

THE RABBI
FROM TARSUS

THE
RABBI
FROM TARSUS

BY
PHILLIP GOBLE
A DRAMATIC PORTRAYAL OF
PAUL THE APOSTLE



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PHIL GOBLE

presents
his single-character play

THE RABBI FROM TARSUS
based on the
biblical life of Paul the Apostle

FOREWORD

The medium of dramatic entertainment may well be the most singularly effective communication in our contemporary society. For too many years it has spoken with little or no accent to the glory of God. Now we see that tragic omission being remedied.

As the director of The A.D. Players at Grace Theater in Houston, I have seen community appetite affirm and encourage this calling. As the actress who played Corrie Ten Boom in *The Hiding Place*, I have seen a God-honoring statement presented with excellence, and have watched it make an impact on the whole world. As a Bible believer who loves the theater, I have seen hope for the artist who yearns to use his craft as a mounting for the jewel of God's Word. Highly skilled and intensely dedicated artists such as James Collier, Tom Key, Tedd Smith, Ken Medema, and a host of others have also seen this hope realized in their own careers. To this "so great a cloud of witnesses" Phil Goble adds his professionally accredited skills and wholehearted devotion.

When I first met him, I knew little about *The Rabbi from Tarsus* other than that Phil had devoted his love and career to this project. Commercial theater is a demanding as well as

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rewarding profession. Phil had earned a place of security in this fiercely competitive field. I knew he must have a tremendous dedication to take on the disciplines of actor and playwright, as well as to risk his established career on a venture of faith.

The Rabbi from Tarsus offers an evening in the theater that speaks to matters of time and eternity. The script is emotionally involving and its accuracy evidences the painstaking care of Phil Goble's doctoral research. Phil's training and expertise as an actor bring a beguiling versatility to his characterization. There is comedy woven into this heroic story of Paul. There is the gentle thread of pathos as we listen in on the thoughts of this scholarly apostle. There is the awesome dynamic of true drama as we view the mighty Jew brought low by imprisonment and lifted high by the power of God. And there is the awareness of commitment's call and its price as we witness the closing hours of one noble believer who chose to be true to the Messiah unto death.

I am delighted that Tyndale House has joined with Phil in bringing to the theater the mighty apostle Paul, the rabbi from Tarsus.

Jeannette Clift George

CAST OF CHARACTERS

PAUL, 60, the rabbi-apostle from Tarsus

It is winter, A.D. 65 in a dungeon cell in Rome.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENE

[ACT ONE]

Paul's dungeon cell in Rome.
A few minutes before dawn.

[ACT TWO]

The same.
A few minutes have passed.

SETTING: Two slimy dark walls form the corner of the cell. The same stone covers the ceiling where light streams through a barred hole and forms the shadow of a slanted cross on the murky wall. In the corner of the cell is Paul's eating area, where he can sit and talk with Luke, who is presumably peering down at Paul's solitary confinement from the hole in the ceiling. In this corner on the floor against the back wall are a wooden bowl for water and an old wooden plate containing a dried-looking piece of bread. To the left, and nearer to the audience, is an old basket containing two scrolls and a tentmaker's needle (it looks like a crochet needle with a wooden handle). Against the right wall, there is a short, low, stone bench. Against the left wall, there is another seat for Paul, an old box made of wood. There is just enough light streaming in from the hole in the ceiling to illuminate Paul's face when he sits and moves in these cramped quarters.

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FROM TARSUS**

[ACT ONE]

[ACT ONE]

SCENE ONE

(Lights come up. Paul is asleep on the floor by the small stone bench. He wakes slowly, shivering, yawns, and rises. He is a thin, energetic man of sixty, with a wispy, gray moustache and beard, and shoulder-length gray hair crowned by a full black yarmulkeh (woven skullcap). He is wearing an unbelted, long-sleeved, floor-length tunic that is so filthy and tattered that he looks more like a leper than an apostle. The ravelings hanging from the tunic combine with the fringes on his old dirty prayer shawl to give him the appearance of an old chasidic beggar. His sandals are worn and his legs, what we can see of them, are dirty and aged. He walks with a slight limp, and a three-foot-long, rusty chain is shackled to his wrists. As the old rabbi rises he sings, at first softly, then with increasing volume.

PAUL:

(Singing) Beed-vahr Ha-shem shah-mah-yeem nah-ah-soo. By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made. Yeesh-lahch d'vahr-oh y'veer-pah-aim vee-mah-late meen ha-keh-vair. God sent his Word and healed them and delivered them from the grave.

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(Speaking) Luke! Wake up!

(Smiles, shivering)

Boker tov!* Did you doze off too, Luke? Doctors shouldn't fall asleep on their patients!

But it's morning anyway, isn't it? You can't even hear the Roman roosters down here in this solitary confinement cell!

Doctor, am I getting hard of hearing? Speak up!

I said, it is morning, isn't it?

Did Demas bring word on Nero yet?

(Paul empties on the floor the contents of a basket containing a tentmaker's needle and a couple of scrolls)

Yes, this morning. Wake up, Luke. My final hearing is at dawn!

(Pacing, irritated)

I specifically instructed Demas to bring us word on Nero before the guards come for me!

He told you about Pudens and Claudia, didn't he?

Their informants are going to try to find out Nero's private reaction to my first defense speech.

Demas hasn't even *been* here since yesterday?

(Tired, crossing to sit on the floor)

(Sighing) Luke, Luke, Luke, Luke, Luke, Luke.

*Boker tov—good morning

PAUL THE APOSTLE

... Luke, you are a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

(Picking up harp, laughing)

What fools for God we doctors are! Me a Jewish doctor of the law of Moses; you a Gentile doctor of the body, Luke!

(Laughing) I can just see you now, with your most *unwomanly*, white *beard* and this pregnant bulge under your cloak. It's a miracle you were able to slip this past the gate. Did you know this is genuine alnumwood? Yes. Like King David's harps in the Temple.

(Playing softly)

I had a dream last night, about the song I taught Silas at Philippi fifteen years ago... and about the earthquake... when God rescued us from prison. Then I woke up... in prison again.

(Pause) There's nothing like music to lift your spirits, Luke.

(Playing) But I don't play just to old Saul... like King David did to my ancestor. I make melodies in my heart to the Lord.

(Sniffs, gets up to put the harp down, and moves to sit on an old box against the wall)

When I was first shown my sumptuous quarters, the pungent smell made me think some Roman latrine drained down here. Then slowly I began to get the picture: This *is* a Roman latrine!

(Laughs)

THE RABBI

Nero, you subtle poet, you! Are you trying to tell me something? Here's a line for you:

(Sniffs) Oh, to awake in the morn to the smell of human waste . . . and the pitter-patter sound of soft little feet—little rats' feet! And this bread they gave me already has a generous supply of green mold on it . . . which appears to be alive. The baker obviously doesn't know whom he's feeding down here . . . or maybe he does.

Luke, I think I'll call this place, ha-mah-lohn ha-kloom-nee-keem. *(Laughs)* What? That's Hebrew, Doctor, for the "Hotel Good-For-Nothing!"

(Rises)

The chef should be informed that *I* am a dignitary who has dined in the *filthiest* dungeons in the empire, I am used to the vilest traif* under heaven, and I demand to know if this is the worst he can do!

(Paul stares at the shadow of the cross on the wall)

Yet, somehow, Lord, when I think about you, this dungeon makes a fitting apostle's scriptorium. *We are* the scum of the earth!

(Yawning, moving)

Doctor, what did you think of my first trial?

(Crossing to the basket to get his scroll)

My first trial! You were awake weren't you?

*traif—unkosher food

PAUL THE APOSTLE

(Stopping and looking up, to the Lord:)

Oi. I ask for a lawyer and you give me a doctor!

(To Luke:)

Did you notice the puzzled look on Nero's face? For a twenty-eight-year-old god, he certainly doesn't know much about Judaism!

How do you explain Judaism to a demon-possessed madman? *(Pause)* By letter? Yes, I wish I could.

(To Luke:)

What do you suppose Nero's thinking?

I don't think he does either. He's too busy hosting blood baths at the Circus Neronis.

I'm trying to see the Lord in this.

Why has God made Nero, of all people, the world's final authority on what is and is not the true Jewish faith?

(Pause, listening to Luke)

I'm not saying that, Luke! Granted, Judaism is a legally protected religion. And Caesar is the final judge of the Roman Supreme Court. But... Nero?

(Sitting on the bench)

He wouldn't know a good mohel* from a bad boil!

(A glimmer of hope)

*mohel—circumciser

THE RABBI

Luke, I've been thinking! I must have made *some* impression on Nero! Otherwise, why did he send me back into custody? Or even give me another trial this morning?

(Pause, listening)

A mere routine procedure, you think? I know, but... *(Pause)* so... very shortly, I will either be declared guilty and be beheaded *or* the death sentence will be commuted and my life will be spared.

(Rising and moving like a caged animal)

But what have I *done*? The charges are utterly ridiculous. What crime have I *committed*? Against the law of Moses? Or the Jewish Temple? Or the Roman government?

(Sits on the box, throwing his wooden plate under the stone bench)

I put it to my fellow prison rats! Stop trying to sneak a bite of my last piece of bread, and answer this question: How about it, cellmates? *Is* the Jewish high priest *right*? Do *I* look like a treasonable, heretical, rabble-rouser? Me? The Apostle Paul?

(Smiling, looking from rat to rat)

What's the verdict, my red-eyed jury?

(To himself, his smile fading)

Even these rats know I'm in for more time than they are!



THE RABBI

It's hard to believe, Luke. For the past eight years, most of the time, I've been living in prisons.

(Reminded)

And time is running short! We've got to finish that letter to Timothy!

Is your stylus sharpened, Luke?

(Picking up the wooden plate)

And please, Doctor, write legibly!

(To the Lord:)

I ask for a scribe and you give me a doctor!

(Sighing, suddenly deeply moved)

O Timothy, my son! My son, Timothy! How I wish you were here! You have been *like* a son to me in all my trials! How little time there is, and so much to write you!

(Swallowing to speak)

Luke, I have no one like him. Selfless, full of concern and loyalty . . . but he's so young! And timid! The false teachers and the troublemakers in Ephesus are violent men. Alexander the coppersmith will make a stew pot out of him!

Hashem,* Rabbono shel olam,* if I die this morning, is *this* how I must leave all the congregations you gave me during my ministry as an apostle in Ephesus? To a soft-spoken Jewish man not even thirty-five years old! Timothy! My successor!

*Hashem—literally "the Name," a euphemism for God.

*Rabbono shel olam—Sovereign of the World, Lord Almighty

PAUL THE APOSTLE

SCENE TWO

(Listening, alarmed)

Who's that coming down the stairs, Luke?

(Moving to stand under the hole in the ceiling)

Demas! You made it!

Baruch ha-shem!*

Did you get to speak to the brothers in Caesar's household?

Yes, Linus too! And Eubulus! Wonderful! What did Pudens and Claudia say?

(Startled) What?

Nero is toying with *what?*

Executing me on the grounds . . . that *I'm* not a Jew? The chasid of all chasidim*—*I'm* not a Jew!

(Suddenly struck with a fit of laughter, then becoming angry)

Rats! Rats! Rats! So *that's* what the god of this world is sharpening his teeth on! Charging me with the crime of inventing an illegal religion! How charming! A foreign superstition! Distinct from Judaism! Without its legal protection by the Roman law! So *that's* what Nero is toying with! He knows I can't be made a scapegoat like Simon Peter. I *proved* I was not *in* Rome last

*Baruch ha-shem—literally "Praise the Name," praise the Lord.

*chasid of all chasidim—the pious one of all pious ones

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summer at the time of his little fire. Wouldn't he love to crucify *me* upside-down! But I, Saul, have a Roman name, Paulus, Paul and civis Romanus sum. *I am a Roman citizen!* (Pause)

(Sitting on the bench)

And old Cephas, Simon Peter bar Jonah, was just an old fisher Jew from Galilee . . . and many of the other believers . . . Nero crucified . . . and burned alive . . . and threw to the wild dogs in the arena . . . (Pause) While he acted like some great, blind Homer, reciting his poetry to the tune of his lyre, declaring his poems will live forever. I doubt if they will live till Passover!

But Nero is the lord of his own life and Caesar is the lord of this evil world.

He's had his belly full of me! Who do I think I am—a skinny little rabbi running all over *his* Roman Empire proclaiming that someone greater than Nero is Lord of the world, the Jewish Messiah!

(Moving to the ceiling hole)

Luke, he probably breaks a lyre string every time he thinks about me! He granted me clemency during my first trial! That was two years ago when he said he'd never heard of me . . . but I sensed the demon in him knew me well!

Now the Devil has put me in prison again to test me. Shema Israel Ahdohnoi Eloheynoo Ahdohnoi Echad. Hear O Israel, the Lord our God is one. . . . And we shall love him with all our being.



THE RABBI

Nero, tell us: Are you the Beast, the false Messiah from hell, who will kill millions of my Jewish people at the time of Jacob's trouble, or are we Jews to expect another?

Luke, what do you think?

(Pause) No, that's right, Nero can't be the false Messiah. The prophet Dahnee-yel did say the false Messiah would defile the Temple in Jerusalem, and fat Nero is too lazy to make the trip!

So now he's toying with the idea of saying I'm not a Jew. Mozel tov!* "Rabbi" Nero thinks he has found an excuse to circumcise my head! I suppose he will put it on a platter with that other non-Jew, Yochannan ha-maht-beel, John the baptizer! When that proud liar Satan lies, he loves to lie big! And all the little Neroes of this world believe him in their pride!

Our blind hearts tell us we are gods, Luke. But our bowels speak more truthfully: We are fallen, evil-smelling clay! Nero, I have no weapon of this world to fight you. My only sword is the Word of God! But *he* will conquer you, you grasshopper, and you will have the burial of a donkey!

(Sitting on the stone bench)

But what do I do, Lord; how do I win this battle? I've got to decide. Do I use these last precious minutes thinking how to defend my own life before Nero at the trial this morning? Or thinking how to defend the believers who are and will

*mozel tov—good luck

PAUL THE APOSTLE

be endangered by this Beast? If Peter or James had not been martyred, how would they advise me now? Luke, everyone's gone, even my family! What would my mother say to me now? My dear Jewish mother. She would call me by my Jewish name as she did when I was a boy and say, "What were you—Saul of Tarsus—the Pharisee of all Pharisees, the chasid of all chasidim, the Hebrew of all Hebrews, the rabbi of all rabbis, *doing* getting mixed up with a roly-poly band of countrified Galileans and—worse yet—unkosher Gentiles." (Oi vay!) My dear mother would have jumped out of her grave to think that such a thing could happen to a nice Jewish boy at the feet of Gam'liel! And my father! My Jewish father! He paid the great Rabbi Gam'liel, successor to the immortal Hillel, to make *me* a rabbi!

(Standing)

My father would have demanded a refund! I can hear him now! "Gam'liel, Sham'liel! I sent him down a Jew, he sends me back a goy!* Such a bargain!"

(Sitting down)

Luke, now my only Father is in heaven. And my only counselor is his Word and his Spirit. Nearly all my disciples are deserting me. With death closing in on me, everyone fears for his own life.

Now I am avoided as a disease, by the very ones who used to admire me, those chasidim with the koh-hain ha-gah-dohl, the high priest, who has

*goy—gentile

THE RABBI

forced me to live apart, as unclean, a *meen*,* a *meshumed*,* a traitor to my people, the supreme apostate, they say, of Judaism.

So here I sit, like an owl among the ruins of a long, hard ministry.

(Rising, moving to the hole)

SCENE THREE

Demas! Luke! What should I do? Work on my defense speech? And try to win the praises of men? Or of God? How shall I win the praises—*ha y'hoo-dim**—the Jews of men! From the world's point of view, I am a fool! I want you men to know, I could have been a sought-after rabbi, a *talmeed chah-chahm*,* happily married, the father of numerous doting children, the head of my rich father's tentmaking firm in Tarsus! Praised by everyone! As my enemies want so badly to be! And many so-called believers, too!

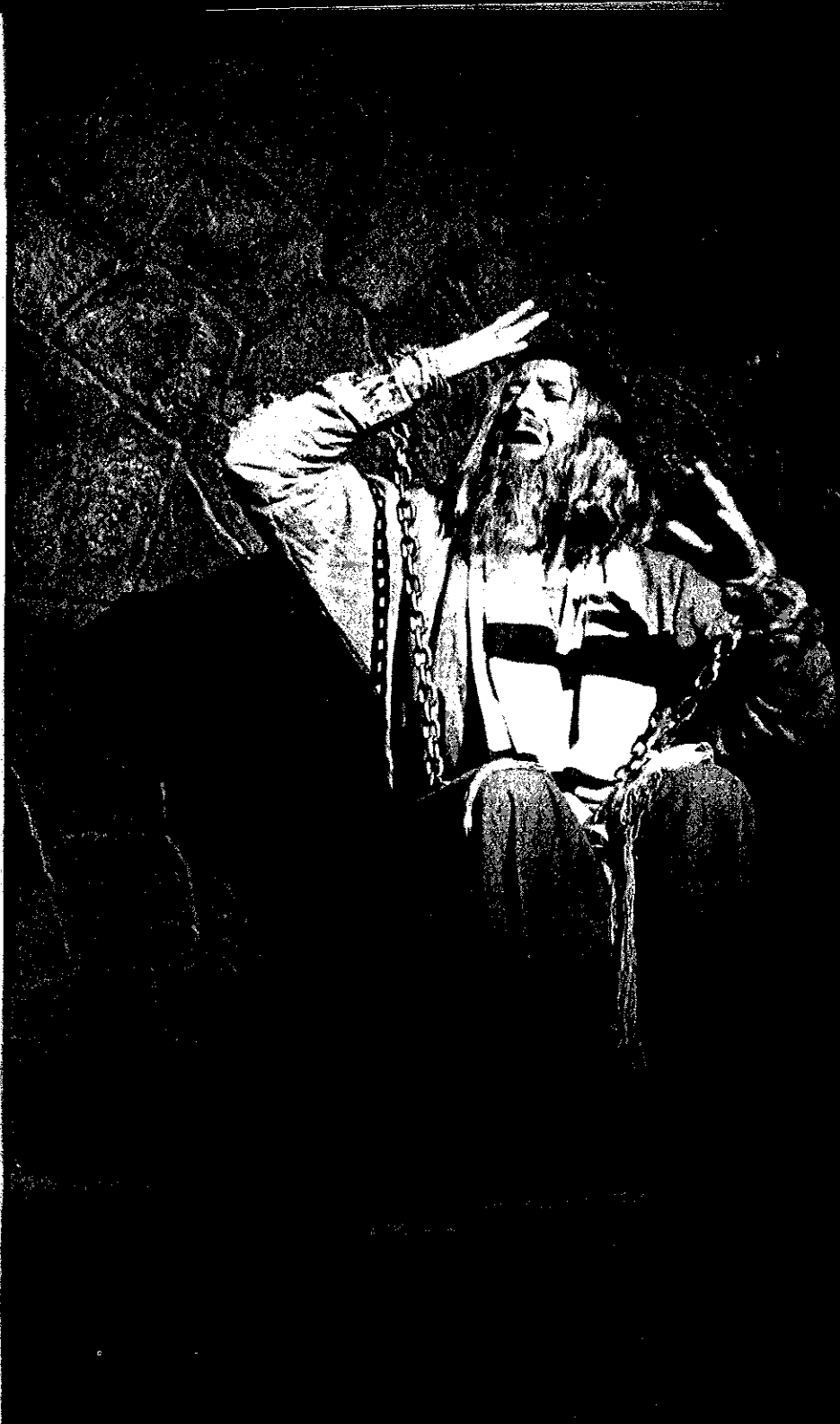
Instead, what kind of life have I known? Demas, I want you especially to listen to me now, because the Lord wants to use you and Luke, but you do not know my manner of life. Demas, I want you to go warn the congregation here in

**meen*—heretic

**meshumed*—apostate

**ha y'hoo-dim*—from Judah, meaning praise or thank, a pun based on Genesis 29:35 and Romans 2:29

**talmeed chah-chahm*—man learned in the Torah



THE RABBI

Rome, because they don't either! Some of them love the praise of men, and are becoming arrogant, especially toward my people Israel. They must be exhorted: Ha-Yeshua min ha-yuh-hoo-deem hee, salvation is from the Jews! They must understand! Why have I suffered all my life? For the sake of God's chosen! But some of these Roman congregants think they are so spiritually rich and superior! Some of them are poor and blind and won't lift a finger to help my people.

They have forgotten that the godly people must *fight* to serve the Lord and his people in an evil world. Demas, will you promise me you will exhort the Roman congregation to help my people Israel? All right—now listen, Demas, because you weren't with us. In all my thirty years of ministry, I never tried to win the praise of men. I've been imprisoned many times. I've been flogged often, and severely. I've been exposed to death again and again. Five times my preaching in the synagogues cost me the forty lashes minus one from my own people. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, four times I was shipwrecked. I spent a night and a day in the open sea.

I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own people, in danger from Gentiles, in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea, and in danger from false believers.

(Picking up his tentmaker's needle)

PAUL THE APOSTLE

I have labored and toiled with my tentmaker's needle, a weaver of tents, paying my own way, being a burden to no one, often going without sleep. I have known hunger and thirst and have gone without food; even now it is winter and I am without a warm cloak. Besides everything else, I face daily, the pressure of the tsuris* of all the congregations I have helped establish throughout the world.

And what has all this gotten me? The praises of men? Some praise I get from many of the so-called "believers" sitting daintily now in the very congregations I risked my neck to establish.

(Sitting on the box)

They say I'm nothing but a weakling, an arrogant writer but a yes-man in person; they say I do suspicious things with my hands (like earn a living!). They say I take no money because I'm not worth any! It's true! I'm a real road bandit! I rob whole congregations of the privilege of paying me a salary! *Forgive me!*

(Laughing, standing, then sitting again)

These heroes of criticism have more! They say my preaching is useless, my personal charisma is nonexistent. I change my mind impulsively. They say that I'm not Jewish enough when I should be more Jewish, but, on the other hand, I'm altogether too Jewish when it's not called for(?)

*tsuris—trouble

THE RABBI

They say I will die and my name will perish, my message will get nowhere, I'm spiteful, money-hungry, carnal, meshuggah* and crazy.

Luke, other than that, they have the highest admiration for me!

So what do I do? I've got to make a decision.
(Listening)

(Pause) Yes, Luke, I knew you were going to say that: Yes, spend time working on my defense before Nero because it's my last opportunity and, besides John, I'm the only living apostle. But, what does the Lord say? Seek first the kingdom of God and *his* interests, not the interests of self, and what is the promise? We will be taken before kings and governors on account of God, but *God* will give us the words to say!

(Rising, pacing excitedly)

Men, I've got it! I've got it! I've got it! I've made a decision and the *Lord* is giving me a plan . . . to protect the *brethren*! A narrative must be written, a history! My legal brief before Nero must be baptized into a theological apologetic, a defense of the faith to protect the Lord's people all over the world . . . until he comes! Also, Demas, I want to share with both of you the Lord's world strategy. You two will continue it for me if I'm executed.

(Pause. Moving to the ceiling hole)

He what? He slipped out?
Demas left?

*meshuggah—mad

PAUL THE APOSTLE

When?

After the third beating with rods? He *left*? What for? When is he coming back?

But I wasn't finished yet! Nobody listens to us! Nobody cares if the world goes to hell! We're losing our strategic thrust around the world. You men may have to take over my work, and he can't even sit still long enough to *listen* to it, much less *do* it! You mean all that time I was wasting my breath? (*Sigh*)

(Dropping to the floor, picking up bowls to put them in the basket)

Luke, I want him to hear about the Lord's work, what the Lord has been showing me, how the people of God must be gathered all over the world and if possible, protected against Nero and false teachers, and warned about the false Messiah who's coming!

Look on the floor, Luke. I guess you'll have to write it: the life of the Messiah and the acts of the Holy Spirit! I'll explain . . . let this be the world . . . in bondage to deep darkness and evil.

(Placing basket to his right)

Here's Israel and her King the Messiah, the light of the world. Here's where I spread the light, establishing congregations . . .

(Laying plates and objects down for places on the "map")

in Galatia, Macedonia, Greece, Asia Minor. Here's the light shining from Israel to Rome.

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But now the Prince of Darkness is coming, who hates the light and the Jews. He will try to make it illegal for us Jews even to live! Even to be called Jews!

(Rising, pacing)

Luke, here's my plan! The Lord wants you to write a narrative (there's no time for me to write it) . . . a story—however the Spirit of God leads you. Start with the life of the Messiah. Show how he was a loyal Jew falsely accused of being a revolutionary and a subversive against the Roman government, who killed him. Then tell how the movement began . . . strictly Jewish . . . and how it spread . . . from the Temple . . . (and indirectly from my persecutions as I drove the believers out of Israel).

Luke, this is important: There is a talmudic saying, "Even a Jew who sins is still a Jew." So explain how—from anyone's estimate—both before and after I came to faith I was still a Jew—taking increasingly dangerous trips to Jerusalem to prove, even if the proof cost me my life, that I was still in fact a Temple-attending, synagogue-preaching, Israel-loyal rabbi who never taught our people not to keep our customs!

Show that wherever I as a rabbi preached, the Gentiles turned from idolatry, and only the unbelievers caused trouble . . . like they did when they tried to kill me in Ephesus because of the shemah,* saying, *(Paul affects a "country" accent)*

*shemah—"Hear, O Israel . . ." (the confession of Deut. 6:4)



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"This rabbi is bad for the idol-making business!"

But Luke, you record the historical truth, that whenever I went before a Roman leader in government (whether it was Sergio Paulus in Cyprus, or the magistrates in Philippi, or Galleo in Corinth, or Governors Felix or Festus in Caesarea, or even King Agrippa in Israel) whenever I went before a government leader, I was regarded as a Jew and my religion as Jewish *and legal*. So if Nero is toying with the idea of killing me because I'm no longer a Jew, he is toying with a lie from hell! Who is a bigger liar than the man who says one cannot be a Jew if he believes in the Messiah?

What does one have to *do* to *become* a Jew, by his majesty Nero's definition? Reject Nero's rival, the Messiah, as the true Lord of the world, of course!

If *that's* the definition of the word "Jew" then I, Saul of Tarsus, was more Jewish than anybody!

Who ever rejected the carpenter from Nazareth more than the tentmaker from Tarsus?

Does anyone honestly think that I don't know all the high priest's arguments? All the reasons he's giving Nero not to protect me because my religion isn't Jewish! I invented most of those reasons myself to prove the followers of the Nazarene weren't really Jewish. Luke, who do you suppose was the high priest's chief prosecutor of these Jews? You're looking at him.

Are you taking notes, Luke?

PAUL THE APOSTLE

SCENE FOUR

(Sitting on the box, growing increasingly sleepy)

Now Stephen, as you know, was a rabbi because he had a following. He also became an apostle. (He saw the Lord!) Stephen was an early leader and so-called wonder-worker of the sect (I thought it was a heretical cult). Put in the narrative that they were not called Christianoi, Christians, until much later, and that by ignorant outsiders, who counted more Greek than Jewish heads in the congregation at Antioch, which is a Roman city with more Gentiles than Jews. But start fifteen years before that when there were no Gentiles in the movement, when I was already a young preaching rabbi, endeavoring to make a name for myself at the Synagogue of the Freedmen! I preached about the Messiah, that he would be the Holy One and that he would bring peace to Israel and the nations! But not like these followers of the Nazarene! They were proclaiming a crucified dead man to be the Messiah! And they tried to prove that he was alive at the right hand of God by the eyewitness testimony of five hundred of his former followers, who claimed to have seen him alive from the dead. But an "ahm ha-aretz" witness? People of the land?

Many of these so-called "eyewitnesses" I saw as country yokels, unschooled ignoramuses. Ignoramusi? Luke, what's the Latin plural of ignoramus? What do you mean, "How should you know?" This is Rome! And what's a doctor

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without Latin! Anyway, the Torah says that any man who is hanged on a tree is accursed by God, damned by God, cut off. But the Mashiach,* blessed be he, the Messiah, was to be the Holy One from God. And how could the Holy One of Israel be the Accursed One of Golgotha?† It was a contradiction in terms; it was foolishness to me.

As a chasid, a Pharisee, I perceived this movement as a dangerously growing cult enticing ignorant Jews away from Judaism.

(Rising, moving down to the stone bench)

So one day, Luke, I confronted Stephen in front of the Synagogue of the Freedmen.

I said, Stephen, you are no longer a Jew! You are destroying many of our people, leading them to believe in a false god—an idol you have shaped in the form of man!

He called me by my Hebrew name. He said, "Saul, God has proven the Messiah is the divine Word he sent."

How?

"By raising him from the dead."

Stephen, I am a Jew. I believe in only one God!

"The Father and his divine Word are one, echad. There is but one God who has but one Word, who became the Messiah."

Mashiach—anointed one, the King, the Messiah, the Christ.
*Golgotha—Calvary



T H E R A B B I

Now be reasonable, Stephen. Can anything good come out of Galilee? Who *was* this nobody from Nazareth? He was a know-nothing, a law-breaker! He broke the Torah by driving demons into innocent pigs!

"Saul, have you ever met an innocent pig?"

Stephen, have you no compassion for animals?

"I have more for a crucified Messiah who loved me!"

This Nazarene was a mamzer* who worked his magic by occult powers! •

"Saul, he said he did only what he saw his Father doing, and only in the power of the Ruach Ha-Kodesh, the Holy Spirit!"

He was a Samaritan with a deviant Judaism that is no Judaism at all!

"Saul, he came to bring what Judaism promised—the bodily resurrection of the dead!"

Then why isn't everyone raised bodily from the dead?

"Because those who hear and believe must first be raised spiritually from death to life."

(Pause—Paul moves to the ceiling hole)

(Luke, I was totally blind to what he was talking about. I was speaking only about external religion.)

(Back to Stephen:)

*mamzer—bastard

PAUL THE APOSTLE

Answer this, Stephen. If this Nazarene is the Prince of Peace, then where is the yah-meem shel Mashiach, the days of the Messiah, with all the world peace the prophets said the Messiah would bring?

"Saul, he did not promise peace to a world that rejects him!"

Just where is he, anyway? The prophets said he's supposed to be sitting on David's throne! I don't see him!

"That's because you're blind to the Kingdom of God! And to the Word of God, who is King and will one day be your judge. Where's your faith, rabbi?"

(Crossing to the stone bench)

My faith is in the law of Moses! Toraht Moshe Torah min Ha-shah-mah-yeem. The law of Moses is the Torah from heaven!

"But, Saul, in the law of Moses, what does the Word of God demand? What's the legal penalty of justice so that no evil goes unpunished?"

Death, of course. You know that, Stephen. It is the curse of transgressing the law.

"Correct, Saul. And when the word of God who came in the law of Moses finally came in the Messiah, what did he offer as justice and mercy for all transgressors? His death, Saul, of course! He turned aside his Father's holy fury against all our ungodliness. He took the penalty of death *for* us. When he said, "My God, why have you abandoned me?" he was God's right-

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eous Word taking our curse of abandonment from God—the curse of hell—upon himself to rescue us from the punishment we all deserve. He did this so that all who believe can be raised to a new spiritual existence with him.”

(Sitting on the stone bench)

Stephen, you are talking like a Greek philosopher!

“I am talking like Moses, King David, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, who all said the same thing! We must be cut free and raised up from the downward pull of evil by an inward circumcision of the Holy Spirit!”

(Standing)

Your Messiah is a Haman! You’ve taken a man and turned him into an accursed male idol! Stephen, I have a question for you! Did the prophet say, “Whoever calls on the name of a male idol will be saved from God’s judgment?” No, he said, “Whoever calls on the name of the Lord!” Jews do not worship men! You are no longer a Jew!

(Pause. Sitting triumphantly)

“Saul, we Jews worship God through his Word which is the way to God! And his Word became the Messiah who is the way to God!”

(Jumping up, grabbing the tent needle)

(Screaming) He was the devil! In the pride of his heart, this devil has said, “I am a god and will sit

PAUL THE APOSTLE

on the throne of a god!" But this Nazarene was a blaspheming man and not a god, and if I had it in my power, I myself would have driven my tent needles into his hands and feet!

"He was wounded for our transgressions, Saul."

That prophecy is talking about Israel!

"Can Israel die for Israel, Saul? Every man must die for his own sins!"

That's right, Stephen. *I* must die for me! Not some mediator! No mere man can die for another man!

"But he was no mere man, Saul! The prophet said, "Unto us a son is born and his name shall be called Mighty God, in Hebrew, El Gee-bor!"

You're interpreting Isaiah literally!

"Because the Messiah was literally seen alive from the tomb!"

His disciples stole the body!

(Stephen begins to speak very rapidly which crescendoes in Saul's scream at the end of this speech)

"Saul, he fulfilled what was foretold about him in the law and the prophets. He was born in Bethlehem, as was predicted, of the tribe of Judah, of the house of David, as was predicted. He healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, gave sight to the blind, as was predicted. He was betrayed by a friend, sold for thirty pieces of silver, pierced in his hands and feet, yet his body

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did not decay, as was predicted! Prophecy after prophecy he fulfilled—”

(Screaming, his fingers in his ears)

So he got lucky, now shut up Stephen! Shekit,* Stephen!

S C E N E F I V E

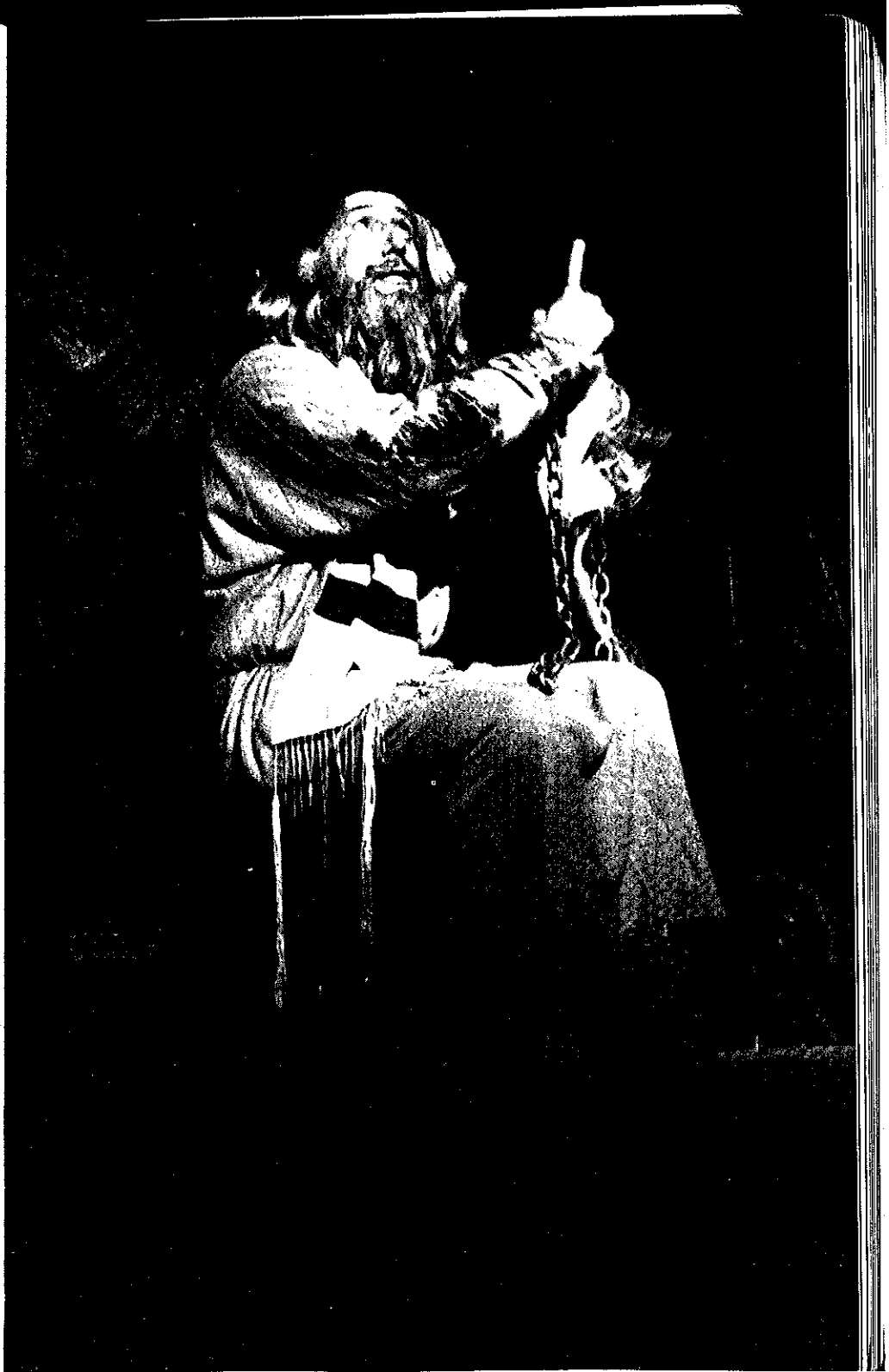
(Quietly, to Luke:)

Luke, no mere man could ever change me.

My rabbi who ordained me as a rabbi, Rabban Gam'liel, tried to reason with me: "Saul, leave these Jewish men alone! If their activity is of human origin it will utterly fail, like the followings of so many false messiahs. But, if it is from God, you, Saul, will not be able to stop these Jews; you will only find yourself fighting against God!"

I disagreed with my rabbi, and I was ready for a fight! They were gaining an enormous number of adherents! In fact, there were more of them than us; there were only six thousand Pharisees. *We* were the Jews of the strictly orthodox persuasion, and I was sure that we were right and they were wrong, these messianic Jews, these Jews who proclaim the Messiah. Now this was no small matter, because the law of Moses commands that if any Jew tries to entice another Jew

*Shekit—shut up



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to worship another god other than the God of Israel, that person must be stoned; he must be put to death. For he is worse than one who destroys Jewish bodies, he destroys Jewish souls by leading them away from the true God and into hell.

All this happened shortly before Stephen was arrested and put on trial for heresy before the Supreme Court of Israel. I can still see him, standing there before the Sanhedrin, with what appeared to me at the time to be the most brazen defiance and disrespect I had ever witnessed. Immediately, Stephen stood up before the Supreme Court of Israel:

*(Stepping out toward the audience,
picking up the basket)*

“You who say that I, Stephen, am no longer a Jew, *you* are no more Jews than Herod! Herod has turned the Jewish Temple into a golden calf for you but the Messiah is breaking camp! To lead the true Jews out to the world! To build a house of prayer for all peoples! The God of Israel is on the move! But you’re fighting God! Like our fathers fought Joseph! Even though God wanted to use him! To be a worthy vessel to feed bread to the whole world! But our fathers tried to kill him like they almost stoned Moses.

“Do you think God wants to languish here with you and your religious pageantry?

“Do you think Israel is the only nation God loves? It’s time to disciple the Gentiles! But all you know is religion! You know nothing about God’s suffering love for the world!

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“Six hundred years ago, Jeremiah stood where I’m standing and prophesied against our fathers and their Temple. They tried to kill him as you are trying to kill me! But God fulfilled his word and that Temple was destroyed!

“You blind guides! Hypocrites! You are trying to ignore the Messiah’s sacrifice and go on with the business of religion as usual! But I have a word from the Lord for you! Your temple, your priesthood, your sacrifices are on the way out! But the body of God’s sacrifice and priest, the Messiah, the temple of his Spirit, although it has been torn down by men, has already been raised up forever by the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

“Now the isles are waiting for his torah, his teaching! We Jews have been given a new commission: And it is later than we think! The new Adam of the new humanity of the new age is already bodily alive! The new wine of the Holy Spirit, which Moses and Joshua tasted, is already being poured out on the whole world! We are a nation of priests! And God is commanding us to proclaim the Good News to all the nations!

“But you, you are totally blind, mere religious functionaries, devoid of the Spirit. You Sadducees! You love to call King David and Daniel liars by denying the resurrection! You love to say, ‘When you’re dead, you’re dead!’ You Sadducees should know, you’ve been dead for generations!

“And you Pharisees, who love to nullify the Word of God with your oral traditions! You

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think even God doesn't know as much about religion as you do!

"You are all leading our people to destruction!

"If you defy these words, which are not mine but God's given long ago by his holy prophets and today by his holy apostles, you are unregenerate goyim, heathen at heart, pagan hypocrites, masquerading as Jews, and you will be thrown headlong into the lake of fire because you always resist God's Word and kill his holy messengers!"

(Paul cuts Stephen off with a muted scream)

Aaaaiiiii! We wanted to beat Stephen's brains out! As one man we leaped from our seats and we dragged him out of the Sanhedrin and through the streets of Jerusalem and tossed him as a blood-splattered mass of wounds into a stone pit.

(Paul panting, exhausted)

And don't say I experienced a pang of guilt as he cried out, "I see the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God! Lord, do not hold this sin against them!"

At that moment I felt no compassion! I wouldn't have cared if he had sprouted angel wings and started to fly! I wanted him dead!

(Listening to Luke)

Why, Luke? How can you say, why? Because one of us was dead wrong and I was sure it wasn't going to be me! I was certain his idola-



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trous heresy was corrupting thousands of Jews in Israel! And if *we* didn't punish him, I believed God would punish *us all* with the punishment God planned for these heretics! You see, Luke, a Jewish religious teacher proclaiming a man as the Son of God was either a heretic to be stoned or a prophet to be believed!

There is no middle ground in the law of Moses, only in human philosophy. But I have never claimed to be a philosopher, Luke, only a Jew and a rabbi, faithful to Moses.

I saw it as my solemn Jewish duty to go to Caiapha, the Kohain Ha-gah-dohl, the high priest. I received permission to organize, as his informal prosecutor of these messianic Jews, a corps of rabbis and Temple guards. They went with me to disrupt their messianic synagogue services and house meetings to teach them a lesson against heresy they wouldn't forget. There were too many of them to stone them all, but I was sure we could at least frighten them into their senses. For this purpose, I procured an ugly-looking whip that could cut through human flesh like a knife. Through certain infiltrating spies and informants, we were alerted every week of their secret meeting places so that we could burst in upon them by surprise, smash up their homes, lash at their screaming women and children, beat their men half to death, knocking out teeth, ripping off clothes, kicking in their faces till the blood poured, throwing them into the Temple prison until they decided whether they wanted to recant

*messianic Jews—Jews who believe Jesus is the Messiah.

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their blasphemous heresy or join Stephen at the stoning pit. That's how it came about that I, Saul of Tarsus, the Pharisee, the chasid, became the angel of death to these messianic Jews.* Put that in your narrative.

SCENE SIX

I'll never forget this one beautiful Jewish girl we arrested. (This is not for the record.) She had long, lovely black hair and the softest eyes. But what infuriated me was that, when we burst into her house, tearing up the furniture, instead of screaming like the other women, she was staring right at me, and calmly talking to someone. There was so much noise in the room, I had to press close to her face to hear what she was saying, you understand. (Oi! She was praying for my soul in the name of this dead Nazarene!) I was filled with rage to see her beautiful Jewish mind poisoned like the rest. I shook her to make her blaspheme his name and shouted, "Yeshua chey-rem ah-lay-chah*—say it!" She prayed louder, defying me! Suddenly the room became deathly still while everyone paused from tearing up the furniture to listen to this beautiful Jewish girl praying at the top of her lungs for the Nazarene to save my soul. I was embarrassed beyond words. I shook her with all my strength, "Yeshua chey-rem ah-lay-chah! Yeshua chey-rem ah-lay-chah!" She began to sob loudly and

*Yeshua chey-rem ah-lay-chah---Yeshua (Jesus) be accursed (out-cast, excommunicated)

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someone dragged her off to be locked up with the others. Luke, *if* I had taken time to take a wife, as my rich father was insisting, since I was an ordained rabbi headed for membership in the Sanhedrin, and Luke, *if* she and I had met under different circumstances, I could have allowed myself to feel an attraction for her, but... I never saw her again.

But, Luke, I want it understood that I felt no guilt. Just regret that these poor deluded people were straying from the truth of the old ways. For it appeared to me their Jewish faith was being destroyed, despite my militant campaign against them.

But be informed about this. I have never been ridden with guilt. I have always served God with a clear conscience and a sincere heart, as my ancestors did, who were rabbis before me. Any errors I made were in ignorance and unbelief.

Recently, it's true, an accusing, condemning thought has come to me with a thorn in the flesh as a messenger of Satan, saying, "Aha! The persecutor is now the persecuted, the executioner is now the victim! What you did to Stephen is now being done to you! For, as it is written, 'Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong and there is no favoritism! Not for Moses, not for David, not for Saul of Tarsus!'"

But, Luke, I walk by faith, not by appearances. By faith I've been taken out of God's condemnation. God is *for* me. Nothing can separate me from his love! Be clear about that.

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What, Luke? That's right! A hopeful thought! I never considered that. Nero hates the Jews so much he may release me just to infuriate my Jewish enemies from Jerusalem!

(Paul collapses on the stone bench, claspng harp to bosom)

But I'm so tired. I've got to fight this... fatigue. Got to finish this letter to Timothy... my only son... in the faith... my heir to finish my work... so far away... *(Weeping quietly)* How I miss you, Timothy, with a sad longing like God has for Israel. Will I never see you again in Ephesus, my son? Or here?... Lift this sorrow from me, Lord. Don't let me fall into bitterness now... I've lost too much... come too far... Where is God, my Maker, who gives songs of deliverance in the night?

(Playing softly while he talk-sings)

It says in the Psalms, God has broken the gates of bronze and cut the bars of iron in two. Bee-d-vahr Ha-shem shah-mah-yeem nah-ah-soo: By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made. Yeesh-lahch d'vahr-roh v'yeer-pah-aim vee-mah-late meen ha-keh-vair. God sent his Word and healed them and delivered them from the grave. Therefore you have exalted above all things, your Word, the Messiah. Therefore, I will praise your Word, as the Scriptures say, in the Lord, I will praise your Word:

(Singing in a chasidic mode)

God has broken the gates of bronze and cut the bars of iron in two. God sent his Word Messiah

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and healed them and God delivered them from their doom.

Kee shee-bar dal-toht n'choh-shet, oov-ree-chay vahr-zel gee-day-ah. Yeesh-lach d'vahr-oh v'yeer-pah-aim vee-mahl-late meesh-chee-toh-tahm.

Kee she-bar dal-toht n'choh-shet, oov-ree-chay var-zel gee-day-ah. Yeesh-lach d'vahr-oh v'yeer-pah-aim vee-mahl-late meesh-chee-toh-tahm.

(Music ends, as Paul nods off to sleep)

I must rest... just a moment... Luke... the Lord will soon do amazing things among us.

(The stage goes black. If there is an intermission, it occurs here)

END OF ACT ONE

**THE RABBI
FROM TARSUS**

[ACT TWO]

[ACT TWO]

SCENE ONE

PAUL:

(Rousing up and putting the harp down, laughing)

Luke, never become a religious fanatic! Doctors are hard enough to deal with as it is!

Who were you talking to just now?

What did the guard want? *(Pause)* I'm terribly sorry I'm making too much noise. Let him go sharpen his sword! There's nothing worse than being hit on the neck with a dull sword!

(Pulling at his hair)

They won't even let me have a knife down here to cut my hair. I look like Samson, without the muscles.

(Scratching)

I'd give anything for one warm bath. I'm reminded of that couple we spoke to in Philippi, Luke. Do you remember? They both had leprosy and she was blind. They were beggars,

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sitting on a dung hill by the city gate. Remember, they seemed anxious to meet us until they found out we had no money. Then the man became preoccupied with himself; he was pulling off these horrible pieces of skin from under his rags, rolling them up into neat little balls, examining them with the greatest interest, then tossing them carelessly over his shoulder. You said, "Excuse me, I'm Dr. Luke. I'd like you to meet (*affecting a British accent*) 'the Apostle Paul.' That's how you said it—'the Apostle Paul!'"

"I haven't got time. Leave me alone. I'm working on something."

(Paul is mimicking the leper as he peels off and rolls up a piece of skin)

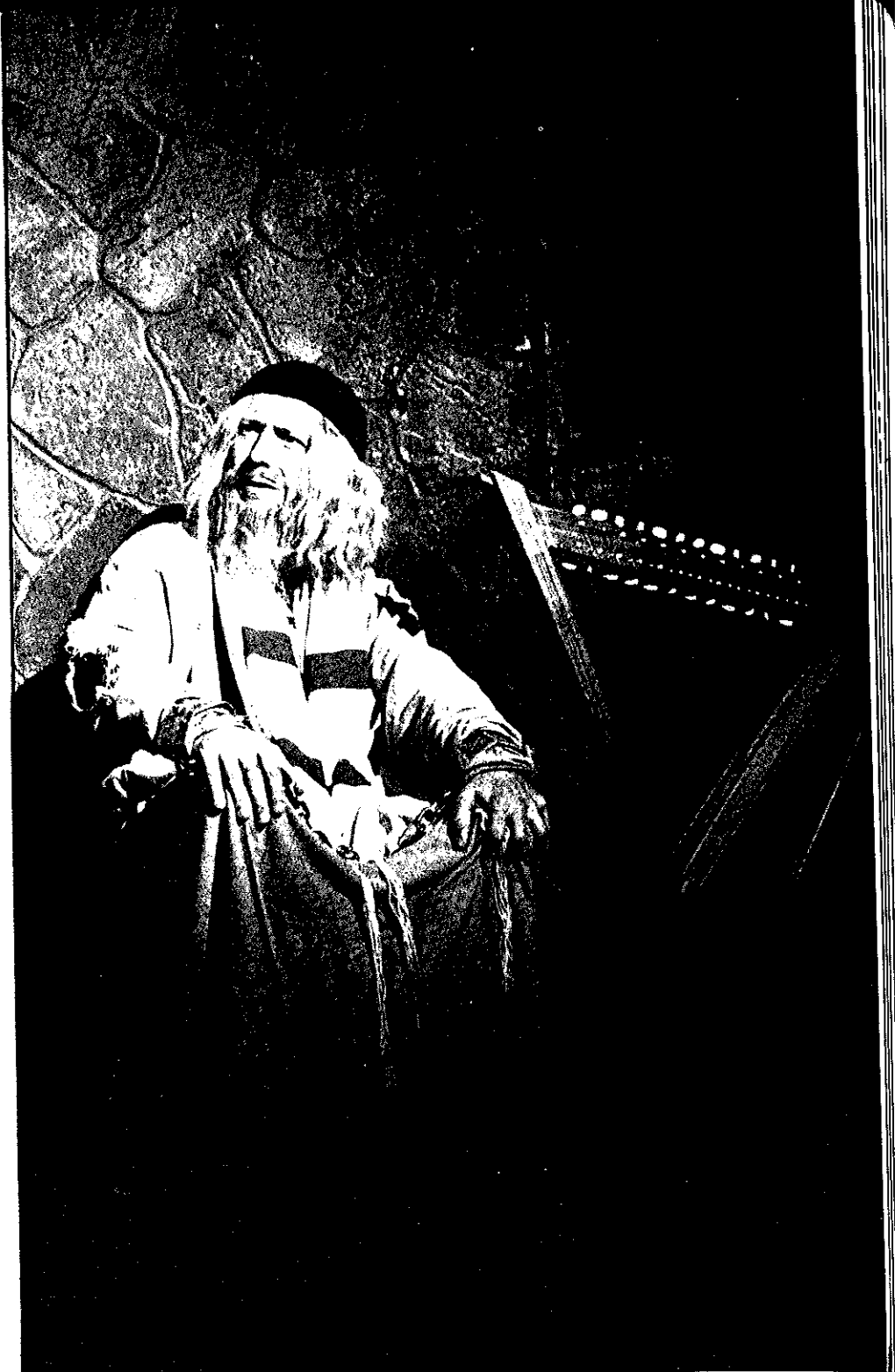
"We see that!" (Do you remember Luke, we were watching with fascination the arc of each piece of—what shall we call it—debris?—as it sailed through the air.)

You said to him, "We represent the Messiah. We beg you for a moment of your time."

"I don't have time to talk to you right now." He looked up from this ball of himself he was examining as though *he* were a busy jeweler looking at a gem and *we* were the beggars begging for his time.

(Standing)

Luke, you said, "But, sir, are you really *that* busy? You're here all day as a beggar and a leper. Mind you, we are *all* beggars and lepers in the sight of God, since everything—even life itself—is a gift and we all need to be cleansed from



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evil. So why spend all your time picking at yourself? Won't you let us help you?"

(Sitting on the stone bench)

"I don't *need* religion!"

Luke, you became exasperated. "We're not talking about mere religion, we're talking about righteousness. It's a *gift*. You're a beggar. Take it! You're a leper. Don't you *want* to be cleansed?"

"I'm a good person. Who did I ever hurt? I never hurt anyone in my life!" (And with that, he threw a ball of himself over his shoulder and it landed on the top of his blind wife's head.)

Finally our hearts went out to this sweet little old lady with the pile of her husband's debris on the top of her head. You went to her, Luke, and you said, "We realize you're blind, ma'am, but if you'll let us lead you, we'll take you to where the Apostle Paul teaches at Lydia's house. I'm Doctor Luke. This is the Apostle Paul. How about it? How would you like to attend a gathering for the study of the Torah?"

"How would you like me to spit in your eye, creep?"

(Paul laughs)

Do you remember that, Luke? I've never seen you at such a loss for words! Whenever I feel sad, I think about the expression on your face and get happy all over again! *(Paul laughs)* You might have said what our prophets have declared, "All our *own* tsidacah, righteousness, is

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like leprosy rags; but God's people will be credited with *God's* righteousness because they live by faith, by loving, loyal, sacrificial trust in God."

(Paul rises)

Luke, that was fifteen years ago. I wonder if that couple ever woke up.

That was my problem, Luke. I needed to wake up to what time it was. It was later than I thought.

(Looking up into the ceiling hole)

Now some of this you know, some you don't. But make one thing clear in your apologetic, whether Nero or any of my other critics understands it or not: I did not change my religion! I changed my time reference and God changed my heart.

But, wait, my critics say. Who *cares* about your heart, Paul? Or your life? Other rabbis have been defrocked, other Jews excommunicated. Of what moment, Paul, is your incessant teaching, your endless sermons? What great battle rages in the trial of my life? What *is* at stake, Luke? What *am* I fighting for? Only the salvation of Israel and the world—nothing more.

And if the issue of this conflict is of no import, where *is* there any weighty drama? "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die." And if what I attest about the Nazarene is not truth, then we, his suffering servants, are of all men most tragically, pitifully naive, and the hope of Israel is dead.

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SCENE TWO

But here is what happened. I had received reliable information that there was a stubborn nest of these Jewish heretics in the synagogues of Damascus. I went to the High Priest Caiapha and obtained from him general letters of extradition, so that if I found any of this messianic sect in Damascus, whether Jewish men or women, I could arrest them and bring them back as prisoners to Jerusalem.

The journey from Jerusalem took us six days on horseback. The other Jerusalem rabbis and the Temple guards and I had just crossed the desert from Galilee. We were approaching Damascus. It was about noon. (*Pause*) The sun was high in a clear blue sky, as clear as heaven. Then, suddenly my ears were filled with a sound like a mighty rushing wind . . . and then . . . a second sun up in the sky blasted down on us from nowhere, lighting up everything like a consuming fire.

At first, I couldn't fathom what my eyes were showing me. I was seeing what Mary Magdalene and Peter and five hundred others had seen three years before. Young as I was, the Devar Adonoi, the Word of the Lord, who came to Moses in the burning bush, was coming toward me, revealing himself to me. In the east, as in the dawn of time, a figure like a man, fire all around him, his eyes sorrowful and dark, his voice like the sound of rushing waters. He spoke to me in the language of the Hebrews: "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting *me*?"

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The glory in his face was brighter than the sun, like the glory of God, blazing around me in heavenly splendor. I had fallen off my horse and was too frightened to move. I said, "Who are you, Lord?" And in the language of the Hebrews, the voice came from out of the fire: "I am Yeshua of Nazareth: I am sending you as a light, my light to the Gentiles. *(Pause)* Yah-chrah-doh-noi pah-nahv ee-leh-chah vee-choo-neh-chah. The Lord made his face shine upon me and was gracious to me. *(Pause)* The Lord was in his heavenly Temple; let all the earth be silent before him. *(Pause)* I sat overwhelmed, my eyes still in total glare from the excess of light. I found out later that the other rabbis did see something and heard something as well, but were not clear on what it was.

(Moving to sit on the stone bench)

I was led blind by the rabbis and Temple guards into Damascus to the house of Judas, on the street called Straight, where arrangements had already been made for me to lodge the night. Had it literally dawned on me that I was blind to the will of God? Or had I hallucinated? I prayed and fasted for three days, asking God to give me physical and spiritual sight. . . . I remembered how I prayed:

O Lord, have I been missing the true way of biblical Judaism? Have I been leaning on my own understanding? Rather than acknowledging your will? Have I been leaning on my own righteousness rather than receiving your righteous Word the Messiah?

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And this Nazarene, I have heard of him and now my eyes have seen him. Therefore, I abhor what I have done and with deep conviction, teshubah,* turn to you for forgiveness with prayer and fasting. I am a Jew and I am going to die a Jew, but show me the truth, and I'll do it.

(Rising, crossing to the wall)

And, do you know something, Luke, at that exact moment, the Lord answered my prayer. Because there was a man in Damascus, probably the only man I would have listened to, because he was a deeply pious Jew, but he believed in this Messiah. His name was Ananias, and the Lord appeared to him, too, and he too became an apostle when the Lord said:

(Paul stands motionless against the wall)

"Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord."

"I have something I want you to do."

"Oh, yes, Lord. I'm your servant. I'll do anything. What is it that you require?"

"I have someone I want you to go minister to and pray with."

"Gladly, Lord. I'll pray with anyone in Damascus. Who is he?"

"The man named Saul who's come up here to arrest you and kill you."

(“Ananias” swallows hard)

*teshubah—turning, as in repentance



THE RABBI

"Oh, him, Lord. (*Long pause*) Well, Lord, I'm awfully busy. Does that have to be done today?"

"Yes, today."

"Well, Lord. You *know* why he's come here . . . to throw the whole lot of us messianic Jews in prison. He's one of the chasidim. What can I possibly tell him?"

"Ananias."

"Yes, Lord."

"Just tell him I said to evangelize the whole world."

"I beg your pardon."

"Today."

"Today? (*Pause. Suddenly sour:*) The *goyim*? Tell one of . . . the chasidim? . . . to go to the *goyim* . . . today?"

And when Ananias came to me, he gave me the precise message from the Messiah that I had heard on the Damascus road, though I had told no one. The message was, "Go to the Gentiles."

(*Moving to sit on the bench*)

And, you know, Luke, as soon as Ananias placed his hands on me and prayed for my sight, something like scales, little cataract-like tissues, fell from my eyes into my fingers, and I could see. I looked at these two pieces of tissue and I realized that the Yah-moht Ha-mah-she-ach, the age of the Messiah, had begun, the Son of the new heavens and the new earth was already shining, the first man was bodily alive from the

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tomb, and I had received the same Spirit that Joshua, Caleb, Elijah, and all the others had received, the Spirit of the new age. I had been born into a new spiritual existence, I had become a new creation!

Suddenly it was revealed to me what had been hidden in the Scriptures but had been there all along: That in Abraham and the Jews, God intended to bless equally all peoples of the world through faith in the Messiah, through *this* Messiah, alive from the dead.

(Rising)

Now, let me pause to clear up one thing, Luke. For the benefit of the scoffers you must refute. What exactly made me switch . . . not religions, but vocations, from that of persecutor to that of advocate and apostle? What was the problem, Doctor? Are the scoffers right? Was it really a mere cause of sunstroke? Nervous collapse? Hallucination? Guilt catharsis? "What is truth for you, Saul, is not truth for me," they say. "There are natural explanations for everything."

SCENE THREE

(Paul reclines on the stone bench like a man talking to his psychiatrist)

Yes, yes, Doctor. Here is the natural explanation. One day, on the road to Damascus, while I tried to enforce the law of Moses, piously serving my God with all my heart, I—the

THE RABBI

arrestor—was arrested . . . by a naive superstition. Quite naturally, a meteor just *happened* to blaze across the sky. At the very same time, it just *happened* to thunder, so that the *other* rabbis quite naturally did see and hear *something*. At the very same time—clumsy me—I just *happened* to fall off my horse. And at the very same time, I just *happened* to hallucinate with a nightmare vision, complete with face, fire, and voice, that just *happened* to be my enemy, who just *happened* to want me to go to work for him! Among the people who just *happened* to be my enemies—the Gentiles. At the very same time, I just *happened* to have tissues form over both my eyes with a purely accidental case of coincidental cataracts!

(Rising)

Yes, Doctor, there are natural explanations for everything, if one has enough bad blind faith to go his own way. (Many like Nero are lords of their own lives who want to go their own way, even if it may lead to hell.) But, Luke, I had to trust God, and like any other disciple, take a step of faith into the mikveh* waters and into the Damascus synagogue.

(Stepping up on the bench)

There, with my eyes seeing clearly again, and with the mouths of my companions, the other Jerusalem rabbis, falling wide open, I preached a new rabbi's sermon, one that I would preach in synagogues all over the world for the next thirty years.

*mikveh—ceremonial bath, as in baptism



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My Jewish brothers, and you Gentile God-fearers, listen to me. God can make Jews out of anyone, even a Gentile like Ruth, if we have her pilgrim faith. I now have that faith! I tried to curse these Jews who believe in the Nazarene, but God has brought me to a point where I can do nothing but bless them!

(Stepping down)

Brothers, I have good news! The Word that promised life through Moses and the prophets has destroyed death and brought immortality to light through the Messiah! I know! I personally saw the Word alive! This same Word will appear again at the end of this closing age to judge all men. Therefore, turn from this dying world and come eternally alive to the new age already dawning. Join my people Israel who by faith looked for him before he came. Join them by living for him now that he's here. Believe the Good News!

Well, Luke, some of the Jews believed and some didn't. Some of the Gentiles believed and some didn't.

And the other rabbis? Well, some of them tried to kill me. And I understood why, since I would have done the same thing. I know the truth of the saying, "He who has been forgiven of much forgives much."

I can still see myself, being smuggled out of town by the Jewish believers, a young strapping of a rabbi, being lowered like Moses into a basket from a Damascus window in the city wall.

PAUL THE APOSTLE

And since then, Luke, I've been all over the world, but I always went to my Jewish people first.

Why? How can you say why, Luke? Because even though the prophets predicted their unbelief, it was also predicted that their faith would hasten the Messiah's Kingdom.

That's why I risked my life by going to Jerusalem that final time. And that's why I've lived all my life as a loyal Jew, never repudiating my people, my customs, or my heritage, so that the veil that covers the eyes and the hearts of Jew and Gentile alike might be removed, and the new age might dawn on many. That's why I'm in chains, for the hope of Israel, where God will plant his people forever.

Luke, we still have to finish that letter to Timothy, if God will give me the strength.

(Sits on stone bench)

We've got to watch and pray, Luke. The evil one is coming and we must be ready to stand against him.

SCENE FOUR

Who was that I heard on the stairs a while ago?

Why didn't you tell me Demas came back?

(Getting up, moving to the hole)

Did he bring any news?

(Brightening) Wonderful! What was it?

T H E R A B B I

He feels called to Thessalonica?

(Pronounced: Thessaloh-nee-cah)

I sent him to the congregation here in Rome!
Didn't he exhort the brothers to keep trying to
speak to my Jewish people?

Why not?

Why is he running?

For his life?

Why, Luke?

(Long pause) Who told him?

(Urgent) Who told him, Luke?

Claudia. Then it's true.

(Long pause) There's no chance for me?

What about my second trial this morning, Luke?

A mock trial.

Did he hear what charge convicts me? *(Pause)*
What *charge*? Are you falling asleep? The charge,
Luke!

Treason against Nero.

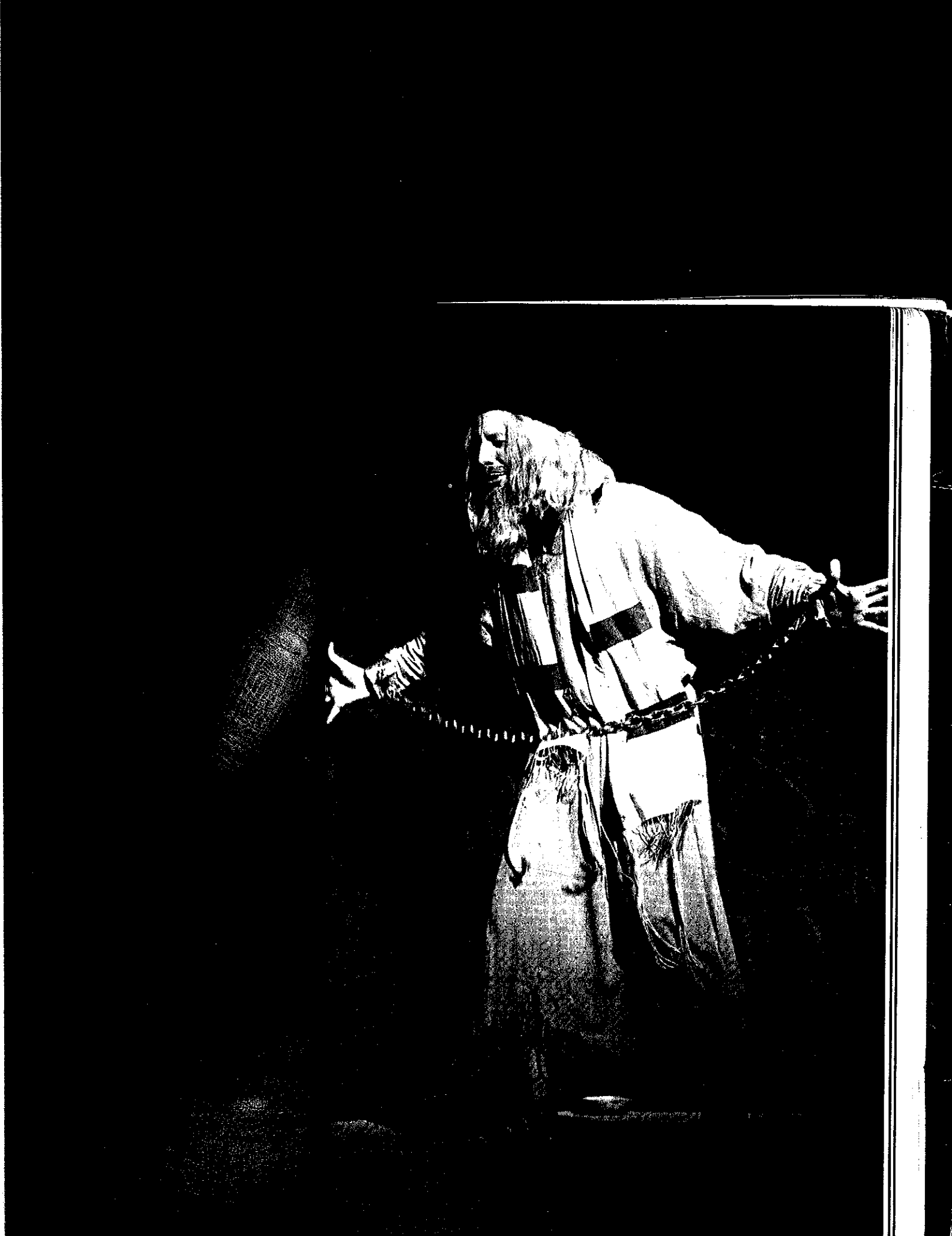
Turning his little world upside down.

Well, at least I'm still a Jew.

*(Paul begins to gather up his things
and put them in a basket, then begins
to weep as he collapses on the floor)*

But who will go, Luke...

Who will go...



T H E R A B B I

Who will go to my Jewish people?

The harvest is past. Summer is ended My people are not saved.

Lord!

Adonoi!*

(Scattering the "cities" on the "map")

Has it all been for nothing?

All my sacrifices!

Is there no healing balm in Gilead for Israel?

(Covering his head with his prayer shawl)

O Lord, I pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

Save your people, Rabbono shel olam.

I could wish I were in hell if that would save them!

(Paul sobs)

Have I spent my life's strength for nothing? A miserable failure!

(Long pause) Luke.

Luke! *(Whispering)* Are you awake?

(Pause) Asleep.

You're not alone, Luke. The whole world is asleep. Wake it up, Lord!

One disciple betrays and deserts me.

*Adonoi—Lord

PAUL THE APOSTLE

One falls asleep on me.

My enemies say, "Where is his Lord now?"

(Paul looks at the bread and picks it up. A faint smile)

I think you saved me my last piece of bread, Lord. Toh-dah rabah. Thank you very much.

Ba-ruch atah adonai elohey-noo meh-lech ha'olam, hamotzi lechem min ha-ah-retz.

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.

For the tradition I handed on to the world came to me from the Lord himself! That the Lord, on the night of his arrest, took bread and, after giving thanks to God, broke it and said: "This is my body, which is for you; do this as a memorial of me."

(Paul breaks the bread and tastes a small piece. He holds up the cup)

Ba-ruch atah adonai eloh-hey-noo meh-lech ha-oh-lahm, boh-ray p'ree hah-gah-fen.

Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who creates the fruit of the vine.

In the same way he took the cup after supper and said: "This is ha-B'reet ha-chah-dah-shah, the New Covenant, sealed by my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this as a memorial of me."

(Paul drinks, and without getting up, he picks up his harp and begins to encourage himself with this talk-sung song, as he strums the strings)

T H E R A B B I

To me to live is the Word of God.
My Messiah is my life.
For I can do anything,
Anything through him who strengthens me.
This one thing I do
Whenever I feel sad
Forget about the past
And all its evil darts
And press on, I press on
With my Messiah.
And suddenly, happily
I receive from him
His love
His joy
And his peace
His patience
Kindness
Goodness
And his faithfulness
His gentleness
Self-control.

(Talking)

O Demas. You're so weak, my son. Running to
a world that's dying, to try to save your life!

PAUL THE APOSTLE

Don't you realize you can't take anything with
you out of this dying world, except the living
Word of God, the Messiah? Oh, Demas . . .

(Singing)

I pray you come to see
The man I came to know
The one who blinded me
So long ago
The scales fell off my eyes
And I was healed of doubt.
A dead man came alive
And I could shout!
I saw his face
Blazing brighter than the sun.
The Son of God I disgraced
My time had come
My time had come
My time had come
I'd been his enemy
He could have killed me then
Instead he mercifully
Forgave my sin
I pray you'd come to see
The man I came to know.

THE RABBI

SCENE FIVE

(Paul puts the harp down)

Satan you are such a liar! I'm not being executed for killing Stephen! God used my sufferings for good to finish Stephen's work, to teach me his obedience, that I might have his honorable departure. And more than that, in suffering I have known something of the suffering love of our God, the God of Israel for his lost world.

(Pulling at his hair)

Lord, I have one last request. Nero is having everything his way right now. But you can destroy his whole empire with five smooth stones! My last request is this: Give me one of those five smooth stones! Let me have one parting shot, one little shot, one final shot at the God of this evil world, Satan.

(Suddenly remembering the lateness)

I wonder what time it is?

Oh, wait!

(Getting up)

The guards will be coming for me soon! I still haven't finished the letter to Timothy, my only son... and to Israel, God's blind, unfaithful wife, spiritually sound asleep. I'm so weak... but down deep inside I feel the Word of God, the Lion of Judah, ready to let out a roar within me that will wake up the whole world. Nero, you have me like a hummingbird in the hands of



T H E R A B B I

a crazed baboon—but when I am most weak, then my God is most strong! Even my defeat he turns into unspeakable victory! I feel the Spirit of the Lord coming on me!

Luke, wake up! Write this down fast!

Timothy, my son, if anyone purifies himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel fit for honorable use, consecrated and useful to the Master of the house.

Therefore, flee from the lusts of youth and follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Avoid foolish and senseless controversies, knowing that they breed strife.

And the servant of the Lord must not quarrel; instead he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, and to bear evil without resentment,

correcting his opponents with gentleness, in the hope that God will give them the grace to turn and acknowledge the truth,

that they may recover themselves out of the trap of Satan, who has taken them captive to do his will.

Now understand this, Timothy: In the latter part of this closing age, there will be *terrible* times.

For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural love, unforgiving, slanderous, drugged—with-

PAUL THE APOSTLE

out self-control, brutal, despisers of the good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,

having a form of religiosity but denying its power: Avoid these people.

There are religious leaders like this who creep into homes and gain control over weak-willed women who are burdened with sins and swayed by various lusts

who are always learning the truth but never acknowledging it by their lives.

Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so do these also resist the truth—men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.

But they will not get very far, because, like the other men, their folly will be obvious to everyone.

But, you, Timothy, you know all about my teaching, my manner of life, my purpose, faith, patience, charity, endurance, my persecutions, sufferings—which came upon me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from them all.

Yes, and all who want to live godly lives in the Messiah will suffer persecution

while evil people shall go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

But, you, Timothy, continue in what you have learned and have been assured of, knowing from whom you learned it.

THE R A B B I

And how from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in the Messiah.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

That the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Timothy, my son, I give you this solemn charge, in the presence of God and our Messiah the Lord, the judge of the living and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom:

Proclaim the Word! Be ready in season, out of season: Correct, rebuke, encourage, with great patience and careful teaching.

For the time will come when people will not put up with sound teaching. Instead, they will accumulate for themselves a great number of teachers to soothe their own lusts and to say what their itching ears want to hear.

They will turn away from listening to the truth and turn aside to myths.

But you, Timothy, always keep your head, endure hardships, continue establishing new congregations worldwide, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

For I am already being poured out in sacrifice to the Lord like a drink offering and the time for my departure has arrived.

(Paul is so weak, he is nearly staggering)



T H E R A B B I

I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

And now there is in store for me, the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall award to me on that day; and not to me only but also to all those who love his appearing.

Timothy, do your best to come quickly.

Because . . . Demas has deserted me. In love with this passing world, he has departed for Thessalonica.

Crescens has gone to Galatia.

Titus to Dalmatia.

Only Luke is with me.

Take Mark and bring him with you, for he is profitable to the ministry.

I sent Tychicus to Ephesus.

Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.

Alexander the coppersmith did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for his evil deeds.

Timothy, you too should be on your guard against Alexander, because he strongly opposed the message.

(Luke, stop the dictation! Seal up the message Alexander opposed: The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through the

PAUL THE APOSTLE

Messiah, our Lord. And this gift has been given even to me, though I am the least of the apostles, because I murdered Jewish believers in the Messiah. But it's by God's unmerited favor that we have been rescued from judgment, through faith—and this is not from ourselves—it is a *gift* from God. Not by good deeds, so that *no one* can boast. If we confess him unashamedly before men as Messiah and receive him as Lord to have first place in our hearts, he will confess us unashamedly before his Father and receive us into heaven. Now, Luke, continue the dictation.)

At my first trial, no one came to my support. All men deserted me. I pray God that it may not be held against them. But the Lord stood by at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the proclamation might be fully known, and all the Gentiles might hear it.

And I was delivered from the mouth of the roaring lion, Satan!

And the Lord shall rescue me from every evil attack and will preserve me to his heavenly kingdom.

Loh ha-kah-vohd . . .

(Luke, you must learn Hebrew.) To him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus stayed at Corinth, but I had to leave Trophimus sick at Miletus.

Do your best to hurry.

T H E R A B B I

Eubulus sends you greetings, and so do Pudens,
Linus, Claudia, and all the brethren.

Luke, who are you talking to?

It's all right, Luke. You can call them what they
are.

(Sighs) So my executioners are here.

(Rolls up scroll)

Luke, see to it that you fulfill your ministry.

Save my letters.

*(Placing the scroll on the bench, stag-
gering, he pulls himself up like a
general standing at attention, though
there are tears in his eyes)*

Tell Timothy I said . . . the Lord be with your
spirit.

And Luke, grace be with you, my friend.

(To the audience:)

And with you.

(Curtain)

ABBREVIATIONS FOR BOOKS OF THE BIBLE

Ge.	Genesis	Na.	Nahum
Ex.	Exodus	Hab.	Habakkuk
Le.	Leviticus	Zep.	Zephaniah
Nu.	Numbers	Hag.	Haggai
De.	Deuteronomy	Zec.	Zechariah
Jos.	Joshua	Mal.	Malachi
J'g.	Judges	M't.	Matthew
Ru.	Ruth	Mk.	Mark
I Sa.	1 Samuel	Lu.	Luke
II Sa.	2 Samuel	Joh.	John
IKi.	1 Kings	Acts	Acts of the Apostles
II Ki.	2 Kings	Ro.	Romans
I Chr.	1 Chronicles	I Co.	1 Corinthians
II Chr.	2 Chronicles	II Co.	2 Corinthians
Ezr.	Ezra	Ga.	Galatians
Ne.	Nehemiah	Eph.	Ephesians
Es.	Esther	Ph'p.	Philippians
Job	Job	Col.	Colossians
Ps.	Psalms	I Th.	1 Thessalonians
Pr.	Proverbs	II Th.	2 Thessalonians
Ec.	Ecclesiastes	I Ti.	1 Timothy
S.S.	Song of Solomon	II Ti.	2 Timothy
Isa.	Isaiah	Tit.	Titus
Jer.	Jeremiah	Ph'm.	Philemon
La.	Lamentations	Heb.	Hebrews
Eze.	Ezekiel	Jas.	James
Da.	Daniel	I Pe.	1 Peter
Ho.	Hosea	II Pe.	2 Peter
Joel	Joel	I Jo.	1 John
Am.	Amos	II Jo.	2 John
Ob.	Obadiah	III Jo.	3 John
Jon.	Jonah	Ju.	Jude
Mic.	Micah	Re.	Revelation

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

The index below gives the references for the portions of the Bible which provide the basis for the scenes in *The Rabbi from Tarsus*. The page numbers following the Scripture references are from the green hardback edition of *The Living Bible* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1971).

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Ge. 1:1-3 (p. 1); Ps. 33:6 (p. 456); 107:20 (p. 488); Ro. 13:11-12 (p. 909); Col. 4:14 (p. 959); Ph'm. 24 (p. 974); II Ti. 4:16 (p. 971); Pr. 18:24 (p. 513); I Co. 4:10 (p. 916); II Chr. 9:11 (p. 369); I Chr. 6:31-32 (p. 340); Acts 16:16-40 (p. 881); I Sa. 16:23 (p. 241); Ph'p. 3:5 (p. 954); I Sa. 9:21 (p. 234); Eph. 5:19 (p. 950); II Co. 5:9 (p. 933); I Co. 4:13 (p. 916); Acts 17:6-7 (p. 882); 24:5-7 (p. 890); Ph'p. 2:22 (p. 953); 2:20 (p. 953); I Ti. 4:12 (p. 966); II Ti. 1:7 (p. 968); 4:14-15 (p. 971); II Sa. 19:4 (p. 272).

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Nu. 6:2-18 (p. 117); J'g. 13:1-5 (p. 215); II Co. 5:20 (p. 934); I Co. 4:7 (p. 916); Acts 16:40 (p. 882); Isa. 64:6 (p. 577); Ezr. 9:15 (p. 401); Ge. 15:6 (p. 11); Ga. 3:6-7 (p. 942); 5:6 (p. 945); Ro. 13:11-14 (p. 909); Acts 26:22-23 (p. 893); I Sa. 10:9 (p. 234); I Co. 15:32, 19 (p. 927).

Act II, Scene Two

Acts 9:1-3 (p. 872); 2:2 (p. 863); Heb. 12:29 (p. 985); M't. 28:1 (p. 776); Mk. 16:9 (p. 799); Lu. 24:10 (p. 834); Joh. 20:1, 18 (p. 860); Ex. 3:2 (p. 49); Da. 7:13-14 (p. 683); Re. 1:15 (p. 1004); Acts 9:4 (p. 872); II Co. 4:6 (p. 932); Acts 9:5 (p. 872); 26:17 (p. 892); Isa. 49:6 (p. 567); Nu. 6:25 (p. 118); Ps. 11:4 (p. 448); Hab. 2:20 (p. 716); Zec. 2:13 (p. 722); Acts 9:7 (p. 872); Hag. 1:5 (p. 719); Pr. 3:5 (p. 503); Ro. 9:30-32 (p. 906); 10:3 (p. 906); Ph'p. 3:9 (p. 954); I Co. 1:30 (p. 913); II Co. 5:21 (p. 934); Job 42:5-6 (p. 444); J'g. 10:15 (p. 213); Ne. 1:6 (p. 403); La. 3:40 (p. 630); Acts 9:9 (p. 872); III Jo. 11 (p. 1002); Jon. 2:2 (p. 837); Acts 9:10-16 (p. 872); 26:17 (p. 893); 9:17-18 (p. 872); Col. 3:3 (p. 958); Ga. 6:14 (p. 946); II Co. 5:17 (p. 934); Ge. 12:3, 7 (p. 9); 22:18 (p. 17); 28:14 (p. 24); Ro. 16:25-27 (p. 912).

Act II, Scene Three

Isa. 53:6 (p. 570); Jos. 24:2 (p. 200); Ge. 11:31 (p. 9); Nu. 23:20 (p. 135); II Ti. 1:10 (p. 968); II Th. 1:7-8 (p. 962); Re. 19:13-15 (p. 1017); II Th. 3:2 (p. 963); Lu. 16:1-7 (p. 823); Acts 9:25 (p. 873); Ex. 2:5 (p. 48); II Cor. 11:32-33 (p. 939); Ro. 1:16 (p. 896); Isa. 6:9-10 (p. 538); 53:1 (p. 570); Acts 3:19-20 (p. 865); M't. 23:39

T H E R A B B I

(p. 770); Mic. 7:18-20 (p. 713); Na. 2:2 (p. 713); Acts 23:6 (p. 889); 26:4-5 (p. 892); II Co. 3:16 (p. 932); Acts 23:6 (p. 889); 26:6 (p. 892); Job 19:25-27 (p. 432); Am. 9:15 (p. 705); Zec. 2:11-12 (p. 722); M't. 26:41 (p. 773); II Pe. 3:17 (p. 997); II Jo. 8 (p. 1001).

Act II, Scene Four

II Ti. 4:10 (p. 971); Acts 17:6 (p. 882); II Co. 11:22 (p. 938); Ph'p. 3:5 (p. 954); Jer. 8:20, 22 (p. 587); Ps. 122:6 (p. 495); 28:9 (p. 454); Ro. 9:3 (p. 905); Joh. 18:2 (p. 857); II Ti. 4:10 (p. 971); M't. 26:40-46 (p. 773); Ps. 42:3 (p. 461); Ex. 17:7 (p. 63); I Co. 11:23-26 (p. 923); Le. 17:11 (p. 102); Jer. 31:31-34 (p. 606); Ph'p. 1:21 (p. 952); Col. 1:15-20 (p. 956); Ph'p. 4:13 (p. 955); 3:13-14 (p. 954); Eph. 6:16 (p. 951); Ga. 5:22-23 (p. 945); Ec. 5:15 (p. 525); Lu. 10:42 (p. 816); Job 1:20 (p. 424).

Act II, Scene Five

Ro. 8:28 (p. 904); Heb. 5:8 (p. 977); Ph'p. 3:10 (p. 954); I Sa. 17:40 (p. 242); Ho. 3:1 (p. 692); Re. 5:5 (p. 1007); Am. 3:8 (p. 702); La. 3:52 (p. 631); II Co. 12:10 (p. 939); I Sa. 11:6 (p. 235); II Ti. 2:21-4:15 (p. 970); Tit. 3:9 (p. 973); II Ki. 17:41 (p. 325); I Chr. 28:20 (p. 362); Ge. 38:7 (p. 35); Eze. 18:4 (p. 645); Ro. 6:23 (p. 902); I Co. 15:9 (p. 927); Eph. 3:8 (p. 948); 2:8-9 (p. 947); Lu. 12:8 (p. 818); II Ti. 4:16-22 (p. 971); Ge. 2:18 (p. 2); Ru. 1:16-17 (p. 224); Col. 4:17 (p. 959).

The Man I Came to Know

Piano Prelude to *The Rabbi from Tarsus*

Words and Music by Phil Goble

Andante

I pray you'd come to see the Man — I came to know,

The first system of musical notation. It consists of a vocal line on a treble clef staff and a piano accompaniment on a grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The key signature has four flats (B-flat, E-flat, A-flat, D-flat) and the time signature is 4/4. The tempo is marked 'Andante'. The lyrics are: 'I pray you'd come to see the Man — I came to know,'

the One who blind-ed me — so long a - go. The scales fell

The second system of musical notation. It continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: 'the One who blind-ed me — so long a - go. The scales fell'

off my eyes and I — was healed of doubt. A dead man

The third system of musical notation. It continues the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: 'off my eyes and I — was healed of doubt. A dead man'

came a - live — and I could shout! I saw His face

The fourth system of musical notation. It concludes the vocal line and piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: 'came a - live — and I could shout! I saw His face'

blaz - ing bright - er than the sun, the Son of God I'd dis - graced.

My time had come, my time had come, had come, my time had come.

I'd been His en - e - my; He could... have killed me then. In - stead He

mer - ci - fly for - gave my sin, for - gave my

sin. I pray you'd come to see the Man I came to know.