



ZWTF

Zapping You Whenever Thoughts Flow

Volume 7, Issue 13

ROMANS Part 147

Chapter 16:14-15

When eight first-century Greeks came to Almont, MI.

(Continued from last week.)

Greet Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brethren with them. 15 Greet Philologos and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas.

It was *Field of Dreams* come to Greenwich, Ohio. God dialed it up perfectly for me, no question about that. He made me love this film in 1989 for its faith-fanning themes. This movie, if you have never seen it, is not about baseball or corn but about conviction

concerning matters not yet being observed. That is, it's about faith.

Whenever faith for my work or my dependence on God had wavered over the years (it had happened a few times), God would once again bring *Field of Dreams* to my mind and provoke me to plug in the CD for the umpteenth time. *Field of Dreams* never failed to deliver. Thank you, Kevin Costner, James Earl Jones, Amy Madigan, Ray Liotta, Burt Lancaster, screenwriter/director Phil Alden Robinson, and everyone associated with this helpful little film, including God.

Little wonder then—come to think of it—that God used the *Field of Dreams* operating procedure (man hears voice in cornfield; miracles ensue) to impress me. But really—who *wouldn't* have been impressed?

BLISSFIELD

Three days before meeting the Greeks in Blissfield, I was not-so-unusually standing in the cornfield adjoining my property. It's an especially peaceful place in the Fall when a breeze rustles the brown, brittle stalks and the sun sits as high as it can in early November. This was field corn (corn for cows) and the owners left much of it astalk until Thanksgiving. There I stood in the midst of it, coffee in hand on the afternoon of November 5, when the voice said, "If you drive to Blissfield, Michigan, they will come."

Being the daring/believing/quizzical type, I answered the voice with a question, saying, "Who will come?" And the voice, being practical, spiritual and dutifully mysterious said, "Why, the last eight Greeks, of course."

I puzzled only momentarily over "the last eight Greeks." For years I'd read the names of the Greek believers at the end of Paul's letter to the Romans, enjoying fellowship with them. I could never simply gloss over the names; I *camped* over them. To me, these people were not simply a last-minute addendum by Paul—a postscript or afterthought to the end of Roman. To

Paul, these were dear, essential friends; fellow-travelers; birds of a believing feather. Thus, they were *my* fellow-travelers as well. They were the first of a spiritual progeny of which I was part.

Paul named thirty-seven saints. These were my people, then, my spirit-mates, the people with whom I would have so much in common that we could launch instantly into easy conversations, bridging great racial, political and even time gaps. (This would soon be put to the test and proven true.)



Thus, rather than skipping over the list (as many readers no doubt do) every time I read the end of Romans, I luxuriated over every syllable of every name, imagining not only the face behind the name, but the spirit and soul behind the face; the *essence* of the precious beings living and dying for Christ two-thousand years before my own birth. For here were people just like me (believers in Jesus Christ and in the grace of God), except that they were contemporaries of the great apostle himself and forerunners—pioneers—of who would succeed them and finish what they started. I believed and still do believe that what they started, we will finish. They were the first generation; we are the last. We are the Omega to their Alpha, the end to their beginning. God has bookended—between us and them—the body of Christ.

I knew they were all dead, of course, but I nevertheless imagined them having passed a baton to us, for us to run the final lap of a monumentally important race. If they could speak or talk from the grave, they would cheer us on, embolden us, implore us never to quit.

These believers were nobodies in their day, certainly, and are only notable now because of their mention in the world's bestselling Book. Because of my spiritual kinship with them, and because I had written for years about them (mentioning them over and over again not only in print but from conference podiums, with tears in my eyes, lest they be forgotten) it is little wonder (within the greater wonder) that God would choose *me* for this assignment—to greet a select contingent of pioneering saints whom He would transfer—temporarily and in the grand interest of timeless fellowship—from their world to mine.

As far as “the *last eight* Greeks” was concerned, it was plain that the people I'd meet would be the last eight of the thirty-seven mentioned, namely: Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, Philologos, Julia, Nereus and his sister (who I later learned to be named Sophronia; shortened to “Sophie”) and Olympas. It struck me as appropriate that the last eight would become the miraculous time-travelers, for it is the standard operating procedure of God to make the last first.

The voice offered no specific date for the rendezvous, but I had already planned months ago to attend the semi-annual Concordant meeting in Almont, Michigan that Saturday—three days hence—a conference at which I would also speak. I figured from this that the upcoming Saturday was the day that I was to meet them in Blissfield.

A consultation of the Rand McNally road atlas apprised me of the location of this town I'd never heard of and, as I suspected, it was more or less on the way to Almont, just off U.S. Route 223, a ninety-minute drive from where I stood,



and another ninety minutes from Almont. I would find the Greeks in Blissfield whenever I happened to show up—God would take care of the detailed timing—take them to the Almont, Michigan fellowship at the home of Dean and Gisela Hough, and then see what would happen next.

Little did I realize what would happen next. In fact, I'm still heartsick over it—even after all these years.

DETROIT

They thought that Detroit was the New Jerusalem. The biggest city they'd ever seen was the one they lived in, namely Rome, but not even Rome boasted anything like the Renaissance Center, the Penobscot Building, Cadillac Tower and the DTE Energy Headquarters.

"Oh, my God!" Julia shouted. "It's New Jerusalem!"

I had to laugh. I said, "No, it's not quite that. It *would* be New Jerusalem, except the tree of life is missing. And the presence of God is also not here, which I admit is a real bummer and not a minor inconvenience. Other than *that...*

oh! And one other little detail: all the curs, enchanters, paramours and murders are *inside* this city, not outside of it. But other than that, yes, this is New Jerusalem."

"Who *built* this?" she asked. "Nimrod?"

"I think Nimrod financed it," I said. "But seriously. The New Jerusalem will make this place look like downtown Nazareth. This is Detroit, by the way. Ted Nugent, Aretha Franklin, Jimmy Hoffa and Francis Ford Coppola are all Detroit people—just so you know.

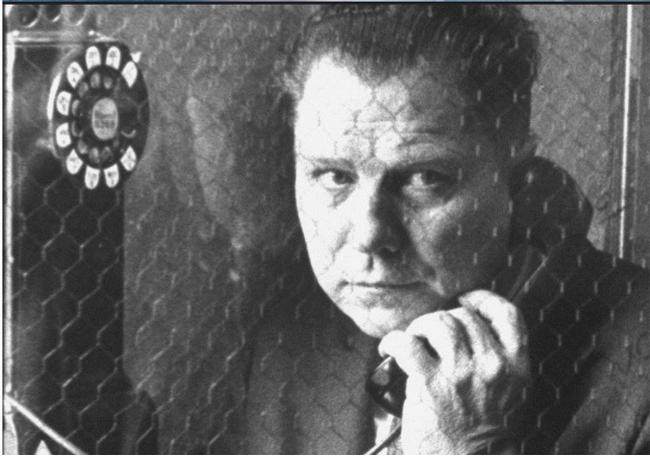
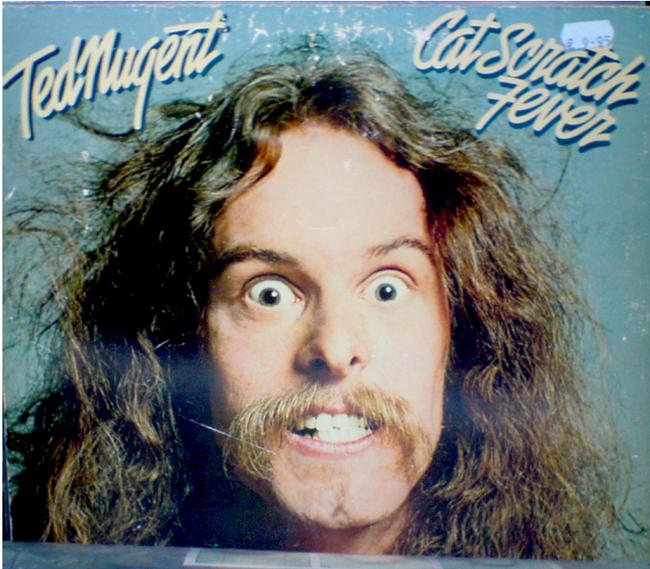
"It's good to know that," said Hermas. "I was wondering about Ted Nugget."

"Nugent," I corrected him.

"Yes, him too."

"It's a big city for sure," I continued, "huge to you guys, but it's not the biggest city in the United States. You should see New York City. But anyway, the country you guys are now in is called the United States of America."

"Are the states united, Martin Zender?" This was Hermas again, the portly one, the same guy who said that it was good to know that Ted Nugent was a Detroit



person; Hermas, who, I discovered, was a bit of a smart-aleck—not unlike myself. It was a rhetorical, joke question about the United States being united states, and for this I liked Hermas. “The answer to your question is yes,” I said. “So far. But we had a close call back in 1861.”

“Sure,” joked Patrobas—also from the backseat gallery—“way back there eighteen-hundred years *after* we were born.”

“This is nuts,” said Nereus. I thought that the man in the passenger seat, the brother of Sophie, was referring to the fact that 150 years ago, from his new perspective, was two-thousand years after his birth. But no. Apparently he was talking about Detroit. He couldn’t take his eyes from the Motor City as it finally passed behind us out the right passenger window, where Philologos and Julia sat.

Olympas said, “I can’t believe all this snow.” He was right. It was still snowing like crazy and was unseason-

ably weird in its volume and persistence. I was beginning to think that God had sent it for their sakes, to keep them from seeing all that they *could* see. I had always theorized that people from any era before 1800, being transported instantly to our day without a thread of acclimatization, would collapse in a heap of nervous breakdown within five minutes. God was proving me wrong. Or perhaps, via the snowstorm, He was proving me right. They simply were not being allowed to see too much, these Greeks. *Interesting.*

SOPHRONIA

But never mind that. I was hoping that Sophie would say something else, and she did. “I’m hungry,” she said. That was good enough for me. But she continued, “I think I’m smelling food that doesn’t even exist. I was hungry when I left. All I had for breakfast this morning was an avocado turnover.”

Sophie’s mere mention of avocado turnovers suddenly made avocado turnovers (which I’d never heard of; none of us moderns have) a topic of great fascination to me. I wanted one. And I wished that she had brought one with her. I had a feeling that she might share it with me. Or would she choose to share it with Olympas? After all, it was Olympas’ lucky lap that she was presently situated upon.

Sophie was a classic beauty, but dark. She could possibly be cast in a modern vampire movie, but would secretly be against the vampires and would vanquish them with



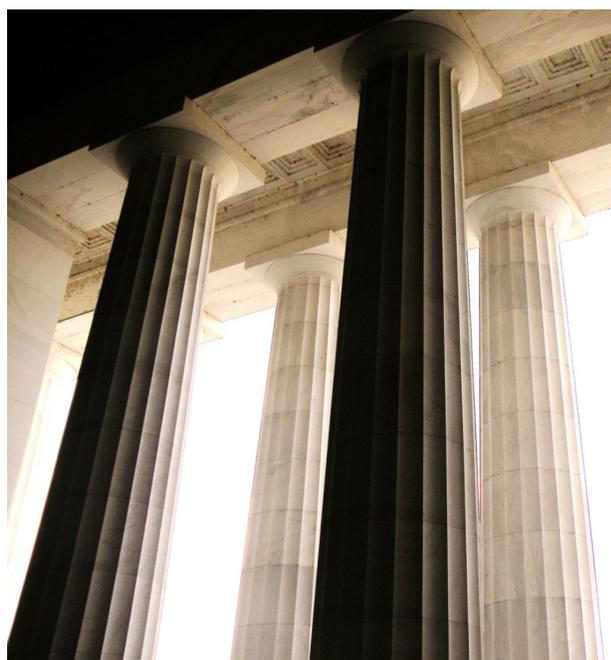
avocado turnovers. Something about Sophronia reminded me of Eve, which was a ridiculous thought because, as far as I could remember, I had never met Eve. So what made me think of the wife of Adam when I first saw Sophie? Was it her long, black hair? (I'd always pictured Eve having tresses like that, but I might have to blame the *Children's Illustrated Bible* for this conception, be it true or not.) Was it her faded-olive complexion? Her Acropoliptic mind? (An elevated mind, hers, replete with Ionic capital pillars, with the Temple of Athena Nike flanking it.) The upturned edges of her lips? Her can-opener eyes outlined in black pencil? She looked at me familiarly when I opened the car door for her, so much so that I imagined I'd somehow seen her before. Was she the forebear of Mary Rita Williams, the girl I fell in love with in the first grade? Such insane thoughts, I know. But people have always told me that I'm a little bit on the crazy side.

Naturally, it was all in my head, as it is with most men. Or was it? Maybe every man imagines such things. Every boy, certainly. A princess looks at us for a moment longer than Dr. Phil recommends, and we are ready to pick out cake toppers and roll out the silk runner ourselves. How pathetic are we? How pathetic am *I*? We think that the female glance is everything—we men do—when in fact it is nothing. Their eyes have to go *somewhere*, do they not? And so I was turning the dime-store look of Sophronia into the most famous architectural marvel of Athens.

I was a man from the future; how could she not gaze upon my modernity? I was the latest novelty; a museum piece from the future. Thus, she looked at me as Eve

ogled the first man, for Adam was also pure oddity—as was everything surrounding the banks of the Gihon River. That was my answer, then. But then I comforted myself: Sophie *could* have looked at my car, or at the snow, or at the roadbed, or at the snow-covered trees, but she chose, in her stalwart, Greek, Christ-tinged mind, to at least gaze at the most animated novelty available to her: Martin Zender. I'd have to settle for that; I *would* settle for it. Oh, I guarantee you that I would settle the hell out of it.

She was deadpan funny, Sophie. Her words had been few, but were weighty and full of bounce, as though God were bouncing them, via strings, from the celestial vault, playfully yanking them up and down in front of my face. When I expected Sophie to speak in a dark monotone (her eyes seemed to beg for that, and the thin eyebrows



above), she produced instead a high-pitched, feminine lilt—especially at the end of her sentences, each one of which was noble. Such incongruity.

How old was Sophronia? Who dares ask? How old were any of them? If you pressed me, the median age of the lot was mid-thirties. Sophronia was probably in her late twenties although, when I met her, she was around 1,980 years old. (So pour *that* onto your Greek salad and eat it.) She looked not a day over 1,500, however. And I tell you this truth: not a single wrinkle betrayed the nearly two-millennia-old face of Sophronia, Super Greek.

But now, ladies and gentlemen, I've just been handed this breaking news announcement: When Sophie said, "I'm hungry," she put her hand on the shoulder of Martin Zender. Yes! It's so true. It's such a true story, verified by at least seven major networks and two minor angels. I shuddered, first of all, to think that a first-century believer who

had received, read, and probably *held* the original letter of Paul to the Romans, was touching my shoulder. I shuddered, second of all, because that first-century believer was Sophie, descendant of Eve, possessor of can-opener eyes, heiress to conian life among celestial hierarchies. As I mulled these things, Sophie said, “Well?”

“Well, *what*, Miss Sophie?”

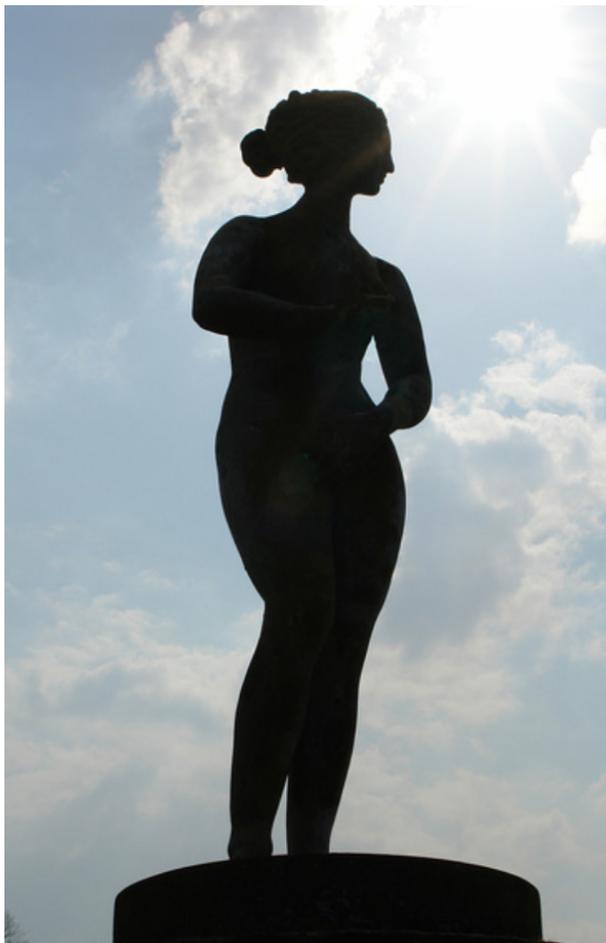
“Well—*food*, Mr. Zender.”

“Oh! That. Well, we’re only forty-five minutes or so from Almont. I guarantee you that Gisela and Gertrude will have tons of lunch there—maybe not avocado turnovers—but I think you’ll be impressed with the amounts of vegetables that Gertrude can put together—even vegetable soup, possibly—and I would *not* be surprised if Gisela makes her famous rigatoni casserole.”

“So tell me about hell,” said Sophie. “You said you were going to.”

See what I mean! Are you getting the Corinthian columns of this woman? The Victory Sanctuary? The Nike Parapet? Winged Victory? Venus? Aphrodite? Hydra?

“You said that you would,” she said again.



From the back seat, Patrobas added, “And you said that we wouldn’t believe what has happened to the evangel. Try not to wreck everything for us, Martin Zender. But I think we should know. Perhaps this is partly the reason why we have come. I think we can handle it.”

TIMOTHY

Oh, boy. Here it was, then. What was I going to do now? What else was there to do but tell them the truth—as if I had anything to lose by it. As if everything was not already perched upon the edge of the universe and the brink of madness.

“Do any of you remember Timothy?” I asked.

“Remember him?” said Philologos, “I *met* him. He was a kid, basically. I met him, along with Silas, in Lystra. Never seen a smarter kid, though. Hermes was with me.”

“Educated by his mother and grandmother,” added Hermes. (Hermes said this, mind you; not Hermas the Portly). “Nice kid. True blue Circumcision guy, until Paul came along. Had a heck of a time talking his mother into it and never did convince his grandmother.”

“His grandmother was Eunice,” I said, trying to sound smart.

“No, that would be Lois. Eunice was his mother.”

“Oh, yeah. I always get those two mixed up.”

“No worries, Martin Zender. I have no idea how you know either name.”

“Lucky guess,” I said. “Tell me more about the problem with Lois.”

“She hated Paul. She could not get out of the Circumcision. She was too steeped in it.”

“Yes,” I said, “but her daughter—Timothy’s mother—had to have been steeped in it too.”

“She was,” said Hermes. “But Eunice was—how shall I



say—more open to it. It really caused a rift between her and her mother. But Eunice liked to listen to the same kind of music that Timothy liked when he started school. Timothy started listening to this modern African percussion stuff—I don't know if it's around in your day—and he thought his mom would hate it but she took to it. He told me all of this. They used to dance together to it in the kitchen, with Timothy banging on the counters and on pots with sticks. The music probably seems like a small thing to you and you are wondering why I'm mentioning it, but it helped when Timothy met Paul and he came

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home one day telling his mother that baptism and circumcision and ‘Jew versus Greek’ didn't mean anything anymore, and that God was declaring a new message among the Gentiles that erased fleshly distinctions.”

This stuff was giving me goose bumps. “We would probably say that Eunice was ‘with it.’ That she was ‘cool.’”

“We would say, ‘on the same page,’” said Julia.

“Wow! We have that saying, too. Still, it had to have taken some time.”

“That’s the weird thing,” continued Hermes. “No. It made complete sense to her right away. Especially when Timothy said that Paul had heard from the resurrected Christ. That sealed it for her. She accepted it all right away, even justification by faith. She was in love with Christ, I can tell you that. May God rest her soul, that Eunice. She loved Christ. Paul’s message made so much sense to her. I can still see her standing in her kitchen making everyone coffee.”

I was shaking my head. “What a gift, such faith. It wasn’t even Scripture yet.”

“But if you’re called, you’re called. Right, Martin Zender?” I looked into my rearview mirror, and Hermes smiled as he said this.

“Yes.”

Patrobas piped up. “What do you mean by ‘there wasn’t even Scripture yet?’”

“I mean, Paul hadn’t written it down.”

“You mean in that book that you showed us?”

“Yes. The Bible.”

“That still astounds me and I’ve yet to comprehend the fullness of it.”

“About that,” I said. “Paul wrote Timothy two letters, and both of them are in that book.”

Patrobas said, “Surely you’re not telling us that they’re inspired. That Paul writing to Timothy was God-breathed.”

“Yes, that is precisely what I’m telling you. As inspired as the first five books of Moses. As inspired as the writings of John.”

I could hear Patrobas puzzling. “But how can personal letters be inspired by God? How can they be infallible?”

“But wasn’t Romans a personal letter to you?” I asked him, and all of them.

I could tell that I had stopped Patrobas in his tracks. “Please continue,” he said.

“Paul wrote Timothy two letters. In the second letter, which was the last letter that he wrote from jail, Paul told Timothy of a great apostasy that would come in the final days of the eon.”

“Wait a minute,” said Julia. “What do you mean, ‘the last letter that he wrote from jail?’”

Uh-oh. I’d stepped in it. “Forget that,” I said. “Let’s talk about the apostasy.”

“I *can’t* forget it,” said Julia. “Now that you’ve said it, you have to explain it.”

I tried to think of some gentle way to explain it without *explaining* it. “Well, you know that Paul was always in trouble, right? He was always in and out of jail. Like in Philippi, right? Remember that?” I couldn’t remember if that had happened yet before ‘56 A.D.—remember, these Greek had only just received Paul’s epic letter—so I ran right over it and kept talking. “And Paul only wrote two letters to Timothy, so the second one was obviously the last one,” I said. “Right?”

“Sounds fishy,” said Julia.

“That’s weird,” I said. “We have that same saying in my world.”

“That’s because fish have always stunk, and always *will* stink,” said Sophia.

THE APOSTASY

“Get back to the apostasy,” said Hermes. “Are you saying that the apostasy is worse in this day than it is in ours? I find it highly doubtful.”

“You have no idea,” I said. “I cannot even begin to tell you how dangerous is this world that you’re now in.

The danger is not just physical, either. It's emotional. It's spiritual. It's philosophical. It's everything. And it's not located; it's not restricted. What I mean is, it's not just in one place. It covers the Earth as the waters cover the sea."

"We have all of that," said Julia.

"I know you do, but not to the degree that it is now. The last thing Paul mentions in a long list of criminals and their crimes is 'a form of devoutness yet denying the power.' I believe that he was talking about religion."

"We have that in droves," said Olympas. "The Circumcisionists."

"Yes, I know about them," I said. "I know about the Circumcisionists. You *think* you have it in droves, but you don't. I'm not trying to be rude or sell you short. It's all relative. I think that we should drop the subject, actually."

I then felt that magical, first-century feminine hand again on my left shoulder, only this time a little more of it. "But you haven't yet told us about *hell*," said Sophie.

"Oh. *That*."

"How far are we from the Almont?" Julia wanted to know. I consulted my odometer. "Ten miles."

"How many kilometers is that?" said Sophie.

"Sixty-five million," I joked.

"Mm. That's a good number. So about this 'hell' business?"

I cleared my throat. "People who do not believe in Jesus Christ do not simply die and stay dead," I said. "Not in today's theological world. Satan has caused something terrible to rise up, and it has come in the name of Christ but not in His spirit, and it has been pushed onto the world through bad translations of the

Bible, which never should have happened—although it's in the absolute will of God—but now most people believe that God will torment unbelievers in a flaming torture pit called 'hell,' which is actually taken from a ridiculous poem written by some insane Italian poet from the thirteenth century named 'Dante,' and that God will torment the unbelievers there *forever*, because not only have certain translators mistranslated your gorgeous Greek word *hades* into 'hell'—we all know that *hades* is the non-existence of the soul at death—but they mistranslated your perfectly functional and stupendous word *aionian*—which we all know means 'an indistinct period of time'—and they have made it 'eternal,' thus throwing a wrench—that's a tool-like thing—into the beautiful spinning wheels of God's glorious plan of eonian salvation."

No one said anything then. How could they? It would take time for my words to sink into their souls, if even the words could; if even the Greeks could grasp them. I felt bad for them. I grieved for what I was telling them. I shouldn't have done it to them so soon, perhaps. But I knew that God had granted us but twelve hours together (another revelation of the spirit) and that God was compelling me to make the most use of our limited time.

When I expected someone to speak, still no one did. I thought for sure that Sophie would say something. Well, she did. Boy, did she. But it was not what I expected her to say, or what any of them expected. As the snow turned into small ice crystals that 'ping-pinged' against the windows of our Cutlass Ciera, Sophie said, "Oh, *God*."

"What?" I said.

"I just realized."

"*What?*" said Julia.

Sophie said, "We all die before the snatching away. All except Martin Zender. And even *he* may die."

Almost by instinct, I pulled over to the side of the road and skidded to a stop. You could have heard a first century Greek coin drop. The realization was coming slowly to all of us.

"My Christ," said Olympas. "She's right. We'll never see it. Not in our day. We're all going to die."

It fully hit me then. Here they were, nearly two-thousand years beyond their time, and the body of Christ still crept like an ant upon the decrepit Earth. The snatching away of the body of Christ—the primal, pressing expectation of every living saint was—even 1,958 years beyond the time of these Greek—still but an expectation.

"How can we go back without that expectation?" said Sophie. "Jesus. How *can* we?" —MZ (*To be continued.*)

