

Now when Cephas came to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, for he was self-censured. 12 For, before the coming of some from James, he ate together with those of the nations. Yet when they came, he shrank back, and severed himself, fearing those of the Circumcision. 13 And the rest of the Jews also play the hypocrite with him, so that Barnabas also was led away with their hypocrisy. 14 But when I perceived that they are not correct in their attitude toward the truth of the evangel, I said to Cephas in front of all, "If you, being inherently a Jew, are living as the nations, and not as the Jews, how are you compelling the nations to be judaizing?" (Galatians 2:11-14)

I TAKE OVER THE ZWTF

Martin Zender has bailed out on us in this, the last week of the so-called year and the so-called celebrations belonging to it, but I will be the first one to say, yes, why not give the man a pause? (My name, by the way—Paul—means “pause,” for

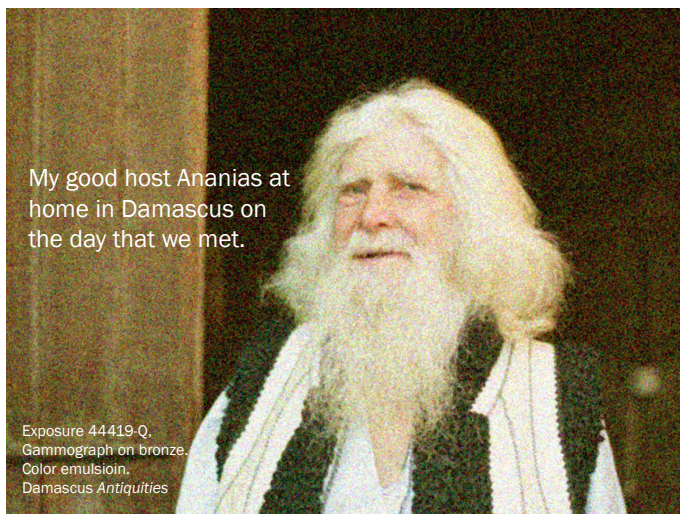
I am the pause in God’s plans for Israel.) This suits me well because I am rather in the mood to write instead of fuss over any of your celebratory happenings. Do not take that personally. Zender filled me in on where he left off, and upon what. I am glad of it, for this topic hits my disposition just right at the moment and, ideally, in every moment. I shall make clear my meaning to you as we progress.

You say that God changed me; I hear it all the time. But He really did not. You are shocked, so I must quickly explain. He changed my steering mechanism; He yanked the reins of my “horse,” you might say, to send me in a completely new direction. This would include the reins of my mind—the horse of my thinking—for I suddenly became the lover of the One I had spurned and rejected so hard and fast. So in this, my Lord changed me. I agree with you all day and all night upon that slant. But in other essential ways, I am not changed at all. I was and am the same man that I have always been.

I looked down at my hands when first I could see again in Damascus (with gratitude to you, Ananias), and I noticed that they were the same hands that I had when I left Jerusalem. I saw the scar on the back of my right hand that I had obtained as a child while playing with my father’s knife. I looked at my feet; they were the same ground-treaders—ugly as ever, with no nail on the small toe of my left foot. I touched my face, and there was my beard, my ears, the tip of my nose with its familiar (and cursed) hook, everything.

I spoke to Ananias, who cared for me in Damascus, as you probably know, and my voice sounded as it always did. What did I expect? With so dramatic a turnaround, I half expected that I would speak and that, upon utterance, light would emerge, or that the voice of an angel (whatever *that* sounds like) would issue to level my host to the ground—literally—so that I would have to retrieve him and apologize for the outburst. You may

find all of this curious. But I tested everything, much as a man who falls off of a horse tests all of his bones to see if they are intact. Then the man who has been de-horsed tries to think a thought to see if he *can* still think. I did all of this (though I was *not* on a horse when it happened, it was right after lunch before I mounted, while we were yet gathering our things, so I speak hypothetically), and was surprised to discover that I was the same man that had left Jerusalem on my insane mission. *How could everything be so different, I wondered, and yet everything so the same?*



STILL ME, THANK GOD

And so I performed all of these tests, as I just said, and they all came back positive. I was still Saul, born in Tarsus, still of the tribe of Benjamin and, at the time, still *called* Pharisee, yet no longer one in heart—that much I knew. So there I sat at the kitchen table of the great saint. That saint, Ananias, stared at me as though he were watching a play. I recalled for him my parents, my brothers, my sisters, my schooling—it was all still there. (It entertained me to see Ananias so puzzled, watching me continue like this, for I was not talking *to* him, formally, but confirming realities to myself, out loud, corroborating my essence.) I remembered precisely the morning I left Jerusalem, the men I took, the lunch we ate just before noon on the fateful day (figs and lamb chops), and the light that blinded me that I shall never forget, that knocked me off my feet. But then something very odd happened.

Ananias said that we ought to celebrate with a little wine. A lover of the product of fermented grapes, myself,

I put up no argument. (God had not taken *this* from me, either.) Ananias had very much of the stuff, several skins from Rome, some from Selucia, and a few of the new bottlings from Damascus, of course, as they are known there for their dry reds and remarkable packaging. So he hands me a cup, I am most appreciative for it, but as I sip it, I note that it is sweeter than a dry ought to be, with a strange hint of cherry. But I speak now of cherries that have rotted on the tree. I took one sip of it—Ananias waited expectantly—and I said, “Gawd! Are you sure that this has not been drawn from the latrine?” I could have bit my tongue as soon as I said it, but instead I started to laugh. Soon, I was laughing so hard that the “wine” (or whatever it was—I was either bold or stupid enough to take another slug of it) spilled out over my mouth and onto my shirt. Ananias was taken aback at first—rather insulted, no doubt—but then began laughing with me, not even knowing why. He surely did not know why *I* was succumbing to the mirth. But I will tell you *just* why.

It was so *me*, to say what I did to that saint. It is the classic contradiction of my personality; the sweet and the bitter from the same well, a thing that made James always say to the others, “This man is the antithesis of everything we hope and dream for.” It was the so-called “old Saul.” I was trouble, you see.

QUICK OPINIONS

It is just that I have been known for speaking my mind. I sometimes even speak before I think, relying on my instinct and the history of all my opinions to inform me, and this they do, sometimes without me. The surprising surprise of it all was that all of this remained intact even after what you have come to know as my “Damascus Conversion.” I do not countenance anything in humanity, really, that is second-rate. Even those bound in sin must excel, is what I think. (Excel in your poverty, in spite of all!) I do not countenance laziness. I am the hardest on myself, just ask Barnabas. (Come to think of it, I would rather that you not ask him.)

My quick opinions oftentimes seem harsh, and I often-times apologize for them, as I did this day with the wine and my good host. When the outburst had run its course, and the wine had run its course down my chin, I said to Ananias, “What I meant to say, my dear friend, is that perhaps you can find another skin among your collection there that has *not* been presented, on the label, as that which it most certainly is not.”

I have often said, privately, that it is sometimes better

to offend and apologize than never to offend at all. The apology brings to the fore the heart, which may lay unknown before the opportunity provided by God for its display. This has served me well, before and after Damascus. All of this to explain to you my “hard sayings” and my “hard advice” to workers such as Timothy (“expose, rebuke, entreat, with all patience”), and that time in Antioch when I withstood the great apostle Peter (otherwise known as Cephas) to his face.

PREFACE TO ANTIOCH

I have never regretted what I did in Antioch at the now-noted wedding feast, but so much criticism befell me for it afterwards—exclusively from the Jews—that I asked the Lord three times for whatever it was inside of me, that made me like this, to depart from me. I asked Christ to remove it and added, “if it must be removed, and if it was meant to be gone from me, then do it.” (Enter soft flute music here. I prayed halfheartedly, I tell you this now, for the truth is that I felt comfortable with the thing, and it was only the opinions of others that made me doubt. But Christ has since taught me to never decide things based on the opinions of others.) I thought that maybe the thing was to be—in its various manifestations—forevermore a hindrance to the work. This, I dreaded. I thought that perhaps the person who I was, deep down, would cause

“Christ has since taught me to
never decide things based on
the opinions of others.”

others to trip so that they would also falter over the evangel itself (due to my quirk of being) and reject it out of hand.

I had been scolded by an elder of the Antioch ecclesia; he had done it nicely, but had no respect for my office. I thought then, *this man is not looking at things rightly*, but I still laid myself down in front of it and in front of him, wondering if perhaps God were speaking to me through this man. I am never too high to learn. So this man berated me because, after all, it was Peter who I had rebuked so soundly and publicly. I can tell you, now, that this elder was and is a respecter of persons. I do not say this to compliment him. Peter is a man, like the rest of us. (Although I, myself, have felt the intimidation of The Rock.) My critic was not influential at all; there is no need to mention his name. His chief argument was, *why do it publicly?* My first

thought was, *good question*, but the thought following soon after was that it would amount to nothing had it *not* been public, for the thing was done, not for the benefit of Peter, foremost, but for the benefit of the Greek believers present, whose faith would falter and *was* faltering at the hypocrisy of the Lord’s great disciple.

There have been other instances when I have sought the Lord to remove something that I deemed to be a flaw of character. At these times, I prayed and got nowhere. I knew that God could remove the perceived hindrance in an instant, in the casting of an eye—anything that He would want gone. And yet there the thing lay. So if I prayed and got nowhere, I knew that I was destined and meant to keep the thing. And so, from then forward, I worked *with* the thing and not against it, even making the former obstacle a present friend. For whatever God does not “remove of,” you might say, He approves of.

What happened in Antioch on the evening of Simeon’s wedding feast is a simple story, really, and yet complicated as can be. It was even more dramatic than how you read of it today in the famous collection, for I held back in my account then, when writing to the Galatians, so many years ago. But now that I am writing for Martin Zender, I shall not hold back, for the restraints holding me then are withdrawn today, and it is my delight now to give full vent to the details—no small thing. I know that this is what Zender does, and would want, and so I feel comfortable in this environment, and thankful for it.

AT ANTIOCH

It was the wedding feast of Peter’s nephew, Simeon. Peter came up for it, as did many of the Circumcision believers. (They all liked to drink, yes, and Antioch was famous for such enterprises. Besides that, everyone liked Simeon and his betrothed, Abaigeal, who served as secretary for the Jerusalem ecclesia.) Barnabas and I were already there, as was Luke. My contingent was in Antioch to work, but we were happy for the time away from it, and of course to see Simeon again.

As a way of preface, the true explanation of what happened that evening may be found in the character of Cephas. He was gregarious and off the cuff, but this was also the man’s occasional downfall. “Off the cuff” may be expressed negatively as “impulsive”; the sandal fits. Peter cares deeply what others think of him, moreso than do I, even in my worst moments. I should not bring this up but I think my account demands it: consider

his denial of our Lord the night of Jesus' betrayal. But now, when it comes to walking on water, who better to call out onto the sea than Peter? He was the only one impulsive enough to try it. But of course, once he does a thing that is so bold, he soon doubts everything. We all know the result of that. This does not lessen my love for the man, but only increases it. He is the most human, I would say, of all the Jerusalem contingent. I do not mean to suggest that the rest are so much pottery, but that, compared to Peter, they are businessmen. They are a gaggle of pragmatists.

PETER'S CELEBRITY

You must know what a celebrity that Peter was then. Wherever he went, people followed him. They followed him to touch him, to have him speak a word to them, to have him write his name on various possessions, even on their arms. Some would have him leave a mark upon their foreheads. (I had witnessed that.) He could not escape celebrity, this man, anywhere in Jerusalem. The saints *there*, especially, (where there were thousands of believers) harried him in the markets, at the library, in the park—everywhere. Peter said to me once, “I could wish for anonymity again,” but it was too late for him, especially in those places where Christ was most enthusiastically named. Here in Antioch, Christ was being so named, and you can thank Barnabas, Luke and me for that, for the Lord had prospered us there. They knew well of Peter, for we had told them of the great fisher of men, even in the synagogues. I had never been with the Lord while He walked the Earth, but Peter had. For here was His right-hand man and for that—I admit—I

even was most anxious to touch him when first we met. My awe of him was profound, but then of course I got to know him and then he was, “good old Cephas.”

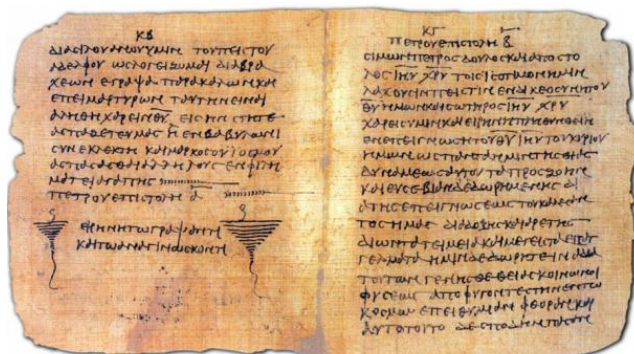
Several months earlier we had convened—and almost just as quickly had successfully concluded—the now-famous Jerusalem council, where it was decided that no burdens such as circumcision should be laid upon any of the converts to my message. It lasted twenty minutes, that meeting. This was the highlight: “no further burdens.” All but a few burdens, in reality. (They had to prohibit *something*, to save national face.) Peter liked it and acceded enthusiastically to it. The others agreed, but somewhat begrudgingly. I knew this. I cared little for the secret misgivings, so long as the decrees went forth with the signatures. (It's what the decrees did *not* say that was important.) It was a resounding victory for my message. Not a full victory as far as the decrees went (they would later be revoked), but good enough at the time. It was good enough to bring freedom, acceptance and legitimacy to the minds of the converts to my message. Many in Jerusalem held the “decrees of Gentile freedom” to be theoretical; this I knew. They simply could not picture it in practice. By “it,” I mean treating Gentiles as anything but second-class citizens, second-class worshippers of Christ, dogs. I tell you, you must not ever underestimate the emotional power of national pride and racial ties.

ATTENDANTS

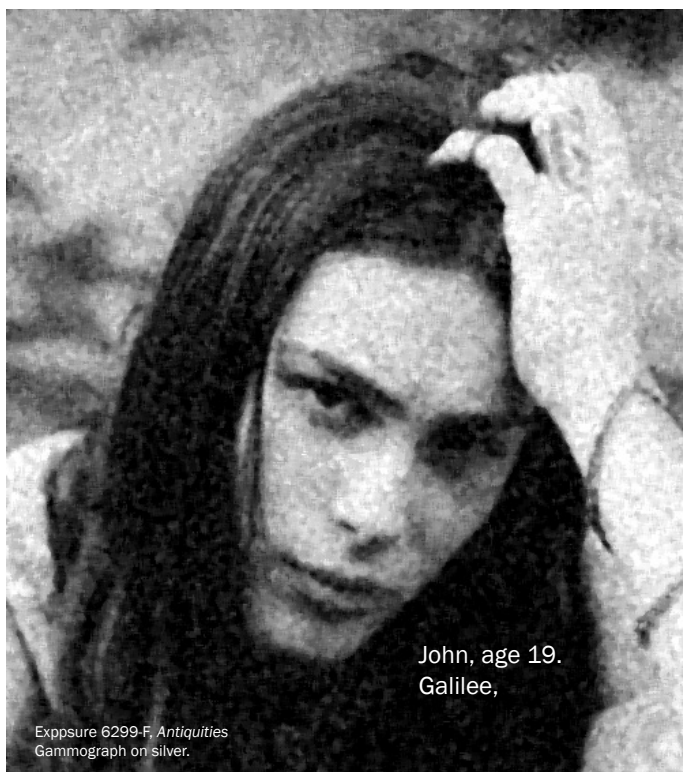
Luke and Barnabas and I arrived before Peter, Andrew and John. I have not told you—and it is not in the official account—that Andrew and John attended the feast; they witnessed the whole of what I am about to describe to you. No one has known that until now; you are the first. Andrew was Peter's brother. John came because of Simeon, the groom. Simeon was a near disciple of Christ's from the time of Cana; he actually attended *that* wedding. He was not of the twelve, but Peter has called him, “Thirteen”—that was his nickname for him. Two hours after the crucifixion, Simeon cut himself to take his own life. John found him behind the home of Miriam in a pool of blood. The darkness was still about the land. Luke saved his life. From the resurrection on, Simeon and John became co-laborers in the work. It would not be incorrect to say that Peter's nephew became John's closest friend. It was not an easy thing, getting close to John.

As an aside, I could not speak easily with John. I knew who I was, John barely knew who I was, but his disposition unnerved even me. I could never find my footing around

Below is a once-removed copy of the original Jerusalem decree, translated into Greek by Titus. This is the actual document I took among the nations. The artwork belongs to Titus, who thought that a tornado accurately depicted the then sweeping nature of the pronouncement. —Paul



Courtesy, Museum of Jerusalem Antiquities.



John, age 19.
Galilee,

Exposure 6299-F, Antiquities
Gammagraph on silver.

the man. I do not say this to his detriment, but to mine. The man moved with a heaviness—I am tempted to call it a darkness, though it was certainly not that—a heaviness and a solitude that hung from him like the beam of wood used to crucify his Savior. He carried weight, but it never bent him. His gaze withered me; he would not move his eyes. His hair was black, and so were his eyes. John moved silently through our world. He moved like a monk, even with Christ. Peter has told me of it. John brooded, especially at their last meal. He witnessed the Transfiguration; only three can say that. He would never talk to me of that occasion. Peter gave me everything, but not John. James would not tell me anything, but for different reasons. Our Lord gave His mother to John from the stake; such was His fondness for the man.

He was the quiet one. To grasp the hand of John, however, was to grasp the branch of an oak tree. Such a gaze and a grasp could hardly be borne, at least not by me. And I knew the best of them. And yet, when he and Simeon were alone, I heard them laughing—this was at the Jerusalem council. I asked Simeon about it later, so singular was the sound of the laughter from a man such as John, but all Simeon would tell me was that John relayed to him a dream he'd had about horses and an emerald rainbow. It was a foretaste of what was to come—we now know—but what humor there was in it at that early time, forty years before the Revelation, I cannot say; I was not made privy

to it. I shall ask John the next time I see Him, at the consummation of those things.

BEYOND CORNELIUS

Many of my converts from the nations sat with me at my table, and four adjoining. In the vast wooden room were thirteen tables, five chairs to a place. Peter sat at the table to my right. Barnabas and Luke sat ahead of that. I had walked in with Peter, aware of his every step. I strained to stay one step behind him, to follow his lead. I wished to see what he did. This was more than a wedding party. It was a mix of Jews and Greeks in Century One. This was the genesis of everything to do with these gospels—the two—and those who would believe them. To us, then, it was all on the brink. You take it all for granted, but nothing was for granted then. We could blow it all up, or so we thought. We were human, and could make mistakes. It was a test of Peter, really. That's how I saw it. He could lovingly embrace them, or shun them. I knew that he had not shunned them in theory, but what about in practice?

“This was the genesis of everything to do with the two gospels. To us, it was all on the brink.”

This was not Cornelius. This was not one proselyte, with Peter surrounded by his posse. Cornelius, at least, had to come through Israel. Peter had to be called for. That was historic (Cornelius was filled with the spirit before baptism), but this was more so. Here, the mediation of Israel was completely dispensed with. It sat well with so few of the mother ecclesia. Something great had happened, and now God had visited the nations with my pen and my voice. God more than visited them; He gave them an expectation far beyond Israel's and—as I said—apart from Israel. Not even Peter grasped that the calling of the nations sat above his. I had told him, but he could not receive it. I saw him look away the day I explained it to him; I saw him not receive it; I saw him tacitly deny it. It was enough for him then to accept the theory. To mingle with Greeks, wholesale, was outside the perimeter of Peter's adventure. This was in Jerusalem, when I told him; we sat near a window at his house.

THE GATHERING

A larger contingent of the Circumcision would come to The Orion Hall; we were early. A contingent was coming up from Jerusalem. How I wanted to press Peter beforehand—impress him, really—about the importance of his role. But I over-manage things by nature. I did not want to do that here. Oh, but I did. I wanted to tell him exactly what to do, where to walk, whom to greet first, how to talk, what to say. I knew how against his religion every aspect of this was, but I also knew of the vision in Joppa. Something stopped me. I did not want this to be the religion of Paul. The religion of Paul must not be the religion of Peter. I would not force the future, or the solution, upon the great man. It must be as an olive flower budding on the tree, at its own pace. It must come to Peter organically. I prayed for it, continually, even as we sipped whiskies at Tuluval's the hour before. Everything helps, yes?

He followed on my coattails; what a turning of the tables *that* was. But this, for a change, was *my* world, and he a visitor in it. He may as well have been on the moon, my Cephas. I went to the table of the Greeks, the one nearest the meats, and here he came with me, full behind me. They all stood, the Greeks. Like me, at first, they all wanted to touch him. But they dared not. None of them did—at first. But they could not take their eyes from him.

Their only world now was Peter. I had practically disappeared from them. This was the chief. This man had touched the soft hand of God. He had walked on

This is Peter's ring. He said he found it in the sand on the sea of Galilee the day that Jesus called him. He wore it for the rest of his life. The image is of a lion at rest. Peter gave this to me the day before his death. —Paul



object nr. FM 35B-48

water, this man. They rose to greet him, even the women. I saw the tears ready to break over Peter's eyes. This was all that I'd hoped for. I saw the dam begin to break. They saw it too. And when they did, it became obvious. I thanked God, all over again, for Joppa; God lowering the simple sheet filled with unclean animals—it did everything. Such a divine strike at such an hour. Without it—nothing. Even Peter admitted that. Because of that, everything humbled him now. After the denials, he thought he could go no lower. But then, *that*. Anything was possible now. Peter said that he needed that vision in Joppa. He acknowledged that, without it, he would have been no use to me. I knew that. Peter said that it glowed like the sun, the sheet. I said to him, "I can relate to that."

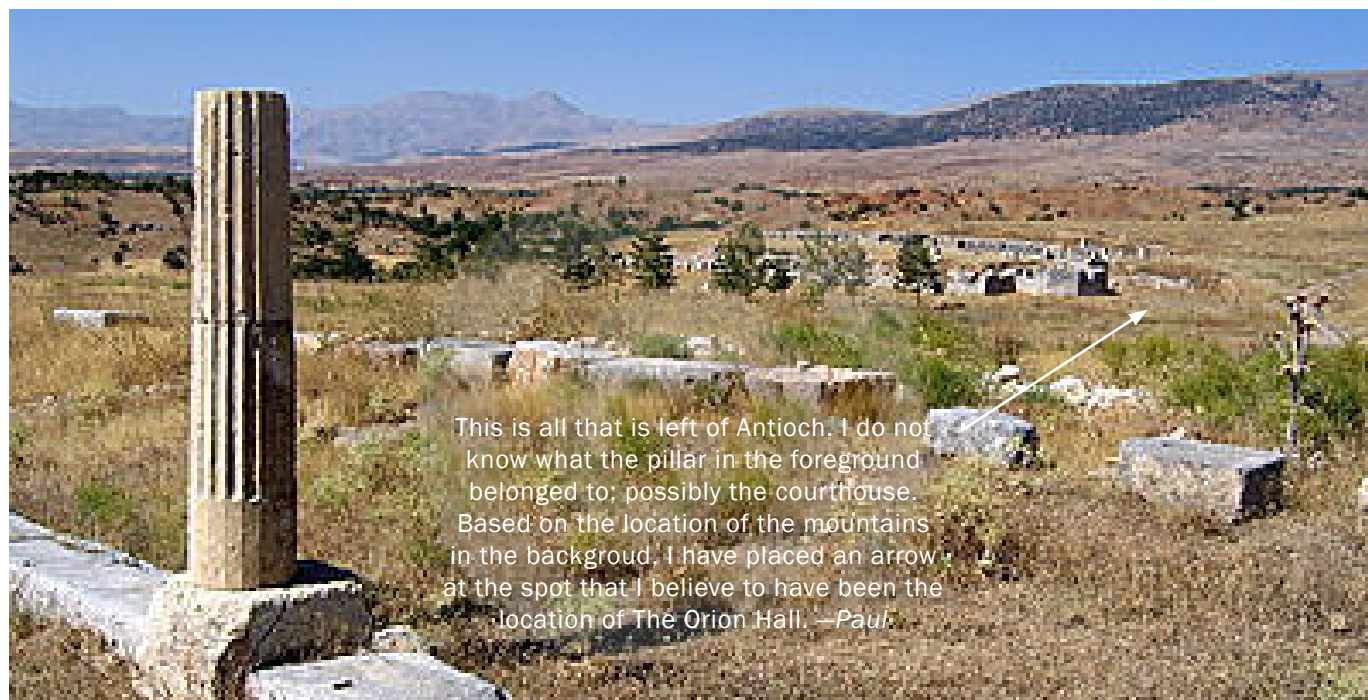
"The religion of Paul must not be the religion of Peter."

The vision—a minute's duration—prepared him for Cornelius of Caesarea, directly, but for me down that same road. And now, I knew, ultimately for this. I had been a killer, fresh from Damascus. Practically the killer of Christ, to them and even to him. None of them wanted me then, except perhaps for dead. It took Barnabas to approach Peter. I had dreaded it, but God's timing never fails. I waited outside until Barnabas gave me the signal—a simple pull of the hand. I came in through the shadows, creeping like a monk. I trembled to even enter, that day. Without Barnabas, I'd have been dead; killed by stealth or otherwise. Without the vision given to Peter, my demise would have become symbolic, but no less an absence of life. And yet, that day, the chief of the apostles granted me, the butcher of Damascus, the right hand of fellowship. I shook the great man's hand. And now he extended the same hand, and both of his arms, to Sospiter, to Agatha, to Adelphius, to Coes and Siculus; to Polyas, Alexis, Cassandra and Narkissos; to Persis, to Iros, to Helen, Rhoda and Tros. It was now the tears flowing from *my* own eyes that obscured this vision.

Thank you, my Lord!

THE DINNER

Challah. Barley bread. Fava beans. Leeks, garlic, onions, on a platter. Figs. Grape honey dripping over pomegranates. Dates. Sycamore figs. On the meat plate:



Fat-tailed sheep. Gazelle. Deer stew. Rib of lamb. The wine table overflowing: falafel, tehina, tabouleh, jandali. At the bell, the wedded couple stood. The stewards and servers stood by their respective tables. Three tables still sat empty; the larger contingent from Jerusalem (a few minors—Circumcision nonetheless—were already here) had yet to enter. I pictured them loaded and barreling up the Antioch Road, even as our mouths watered for the deer stew. I looked across three tables to see John, who sat with Andrew and all the Greeks. He didn't care, John. Not John. He never did need a vision—his mind and heart being broader even than those of the chief apostle. John was born to be of men. John did not see me for his drinking. Clearly, he commanded the attention of his table. And why wouldn't he? He had laid his head on the breast of Christ at the last supper. He had been at Gethsemane. He had witnessed the crucifixion. He was Mariam's caretaker. Then he turned at the suggestion of a breeze from an open window, John did, and noticed me. Even then, I could not long hold such a gaze.

Simeon made a speech; it was short, but why he mentioned war, none of us knew. I certainly did not know. (I did not know every tradition of Antioch—Simeon's mother was from there—how could I?) The speech began with his meeting of Abaigeal, then turned to Abaigeal's father's tenure in the army. No one understood why this was mentioned. Apparently, conflict brewed up in Decapolis. But was this the time to speak of it? Peter leaned over to me to say, "He is nervous about the consummation." I

did not grasp his meaning. I said, "The consummation of the war?" And Peter said, "No, of his marriage." I had to laugh. Several of the Greeks heard it and stared in amazement. The holder of the keys to the kingdom had made a joke. They could not have imagined such a thing, not even an hour ago.

There then came the consummation of the speech, for which all were thankful, and the tapping of wine cups. Every foreign diner at three adjacent tables toasted Peter. He could not drink wine again, yet, with his Lord, but his Lord had given him this, and with his outstretched arm and large folds of clothing dragging across his food, Cephas honored as many of the Greeks as he could while still guarding his lamb.

We ate.

THE COMING OF SOME FROM JAMES

Peter was gnawing on a generous bread chunk, chasing it with hearty swallows of his wine, saying something pithy, no doubt, to Rhoda of Cyprus, when it happened. The Circumcision had arrived. *God*. They did not arrive, they *entered*. These were believers in Jesus, mind, but zealous for the law. This was the trick of them, and the thick of them. These were the bigshots. None of them fully trusted me. I was teaching apostasy from Moses, they said. They knew the resurrected Jesus, but they did not know *my* Christ. I recognized Azreal, Barrak, Giannes and Kanaan. I may have known a fifth

man, Pesach. The others, I did not recognize. I had not seen them at the council. They entered with authority so that everyone stopped to assimilate the quiet pageantry. It was a moment ripe with childlike agitation. There were nine of them. More than mere guests, this was “the Jerusalem Contingent.” They were “from James.” (Everyone knew James, the literal brother of Jesus.)

Their presence had been anticipated. Peter, Andrew and John were already among us, yes, but these three men

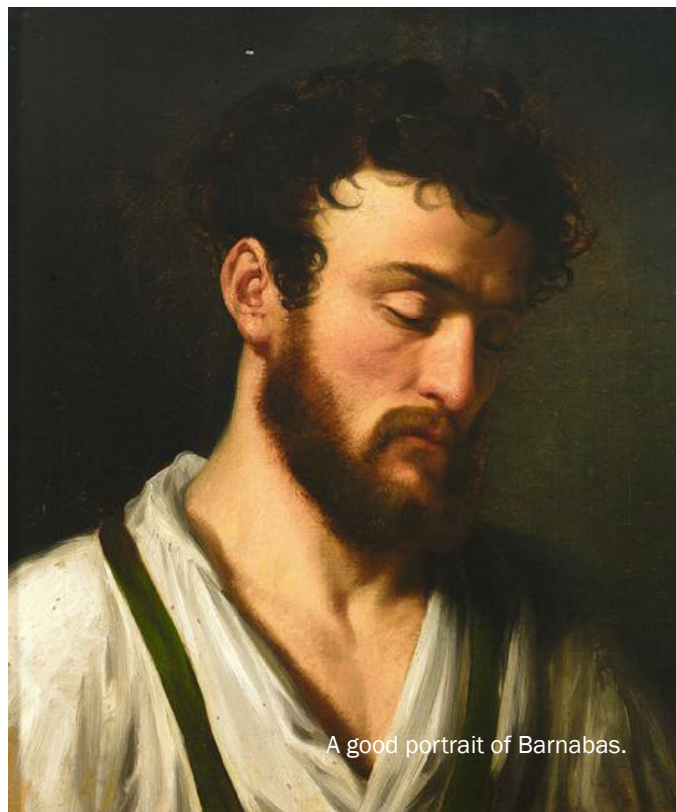
“Even the Antiochians
knew that something
slightly more than human
had come.”

were living letters of the humility of Christ. Not so, The Contingent. The men at the door paled in importance before Peter, Andrew and John, yet they presumed to be something, and this carried weight with impressionable ones, and the weight blew with the wind from the open window across the wooden hall. Even the Antiochians knew that something slightly more than human had come. The men wore preponderance like so many sashes across their chests. The stewards rushed to seat them. Here was the chance to restart our eating, and we did. But not Peter. No, not him.

I saw it happen. Damn it, I *watched* it happen. He got up to stretch. He “needed to stretch,” he said, and he needed to “get some more lamb.” *So stretch*, I thought to myself. *Go get some more lamb, dumb ox*. I already knew what would happen. His rising from his chair was too instantaneous. There was no gradual realization, for Peter, that either the stretch or the lamb was called for. He had caught one of them looking at him? But of course. *Everyone* looked at him.

I would wait it out. But I found, while waiting it out, that I could not take another morsel. I watched Peter’s every move. Perhaps I would do nothing. *God, help me do nothing*.

Carrying his plate to the lamb, he forked some onto it. He looked back, to see if I was noticing. He found his answer quickly. I pierced him so hard that he had no choice but to turn back to the meats. He knew that I knew. And I knew that he knew that I knew. He could still save himself. The opportunity now was golden, if short. The moment had arrived for the man to either



A good portrait of Barnabas.

continue walking on the water, or doubt his Lord and sink. *Keep your eyes upon Christ, my dear Peter, and walk out to Him in a miracle, and to the thunderous applause of celestial eyes—or look to the roiling sea once again, and falter and sink. It is your decision again, my dear friend.*

He hesitated. I saw him stand inside that instant, like a sheep for either slaughter or deliverance. And then—down he went. He turned on his heels toward the contingent from James, and the water of Galilee once again consumed him. I heard light chatter between them, and then he sat with them. He sat with them.

He *sat* with them.

THE NAPKIN

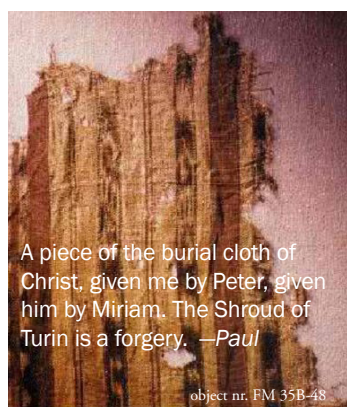
No, not Barnabas too. Yes, him. Barnabas, too, so abruptly in need of a fresh drink and, what do you know, an entire leg of lamb, that man. Hypocrite! Unlike Peter, Barnabas never looked back. It was too much for me. Barnabas followed Peter to the long table of Azreal, Barrak, Pesach and the others. What about Luke? The physician stayed nailed to his seat; his spirit was that of John’s. He’d not even seen what had happened.

Rhoda’s eyes said everything. Peter’s fame, as I said, meant everything to the Greeks. To hades with Barnabas; he was nothing except to me and to the Jerusalem contin-

gent; the nations cared little for him. But *Peter*. Peter's love of them meant the world. His acceptance, to these minors in Christ, made or broke them. It was not only filial—the fellowship—but symbolic of so much more. Peter's friendship confirmed everything that I had told them about him, about John, and about the Master of all of us. Peter had become, to them, a metaphoric priesthood—a link of emotion and flesh binding them to God, through Christ.

I was not enough for them, in those days. You must understand that. I grappled to understand it at the time, but now it is your turn. You must grasp the weight of Peter and the weight of the man, Christ Jesus, *upon* Peter. I had beheld the light, but Peter had beheld the crucified One. You must grasp the difference between that and the light. You must grasp the link of flesh that these people felt between the humble yet famous fisherman and the universal love of God, won at the stake through the Man, Christ Jesus. Peter had

witnessed the crucifixion. This meant something to them. John was unobtainable to them, but Peter was *everyman*. Not even Peter was fully aware of his role. It was not just Rhoda, but all of them. They all saw and felt what Peter had just done. It was worse to them than a strike to the face. Not even a dissected lamb, roasted and



arranged in pieces on a platter, could have missed the infidelity. Siculus, sitting at my left, grabbed me by the elbow and said loudly enough for many to hear, "God *damn* it, Paul! What *are* we, then? Is it all a lie?"

I ran both hands, hard, through my hair. None of the Greeks moved then, so intuitively did they know that everything now rested with me. Now, *I* was their god. Utensils upon plates clinked again, tentatively, but nothing returned to normal, not for me. *I must gain something from John*, I thought. As I sought him, something was coming from him to me through the hands of the Greeks. He had handed them something; I saw the tail end of him writing. An odd smile curled upon John's lip as the thing came. *What in the world?* It was a folded napkin. Undoing it, I found only four words: "CLASH OF THE TITANS."

I CANNOT CONTAIN MYSELF

John's words flashed like the Damascus light from my head to my heart. After that, it was no longer a matter of

thinking but of doing. Hot blood rushing, made me hot. I had felt this before; it was the thing that I had begged God and Christ to remove from me. They hadn't bothered. But now, flowing into the pool of anger, I felt the warmth of the spirit of God, mingling. An exotic cocktail, this: the blood, the spirit and the fire. Enough blood went to my legs so that I shot instantly to my feet; I came up so hard that the table shook, alarming guests at three adjacent places. The rest would soon follow.

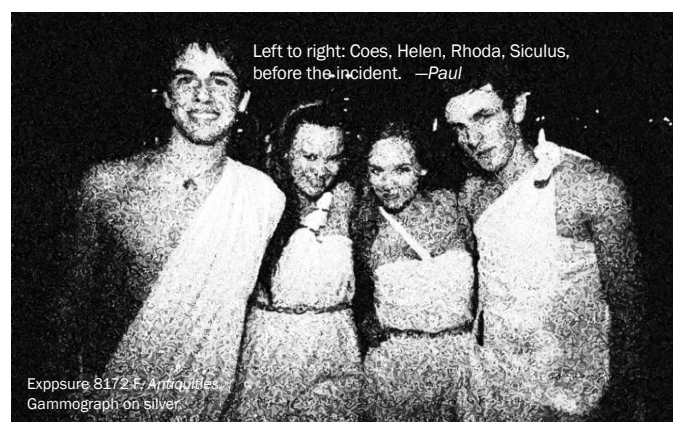
I grasped my cup, from the top. I slammed it repeatedly against the table bottom like a steady alarm; a concussion of iron rod against the sheep gate; a warning in the storm. A miracle sustained the cup but not the wine, which arced to the four corners. Eyes both terrestrial and celestial beheld a man yet silent, save for his cup. Perhaps the man would now render a toast.

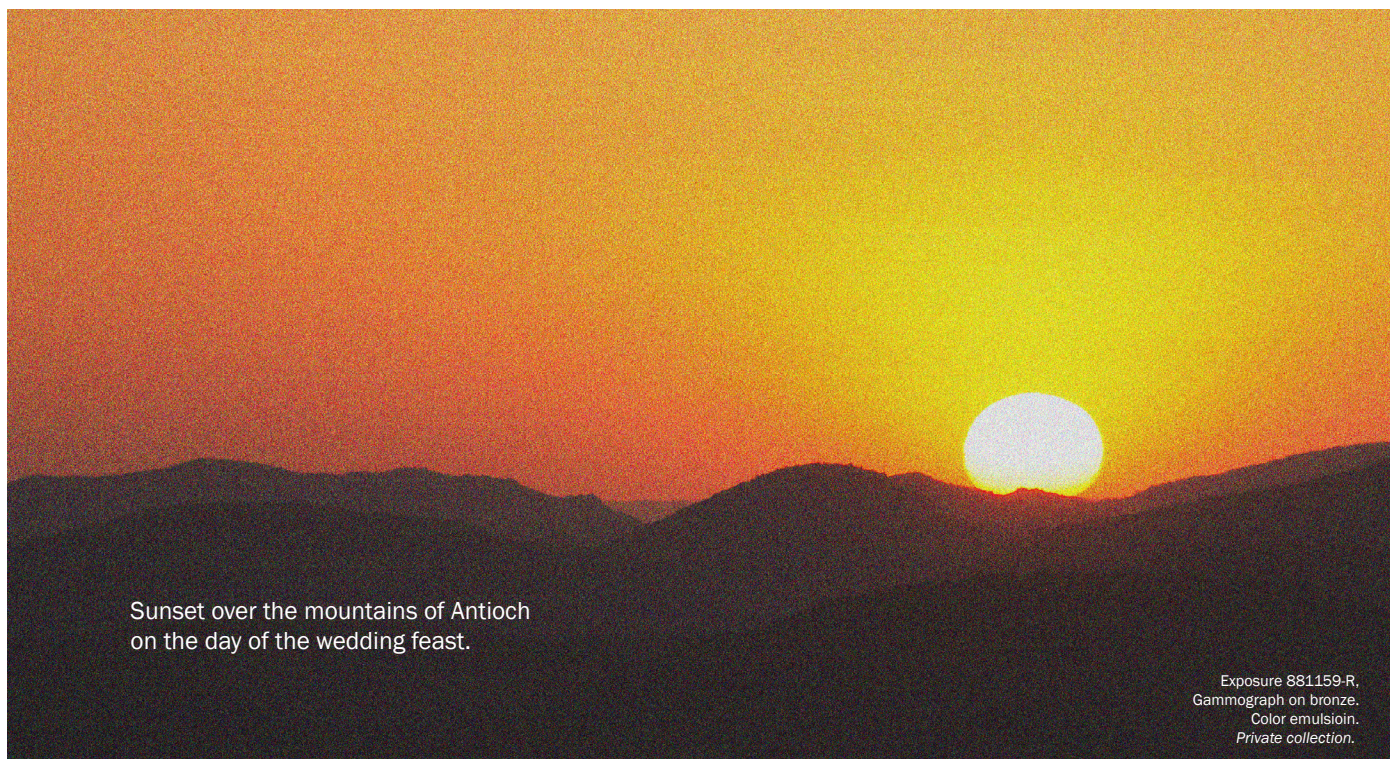
Perhaps not!

Before I could speak, Simeon broke the silence. "Paul. *What?*" It was a matting for God's masterpiece, those two words. I know when it is happening. When it gets this far, it cannot be stopped. Gone was Simeon, his bride, the feast, the halls, the walls of the great city so far away, the coming of Titus from Rome, even my own childhood. Perhaps my entire life passed before me. The tension had now vanished.

"I propose a toast to my friend, and the disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, know by us all, the great Cephas!" I paused for effect. "And to Barnabas also!" Barnabas knew instantly what I was about. His head fell then, to his chest. Peter was slower, preparing himself to be honored. *My poor friend. I do not mean to be doing this. At the same time, there is nothing I mean more.*

"Peter! You, my friend, are inherently a Jew! Yes? Ah, like several of us here. Jews. To us belong the Scriptures, the Fathers, the legislature, everything. Yet God visits the nations, does He not? And you, my friend, you *also* visit the nations. In fact, you do so here, at this great hall. Here,





you visit them, not on papyrus or in letter in Jerusalem, as though it were some theory, but you visit the nations in fact, even *here*, sitting in this chair that is now empty, at this table, where you fellowshiped with those formerly known as curs, aliens, dogs—nothings! Yet you kiss them and laugh with them, I saw you. Remember the tears? Even five minutes ago, Peter. I seem to recall it, and so do they. But now you are over *there*. I can barely see you, so distant are you. Why are you now *there* and not here, with the Greeks, in the place you *were* the moment before Azreal, Barrak and Pesach arrived? I wonder what has changed. These men from the almighty James mean a great deal to you, yes? Then I wonder what these Greeks now mean to you. I wonder!”

On the face of Peter, a brief wave of regret gave way to understanding; great understanding; delayed understanding. He did not lower his head, as Barnabas. No, he faced it. He was past it already—past. I knew he was. He could have gotten up then and confessed it all. Everything was well; I had already said enough. The angels rested their wings. But I knew that the record must be set, and that my sarcasm must be softened for the final print. I cannot help how I begin these things, and neither can I help how God ends them.

I knew that what I would say next would be Scripture. I can sometimes tell this, when my words end and the Lord’s begin. Here in Antioch, this day, it was obvious.

“They would be the words that
rest in the top drawers of hotel
rooms across the world.”

What would come next would be completely and utterly of God. They would be the words that you have read for two millennia, the words that rest in the top drawers of hotel rooms across the world, the bestselling words ever to come. But I cared—and I presently care—nothing for that, but only for the truth. I cared only for that truth that would continue with the dear souls in my charge, in Antioch and beyond. So I took that inhalation that I always take at these times, the easy one, and I said consciously and unconsciously at the same time—

“If you, being inherently a Jew, are living as the nations, and not as the Jews, how are you compelling the nations to be judaizing?”

What happened next has not, in the wisdom of God, ever been recorded. Next week, if I am still here, it shall be. (*To be continued.*)

Produced by Martin Zender/www.martinzender.com
© 2016 by Martin Zender/Published by Starke & Hartmann, Inc.
email: mzender@martinzender.com