

His great-grandfather and his grandfather were great storytellers. Paul began to receive more and more impressions of the world around him, and one particular story allowed him to understand his place in the world. It was a fantastic story; his grandfather relished telling it, but would always leave out certain points of the story to tantalize Paul. Then one morning he said, "Tomorrow we're going to go 12 miles from one end of the Cedrus River to the other, and I'm going to tell you a story of what happened when I was just about your age. I witnessed the greatest day in all the history of Tarsus."

And so long before daybreak and moving very quickly, they covered 12 miles. It was no more than 2:00 in the afternoon, all the time, his grandfather was filled with tales of the period of time when Julius Caesar had conquered the city of Rome and how he had been killed with knives and how two young men rose up to attempt to take over the empire and that there was a great battle between those two men and two other men up on the plains of Philippi. He never realized that one day he would stand on those same plains and hear the story of those who were defeated, whose names were Brutus and Cassius. Nor had he come to understand that the other two men who split the empire into two pieces to the east and to the west would one day surely meet in one final battle out of which there would be only one survivor.

All of these were stories his grandfather told him as they moved south to the edge of the Cedrus River. There was something else he noticed, and that was the entire Cedrus River on the eastern side, with a small walkway along the banks, was a matter of nothing but one heathen temple after another. He paused to look at one of them, for it was larger, richer, more fashionably and more fantastically built than any other, and it was to the Egyptian goddess Isis. And his grandfather explained to him that this had been only a small temple until a pharaoh came and gave great amounts of money to enlarge the temple, where people could come to bow down and worship the leading goddess of the Egyptians.

And then they came to the end of the Cedrus River, and he looked at Saul and said, "Oh, it was about 60 years ago that I stood right here and walked all night and through the day, and there were tens of thousands, the entire population of Tarsus, on both sides of the riverbanks. The western side was given over to trading, bargaining, and the use of barges and small boats, while the eastern side was reserved for the construction of great temples and places of worship. It was there that I sat all day, waiting for a speck to appear out of the south, coming up from Egypt. The Pharaoh of Egypt was coming to Tarsus, and we were all there to see it."

Paul squinted, almost expecting to see the barges appear again, all these years later, long after the story had been played out. And then his grandfather began to talk. "I saw a speck, and every person around us began to rustle, press themselves forward to the mouth of the ship at the port. Small ships came from all places. Here it came, the speck grew larger and larger, until it became a ship, a gigantic barge, the biggest the world had ever known. And as it began to approach the mouth of the Cedrus River and made its way to the heart of the city, great ores came to be thrust out from the side, all of them tipped in silver." "And I began, said his grandfather, to hear the methodic

groans of those who manned the paddles. Groans were the sound deep within the belly of the barge. Each time the oars moved, they were lifted just for a moment, to catch the glow of the sun. And it was just at this time, at the mouth of the river, that the Pharaoh appeared, coming out on the eastern side. Knowing that's where most of the people would be, the Pharaoh settled down upon a pile of luxurious pillows and sat there, and then lay down for the entire city of Tarsus to admire.

There was one great purple sail. At the top of it were four streamers, one yellow or gold, and blue, red, and white. "The Pharaoh, whispered his grandfather, had fingernails and toenails painted green with great paintings on the Pharaoh's face with a bedecked golden crown upon her head. The pharaoh was reputed to be very, very good-looking. His grandfather paused and said, "She wasn't beautiful. Furthermore, she was overweight," he said dryly. And so, he now moved with the barge, running, falling, sometimes slipping down, being pushed, cast aside, nonetheless, keeping up with the barge.

And now, as the barge entered the city, it was discovered that the oars were hollow and great, with massive amounts of perfume pouring through them into the city, until the whole city was enveloped in an aromatic scent. A city almost alive with the perfumes of Egypt. Suddenly, the oars went straight into the air, held there, and the barge glided safely to the end of the river. Out came, from nowhere it seemed, the man who had one half of the Roman Empire to call his own. His name was Mark Anthony. He was greeted by the Pharaoh and invited to come inside the Egyptian barge. And I saw the very moment when Mark Anthony touched the hand of Cleopatra.

All night long, they, we were told, negotiated a treaty. The next morning...we were told he was in a drunken stupor...he announced that the treaty had not only been reached but that all the leading citizens of the city, which happened to include Saul's grandfather's father, who was one of the leaders of the city and stood and sat on the seat of the magistrates. All of those who were leading men of the city were now declared to be Roman citizens. And it was at that moment when Saul's grandfather looked at him and put his hand on his head and said, "Son, it was because of that story which took place some 60, 65 years ago," that made it possible for you to proudly wear the evidence of Roman citizenship around your neck and to say to the world, I am a very rare person. I am a Hebrew, and I am a Roman, with all the rights of a man of royalty or leadership born within the limits of the city of Rome.

And then he told me what my rights were. Saul thought very little of them. One of them was that the only way you can be executed is by the sword. You cannot be tried by anyone except Romans, no matter what your crime. And at any time that you're convicted of any crime, you can appeal to the emperor himself, where your case will be heard and the emperor himself will rule in your favor or against you. Paul was not impressed; he never intended to be in a court of law, and he knew he would never need to be executed nor even to appeal to Caesar.

Now, it was that it was almost at this time that Paul reached the age of going to the city of Jerusalem. Now, the tales about that city were too fabulous to believe. A great city chosen by God, ruled over by King David and then by the great King Solomon, a city with the largest and most

beautiful temple in the world in it. When the sun rose in the east, it shed its beams across the face of the walls facing east, all trimmed in gold, which not only gave the citizens of the city a breathtaking view of the temple, but on occasion was so bright that men had to cover their eyes in viewing the entrance to the temple. There were two ways to get there. One was to walk; you'd walk past, but not into, the hated land of Syria, for Syria and its capital Antioch, in those were the people who had at one time, over a hundred years earlier, attempted to annihilate the entire Hebrew race. It was the fourth generation of kings of Syria who had declared war on Israel with the announced determination that when he was finished that there'd not be a Jew left alive. Nor did he back down from his word, for there were 40,000 Jews slaughtered in Israel in one week.

It was at that time that Saul's ancestors fled Israel and came to the land of Tarsus in Cilicia. Now you would walk south until you reach Damascus, from Damascus to Capernaum, near Capernaum, across the Jordan River, and on west to the city of Jerusalem, where you would participate in the singing of the Psalms with the ascent going up to Jerusalem. Whether you came by the east or the west or the north or the south, you went up to Jerusalem, or you might go by sea. The only drawback with going by sea was the terribly crowded conditions on the ships, for a ship seemed to come out of nowhere to take the Jewish people in springtime to Jerusalem. Not by the thousands, but by the tens of thousands, from all points of the known world, and sometimes from places not known at all, for as far away as Babylon, as far away as a place called Spain 1 and Spain 2, from the mysterious lands of the north where live the Gauls and the Franks, and even those who lived on the frontier of the north of the empire, those who came from the Germanic tribes. Those who came from Babylon and as far away, it was said, from some land called India.

And the day that Saul went to Jerusalem for the first time, he ported there on the docks of the Cedrus River. The ship was loaded with human cargo; all of them were Hebrews. You sat or you slept, whether you sat up or stretched out, on the cargo. There was nothing there for you in the way of accommodations, and you provided your own food. The ships stopped at Tyre and Sidon, as well as at a small village named Babylon, a tiny village composed almost entirely of shipbuilders. The ship came further and further until it began to approach what was called Caesarea by the sea, a city that had never existed except as a small village that had been notorious for its brothels. But now, in what was simply called the tower, Herod had decided to build a great temple and a city for Augustus Caesar. So, the city was named Caesar, the first true Caesar of the empire.

Herod was a man who knew how to placate people. They hated Syrians. He built a polished marble road north and south, east and west in the city of Antioch. For the Jews, he built a sacred temple, rebuilding that of Solomon's torn down temple. And only 60 miles away, a heathen temple sits on the banks of the Mediterranean Sea. A city dedicated to the worship of Augustus Caesar and to Apollos.

There had been no seaport there, nor was there any hope of one, but Herod the Great had built great wood, vats of wood, nothing but wood about six feet deep, had them floated 700 yards out into the city and sunk, and there they sat from the edge of the city out to 700 yards out. These

wooden vats were held down in a restless sea. After they had been solidly secured into the seabed, concrete was pumped into all of these compartments, reaching 700 yards out into the sea. The concrete hardened after several years, and suddenly, there was a harbor. Ships could come in from the sea on one side and then on another, with the mouth of the sea, of the harbor, awaiting the largest passenger ships and warships of the world. And as they entered the harbor, they saw exactly what Saul saw. High up on the hill, a heathen temple to Apollo, the god of fertility and other things. He kept his head down and his hands over his eyes.

He spent the night with a Jewish family; the next day was a meeting in the synagogue. He went down a small, narrow lane, not knowing that in a few more years, within his lifetime, a great war would break out between the Jewish inhabitants of Caesarea by the sea and the entire Roman Empire right there on that narrow street. He walked past the great hippodrome, beautifully garnished with all sorts of statues, a vast area of land and stadium seats laid out for horse racing. Neither could he have possibly conceived that on one day, one day, 40,000 Jewish men and women and children would in the year 66 be slaughtered on the stadium floors of that hippodrome.

Now, Saul did with his father and his grandfather the same thing that most people did; he timed his arrival to be on a Sabbath. And so, for 60 miles, he and other Jewish people came arm in arm singing the Psalms of Ascent. They approached the city coming in on the Sabbath day, the day before and the day after, to observe the great Passover, to see the city, to see the gold, to see the pomp, to see the thousands of Levites, the hundreds of trumpets, to watch 20 men push and pull and tug to do nothing but open the gate to the city of Jerusalem, to walk into that great packed temple courtyard and watch the Levites blow their trumpets, and their drums, their bugles, and see the high priest step out on the highest terrace and know that behind those doors was God himself.

That was Saul's first time in the city. There is a little-known event that took place in his life that day. There were over a hundred colonnades, or over a hundred cloisters, where many things took place, including buying and selling, but there was one cloister that was given over to a very devout and highly regarded teacher. His name was Hillel.