



drama by george

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“How Do I Send the Money?”

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Tetelestai

By George Halitzka

Inspired by a concept by Tim Nussbaum

"Tetelestai" first appeared in the April/ May 2002 issue of Drama Ministry.

(CORNELIUS is seated behind a table, attending to a line of taxpayers streaming by his position. He seems to greatly enjoy his job--or at least the large amounts of money he's collecting. A sign reads, "IRS: Israeli Roman Revenue Service.")

CORNELIUS

Thank you, Tetelestai.

(with a condescending smile)

Tetelestai, Rabbi.

Tetelestai.

"Your debt is paid in full"; that's what tetelestai means. Whatsa matter, you don't speak Greek?

Yeah? Well, your mother wears army sandals!

(A stranger approaches--someone who does not seem to have taxes on his mind.)

Okay, buddy, where's your 1040?

Yeah, that's what they all say. If you're not from around here, where are you from?

Jerusalem? I know one of your collectors down there--guy named Zaccheus. You ever met him?

You interviewed him?

(He motions Luke closer.)

Are you a reporter for the *Jerusalem Gazette*?

CORNELIUS (*cont'd*)

(disappointed)

Oh, "writing a book." Yeah, you and everybody else, buddy. Okay, "Luke the Physician"--if that's your real name--what can I do for you?

Ahww . . . not that Jesus thing again! Don't tell me you're one of those crazy Christians; worshipping a dead guy--

Yeah, I've heard those "rose-from-the-dead" rumors. When I see it, I'll believe it . . . now what can I do for you?

Sure, I was in Jerusalem at the time. Chasin' down a delinquent taxpayer. You shoulda seen his face when I found him . . . but he had the money, so I just gave him the old "tetelestai."

It means, "Your debt is paid in full." Doesn't *anybody* around here speak good Greek?

Oh--yeah, about Jesus. Well, the day they crucified him, I was near Golgotha, so I went to see it. Hadn't seen a good execution in a while, y'know? There was a coupla broads crying, and some guy named John that smelled like fish . . . nobody else except the soldiers.

Well, I gotta admit, I did feel kinda bad for him. I mean, I don't think he did anything to die for--especially not like *that*, y'know? Some people thought he was God--

What do *I* think about God? Look, you aren't gonna put this in your book, are you?

Okay. Well, the way I got it figured, God is this Big Guy up in heaven. Everybody has an account with him, and when we do something good, it's like money in the bank. Every time we screw up--like when I, uh, oh, I don't know, collect too much tax, or something--it's a withdrawal. I just hope I got more pluses than minuses when I buy the dirt farm, y'know?

(CORNELIUS laughs incredulously.)

Of course I don't use that system! If somebody owes taxes, he better pay up!

(realizing that this doesn't fit into his previous statement)

But . . . God is different! He's--y'know--God!

CORNELIUS (*cont'd*)

God is just, like a judge? No . . . c'mon, buddy, that would mean I'd have to be *perfect* to get into heaven! Nobody's perfect!

Okay, or somebody would have to "pay my account." Whatever. Look, let's get back to what you came for; I got a lotta taxpayers to find. Jesus died on the cross about noon, then those dames and the fishy guy left, and--

Why are you askin' all these hard questions? Okay--look, this is--whatta you writers say--"off the record," okay? Yeah, a lotta weird stuff happened! The sky got dark, there was a big earthquake . . . I saw this rock--no, more like this boulder--it split wide open! Right in front of my nose! I guess maybe that Jesus was kinda special--

Yeah . . . yeah, I remember his last words. They were kinda kooky; I never figured 'em out. Something like . . . "It is finished."

His exact words? Well, come to think of it, I guess he said . . . "Tetelestai."

(CORNELIUS looks thoughtful as he begins to realize the full impact of the word. Blackout.)

Note: "Tetelestai" (tuh-TELL-iss-tie) is a rendering of the Greek word that is translated "It is finished" in the NIV.

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