crucify him!" He says, "It's over." Then he hears the shuffling of the jailor coming down past the cells. He stops at his door. Swings open the door, says, "Barabbas," and his life is over in his eyes, "you're free." Now, if you're Barabbas what's going through your mind? "What?" "You're free." "How can that be?" "Someone took your place." You with me now? Okay.

Dr. Reagan: Yup, I'm with you.

Doug Greenwold: "Well, who took my place?" "Well, His name is Yeshua." "You mean that Rabbi? That One that many people say He's the Son of God? He's taken my place?" "Yep. You're free." Unshackle. Unshackle. Unshackle. He stands in the doorway. "Where can I see Him?" "Well, last I heard that they're winding towards Golgotha. They're going to crucify Him." "Oh, no." So, he works through the crowd. And he gets a little bit there late, but he gets there in time to see. And he says, "Those are supposed to be my hands. He really did take my place." I don't know whether that actually happened. But it could have. And if you were Barabbas how would that have affected you?

Nathan Jones: We are Barabbas you're saying?

Doug Greenwold: Exactly. We have to identify with Barabbas. Now, freeze that thought. Let's go to the old video tape days. Push the rewind here, I want to go back into the cell. Okay. I'm Barabbas. I'm chained. The rats are nipping at my feet. The door opens and the jailer says, "Barabbas, you're free." And Barabbas says, "I'm not interested. I'm going to stay right here." "No, Barabbas you don't understand. You're free. It's an absolutely free gift. You haven't deserved it but it's yours. It's free." "I'm not interested." Slam the door, lock it up. Does that sound outrageous? Thousands of people do that every single day when they hear about the free gift of eternal life from Yeshua and they say, "I'm not interested." Barabbas. And that's why-see Lazarus set the stage as to why Resurrection Sunday is going to happen. Barabbas is the reason Resurrection Sunday had to happen; to set the prisoners free.

Dr. Reagan: Wow, what a story!

Doug Greenwold: It is quite a story.

Dr. Reagan: What an application. You know it reminded me of the fact that one of the worst aspects of Christian history is that early in the Church history Replacement Theology developed

and they began to argue that the Church has replaced Israel. And the reason is that the Jews are the Christ killers. And they were--the Church even taught people to hate Jews because they were Christ killers. But Acts 4:27 says, "That truly in this city they were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod, Pontius Pilate, the Gentiles and Israel." The Roman authorities, the Jewish authorities, the Jews, the Gentiles were all responsible for the death of Jesus plus you and me because He died for all of our sins. We all have the blood of Jesus on our hands.

Doug Greenwold: Yeah, and technically from another point of view in John whenever he uses the phrase the Jews its reference to the aristocracy, not the people.

Dr. Reagan: Well, I want to in the time we have remaining I want to get your perspective on something that really bothers a lot of Christians and that is that when Jesus was hanging on the cross, one of the things He said was, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me." What is your perspective on that?

Doug Greenwold: Yes. Here's the traditional perspective is there is Jesus hanging on the Cross, it is such a horrible sight. The Holy God turns His back on His Son, breaks the forever of the Trinitarian fellowship and that's the pain of Calvary. And if you're a Westerner and if you look at the words per say I guess that is the only conclusion you might arrive to, although the word forsake has never meant abandoned contextually in the psalms. That's a side point here. But let me suggest a totally different way to view this, as a technical view from a linguistic perspective called a remez, rabbis taught with a technique called remez; make a harkening back to something that everyone knows the full meaning thereof. And when you deal in a culture where every young boy, or most young boys have memorized their complete Old Testament Scriptures by the time they are bar mitzvah at 13 you speak in short hand. So, you say something, a phrase and it's as if you had said all of this even though you only mentioned the phrase that starts it. What Jesus said was Psalm 22:1. I would suggest another way to look at the last words of Jesus it is a deliberate referencing back to Psalm 22. Where you look at the detail of how He's being crucified, excruciating detail. And then we once talked with a rabbi in Jerusalem that he felt that back then Psalm 22, 23, and 24 were unitized whole. It could well be that Jesus is referencing all three Psalms as His final benediction. His final prayer. His final statement. And when you read those three psalms from Jesus' perspective it takes your breath away.

Dr. Reagan: I think you're right about that in the sense that He probably quoted part or all of Psalm 22, because even Psalm 22 ends with the words he has performed it. Which literally means it's finished.

Doug Greenwold: It is accomplished that's the originally meaning. It's a double remez, its bookends.

Dr. Reagan: Yeah, bookends.

Doug Greenwold: And that has never happened in Scripture where there is a double remez. And people understood that is what He was doing.

Part 3

Dr. Reagan: Welcome back to Christ in Prophecy and our interview with Doug Greenwold about the importance of context in understanding the Bible. Doug, it has been a great joy to have you on the program.

Doug Greenwold: Thank you, David.

Dr. Reagan: Thanks for coming. Tell people how they can get in touch with your ministry.

Doug Greenwold: Well, if you go to preservingbibletimes.org, you will see a wealth of resources there; it is CD's, DVD's, books, publications, seminars, conferences that will get you on your way and help equip you to understand the Bible more deeply in its context.

Dr. Reagan: Well, folks, that's our program for today. I hope it's been a blessing to you. And I hope you will be back with us again next week the Lord willing. Until then this is Dave Reagan speaking for Lamb & Lion Ministries saying, "Look up, be watchful for our redemption is drawing near."

End of Program