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### Library of Congress Cataloging-In-Publication Data

Edwards, Gene, date

The Silas diary / Gene Edwards.

p. cm.

ISBN 0-8423-5912-5

1. Silas (Biblical figure)—Fiction. 2. Barnabas, Apostle, Saint—Fiction.  
3. Paul, the Apostle, Saint—Fiction. 4. Bible. N.T.—History of Biblical  
events—Fiction. I. Title.

PS3555.D924S55 1998

813'.54—dc21

97-32269

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Printed in the United States of America

05 04 03 02

9 8 7 6 5 4

## C H A P T E R 1

What's that?!" John Mark asked, looking startled.

"Singing!" exclaimed Barnabas. "The brothers and sisters—they must have walked all night from Antioch just to come tell us good-bye. No doubt they've planned a royal send-off for us."

At that moment some five hundred believers from the assembly in Antioch appeared on the wharf, shouting and singing as they came.

"What a sight!" cried Saul as he ran toward them.

The three men melted into the throng. After several minutes of boisterous singing, they all edged their way along the pier until they came to the small freighter that was to carry them to Cyprus. Sailors and slaves moved aside to make room for the happy intruders.

"Oh no, not more food!" groaned John Mark as brothers and sisters began thrusting delicacies into his hands. "I've got so much food now that these sacks weigh more than I do."

"Make room for these passengers," shouted the captain. "But let no passengers board until I say. This Seleucia harbor is the choppiest in the empire. Even the hardiest sailors get seasick after a few minutes on one of these bucking ships." He paused, then added, "We will sail in a few moments."

Hearing these words, the believers from Antioch began singing a farewell song as slaves spread out along the pier, ready to push the ship away from the pier with long poles.

“Board!” cried the captain. “Find a place on the cargo deck. No passengers below. No fires. And remember, you provide your own food.” Then he added, “It will be about six hours to Cyprus.” He glanced at the sky, then muttered to himself, “If the weather holds.”

Mark struggled manfully to pull his baggage aboard, even as some of the Antioch believers handed him still more food. The hoisted sails caught the early morning breeze. Barnabas and Saul rushed aboard even as the slaves began using their poles to push the ship free of the pier.

Shouts of encouragement rose from the throng of believers as the ship eased out into the churning waters of the man-made port. Barnabas, grabbing part of the rigging, swung up onto the ship’s railing and began returning the brothers’ exhortations. The Antioch Christians roared their approval. Saul smiled with delight, while Mark continued to wrestle with his baggage.

The freighter found the strength of the wind and began moving down the rock-hewn channel, tossing as if in a storm. Fading shouts turned to songs as the ship moved away from the port of Seleucia and out toward the restive sea.

“You’d better move toward the center of the ship until she reaches the open seas,” said one of the sailors. “The tides in the channel make a ship buck like a horse. This port should never have been built, if you ask me.”

“Six hours to Cyprus?” inquired Mark.

“With good winds,” responded the sailor. “We’re the very first ship out of Seleucia this year. The weather is *too good* for early March. Mark me, we’ll pay for this good weather come April.”

“Five denarii,” interrupted the captain. “No food. No water. No going below. The deck alone is what you buy. Only if

there is a storm will you be allowed below. Find yourselves a place somewhere among the cargo on the deck. Steal, and I'll throw you overboard!"

"Five days' wages for six hours of sailing," protested John Mark. "That's not fair."

"It's all right, Mark," explained Barnabas. "Some brothers from Antioch came down last week and struck the deal. It's pretty close to the usual fare and cheap when you consider we are the first ship out this year."

John Mark stared at his two overstuffed bags and then sat on one of them. Barnabas smiled. "I have an idea that when we get to Cyprus the saints there will be giving you even more food." Mark groaned, and Barnabas laughed good-naturedly. Then Mark's face suddenly lit up. Without saying a word he grabbed one of the bags and disappeared between the rows of cargo.

The ship broke out into the Mediterranean Sea, and Saul and Barnabas watched with intrigue as a small boat, full of young men, rowed furiously toward them. As the boat came alongside the ship, the young men began shouting wildly for John Mark. Mark peered out from the cargo, rushed to the railing, and shouted gleefully to his friends. One of the brothers in the small boat cried out to Mark, "We're jealous, John Mark. We wish you were back in Israel and we were on that ship." John Mark came back with a quick retort, but his words were lost in the wind. As Mark's friends turned back, they waved and shouted words of encouragement.

"Your first voyage?" asked a sailor who had been watching the small boat.

"Yes, sir," responded Mark. "We are followers of the Hebrew Messiah. We're on our way to Cyprus. Maybe we'll stay, but just as likely we'll sail from Cyprus to some other, uh, Gentile country. It all depends."

"Best not to sail beyond Cyprus. Not now. Not in April.

Spring has come too early; the seas are too peaceful. The gods will take revenge for this weather, be sure of that.”

“Your captain said the same thing.”

“Winter hasn’t had her full say. She’ll yet war with Spring.”

“Now that we’re in the open sea,” Mark responded, “the ship’s quiet, and there’s no chance of seasickness. Would you happen to be hungry?”

“I was hoping you’d ask,” the sailor responded. “I saw your generosity to some of the other sailors.”

Barnabas and Saul had moved to the bow of the ship and were staring out at the calm sea. “That was quite a farewell they gave us,” said Barnabas.

“Too nice for young Mark,” laughed Saul. “But it’s to be expected of those spirited Antioch believers.”

Barnabas grew pensive. “It will not be so warm a welcome on Cyprus. For me, yes, but perhaps not for you.” He glanced at his companion, then continued. “I expect there will be a good-sized group to greet us, but they will be a more restrained people. The holy ones who live on Cyprus are quite reserved. It wasn’t like that at first—right after Pentecost. When the Cypriots who were in Jerusalem at Pentecost came back home to Cyprus, they were on fire. They spoke to just about every Hebrew on the island. But the glory of Pentecost has faded.

“Part of it is an island mentality. Those who live on a small island with a small population of their own people—well, they tend to be very conservative. The rest is our culture. We Hebrews are not as exuberant as the Gentiles in Antioch.” Barnabas shrugged his shoulders. “I forget how different it is until I leave Antioch and move again among the Hebrews.”

“I have a feeling you and I are going to miss the Antioch believers while we’re gone,” rejoined Saul.

“Saul, are you ready for a cool reception on Cyprus? Many of the believers are still not sure you have become a true

follower of the Lord Jesus. They still think it's possible you're among us only to learn our ways, turn on us, and . . .”

“I know,” came Saul's steady reply.

“I will testify on your behalf, of course, but . . .”

“As you have so many times before, starting with the very first time I visited Jerusalem.”

“Still, some will not believe even my words. You will be confronted. Many still bear the scars they received during the persecution when you attacked the assembly in Jerusalem.”

Saul stared silently across the waters for a moment, then shut his eyes. “I'm ready,” he said quietly.

Musing about what might lie ahead, Saul returned to silence. Leaning back against a bag of grain, he closed his eyes. They had been up nearly all night with a small group of believers, who had accompanied them to Seleucia the day before. He smiled as he thought of their songs and their heartfelt prayers. As the sun warmed him, he drifted into a light sleep.

Several hours later, John Mark reappeared. “Are either of you hungry? I've got lots of . . .”

Barnabas laughed while Saul sat up and rubbed his eyes. “One sack is almost empty!” exclaimed Barnabas. “Did you eat it all?”

“No!” protested Mark. “I gave it to the sailors and the other passengers. They've got enough food to last them a week, and I've still got more than I can lift, not even counting the satchel with the scrolls and the one with our clothes.

“Look,” Mark said, interrupting himself. “Way out there. Cyprus! Can you see it?”

“Oh, for the eyes of youth,” Saul replied wistfully.

“Mother says I'm related to half the Hebrews on Cyprus.”

“Yes, my sister and I *do* seem to have a lot of relatives there,” agreed Barnabas.

The captain steered the ship toward the left to sail south of the island. Barnabas stood at the rail, drinking in the sight of his

hometown. “Look over there, Saul. We’re coming under the island’s long eastern peninsula. You can see the little village of Eloeia on the lee side. Few people live this far out, and most of them make their living by fishing in these shallow waters. Those hills are called the Olympus Mountains. In another hour we’ll see Salamis, on a beautiful bay at the base of the peninsula. The harbor is protected by the peninsula, making it one of the safest harbors in the world. Also one of the busiest.”

“You sound like a sailor,” said Saul.

“No, only one who grew up in a family that sold copper. But the copper was always shipped out of the port of Salamis, and Cyprus is a land full of sailors.”

Barnabas searched the distant coast for familiar landmarks. Eventually the harbor came into view. A great semicircular pier on the left and right, reaching out into the sea, seemed to extend its arms in welcome. “The Italians and Phoenicians come sailing down from the north to Cyprus. Rather than sailing all the way to Egypt, they deposit their wares here. Then they load up with goods left on Cyprus by the Egyptians sailing up from the south. The Egyptians do the same. Whether Egyptian or Roman, everyone sells and buys here. Much of a ship’s goods are bought and sold right on the dock, then transferred to another ship. What is not sold immediately is left with brokers, mostly Jews and Greeks. They sell to the islanders and merchants of smaller means.”

Despite the sun, a cold afternoon wind cut into Barnabas’s face. He pulled his cloak tight and muttered, “Winter hasn’t had her last say, has she? Bad weather is in store for someone out there.”

As the cargo ship neared the Salamis docks, small boats rowed out to meet it. Ropes were tossed down. The men in the waiting boats grabbed the ropes and began rowing back toward the docks, the ship in tow.

Mark stared out at the wharf. “Look at that! I’ve never seen so much stuff,” he whispered.

The entire wharf was covered with bales of cotton from Egypt, sacks of grain of all kinds, and crates of a very precious metal called tin, which came from the mysterious island of Britain. There were piles of rattan, stacks of teak and other exotic woods, along with mounds of carob, fruits, vegetables, nuts, and seeds. Bolts of linen from the Orient were stacked head high. But most of all, there were copper bars—cross-stacked higher than a man could reach. Cabinets and other fine furniture, to be sold to Italian merchants for the rich households in Rome, rested under protective canopies. And dotted all along the wharf were artisans, making and selling their wares.

“I didn’t know Italy and Egypt could produce so much,” said Saul.

“Actually, the Phoenicians have long trade routes. They circle the entire Mediterranean, stopping at every port in existence, buying and selling. Then they bring it here. What you see is really from all over our world.”



As the freighter pulled closer to its berth, Barnabas pointed to a crowd of Jews gathered on the wharf. “Look, there are the brothers and sisters.” It was obvious that Barnabas could scarcely restrain himself.

A moment later the believers on shore began singing an ancient Jewish hymn of greeting. Barnabas’s eyes filled with tears. “I can hear their Cypriot accent!”

Saul and Mark began to wave, but Saul could already see curious stares.

The ship’s sails were struck, the ropes tossed to waiting slaves, who wrestled the ship to the pier. As soon as the gangplank was lowered, the three men disembarked and quickly found themselves encircled by well-wishers. Barnabas began

reaching out to one and then another, calling names and receiving warm embraces.

“This is your cousin, John Mark. Mark, this is your great-uncle. This is my childhood friend. And who are you? Your face looks familiar, but I don’t remember your name. How you’ve grown!”

Some in the crowd were calling out to Barnabas, “You must stay.” “We need you here.” “There is so much work to be done.” “Cyprus has much need of you.” “Please stay.”

Saul stood back, silent and unapproached.

Much to Mark’s relief, some young men picked up his luggage. “Scrolls, clothes, and food; be careful with the scrolls and clothing,” he admonished. Mark watched with satisfaction as the young men struggled to lift the sacks of food.

After a few minutes, the band of Hebrew believers led their visitors away from the harbor and through a maze of narrow streets. They passed Salamis’s famous racetrack, and finally their route led to a street barely more than a shoulder’s width across. They stopped at an equally narrow door.

“We have rented this room for you three brothers. There is a sleeping mat for each of you. Sisters and brothers will come once or twice a day to bring food and meet whatever needs you have. When night arrives, some of the brothers will come to meet with you and share their hearts concerning Cyprus. John Mark, the sisters in the assembly wanted me to tell you they have prepared a great deal of extra food for you to take along as the three of you go out to visit the assemblies in other cities.”

Mark managed a weak smile and a lame “Thank you,” even as he watched the young men struggle to drag two particularly heavy bags across the floor. When their hosts had dispersed, Barnabas, Saul, and John Mark arranged their few belongings beside their sleeping mats.

As darkness drew near, men from the assembly in Salamis began to arrive. After a few minutes of formal greetings, the

men began telling their visitors of the state of the faith in Salamis and across Cyprus. “We need you here very much,” was the recurring theme. “None of the twelve apostles has ever come here. The assemblies are all small, and they are weak. We are so glad you are here. Please stay.”

“Since those first days after Pentecost, when you all came back to Cyprus, have many other islanders become believers?” inquired Barnabas.

“At first there were many. Some of them are still with us. You’ll be interested to know that every Jew on the island has heard the news of Jesus. The assemblies need you to gather some of these back. To speak to us. And to reach those who never believed.”

Saul had kept his silence from the time he had arrived. His first words came directly to the point.

“How many Jews are on this island?”

“In all, perhaps a thousand.”

“Followers of the Lord Jesus?”

The question turned out to be more difficult to answer than Saul and Barnabas had anticipated. But the answer was revealing.

“In the synagogue—many, perhaps most, are sympathetic to the news of the Messiah.”

“In the *synagogue*?” asked Saul, clearly startled. “How many outside the synagogue?”

The men in the room exchanged uncertain glances. “Well, you see, the believers almost always meet in the synagogue on Saturday with all the others in the Jewish community.”

“But,” one hastened to add, “sometimes we gather in homes, too.”

Saul repeated his question. “But how many believers are there apart from those who meet in the synagogue?”

The Cypriots looked at one another, not sure how to re-

spond. “We don’t know; we’ve never thought in those terms,” was their consensus.

There was silence. Barnabas tried to assimilate this news, then struggled to find a way to respond. “We’ve been in Antioch a very long time,” he explained. “We had just about forgotten that some of the Lord’s people still enter the synagogue. In Antioch, the people who go to synagogue are *very* much opposed to the Way.”

“Oh, that’s not true here on Cyprus. The synagogue is our gathering place. There are a few *ecclesias* that meet in homes in small towns, but that’s because there are no synagogues in the villages.”

Saul ventured one last question, knowing the answer would dictate the entire course of their relationship to Cyprus. “How many Gentiles gather with you?”

“Gentiles?” It was evident that Saul’s question was rather unfathomable.

“Don’t any seekers from among the heathen nations ever come to your assemblies? Are there any *Gentile* believers?”

“Well, no, I don’t think there are,” responded one of the brothers.

“There is one Gentile, I’m told, in the *ecclesia* in Tamassus,” inserted another. “At least I think that is what I heard.”

Saul stumbled over his response. “All the believers on Cyprus—they are *all* Hebrews?”

Again the local brothers exchanged wondering glances. “Uh, yes. Why do you ask?”

Lest silence engulf the room, Barnabas changed the subject. “I understand the brothers and sisters here plan to gather early tomorrow morning. Perhaps we should all get some sleep. Will someone come to lead us to the home where we will meet?”

“Yes, but we will be meeting in the synagogue.”

“The synagogue!” Saul nearly choked on the word.

“Yes, the manager of the synagogue is very willing, and he may even come to the meeting. Saul, he thinks he may have met you years ago in Jerusalem. He wanted to know if you were ever a student under Gamaliel.”

Saul stifled a groan.

“Everyone is expecting you to speak to us, Barnabas. And Saul, as you know . . . well, there may be questions.”

“It’s very late,” observed Barnabas again.

“Before we go, may we tell you of our plans for your travel?” asked one of the brothers.

“Of course,” replied Barnabas.

“You will go from here to the town of Citium, on the southern coast. It’s a two-day journey in good weather. The brothers and sisters from the ecclesias in the towns of Tamassus, Ledra, Kyrentia, and Lapithus will come to Citium to be with you. Everyone is excited. You will stay with the holy ones in Citium through the Sabbath and the Lord’s Day. From Citium you will continue south and west to Curium. There is a strong body of believers in Curium. From there you will go on to the western end of the island, to the capital city of Paphos.

“One of the brothers in Paphos is seeking to arrange for Saul to have an audience with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus. It’s our hope that by the time you reach Paphos, you will have decided to stay with us on Cyprus. We need your encouragement.”

The meeting closed. A moment later Barnabas, Saul, and John Mark were alone.

“No Gentiles! Did you hear that?” Saul could hardly believe his own words. “Barnabas, they said there are *no* Gentiles in the assemblies! A thousand Jews on this island, and they’ve all heard of the Lord. The Jews all know God’s good news, but these believers have no interest in speaking to the Gentiles about the Lord!”

“Unless they recognize that the Gentiles have also been

marked out for redemption . . . I'm afraid there's not much for us to do here," sighed Barnabas. "Encourage! We can encourage, but not for an entire lifetime! God did not call us to encourage. He called us to take the good news to the heathen nations."

"I'm glad to hear you say that," answered Saul. "I didn't want to have to remind you that when we knelt in that room in Antioch with Lucius, Manaen, and Simeon, the Holy Spirit sent us to the Gentiles. *Sent*. To Gentiles. To declare Jesus Christ to them and bring those who believe into the ecclesia. *What are we doing here?*"

Saul bit his next words. "We were sent to bring Gentiles not into a religious building but into the body of Christ!"

"I love this island," Barnabas responded. "My people are here. It is my home. I've dreamed of seeing a vibrant, living assembly on this island. But until the believers here understand that the good news is for the heathen, too, this is not where we belong. I'm afraid we would do great harm and bring much division if we sought to reach the Gentiles living on Cyprus. Confusion and damage would be everywhere."

"Good. Then let us go to the Gentiles. Let us find our way to places where neither Gentile nor Jew has ever heard the name of Jesus."

Barnabas sighed. "So be it. Tomorrow we will begin inquiring as to exactly where the gospel has reached and where it has gone no farther. *That* place, wherever it is, *that* is where we belong. Now, let's get some rest. The meeting begins at sunrise!"

"In a synagogue!" moaned Saul. "Synagogues are where I preach to unbelievers and where I get beaten, not where I preach to believers. Tell me, Barnabas, when was the last time you were in a synagogue?"

"Hmmm. About four years ago, just before I left Jerusalem for Antioch."

“What were you doing in a synagogue?”

“Asking permission to make copies of some of the Hebrew scrolls they keep locked up there. I am a Levite, you know. I have the right to ask.”

“Did they let you?”

“Of course not! And you? When were you last in a synagogue?”

“In Tarsus.”

“What were you doing in a synagogue in Tarsus?”

“I was there for the same reason you were. After all, I *am* a Pharisee!”

“Did they let you copy any of their scrolls?”

Before Saul could even think to answer, both men were convulsed in laughter. “I suggest I am not Levite enough, nor are you Pharisee enough, to satisfy our conservative Jewish brothers.”

“How fortunate!” rejoined Saul.