

## PAUL TO THE ROMANS

A Martin Zender paraphrase

### PART IV



Tryphena, at the Coliseum.

**W**e were in Paphos, on the Cyprus coast, visiting the proconsul there, Sergius Paul. We'd heard the man was seeking Christ. This came to our ears in Jerusalem, yet we set forth from Antioch, where the spirit of God separated Barnabas and me for the task of proclaiming Christ among the nations. What better place to start—what more audacious place—than at the seat of a Gentile government.

There he sat, quietly, in the room with us, unseen at first, draped upon a chair in a dim corner. I do not speak of the proconsul—who immediately struck us as a sane, honorable man—but of the proconsul's so-called magician, Bar-Jesus, known as Elymas.

I tried to ignore him. It troubled me that the proconsul would keep him. *Why?* I could not make that my business; my business was the word of grace and life. But just as I began my account to Sergius, the dark man spoke:

"I am a Jew."

*So what? Of course you are a Jew; you are disrupting me; that's what Jews do.* I had no sooner turned again to the proconsul, when Elymas said:

"*This man is also a Jew.*" My back was now to him, but I knew he was pointing at me. "Yet, *simultaneously*, he is the *enemy* of our laws, and he will *baptize* you—Captain Intelligent, the Seeking Sergius—not into the waters of our gracious God—oh, far from it—but into a cesspool of His

# Martin Zender's Clanging Gong News

"If I know all mysteries and all knowledge, but have no love, I am a clanging gong" --1 Cor. 13:1-2



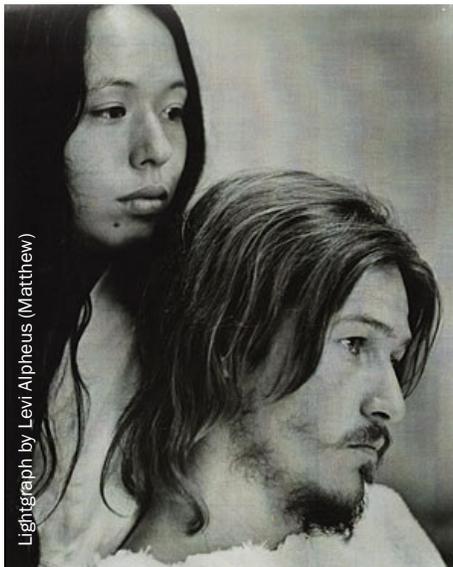
Two out of three isn't bad.

sworn enemies who, themselves, oppose the sacred laws of *all* good men of Israel."

Evil dripped from his emphasized words; I took a chill from it. I looked at Sergius, who was aghast. I saw instantly then what was happening. The livelihood of Elymas somehow depended on dissuading this man from the faith. From the look on the face of Sergius, Elymas mattered to him. It was then that the Spirit rose in me.

### Our Lord "cleared house"

The most startling story ever related to me concerning our Lord—even more startling, to me, than the raising of Lazarus—was His chasing of the money-changers from the temple. I had heard about it, of course, when it first occurred. The priesthood feared Him after that; they feared His popularity. The temple ruckus endeared Him to the true God-fearers. Peter had witnessed it, and related the following:



Lightgraph by Levi Alpheus (Matthew)

A quieter moment, with Mary of Magdalene.

"I was standing at the north portico, with Andrew and James. We had been talking with Him about going to Joppa to speak at the synagogue there. Andrew said to Him, 'It'll be three days to Joppa.' I distinctly

remember that. The Lord didn't answer. He was staring at the money-exchange tables. You know how they were set up then; five tables along the west wall. The Lord suddenly looked at me and said, 'Give me your belt.' He said the same to Andrew and James. He was breathing heavy and shaking. We had no idea what was about to happen.

"He *strode* into them, Saul. He made our belts into a whip, but He was saving that. He put His palms under the first table and pushed it over, lengthwise. *Length-wise*. It took out the next table, and part of the next—that was the momentum He gave that first table. The workers at the second table came at Him, but He slashed them with His whip, and I mean, *hard*. After that, nobody came after Him.

### "There was something huge inside of Him that He never showed."

You know how short He was; any two could have taken Him. But the problem was that He was coming across dangerous, like a crazy person. Nobody was going to mess with Him. Something came out of Him that scared the s\*\*t out of those pricks. Us too, really. We never looked at Him the same way again, after that. I wish I could explain to you the *fury*. There was something huge inside of Him that He never showed. We knew we were screwed after that, though. Nothing would be the same after that, and it wasn't. Some people say Lazarus made the regime angry, but this was worse. It didn't even last two minutes. He came to us afterward, still shaking, and said, 'Let's get out of here.' And that was that."

### My own righteous indignation

I knew it was no longer Elymas with-

standing me, but Satan himself. For we do not wrestle against human beings, ultimately, but with the spirit powers of darkness backing them.

I did not have to think of what to say, for it was the Lord Himself supplying the words that came like a thunderbolt from my mouth. Looking intently into the eyes of Elymas, I said:

“O, full of all guile and all knavery, son of the Adversary, enemy of all righteousness! Will you not cease perverting the straight ways of the Lord? And now, lo! The hand of the Lord is on you, and you shall be blind, not observing the sun until the appointed time.”<sup>1</sup>

Instantly, the magician leapt from his chair, crying, “I am blinded! What has happened to me?”

No one rose to help him, not even the proconsul. John-Mark and Barnabas, flanking me, stood glued into place. Elymas groped down the wall with his open hands, hoping for the door.

Whatever powerful thing had come upon me, was gone. I felt calm and peace in the aftermath, as if the thing had never happened. To prove this to you, here’s what I said to Elymas, who was slapping the wall in a panic now, “About a cubit to your left, good man—that’s a boy.” Elymas cried for the page, who led him from the room by his wrist.

### The proconsul is impressed

I think God gives to people what they need. I have become a Jew to the Jews and a Greek to the Greeks; I learned this from God. Sergius followed the black arts, and here were “arts of light,” if you will. This miracle was for his sake, and his sake only. In my flesh, I would have argued that the blinding of Elymas was overkill—that is, until I realized later what it all meant.

“You spoke the word, and it happened!” said Sergius.

“They were not my words,” your Excel-

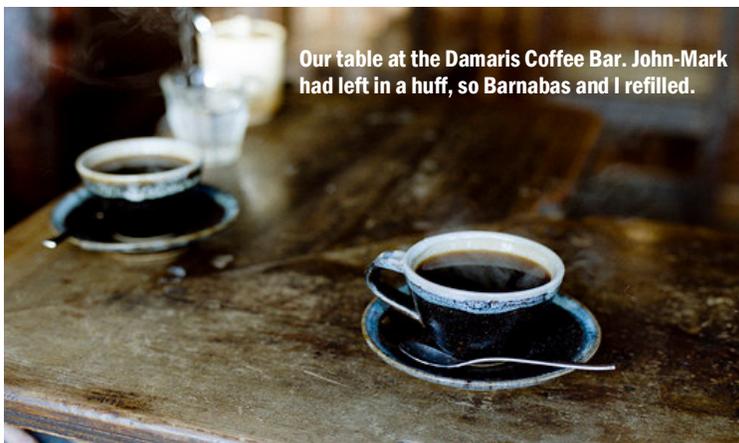
lency, but those of Christ. Christ has conquered the powers of darkness, and they are no match for Him.”

For the next three hours, we expounded the gospel of grace to him, and the proconsul believed. Sergius Paul believed!

### At the coffee bar

Later, at the Damaris Coffee Bar (the one on 7th Street, for those who care), Barnabas was beside himself with excitement.

“You realize what just happened,” said the Son of Thunder.



Our table at the Damaris Coffee Bar. John-Mark had left in a huff, so Barnabas and I refilled.

“Tell me,” I said. I took a deep sip of a black house blend; I never cream or sugar it. Cephas does that; I cannot talk him out of it.

“The proconsul was the first Gentile to be called into the body of Christ.”

I knew that. But I had not even considered what Barnabas said next:

“And think of this, Saul. There is a higher picture. Who was withstanding you? A Jew. And who was saved? A Gentile. Who has been withstanding us all along? Jews! And what just happened to the Jew, my friend?”

I held my cup halfway between the table and my lips. “A Jew was blinded to save a Gentile.”

“Yes.”

It all came to me then. Barnabas himself could not have known the height, breadth, and depth of his own words.

### A picture of the new era

The risen Christ had called me on the road to Damascus to herald a message of grace to the Gentiles. We were entering an era that no one but I, then, knew of. Israel was about to be cast from God—not permanently, but for a season. I had yet to reveal this truth. And then the words by which I had blinded Elymas came to me: “You shall be blind until the appointed time.” These were uttered under inspiration of Holy Spirit. Every word had been tried in a furnace, seven times. I bring this to your attention because of the phrase, “until the appointed time.”

I knew that Israel, as a nation, was to be blinded from the truth for an appointed time. These were the precise words given me by Christ in the Arabian desert: “... for an appointed time.” What perfection, then! The Christ relaying *those* words, to me, was the same Christ cursing Elymas through my lips, blinding him, “until the appointed time.” And what was to occur *during* this appointed time? God would call out

members of the nations—one by one—into the body of Christ! Who withstands truth to the nations, always? Barnabas was right: It is the Jews.

**“Barnabas himself could not have known the height, breadth, and depth of his own words.”**

We had all just witnessed a miracle. Asked to describe it, any bystander would say, “One man was blinded by another man’s words.” Perhaps that’s what it would be to them. To me, the miracle was God showing me a picture—a small picture in the span of three hours—of His course for this eon.

Think of it. Elymas, the Jew, allegorized the nation of Israel. What does Israel say of me? “He is a blasphemer; stay away from him!” Elymas said this of me to the proconsul, did he not? And you should have seen the face of the proconsul! He was ready to lay an egg. He stood prepared to throw me out, it seemed.

It’s the same with the nations, at first. They do not trust us. They see the power of Israel; they witness her miracles—the resurrections; God’s provision for her in the Sinai wilderness—and they worship that. Israel has a *history*. What is *our* history? Well, let me see. It is one minute old, compared with that of Israel.

What does it take to impress the nations, then? Do they not long to see miracles, such as God gave Israel? Are we wrong to fault for that? I thought, *maybe so*, but now I am not so sure. God wrought a fine miracle on the back streets of Paphos that day, and it is gaining publicity yet. But listen to this, because here is what thrills *me*: On our first excursion into a road of the nations, God blinded a Jew to save a Gentile. Oh, the wisdom and the foreknowledge of God! What a picture of His plan for this remaining age.

And now, back to poor Sergius. If he nearly became a hen at the words of Elymas, he seemed near to leaping from his feathers when God removed his magician’s sight, at my word. This *so* impressed Sergius that he could not lean hard enough into our ensuing words. The result? Belief!

The blinding itself—that was for the sake of



Compared to this, our ministry is one minute old.

Sergius. The larger event was the Lord’s way of telling me: “Saul, you are on the right track. See? It is happening. I am already starting it. I do not call you for nothing. This is not a theory, Saul. It is real. See how real it is! The Jew cannot find a door, and a man of the nations gains access to My very throne!”

#### Poor John-Mark

I was mulling over these things, so thankful to God for His care of me. There sat old Barnabas, grinning ear to ear. And there slumped John-Mark, staring at the table.

“What is wrong with you?” Barnabas asked him. “Do you not like your fig pastry? Why won’t you eat?”

Barnabas was pushing him, to get a word from him.

“Is this what our grace is all about?” John-Mark said. “It’s about blinding people—is that what it is about? It’s about cursing people?” He turned to me. “You *cursed* him, Saul. Where is the grace in that? You blinded a man. The man *cannot see* now. No one knows for how long. Do we even care? Apparently, we do not. For here we sit, drinking coffee, eating pastries, and discussing what it all means to *us*. Aren’t *we* the righteous ones. And you tell me *God* does

this evil?”

I said to him, “Mark, we never said this would be an era of ‘nice.’ No, but it *is* an era of *grace*. Do not confuse the two. Remember how the Lord turned the tables of the money-changers? This is no different.” Then I noticed a piece of paper under his coffee mug, with writing on it. “What is that?”

“Our announcement. The page handed it to me to give to Sergius Paul. I forgot. So, here. They got your name wrong.”

I took it and, unfolding it, read aloud: “In audience; 1 May 44: John-Mark, Barnabas, Paul.”

Barnabas said, “*Paul?* Who would have guessed that even the Roman government makes typos.”

“It’s a nice Greek name,” I said. “I like it.”

“So why don’t you take it?” said Barnabas.

“It would be a better introduction to the Gentiles, would it not? I only have to change one consonant. You’re the linguist, Barnabas. Tell me what it means.”

“It means, ‘pause.’”

Oh, did that send a chill down my neck! What was my ministry, but a *pause* in God’s operations with Israel?

“Nice to meet you, Barnabas,” I said, extending my hand. “The name is Paul; what’s yours?”

That must have upset John-Mark, because he got up quickly from the table, leaving Barnabas and me with the bill. ■

(To be continued in two weeks.)

(Dramatization adapted from Acts 13:5-12)



I am still behind on mail—for good reason. Thank you for your patience. If God is moving you to contribute to this cause, then please go for it. The cause can use it. —Martin

