

LAZARUS:
THE SAMARITAN

KATHERYN MADDOX HADDAD



Dedicated to My Alma Mater
Harding University

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1 ~ The Road

AD 7

Road Camp between Mounts Gerizim and Ebal, Sychar,
Province of Samaria, Palestine

“Who’s there?”

Gersshon, on the ground, jerks his head up, grabs his sword, and leaps up to a crouch. The blackness of the night surrounds him. He peers through it, turning in a circle to find the intruder.

He kicks Chanaan without taking his eyes off the inky unknown. “Sir! We’ve got company.”

Chanaan, superintendent of the road gang, jumps up with his own sword.

Back-to-back now, the two men turn through the sinister blackness, staring out into the night-time unknown.

“There it is again,” Gersshon warns. “It’s straight ahead of me. Do you think it’s a mountain lion, sir?”

“No. It sounds like a man. Or men. Keep on the alert.”

Gersshon turns and stands side by side with his superior and together they move forward, one shuffle at a time.

“Who’s there? Gersshon repeats. “Whoever you are, you don’t have a chance. We’re heavily armed. Come out now while you can.”

One step at a time, challenging but not knowing who. Or what.

“Uh, sir, were you talking to me?” The muffled voice is deep.

“Come out and show yourself,” Chanaan demands.

“Well, uh, sir, okay.”

Chanaan lowers his sword. “Zarus, is that you?”

“I’m over here. Did I disturb you?”

“What in the world are you doing, Zarus?”

“I knew you were under deadline to get this new road to

Sebaste. I wasn't sleeping anyway, so thought I'd work on getting this boulder out of the way."

"Gersshon, the next time you go after strange noises in the night, don't wake me up," warns Chanaan, turning to walk back to his blanket on the ground.

"Hey, pipe down," a voice in the darkness calls out.

"Everyone shut up so I can go back to sleep," another voice demands.

"Well, sir," Gersshon announces, "everyone seems to be awake. We may as well get an early start."

"Gersshon," Chanaan replies, "remind me never to hire you again, so I can get some rest. All right, men, you may as well get up and get back at it. Gersshon has managed to wake up the entire crew."

"You would have been thanking me if it had really been an intruder—or a mountain lion."

Yawns. Groans. Grunts.

"With men like Zarus and Gersshon who never seem to sleep, we just might get to work and maybe arrive at Sebaste ahead of deadline," the superintendent mumbles.

As a faint hint of dawn appears in the gray east, Gersshon walks over to his long-time friend, his eyes adjusting to the darkness.

"You worked on that boulder half the day yesterday, ole boy."

"Yeah, I was dreaming about it during the night, so just got up and went back to work on it," Zarus replies. "I hope this iron bar doesn't break before I get it out."

"Gersshon, I'm going to get you for this," a crewman calls out.

Zarus pulls out a handkerchief from his sleeve, wipes his brow, and sits on the ground.

"Here let me help you," Gersshon replies. "I've got a strong board to wedge under the boulder after your iron bar gets a groove started down there."

"I don't need any help," Zarus responds. "My iron bar and shovel are working just fine."

"Why don't you let me handle your iron bar while you dig?" Gersshon says.

"Well, you can't, because the iron bar is the handle of my shovel. Besides, it's almost as long as you, buddy. Of course, you could put that sword of yours to good use under the boulder," Zarus teases.

The two men sit together a few moments longer, waiting for a little more light on their project.

"You're not going to get this boulder out without my help one way or the other, because you've always needed my help, even when we were kids," Gersshon says, standing back up and stepping closer to

the boulder.

“Watch out!”

Zarus’ warning is too late. Gersshon falls into the shallow pit dug around the unmanageable chunk of granite. He stands and brushes off his knees. “Stubborn rock, I see,” Gersshon says with a grin. “How deep do you think it goes?”

“We could go down three or four more hand spans before we see the bottom of it. Maybe more.”

“Well, get back to work, Zarus,” Gersshon orders. “We don’t have all day.”

Used to Gersshon’s take-charge ways, Zarus smiles and resumes his work.

The two men, one tall and thin, the other short and ample, circle the stubborn and deceptively-large boulder digging, prodding, poking, leveraging, to get it out of the way for the next section of road bed.

“Why don’t we just take the road around this monster?” Gersshon asks.

“You know how those Roman surveyors are. They want their roads straight as an arrow.”

They continue working in silence.

Though still early morning, perspiration drips off the men’s foreheads until the salty sweat stings their eyes and they have to pause long enough to tie a band around their head.

Everyone with their own job to do. Team work. Everyone pulling together to get the job done for Rome.

“Auhhh!” It is Gersshon.

Purple and white light flash in his head. A sensation of being struck by lightening immobilizes him. A hand shoots up to cover his eye. He leans over as though his head has become too unstable to hold up. Now the light is gone. All light. Only a heavy blue blackness left. And the sharp pain of being stabbed by a million needles.

“What? What happened?”

“Auhhh! The board broke. Part of it is in my eye,” Gersshon replies.

Zarus grabs Gersshon’s shoulders and guides him out of the trench and over to the blankets not yet picked up from the night before.

“Water, someone,” Zarus shouts.

Chaanan rushes up with his water skin. “Hold his head back.”

Zarus leans his friend’s head back and pulls his hands away from his eyes. Chaanan pours water over them while Zarus holds his lids open.

“Ahhh.”

“What’s going on here?”

It is a feminine voice. While still holding his friend so water can flush his eye of the splinter, Zarus looks in the direction of the voice.

Her heart-shaped face is framed with long, flowing black tresses and a pale blue shawl. Though the ground all around them is rocky and uneven, she seems to float above it all. Behind her head, the glow of the gradually rising sun gives her a well-deserved halo.

“Be careful where you’re walking, madam,” Chanaan warns,” his water skin now empty. “Lots of holes and stumps out here.”

Devorah reaches the three men on the blanket.

“Good thing I brought some supplies to treat injuries along with food for your breakfast,” she says, smiling at Zarus and motioning for him to give her his place next to the wounded man.

Her touch is both warm and cool on Gersshon’s face.

“Try to quit blinking so I can see what got into your eye,” she urges with her sweet voice.

“Hmmm. That is a big splinter. If you can hold still, I think I can grab it with my fingers.”

Zarus kneels on the other side of his friend while Superintendent Chanaan holds Gersshon’s arms down.

Devorah holds Gersshon’s eyelid open with one hand, and with deftness, takes hold of the large splinter with two fingers of her other hand, and pulls it out.”

“Ahhh!” The stinging again. The needles again. The white light again. He grabs at his eye. “Ahhh!”

“Okay, I have some bands in my basket I can wrap around your eyes.”

Gersshon, shorter than many men in the world, blusters back. “Oh, no you don’t, missy. You can put the bands around my bad eye, but you’re not going to make me blind. I’ve still got work in me.”

“Whatever you say,” Devorah replies. She works fast while Gersshon tries to get his mind off the pain by concentrating on her gentle touch.

“There you go. One eye covered, and one eye only.”

Zarus stands and helps Devorah to her feet. She looks up into his unusual blue eyes. “Thank you, kind sir.”

Their gaze lasts more than it should between two strangers. *She is as beautiful as a pearl.*

Devorah looks away to break the spell she knows she should be ashamed of.

“Now I’ve got to distribute breakfast to all these hungry men.”

Gersshon looks up at the two with his one good eye, momentarily oblivious of the pain, and manages a grin.

“Hey, do I get breakfast first? I think I deserve it.”

“Indeed you do,” Devorah says, reaching into her basket for a small loaf of bread and two figs. “Don’t eat too fast,” she warns. “And stay down on that blanket. You don’t know how much damage that wood did to your eye. By the way, there are only scrub bushes here. Where did the splinter come from?”

“A board,” he replies. Since she has already turned away, he doubts she hears.

Devorah makes the rounds of the road crewmen. As she does, she notices Zarus is gone. She looks around and sees him by himself bowed prostrate in prayer. But he is facing the wrong way. He is facing Gerizim, not Jherusalem. He is a Samaritan.

She leaves his share of food nearby without disturbing him. She makes her way back over to her Egyptian horse, lowers a stool off the bridle, steps on it, flings herself over the Egyptian’s bare back, pulls the stool up, and leaves.

“Well, I’ve got to go into Sychar to get another load of sand,” Chanaan announces. “It was supposed to be delivered a few days ago from the Aravah Desert where Devorah’s father has a copper mine.”

“Yes, sir,” Gersshon replies. “What can I do while you’re gone? I’m injured but not helpless.”

“Well, you like to boss people around, you may as well be boss while I’m gone. But your only job is to make sure everyone keeps working in my absence, and that’s all. Am I clear?” Chanaan demands.

“Perfectly,” Gersshon replies, while looking in Zarus’ direction. Prayers now completed, his friend comes alert at the mention of Devorah’s name.

“Okay, ole pal, your prayers are done and the lady is gone. Get your head out of the clouds and back to work.”

Zarus obeys out of habit. Gersshon, though much shorter than Zarus, has been bossing him around since they were kids.

Gersshon leans on his sword, grows tired of standing, and sits awhile, watching each of the crewmen with his one good eye. Most work slowly, but they are steady and do their job well enough.

Now and then he dozes. No one pays attention to him. To keep from falling back asleep, Gersshon stands and paces, despite the fact he is developing a small headache. He walks around the men, sometimes telling someone to do something differently, though still no one pays attention to him.

He goes back to his original perch to survey the crew. His eye settles on Zarus who is now rocking his boulder back and forth.

“I see you’ve got it about out,” Gersshon calls out.

“Yup,” Zarus replies, the muscles in his big arms, legs, and torso straining. Blood vessels pop out on his forehead. His face is red. He grits his teeth.

“Here, let me help.” Gersshon says, approaching the boulder. He puts his hands on the boulder, pushing Zarus out of the way. “This is how it is done, ole boy,” he says.

“No. You’re half blind with that injury from the board. You can’t see things right. Go sit down,” Zarus counters.

Without warning, Gersshon grabs Zarus’ crowbar shovel and pulls dirt out of the way in the direction the large rock is leaning. It groans and breaks free of its centuries-long confinement and begins a slide down the hill.

“Watch out below!” Gersshon shouts, delighted with his accomplishment.

“Watch out below!” Zarus echoes.

Men at the bottom of the gully chiseling gravel out of larger stones look up, eyes wide, brow furrowed, mouths opened and catching the dust. Immediately, they jump out of the way.

The unrelenting monster of a boulder heads for them. Sliding, bouncing, careening.

Gersshon himself is thrown off balance and follows the boulder down the slope.

Both land. The boulder and Gersshon.

The gravel chisellers at the bottom of the gully stand and rub their eyes in all the dust. When it settles and they can see better, they begin looking around for Gersshon’s body, but still rubbing their eyes.

“Over here, guys,” Gersshon says standing and leaning against the now-settled boulder, the band over his injured eye still in place. “The boulder landed exactly where I intended for it to.”

“Man, you almost killed us. Then you blind us with all that dust,” one of the men calls out.

“Well, if you had been more alert, you wouldn’t have gotten all that dust in your eyes in the first place. Just put some water in them and you will be fine.”

“We can’t. All the water we have is for drinking.”

“Well, you can have my water.” Gersshon takes the water skin still attached to his rope belt, pulls the plug out, goes over to one of the men, reaches up to pull his head back, and the man loses his balance.

Medad begins to fall backward, and swings his arms to regain control. He descends off the cliff at the far edge of the gully. The sky turns upside down. His muscles strain. He grabs what little brush he can to break his fall.

By this time, the road superintendent, Chanaan, is back and has been watching the turmoil from the top of the hill. "Get a rope to the men so they can get down to Medad."

A rope is thrown down, and the gravel chisellers tie one end around Zarus' boulder and throw the loose end down to the trapped man."

"Hey, Medad. Are you okay?"

"Medad! Medad!"

They look in the direction of Gersshon with his band still over his one eye. "He'd better not be dead!"

One-eyed Gersshon shrugs his shoulders and turns his hands up. "I was just trying to get the dust out of his eye."

Down at the bottom of the cliff Medad raises one hand, then lets it fall again. There is blood on his head, legs and hands.

"Can you wrap this rope around your waist, Medad?" Superintendent Chanaan calls down to him.

The injured man turns over and crawls in the direction of the rope. He does not get far.

"I can't reach it," he groans.

"Okay, one of us will come get you," Chanaan responds.

One of the chisellers pulls the rope back up and ties it around his waist. He repels down the cliff until the rope will not go farther. With the rope still around him, he reaches for Medad, but the injured man is not close enough.

"Medad, can you crawl over to me?"

Medad crawls a short distance, but cannot continue. The pain stabs at his bones and his muscles cry out in anguish. He reaches exhaustion almost immediately. Every part of his body objects to any further torture.

"Okay, Medad. I'm going to go back up and figure something else out. Will you be okay?"

"I think so," he groans.

"Hang on. We'll be back for you."

The crewman climbs back up the cliff. He talks to the other rock chisellers and looks up at their superintendent.

"What'll we do?"

"Too bad we can't throw Gersshon and his splinter over the cliff and let him trade places with Medad."

"I think I can help." It's Zarus. "I'm the tallest one of anyone out here. I think I can reach him."

Zarus is handed the rope, and ties the end of it around his waist. He walks to the edge of the cliff, turns around, and repels down its straight wall. When he reaches the bottom, he unties the rope,

walks over to Medad, and kneels.

“How are you doing, Medad? You’re pretty messed up. Do you think you broke any bones?” he asks as he probes the injured man’s arms and legs.

“I don’t think so, but I hurt all over.”

“Here, I brought some bands to wrap your head in. And here’s some water. Take a sip. See if you can sit up.”

Zarus helps Medad to a sitting position. “Okay, now, Medad. I’m pretty strong. I’m going to wrap the rope around my waist again. Do you think you can hang on to my back?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Okay, let’s think this through.” The two men sit at the bottom of the cliff with Medad leaning over on Zarus strong shoulder. Zarus has his arm around him to keep him from slumping down. The other men watch from above.

“Okay, let’s try this,” Zarus says. “I will put you over my shoulder. Do you think you could handle that?”

“I can try.”

“Okay,” Zarus continues, “I’m going to carry you over to where the rope is, and you can sit on the ground while I tie the end around my waist. Then I will pick you up again and put you on my shoulder. Do you think you can hang on to my neck from that angle?”

“I’ll try. I think I can.”

Remember, I’m strong. I’ve lifted a lot heavier than you in my twenty years here on earth. Once you are on my shoulder, I will begin climbing back up the cliff. There will be men pulling at the other end, but they’ll need my help.

“Yes, sir. And, if I don’t make it, sir, thank you for trying. And, one more thing.”

“What’s that, Medad?”

“Tell my wife I love her.”

“That, my friend, I am going to make sure you tell her yourself. Here we go now, Medad. Jhehovah bless us both.”

“Ahhh...”

“I didn’t mean to hurt you,” Zarus says in almost a whisper. “Hang on now.”

Medad, now over Zarus’ broad shoulder, hangs on to Zarus’ neck.

Zarus’ muscles strain as he fights for strength. He puts one hand over the other. They are now off the ground. Each muscle, each sinew is called on to become mighty. Now the other hand reaches up. And the other.

He tries putting his feet flat on the edge of the cliff for better

leverage, but finds Medad is less steady when he does. He lets his feet dangle, and stretches the muscles of his other arm to reach up. *Don't stop. Don't think about it. Keep going. Keep the momentum going.* One hand, then the other, and the other.

The men from above the cliff watch in astonishment as young Zarus works his way up the cliff with their injured comrade. They grab hold of the rope where it is attached to the boulder and add their own strength to it.

“Pull!”

“Pull!”

“Pull!”

One hand at a time at the top of the cliff. One hand at a time on the edge of the cliff. Closer to safety. Life-saving safety.

“Pull!”

“Pull!”

“Pull!”

Once at the top, and the rope untied from his waist, Zarus shifts Medad around so he is in his arms, and works his way up the hill. He lays Medad down on the same blanket he had laid Gersshon down on a few hours earlier with his eye injury.

The dust is now settled. He looks around for Gersshon, but does not see him.

Instead, over where the newly laid road ends are two men dressed in finery. They watch Zarus a moment longer, turn, and walk toward the gates of Sychar, the well, and the home of Devorah.

"Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?

How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye?

You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."
(Matthew 7:3-5)

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