

Chapter-by-chapter notes

Chapter One

Important points to note:

Ronni is grieving the loss of her father and Steven (whom readers discover in chapter two was her older brother). She feels that because they lost their lives in the course of saving a stranger, they died for no good reason. She doesn't understand the concept of sacrifice, including that of Jesus dying on the cross.

Ronni and Tabby have been given permission to work on their religion assignment: to examine the religious themes that can be found in a classic movie. They have chosen to work on *The Wizard of Oz*. This movie is an important thread that will run throughout the book, and there will be numerous parallels to *The Wizard of Oz* in the text. This is something to which students could pay special attention, perhaps even noting when similarities occur.

Tabby is depicted as a fair-haired, fair-skinned young lady who doesn't share Ronni's faith—or a belief in any faith.

Ronni's mother frequently asks the Blessed Mother to intercede with her Son on behalf of Ronni's mother. Some people don't appreciate the Catholic understanding of Mary as Queen Mother, but it is a Biblically-based role, one that is evident in the reading of the Old Testament. In the Davidic kingdom where kings led the people of God, the queen wasn't the king's wife—many kings had more than one wife. Solomon, for example, had 700! The queen was the king's mother, of which (of course), there was only one. That's why when a new king is introduced to readers in the Old Testament, we are told right away who his mother is. It was her role to intercede with her son on behalf of the people. By appreciating the role of this queen-mother, or *gebirah*, we can see how this “can serve as a background for understanding Mary, the mother of the Messiah-King”* and, by extension, her role as intercessor for us.

*From the book **Queen Mother: A Biblical Theology of Mary's Queenship** by Dr. Edward Sri.

Chapter Two

Foreshadowings of future events in this chapter include:

- The possibility that Mark may have inadvertently glimpsed Ronni in the all-together
- The mention that the day the story starts is the Wednesday before Good Friday

Ronni mentions that her mother is constantly lecturing her about her body being a temple of the Holy Spirit. In particular, the Scriptural references to St. Paul's writings include:

Shun immorality. Every other sin which a man commits is outside the body; but the immoral man sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body. 1 Cor 6:18-20

Chapter Three

This chapter represents the transition from modern-day America to first-century Jerusalem.

From Ronni's perspective, she can "see," but she is unable to open her eyes. They feel sewn shut (a method used to keep the eyes of the deceased shut) or weighted down by metal. In ancient days, coins were frequently placed on the eyelids of those who had died.

As her hearing returns, she picks up the sound of flutes being played mournfully:

While he (Jesus) was thus speaking to them, behold, a ruler came in and knelt before him, saying, "My daughter has just died; but come and lay your hand on her, and she will live." (Mt 9:18) And when Jesus came to the ruler's house, and saw the flute players, and the crowd making a tumult, he said, "Depart; for the girl is not dead but sleeping." (Mt 9:23-24).

Note that the mournful playing of flutes is associated with grieving the death of someone.

As Ronni's story continues, she is roused in a scene drawn from Mark 5:37-43:

And he allowed no one to follow him except Peter and James and John the brother of James. When they came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, he saw a tumult, and people weeping and wailing loudly. And when he had entered, he said to them, "Why do you make a tumult and weep? The child is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him. But he put them all outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. Taking her by the hand he said to her, "Talitha koum"; which means, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." And immediately the girl got up and walked (she was twelve years of age), and they were immediately overcome with amazement. And he strictly charged them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.

When Ronni is healed, she hears her mother launch into praise of God, and she is joined by others in the room. This is Psalm 103, a psalm written by King David:

Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name! Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's (Ps 103:1-5).

Note similarities to *The Wizard of Oz*:

- The three men standing at the foot of Seraphina’s bed are like the farmhands who are next to Dorothy’s bed in the movie.
- When Seraphina opens the door that leads to the courtyard, she goes from a “monotone interior of the room” to a “colorful outdoors,” very much like what Dorothy experiences when the tornado-blown house lands and she opens the door.
- Seraphina nicknames the goat “Toto,” and she says the same thing Dorothy says to her little dog: “Toto, I don’t think we’re in Kansas anymore.”

Chapter Four

This chapter finds Ronni/Seraphina struggling to make sense of her surroundings. Is she a 21st-century American girl flung into the past, or a 1st-century Jewish girl from Jerusalem who dreamed she lived in the future?

She notes that the city is quite crowded, and Mark’s comment that it was the time of Passover would explain that. Jerusalem in the first century would have had a permanent population of some 80,000. During Passover, one of the three great festivals during which Jews were obligated to make sacrifices at the Temple, the city would see between 100,000 and 250,000 visitors, definitely crowding the city.

Seraphina is momentarily confused when Mark refers to himself as her brother, but upon further reflection, she realizes he used the Aramaic word *aha*, which can mean “brother” in the sense of “kinsman” rather than a sibling relationship.

Mark mentions the Emperor Tiberius—a name which rings a bell in Seraphina’s memory. Careful readers of Luke’s Gospel will note this mention:

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, and Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, in the high-priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John the son of Zechariah in the wilderness (Lk 3:1-2).

This is the point in the story of Salvation History where John the Baptist begins his ministry in preparation for the coming of Jesus.

Chapter Five

Seraphina questions Mark about what day of the week it is, and she discovers that it's three days since "the first day of the week"—making this day Wednesday. It's the same day it was when she was living her life in America—Wednesday of Holy Week.

Seraphina learns that she was present at the triumphal entry of Jesus in Jerusalem this past Sunday.

And they (the two disciples) went away, and found a colt tied at the door out in the open street; and they untied it. And those who stood there said to them, "What are you doing, untying the colt?" And they told them what Jesus had said; and they let them go. And they brought the colt to Jesus, and threw their garments on it; and he sat upon it. And many spread their garments on the road, and others spread leafy branches which they had cut from the fields. And those who went before and those who followed cried out, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming! Hosanna in the highest!"
Mk 11:4-10

Why was Jesus riding a donkey? Four reasons:

- 1) First, the prophet Zechariah wrote: "Behold, your king comes to you, triumphant and victorious. He is humble and riding on an ass, on a colt the foal of an ass." (Zech 9:9) When Jesus enters, the people cry "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" which is something Catholics say during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.
- 2) A donkey was key in Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, the son he loved. It was the way they traveled to the site of the sacrifice (Mt. Moriah, the hill upon which Jesus, God the Father's beloved Son will be sacrificed).
- 3) King Solomon rode to his coronation on a mule that belonged to his father David. Jesus is the final and ultimate King in the line of David, and He is entering Jerusalem in the same way Solomon did.
- 4) Another Old Testament king, Jehu, rode over the garments of his supporters as he entered Samaria (the Samaritans are idol-worshipping half-Jews who live north of Jerusalem and with whom the Jews do not get along) in order to destroy the temple of the Samaritan's false god. When Jesus enters Jerusalem on the donkey, he immediately goes to the Temple to cleanse it.

On their way into the city, Mark and Seraphina stop at the graveyard where her father and brother are buried. Mark cautions her about touching the grave—doing so would make someone "ritually unclean" so that they would not be able to celebrate the Passover. Since the city was so crowded at Passover, the graves were whitewashed so that they could be easily seen and so no one would inadvertently touch one.

The rock quarry Mark and Seraphina walk through really existed, and modern archeologists have uncovered the quarry from which they believe the stones were taken to build the Temple that existed at the time of Jesus.

Chapter Six

The barrier that kept non-Jews from entering the inner courts of the Temple actually existed. The first century historian Josephus wrote about the large stones bearing the message that a Gentile was subject to death if he or she breached the barrier. The Temple and Jerusalem were destroyed by the Romans in 70 A.D., and it wasn't until 1871 that archeologists actually discovered such a sign carved into stone and written in Greek.

Each day at the Temple, the Levitical Choir would sing a special song for that day. According to oral tradition, Wednesday's song was Psalm 94, and this is the song that Seraphina hears them sing.

When Seraphina bumps into a Pharisee, she notes that he is wearing a phylactery on his arm and one on his forehead. These small leather boxes, also known as tefillin contain four passages from Scripture which include these verses: Exod. 13:1-10, 11-16; Deut. 6:4- 9; 11:13-21. They serve as reminders to keep the Word of God always at the forefront of one's life: *You shall therefore lay up these words of mine (God) in your heart and in your soul; and you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.* Deut 11:18.

Skin problems like eczema could easily be confused with leprosy, and that's the problem Seraphina faces when her hands land upon the Pharisee's arms. Here are some relevant passages from Leviticus: *Anyone who develops a contagious skin disease must go to the priest for an examination* (Lev 13:9) and *As long as the disease lasts, they will be ceremonially unclean and must live in isolation outside the camp* (Lev 13:47). The people at that time didn't know (and couldn't tell) the difference between a skin condition that might or might not be contagious.

Tabitha risks her life to help Seraphina escape the Temple, and then Seraphina enters Hezekiah's tunnel to get away from her pursuers.

Chapter Seven

Around 700 B.C., Hezekiah, the King of Judah, wanted to protect Jerusalem from her enemies. One important thing was to make sure that water could be supplied to the city. A tunnel stretching 1/3 of a mile long was dug connecting the Gihon Springs outside the city's walls with a storage pool inside the city, which was later called the Pool of Siloam. The tunnel still exists, water flows through it, and visitors can walk through it like Seraphina does. It's pitch-black inside, so flashlights (or a torch, in Seraphina's case) are imperative.

Water continues today to flow through the tunnel, and the level can range from covering a person's ankles to reaching mid-chest height. The passage grows narrow in places, to just a bit wider than a man's shoulders. The height ranges from about 4 ½ feet to 6 ½ feet.

Three hundred years before Hezekiah, there wasn't a tunnel, just a shaft between the springs and the inside of the city. It was at this time (1000 B.C.) that David was King, but the Jebusites inhabited Jerusalem. In order to get into the city, David (or his men) entered through this shaft and took over the city which became known as "the City of David."

Chapter Eight

One of the 613 laws laid out in the Old Testament is the following from Deuteronomy 22:5. “A woman shall not wear anything that pertains to a man, nor shall a man put on a woman’s garment; for whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD your God.” But Mark gives Seraphina his cloak without reservation, noting that the Pharisees were apt to take these laws far too literally, and in fact, they went to great lengths to impose even tighter restrictions on actions so that the people didn’t even come close to committing an error.

The mezuzah on Seraphina’s doorpost contains the *Shema*, the section of the Torah (the Hebrew Bible) that is an important part of the prayer life of Jews. Three passages from the Bible form the prayer. The passages are Deuteronomy 6:4-8 and 11:13-22 and Numbers 15:37-42. Part of it is:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD; and you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words which I command you this day shall be upon your heart; and you shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes.” Deut. 6:4-8.

In this chapter, Seraphina’s mother reveals her relationship with the Holy Family. She was a child at the same time Jesus was, and when the Holy Family came to Jerusalem, they would frequently stay with her family, she says. She alludes to the time the Holy Family had traveled from Nazareth to Jerusalem to celebrate Passover, and Jesus was inadvertently left behind.

“ . . . and when they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem, seeking him. After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers . . . ” Luke 2:45-46

Mary and Joseph were three days in Jerusalem looking for Jesus. They had to stay somewhere, and why not (in the mind of this author) the home of Seraphina’s grandparents?

Chapter Nine

Men generally did not fetch water in the first century—that was women’s work. This book has given a reason why a man might be carrying a jar of water—something that must have occurred at this particular Passover. Read Mark 14:12-15:

And on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they sacrificed the passover lamb, his disciples said to him, "Where will you have us go and prepare for you to eat the passover?" And he sent two of his disciples, and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the householder, 'The Teacher says, Where is my guest room, where I am to eat the passover with my disciples?' And he will show you a large upper room furnished and ready; there prepare for us."

Bar Abbas’ name really does translate as “son of the father,” and some ancient manuscripts do give his name as “Jesus Barabbas.” It is an imagined scenario in which Barabbas commits a crime and gets arrested. It only made sense that Ronni/Seraphina, would know that if she could keep him from being arrested, he wouldn’t be available for Pilate to release to the crowd . . . and, therefore, Pilate might release Jesus instead. Thus, the motivation for her action.

Tabitha’s father, who was alluded to in the beginning of the book as formerly being in the army, is introduced here as a first-century Roman centurion who rescues Seraphina from the clutches of Barabbas.

Chapter Ten

Ronni/Seraphina realizes that she knows more about the future than just what will happen to Jesus. When Tabitha mentions her family’s desire to live with grandparents in Herculaneum, Seraphina is horrified because she knows that in 79 A.D., Vesuvius will erupt, burying both Pompeii and Herculaneum.

Tabitha has rescued Seraphina already in this story; Seraphina wants to return the favor. If she can convince Tabitha to steer clear of Vesuvius, her life, and the lives of her family, may be saved.

Chapter Eleven

At the preparation for the Last Supper meal are a man, Cleopas, and his wife Mary. Cleopas asks if they can have some of the shelled nuts for the couple’s return to their hometown of Emmaus. The account in Luke 24:13-35 tells of two disciples traveling to Emmaus on the day of the Lord’s resurrection. One of the disciples is named as Cleopas. The other is not. The implication in this chapter of **Awakening** is that the other disciple could possibly have been his wife.

Cleopas’ wife Mary makes another appearance in the Gospel of John: *But standing by the cross of Jesus were his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas (or Cleopas), and*

Mary Magdalene (Jn 19:25). Who was this Cleopas? We don't know for sure, but some people propose that he was Jesus' uncle—the brother of either the Blessed Mother or St. Joseph. In preparation for the Last Supper, Seraphina's mother has her chop up green leaves called *eryngo*. (The correct pronunciation of this word also comes in handy if you happen to meet the Beatles' drummer: *your-ring-o* – “You're Ringo!”) These are the bitter herbs that made up part of the first Passover meal when the Israelites were fleeing Egypt. *They shall eat the flesh that night, roasted; with unleavened bread and bitter herbs they shall eat it* (Ex 12:8).

Joseph of Arimathea makes an appearance as he gives a gift for Jesus' Passover supper: a finely-woven tablecloth. More information about this detail appears in the notes for Chapter Nineteen.

Chapter Twelve

Seraphina notes that Jesus and the apostles are arranged around the table in a manner not at all like that depicted by Leonardo da Vinci—and other painters—with all the men lined up along one side of the table and possibly even sitting in chairs. In fact, the more likely table arrangement was a triclinium, a low, U-shaped table around which the diners would have reclined on cushions on the floor, in the manner depicted in this chapter.

Seraphina wants to speak to Jesus, but she approaches the task with trepidation. Instead, she seeks the help of his mother, Mary. Mary is depicted as the Queen Mother who is always there to assist individuals wishing to draw near to her Son. The advice she gives Seraphina is the same she gives to the servants at the wedding feast in Cana: *Do whatever he tells you* (Jn 2:5).

Ancient peoples were dependent upon an oral tradition for passing along information and history. They didn't have the books, let alone the technology we have in this day and age, in order to store and recall things. They used their memories, and their memories were very well trained.

Knowing that, it's not difficult to understand how all of the psalms would be committed to memory. Even in our day, it's easy to believe that people can know and recall the words to 150 songs, right? Therefore, it shouldn't come as a surprise that the people of Jesus' day could jump into a psalm and sing the entirety of it.

In chapter three, Seraphina's mother launches into a psalm when her daughter is healed, and everyone else in the room joins in. The same thing happens in this chapter.

At the conclusion of the Last Supper, the attendees sing Psalm 136, “The Great Hillel” psalm. “We get the word *hallelujah* from ‘hillel,’ which means ‘praise’ (and) ‘yah,’ Yahweh: *hallel-u-jah*,” says Scott Hahn, well-known author, speaker, and professor of theology.*

Also in this chapter is another reference to Pompeii. The reflective rocks that separate the larger stones in the roadway Seraphina uses to exit Jerusalem are something that she may have learned about in history class, for they do exist in the roads of Pompeii. At night, these rocks would be iridescent, reflecting the moon's light. The Romans had a highly developed road system, and it seems logical that during their occupation of the Holy Land, some of the techniques used in Italy would be employed in the lands they conquered.

*Scott Hahn, “Eucharist, Holy Meal,” from *Answering Common Objections*, St. Joseph Communications

Chapter Thirteen

On their way to Gethsemane, Seraphina and Mark cross the Kidron Valley which separates the hill on which Jerusalem is built from the Mount of Olives to its east. Gethsemane is located on the Mount of Olives. When Mark falls in the creek and gets drenched, Seraphina urges him to take off his wet clothes and wear her robe, lest he contract pneumonia. Mark is unsure what that word means, but Seraphina believes that with his knowledge of languages, he could figure it out. And he probably, *could* have figured it out, for the word comes from the Greek *pneumon*, meaning “lung.” The Greek word *pneuma* is frequently found in Scripture and can be interpreted not only “breath” but also “spirit.”

Seraphina and Mark reach Gethsemane, which translated means “oil press.” Located on the slopes of the Mount of Olives, olive trees grow there today as they did in Jesus’ day. This particular garden was probably a place where harvested olives were crushed and their oil extruded.

Seraphina and Mark hide so that they don’t disturb Jesus’ praying; they witness the apostles asleep on the ground, and they watch the arresting party approach. Frequently, questions arise at this point in the book about Jesus sweating blood. According to Dr. Frederick Zugibe, Chief Medical Examiner of Rockland County, New York, this phenomenon is well-known. It is called “hematohidrosis.” There are many blood vessels that form around the sweat glands, and under great stress, the vessels constrict. When the anxiety passes, the blood vessels expand to the point of rupture. The blood seeps into the sweat glands, which are producing a lot of sweat, and the blood which is pushed to the surface emerges as droplets of blood mixed with sweat.

Luke’s Gospel is the only one that mentions this: *And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down upon the ground* (Lk 22:44). That Luke would note this condition is not surprising. After all, he was a well-educated man and a physician at that—and he may have been familiar with this phenomenon.

Certain Biblical translations of John 18:3 describe those who came to arrest Jesus as a Roman cohort and officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees. A cohort would normally be a force of up to 600 men. Even if the entire cohort did not go out to arrest Jesus (just like when we say the “fire department” responded to an emergency, we don’t mean every man and woman in the fire department), there were, nonetheless, many Roman soldiers who would have been sent by Pilate. With so many people in Jerusalem for the Feast of Passover, Pilate certainly would have wanted to do anything possible to prevent an uprising. These soldiers would have accompanied the temple police who were ordered by the chief priests and Pharisees to arrest Jesus. The group would have been quite large, and as Seraphina notes, would have appeared to be “a whole army for one man.” The Roman soldiers were accompanied by Temple guards who would have been Levites who were the security force for the Temple. Among them is the guard Seraphina has nick-named “Arrow Brows.”

They witness Peter cut off the right ear of Malchus, who happens to be “the high priest’s slave” (Jn 18:10), and although the soldiers see Jesus miraculously heal the severed ear, they still don’t

believe in him. Seraphina gets up the courage to try to intervene on Jesus' behalf, and that's when she spots Arrow Brows.

Chapter Fourteen

And they all forsook him, and fled. And a young man followed him, with nothing but a linen cloth about his body; and they seized him, but he left the linen cloth and ran away naked (Mark 14:50-52).

Who was this young man who ran away naked? And why was he so scantily clothed? According to Dr. Mary Healy in her book **The Gospel of Mark**, "One traditional suggestion is that the man is Mark himself in whose house Jesus may have celebrated the Last Supper." This detail may have been included because, perhaps, other people knew of this story, and its inclusion in the Gospel by the person to whom it may have happened, would give the account additional credibility.

The book **Awakening** creates a scenario that would provide a reasonable (although fictional) reason as to why a young man would be clad in just a linen cloth and why he might run away naked from the scene of Jesus' arrest.

This chapter and the two before it note that the moon is full. Jesus' Passion takes place during Passover, and the moon is always full at that time. Passover begins on the 15th day of the month of Nisan, which typically falls in March or April. Passover is a spring festival, so the 14th day of Nisan begins on the night of a full moon after the vernal equinox. The fact that the moon is full will make for an interesting observation in chapter eighteen of **Awakening**.

Chapter Fifteen

The story moves from the Garden of Gethsemane to the courtyard of the high priest Caiaphas who puts Jesus on trial before the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin is a governing body of 70 Jewish elders. The establishment of such a court can be traced back to the Old Testament time of Moses:

And the LORD said to Moses, "Gather for me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; and bring them to the tent of meeting, and let them take their stand there with you. And I will come down and talk with you there; and I will take some of the spirit which is upon you and put it upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone (Num 11:16-17).

Jesus commissions a group of men to assist him in his work, and the parallels to the Moses incident are obvious:

After this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to come. And he said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go your way; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves (Lk 10:1-3).

In the courtyard of Caiaphas, three separate times, Peter is questioned by one of the bystanders. Seraphina inadvertently becomes one of those questioners when she tries to persuade Peter to come to the aid Jesus. Not only does she not succeed in getting what she wants, she becomes a catalyst for the action she *doesn't* want to happen. A similar situation occurs when she tries to stop Barabbas from committing a crime. When Seraphina is inserted into these situations, the outcome she encounters is the exact opposite of what she was trying to achieve. Not only is it a plot device for the progression of the book, it is an opportunity for readers to feel aligned with Seraphina and to consider how they handle situations that don't turn out as expected.

Chapter Sixteen

St. Jerome, an early Church Father and Doctor of the Catholic Church, who died in 420 A.D., translated the Bible into Latin. "Ignorance of Scripture is ignorance of Christ," he said. His point is clearly illustrated in this chapter.

When Seraphina is in Caiaphas' house, she formulates a plan to break Mark out of the cell in which he is being held. She has the opportunity to view a scroll which has been left unrolled on a table in Caiaphas' library. She sees that the passage he looked up is from the prophet Daniel.

I saw in the night visions, and behold, with the clouds of heaven there came one like a son of man, and he came to the Ancient of Days and was presented before him. And to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom one that shall not be destroyed (Dn 7:13-14).

When Jesus is being questioned by Caiaphas, he says:

But I tell you, hereafter you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming on the clouds of heaven (Mt 26:64).

Jesus' words are a clear reference to the prophet Daniel. "Son of man" is a Messianic term. Caiaphas knew this. Jesus is claiming to be the Messiah. That's why Caiaphas becomes so enraged that he tears his garment—in his eyes, Jesus has committed blasphemy.

Careful reading of Scripture and understanding of the Old Testament can lead one to know Christ, for as St. Augustine, a contemporary to St. Jerome, said, "The New Testament lies hidden in the Old and the Old is unveiled in the New."

Chapter Seventeen

This chapter encompasses many of the “Stations of the Cross” – which mark certain events along Jesus’ walk to his crucifixion. Mark and Seraphina arrive at the place where, just a few minutes before, Jesus has fallen for the first time. In fact, some of his blood is still on the stone road. But Jesus has moved farther down the way toward his crucifixion, and Mark and Seraphina hurry to catch up. When they do, they witness Jesus meeting his grieving mother. Then they watch as Simon is forced to carry Jesus’ cross.

As is the case with many of the characters in the book, Simon of Cyrene makes an appearance earlier in the book, in Ronni’s modern-day life. He is the man who helps Mark with his car, and his two boys, Alex and R.J. are the kids Ronni babysits. Simon’s sons are mentioned in the Gospel of Mark: *And they compelled a passer-by, Simon of Cyrene, who was coming in from the country, the father of Alexander and Rufus, to carry his cross* (Mk 15:21). Because the sons are specifically named in this Gospel, it is assumed that they may have been well-known to the audience of Roman Christians to whom it is believed the Gospel of Mark was addressed. In fact, in St. Paul’s letter to the Romans, he asks his readers in Rome to *Greet Rufus, eminent in the Lord . . .* (Rom 16:13). Might this be the same Rufus, the brother of Alexander, the son of Simon of Cyrene?

The sixth station of the cross is where Veronica wipes the face of Jesus. Veronica. Seraphina is no more. Ronni has received the name that she bears in the 21st-century: Veronica, for which “Ronni” is a nickname. The story of Veronica was a driving force behind the writing of **Awakening**. She’s not mentioned in the Bible; we know of her only through tradition, and we know very little. She is a woman whose name is changed, whose life is changed by her encounter with Christ. In the Bible, a change of name is associated with a redefining of, or a change in that person’s mission. Think of Abram (Abraham), Sarai (Sarah), Jacob (Israel), Simon (Peter), and Saul (Paul), among others. They all received new names, and they were all called to very important missions.

Jesus falls for the second time (the seventh Station of the Cross) and then speaks with the women of Jerusalem (the eighth Station). Ronni witnesses all of this.

Another impetus for the writing of this book arose from asking the question “Why must Jesus die in order to save Israel?” Author and biblical scholar Tim Gray addresses that question: “The biblical answer is ‘the covenant.’ Israel and Yahweh had made a solemn covenant, and covenants—such as marriage—are permanent. Therefore, the oaths that Israel swore as part of the covenant, which included the curses, could not be taken back. God and Israel swore that breaking the covenant would end in death. According to the curses, Israel had to be exiled and destroyed for her unfaithfulness—unless one of the parties were to die. Israel’s death would hardly solve the problem, and God couldn’t die—or could He?”*

*From the book **Mission of the Messiah** by Dr. Tim Gray.

Joseph of Arimathea is the one who explains the way a covenant works, and he, too, poses the question to Ronni: “So if the covenant was to be ended, what alternative was there? *God*

couldn't die. Could he?" The answer, of course is, "Yes!" God could die; God *does* die. The old covenant is ended. The new, everlasting covenant between God and his people—all people, not just Israel—begins with the death of Jesus and the shedding of his blood.

Chapter Eighteen

Ronni describes what the Gospel of Mark records: *And when the sixth hour had come, there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour (Mk 15:33)*. The darkness came on suddenly at noon (the sixth hour) and lasted until Jesus died at 3 p.m. (the ninth hour). Ronni attributes the darkness to a solar eclipse, but was that really the cause? First of all, an eclipse occurs gradually, not immediately like this one does. Also, an eclipse lasts minutes, not hours, and it isn't completely dark for the duration of the eclipse. Additionally, the Passover (the time of year during which Jesus died) occurs during a FULL moon. A full moon can't cause an eclipse, because in order for the moon to be full, the earth has to be between the sun and the moon (which is reflecting the sun's light). A solar eclipse occurs when a new moon, which is *between* the sun and the earth, obscures the face of the sun. The total darkness at the time of Jesus' death couldn't have been a natural occurrence; rather, it must have been *supernatural*.

As previously discussed, it would be expected that the people of Jesus' day would have the psalms memorized, and the first line of a psalm did, indeed, serve as the work's title. As he suffers on the cross, Jesus quotes the first line of Psalm 22: *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* Is Jesus angry at God? That is frequently how this psalm is interpreted. However, if one reads the entire psalm, a deeper understanding can be gleaned. This psalm is actually one of praise, written by King David. It is called a *todah* psalm. *Todah* means "thanksgiving." *Todah* psalms begin with an expression of grief or trouble and call upon God's help by making a petition. Then they turn into a psalm praising God and giving thanks. Psalm 22 is no exception:

The afflicted shall eat and be satisfied; those who seek him shall praise the LORD! May your hearts live forever! All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn to the LORD; and all the families of the nations shall worship before him. For dominion belongs to the LORD, and he rules over the nations (Ps 22:25-28).

When Jesus begins with the first line of the psalm (or its "title"), he is inviting those around him (and those of us who read the account of his death) to join in with him in giving thanks to God and praising him.

When Centurion Longinus thrusts the lance into Jesus' side, Ronni hears the Blessed Mother shriek. This brief action refers back to the Presentation of Our Lord, recorded in Lk 2:34-35, in which Mary's pain is foretold:

Simeon blessed them and said to Mary his mother, "Behold, this child is set for the fall and rising of many in Israel, and for a sign that is spoken against (and a sword will pierce through your own soul also), that thoughts out of many hearts may be revealed."

Although the sword piercing her soul means much more than just this one instance, one can only imagine the pain the mother of Jesus felt when the lance was thrust into her Son's side.

Chapter Nineteen

Joseph of Arimathea sends Mark back to the Upper Room to get the tablecloth. Recent attention has been given to the Shroud of Turin with the question being posed of it: “Could the Shroud be the actual tablecloth used at the Last Supper?” The Shroud of Turin is finely-woven, much finer than the less-expensive cloth that was generally used at the time for a shroud. But an expensive cloth such as this one would be ideal for a special meal. And what of Joseph of Arimathea’s connection to the cloth? Recall the Gospel passages that refer to Joseph’s involvement with the removal of Christ’s body from the cross and the preparation of our Lord for burial:

Now there was a man named Joseph from the Jewish town of Arimathea. He was a member of the council, a good and righteous man, who had not consented to their purpose and deed, and he was looking for the kingdom of God. This man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then he took it down and wrapped it in a linen shroud, and laid him in a rock-hewn tomb, where no one had ever yet been laid. It was the day of Preparation, and the sabbath was beginning. (Luke 23:50-54).

Where would Joseph have gone to get this shroud? The Sabbath was beginning and the shops would be closing. He needed cloth—and immediately. If he had made a gift to Jesus of the tablecloth for the Last Supper, he would know exactly where he could get a length of material perfectly suited to his needs: at the Upper Room. In addition to the image of the body which the Shroud of Turin contains, there are wax stains (from the candles lit for Passover?) and other stains which may be that of food and wine.

While in the city, Mark learns that the curtain in the Temple has been torn in two. What is the importance of this? The curtain in the Temple is a continuation of what the Lord required of the Israelites in the wilderness during the Exodus. (See Ex 26:31-35.) The purpose of the curtain was to separate man from the Holy of Holies or Most Holy Place which contained the Ark of the Covenant. It was here that God came down in the form of a cloud to meet with his people. But only one man could enter this area, and only on one day a year, the Day of Atonement. When the Temple was built in Jerusalem, the curtain was in place there as well, separating God from man.

However, just before the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple in 586 B.C., the prophet Jeremiah took the Ark of the Covenant and other holy items and hid them somewhere—a location that until this day no one, not even Indiana Jones, has been able to find. There’s a clue as to the Ark’s location, however, in Scripture:

[Jeremiah] went out to the mountain where Moses had gone up and had seen the inheritance of God. And Jeremiah came and found a cave, and he brought there the tent and the ark and the altar of incense, and he sealed up the entrance (2 Mac 2:4-5).

Mt. Nebo is the mountain Moses ascended and from which he viewed the Promised Land, which he would never be able to enter. Mt. Nebo is across the Jordan River, east of Jericho (where Joshua led God’s chosen people into the Promised Land).

Even though the Ark is no longer inside the Temple, the tearing of the curtain which covered that holy place is horrifying to the Jews. It is a telling sign that the curtain rips just as Jesus dies—there is no more need for any kind of separation between God and man.

Mark and Ronni note that the earthquake has split the earth down into the quarry where it comes to a stop in the area of stone not used by the masons. This is a reference to Psalm 118, and several verses in particular are worth noting:

I thank thee that thou hast answered me and hast become my salvation. The stone which the builders rejected has become the head of the corner. This is the LORD's doing; it is marvelous in our eyes. This is the day which the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it (Ps 118:21-24).

This scene is also drawn from Daniel 2:34, which refers to a stone which has not been cut by human hand—a stone which can topple powerful rulers and kingdoms.

When Ronni and Mark return to Ronni's Jerusalem home, Ronni tries to comfort Mark who is grieving the death of Jesus. She realizes that although she was never supposed to stop the death of the Lord, she *does* have an important mission—that of convincing Mark to write a Gospel that will spread the story through the nations.

The New Testament refers to an individual known as “John Mark,” who was a missionary companion of St. Paul. He may have also very well may have worked as an interpreter and translator for St. Peter, perhaps even writing down St. Peter's memories in what became the Gospel of Mark. Furthermore, the home of the mother of John Mark may have been the setting of the Last Supper as well as the setting where the disciples were gathered in prayer at the time of Pentecost.

Chapter Twenty

Back in her room in 21st-century America, Ronni discovers that Tabitha's family has been impacted by their experience in church on Good Friday. Their ski-trip vacation was prevented by an avalanche on the road, but Ronni's mom sees the benefits that have come from that hiccup in their plans, and she quotes St. Paul: *We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose (Rm 8:28).*

Perhaps the biggest change Ronni experiences is the growth in her faith. Her time in first century Jerusalem has taught her the meaning of sacrifice—particularly the sacrifice Jesus has given for her and for all people. When she opens the cloth she used as a veil, she is expecting to see the face of the Lord. But when she doesn't, her faith stays intact. *Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe (Jn 20:29).* She takes comfort in Jesus' words to Thomas, but the question still lingers, was she really there in Jerusalem? Did she, in fact, SEE?