

Chapter 1

The America that once existed was a great nation. It was great because we had freedom — freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of the press. We were all able to speak our minds about important issues and we could assemble peaceably to address them. Everybody was entitled to express how they felt about things, even if they were the wrong things, at least in other people's minds. We weren't bound by anything but the Constitution as far as what we could and couldn't do, both individually and collectively.

In America you could worship however you want to whatever you felt was god — Yahweh, Jesus Christ, Allah, even the Flying Spaghetti Monster. Christianity had a garden variety of denominations in America for whatever suited your fancy — Catholicism, Orthodox, Lutheranism, Presbyterianism, Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostalism, Charismatic, any number of cults that claimed the name of Christ in some form. We all felt like we were reaching God in some form or another, and that seemed okay to a good deal of people in America, as long as nobody was "pushing their religion" unto others.

Of course, that same freedom allowed people to do evil things. There was still murder, rape, theft, sexual sin of all sorts, exploitation of the poor and needy, hatred towards various minorities and ethnic groups. America was far from being a paradise, and when people did those evil things and brazenly declared them to the public, some cheered while others mourned. But as much as we wanted a perfect world to live in, we knew that as long as people loved and chose to do evil, it would always remain a distant dream. Nonetheless, we would usually work together for the benefit of all people to make sure there would someday be a perfect world where everybody could live in peace with each other.

But just as there was a snake in the Garden of Eden that desired to ruin paradise, there were those who wanted an America that was modeled after their own desires of a "perfect world". They were the Cains that looked at the Abels of society in jealousy and wondered why those people were considered acceptable while they themselves weren't. They felt like they were given divine rights by their Creator to be the ones on top of the mountain looking down at the masses of humanity and be rulers of everything and everybody, but somehow they weren't because they had been passed over and despised.

These people would be called the Dominionists, and they sought to use religion to their own ends to gain control over the whole world.

They got that name from what God said to the first man and woman He created in the book of Genesis: "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Have

dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." They assumed from that verse that God was telling them to also have dominion over every man, although at that point there were only two people on the face of the earth.

In the gospel of Matthew, when Jesus was about to go back into heaven, He told His disciples: "Go, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I commanded you." In the gospel of Mark, Jesus also said, "Go into all the world, and preach the Good News to the whole creation. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who disbelieves will be condemned."

How these people called Dominionists think that Jesus meant for His disciples to take over the world, nobody even among those I have talked to had any idea. But then I seem to be the only one that even understood the Scriptures, even though I had never went to Bible school. The only schooling I had when it came to the Bible was just me reading the Scriptures from Genesis to Revelation all over and studying with some Bible about what the Scripture verses meant.

The church I once belonged to, an Assembly of God, paid very little attention to what they were really about. The Dominionists were dismissed as harmless, only seeking "to restore America's Christian heritage" by having prayer be put back into schools and all. That didn't mean some of the language of the Dominionists didn't filter their way through to our assembly and others like it. There was some talk about "the seven mountains of influence" that the pastor and his wife said we must pray over: family, business, education, religion, government/military, arts/entertainment, and media. They were engaged in odd forms of "spiritual warfare", such as taking prayer walks all over town, "claiming this town for Jesus Christ," as if He didn't already own everything on earth.

My pastor truly believed with all his heart that there would be a great end-times revival that would happen before the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. I tried to tell him that the Bible never predicted that to happen, but rather there would be a "falling away" that would occur before the Day takes place, and that the "man of sin", the "son of perdition" from Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians, would be revealed. The pastor seemed to ignore it, saying that what he believed was a prophecy that came to him by the Holy Spirit and that it would come to pass, and at one time accused me of having a "Jezebel spirit" trying to divide the body of Christ.

Trying to tell this to the rest of the congregation did no good either. They seemed so convinced that the pastor was right about the "great end-times revival" that they refused to even look at the Scriptures that I was pointing them to to prove that God's Word about the whole end-times situation was right. It

seemed like a losing battle.

What was I to do? Should I continue to warn them out of love for their souls, even if that meant I would be excommunicated from the church, or do I just go along with them and damn myself along with the congregation? I prayed to the Lord to see what He would want me to do. He had me stay where I was and just pray for their eyes and ears to be opened to the truth, to simply love on them in the hope that they would be turned from the false light they are trying to follow.

I continued going to the church, praising the Lord as usual, reading the Scriptures daily, keeping myself fed with the Word of God and in constant contact with the Lord, even though I was struggling with some things that I was beset with since my birth.

I have heard about Jesus Christ since my childhood. I had been raised in a few Catholic-run residential schools and attended Mass on a regular schedule. I was taught how to pray by the counselors, even though the only times the students actually prayed was before meals. To me at the time, it was more of a fascination that eventually dwindled when I became a teenager and my mind was on things like sex and being in a relationship with somebody. I really didn't have much of a desire to become a priest, because I have heard that priests live a solitary life without sex, just like Jesus, and being that I wanted to be married to somebody in my adult years, becoming a priest just wasn't for me.

After I left the residential schools, I stopped going to church except for Easter, Christmas, marriages, and funerals. At that point I was hearing various people spouting verses from the Bible that I knew nothing about, since I had never actually read the Bible when I was in residential schools — I had only heard stories from the Bible. The verses seem to make God sound rather offensive to the way I was living, and I didn't seem to want to have anything to do with that kind of God who hated the way I lived, much less the people speaking those verses. Some of them were well-meaning people who became my friends, but when some of them got really pushy, I would distance myself from them until they stopped. But that didn't really stop the ones dedicated to "pushing their religion" on me.

It was in my early thirties that I decided to give this church one of my friends recommended a try and that I started reading the Bible for myself. Compared to a Catholic mass outside the residential schools, this church's service seemed very lively in their worship, lots of shouting and unusual vocalizations that I came to find out was actually them "speaking in tongues", and that the pastor of that church preached messages that had us examining ourselves to see if we were truly "in Christ". The first Bible I read was the New International Version, and that seemed to get me through as far as introducing the truths of God's Word

into my life. The thing is, the church I was going to used the King James Version exclusively, and the pastor didn't like that I was using what he called "a perverted Bible" in his services and for my personal devotionals. I did get myself a copy of the King James Version to satisfy him during the services and study groups, but privately I still read the New International Version.

Over time, though, I got sick of that church because it seemed so strict and cult-like, and my family had to rescue me from that as I ended up losing the job that I was in at the time due to some mental problems I was having. Another friend of mine, who was a Christian, recommended me to another church, which was an Assembly of God, which had a worship similar to that of the previous church I was in but wasn't afraid to use other translations when preaching messages. I felt like I was loved in that church, and eventually I gave my life to Jesus Christ to be my Lord and Savior and was baptized. After fully reading the New International Version, I decided to switch to a translation that was similar to the King James Version but was more readable and understandable by modern audiences, so my next Bible became the New King James Version.

But things in that Assembly of God church changed. The pastor who was in charge of that church at the time was eventually called to be the pastor of another church, so he and his family, which included a wife, a son, and a daughter moved out of the area. There was a new pastor who came from Maine. He seemed very friendly, but he was a complete firebrand with a passion for winning souls compared to the previous pastor, who seemed like he was a bit dull and wooden. His wife wasn't a worship leader like the previous pastor's wife, but she was a good teacher and she knew her way around running the church as an administrator. The church seemed to like this new pastor, and after careful praying and seeking the Lord's will, he and his wife settled in and he became our pastor.

At first things in the church seemed to be going so well, as there were improvements in the worship, which became as lively as the church I had previously gone to, if not much more. But then the pastor started preaching that the American government was "taking our rights away as Christians", that Christians didn't have the freedom to proclaim the Gospel like they used to anymore, that since prayer has been taken out of schools there has been all sorts of disasters, even school shootings like the one in Columbine. People couldn't say "Merry Christmas" anymore because businesses wanted all religious holidays in December to be recognized. Gays were gaining the right to be married nationwide and were even fighting for the right to adopt children. Marijuana was becoming legalized in more states for both medicine and recreational purposes.

This kind of preaching started off as rather benign, but as time went on, it

seemed to be dominating the preaching as we heard less about the Great Commission and the promised Rapture of the church, and more about Christians needing to "take back their country for Christ". It was all about "our rights as Christians" and nothing about reaching out to the lost and perishing souls. The pastor didn't see anything wrong about preaching this kind of message, for he felt in his heart that if the country was "taken back for Christ", then there would be a great end-times revival that would happen before the Lord's coming.

I felt rather hopeless and helpless. In part, I felt like I was Jeremiah in the situation where he couldn't speak the Word of God to God's people because they didn't want to hear it. He said that the Word of God became like a fire shut up in his bones and he couldn't hold it back. That's what it felt like to me, a fire that was shut up in my bones, but being that I had trouble communicating anything to anyone, how was I going to speak this to other people?

I did this by beginning a private blog on the Internet. I started very slowly to speak my mind in the blog since it felt like the place where I could freely communicate myself with nothing lost in the translation of brain to lips like in natural speaking. Nobody in my church knew about this blog, or if they did, they seem to act as if they haven't seen it. But eventually came the people who did read what I had to say, and there came comments of every stripe — those that agreed with what I had to say and those that didn't.

I didn't know how long I could continue being silent in my church while the congregation was being led on the wide road to Hell without knowing it. They seem to act as if it was the Lord's will all along, as if the Lord's will superseded everything He ever inspired the authors of Scripture to write down. The church was supposed to be for people seeking a refuge from the world so they could made whole in Christ and then be ready to go out into the world to help bring in the lost sheep. Now it just seemed that the Great Commission was not enough, that simply preaching the Gospel message wasn't enough, that the Lord was too slow in His promised Second Coming and they needed to hasten it somehow.

Granted, I didn't like how dark the world was becoming without Christ. But I didn't like seeing a growing darkness creeping within the church and mocking the very methods for winning souls that the world would consider foolishness. And there was just no way to stop the darkness from growing.

Jesus said in Scripture that things like this would happen: that brother would eventually betray brother, and that false prophets would arise and deceive many, and that false Christs would display signs and wonders that would deceive, if possible, even the very elect. He said that a time would come that whoever kills you would think they are doing service to God, and that they do those things because they know neither the Father nor Him.

I look at the congregation and begin to wonder: when will that happen? Who will stand for the truth of God's Word and who would be persuaded by the devil's schemes and lies? When would this great "falling away" occur that would cause brother to betray brother? Who would initiate all this prophecy to happen? The congregation says it would be the appearance of the Antichrist, and their thinking is that they believe he would arise from the unbelieving secular masses to deceive many. But Scripture says of those who were called antichrists that "they went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us."

So that left me wondering, as all the congregation did: who would become the Antichrist?

Chapter 2

So let's set the scene. I first became part of Westville Assembly of God in 2001. That was around the time of 9/11, when Islamic terrorists took over two planes and crashed them into the Twin Towers in New York City. I woke up on that day and went to get myself a cup of coffee when my father's TV was showing pictures of the Twin Towers with smoke pouring out of them. Then both towers eventually collapsed like stacks of Jenga blocks when somebody makes the wrong move. It was a shocking day. Fortunately nobody I knew personally was in the towers when they collapsed. But it was a really sad day for people who did lose loved ones or friends in that incident. Even those who had no part on it were shocked, surprised, and upset. We all had questions. How could this happen? Could this thing happen again? Can we do anything about it? It was then I decided to go to a local Assembly of God that was recommended by my Christian friends and give it a try.

The Westville Assembly of God was an okay church. It was more restrained than the one I visited in Southville previously. No full live band, no really "modern worship" songs, just a person on a piano playing tunes from a hymnal. Its pastor, Patrick Keller, was a friendly guy. His wife Maureen and her two children eventually formed a small worship team that was okay, it just wasn't Southville Assembly's style of worship. The sermons were pretty typical middle-of-the-road stuff about being filled with the Holy Spirit. Nothing to get all excited about. Attending the services felt like you're attending a Bible study class. He made you read the Bible more, which was what I was okay with doing, since I was pretty new to the Bible at the time. I was still working an assembly job, and I got myself some Bible study software so I could read and study at my own pace at home.

Then a few years later, Pastor Keller and his family were called to a different church, and the Westville Assembly of God was left without a pastor for about half a year. Nobody knew what the future of that church was going to be. I felt like it was going to close if nobody found a full-time pastor for that church and that I would have to shop around for a new church to call my spiritual home. But then, when it seemed all hope was lost, a new pastor was found. He was Walter Hightower, who previously pastored a church in Bangor, Maine. He and his wife Grace were good people. Both of them were already divorced when they married each other, so their children were all grown up and raising families of their own. He felt personally called by God to move to Westville to pastor an Assembly of God church, because God was going to move in that church to bring new life to what seemed a dormant and sleeping church.

And over the course of a full year, Westville Assembly of God had changed. The worship was more lively, even at one time matching the energy that I felt at the

Southville church. Walter preached fiery sermons that felt like a double shot of cappuccino in audio form. Prayer became more a part of services than Bible study. We were engaged in "spiritual warfare" against "the demonic forces of hell" more often than not. At one time it seemed like a miniature version of the Brownsville Revival, for people who never went to church before started showing up to see "a move of the Spirit" in their services. There were outreach programs for children and homeless people and the elderly shut-ins. I never felt happier to be in a church that felt like Southville Assembly all over again.

But things started to change in 2020. The global pandemic forced churches in America to shut down for a while, and many pastors, especially Pastor Walter, didn't like it. He felt like the American government was stepping on a Christian's "religious freedom" to assemble together peaceably while liquor stores and marijuana dispensaries remained open for business. People began to assume that this "global pandemic" was planned by inside groups to start a "one-world government" that would be ruled by the Antichrist. Pastor Walter loved talking about the Antichrist so much that it seemed to dominate his sermons a lot, particularly about the fear of "being left behind" to go through "seven years of holocaust that would beggar description" and being forced to take "the mark of the beast" in order to buy or sell anything. This shift in preaching made a good deal of people in the congregation uneasy, while some clung to his words like they were "rhema words of God".

It was also during this time when we started hearing about this charismatic governor from Georgia named David J. Shepherd who was planning to run for the Presidency of the United States in 2024. Evangelicals seemed to like him a lot. He spoke their language. He sympathized with their desire to "make America great again". He felt that Christianity needed to take center stage again in American thought, that too many people have drifted away from "the nations' Judeo-Christian foundation", that the Founding Fathers wanted us to make America "a shining city on a hill", that the true Kingdom of God needed to start with us becoming a "Christian nation" so that the world would become a "Christian world" before Jesus Christ comes again. He lived such a flawless public life that few Christians would question him about, being so free from scandal or anything that would put doubts in people's minds about his character. He was everything that American Christians would want in a President — and a whole lot more.

But something about Shepherd gave me pause. It was from a dream that I had about him when I was asleep. I felt like I was watching a movie version of Revelation chapters 12 and 13 being played in my subconscious. A woman being clothed with the sun, standing on the moon, wearing a crown of twelve stars, seemed to be clutching her stomach and was moaning in agony. She was about to give birth. And standing in front of her was a seven-headed dragon that

looked hungry, and was about to devour her child as soon as it was born. Then the Child emerged, glowing like the sun in all its brilliance. He was caught up to the throne of God, bearing an iron scepter with which He will rule all the nations. The dragon roared with anger and caused a third of God's angels to come and take his side. Two-thirds of the angels took God's side, and there was war in heaven, but the dragon and his angels could not prevail. Then the dragon and his angels were cast down from heaven, and the angel cried out, "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens, and you that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! For the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has but a short time."

After the dragon landed on the earth, he persecuted the woman who brought forth the Child. She was given two wings of a great eagle, and with them she began to fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she would be nourished for a time, times, and half a time. The dragon cast out of his mouth water in the form of a flood toward the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth. The dragon was angry with the woman. "I will make war with the remnant of her seed, who keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ," the dragon said.

So I watched as the dragon conjured up two beasts. The first one, which came out of the sea, had seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. This beast was like a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion. The dragon gave him his power, his seat, and great authority. I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death, and his deadly wound was healed, and all the world wondered after the beast. They worshipped the dragon which gave power unto the beast: and they also worshipped the beast, saying, "Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war with him?" There was given unto him a mouth that spoke great things and blasphemies, and power was given unto him to continue for forty-two months. He opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven. It was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them: and power was given to him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.

"All that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," a voice from heaven said. "If any man has an ear, let him hear. He that leads into

captivity shall go into captivity: he that kills with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints."

Then came the second beast who emerged from the earth, who had two horns like a lamb, and spoke as a dragon. He exercises all the power of the first beast before him, and causes the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. He does great wonders, so that he makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, He deceives them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast. He says to them that dwell on the earth, "Make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and lived. I have the power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed." He causes all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads, that no man might buy or sell, except he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

"Here is wisdom. Let him that has understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is six hundred sixty-six," the voice from heaven said.

"What is the name of the beast?" I asked.

One word was spoken: "Shepherd."

And then I woke up in the middle of the night, feeling really shaken. Was that dream really from God? Was he really communicating to me the truth that the world will one day know, to its peril? And am I the only one who knew?

I had to ask my pastor about this. I called to set up a time when I could speak to him alone in his office. It was a Tuesday afternoon, after the noontime prayer session. Everyone else left the room but me and Pastor Walter. He could see that I felt uneasy about this meeting and what I had to say.

"So, Vincent, what's going on in your life that you wanted to share with me?" he asked. "I promise you that everything you have to say is only between me and you, and will not be shared with anyone else."

I took a deep breath before I began. "I had a dream that was like watching a YouTube video movie of Revelation chapters 12 and 13. I saw the woman and the dragon in heaven, the woman gave birth to the Child that would rule with an

iron scepter, and the war in heaven between the dragon and his angels and Michael and his angels. The dragon and his angels were soon cast out of heaven. The dragon tried to destroy the woman who birthed the Child, but she was given two wings to fly to her place where God would take care of her. Then I saw the dragon conjure up two beasts: one from the sea, and the other from the earth. The one from the sea had seven heads, and one of his heads was wounded but also suddenly healed, and the world worshipped the dragon and the first beast. The second beast told the people of the earth to make an image of the first beast to worship, and also caused many to take the mark of the beast, that no one may buy or sell without having that mark. I asked who the name of the first beast is, and a voice said, 'Shepherd.'"

"I know it's common for certain people to have dreams like the one you described to me, Vincent, especially after studying the book of Revelation," Pastor Walter said. "However, I'm curious to know why you heard the name Shepherd at the end of your dream."

"I'm just as curious to know myself, Pastor," I said. "Maybe the Lord was telling me that David J. Shepherd, the Presidential candidate, was going to be the Antichrist, the one who will lead many people astray."

"It's possible that it could be the Lord telling you this, Vincent, but it's also possible that it could be demonic forces that are telling you this, or that you are probably just conjuring this up from your own subconscious," Pastor Walter said. "I'd be cautious about sharing this information with other people, especially members of this congregation. One of the seven abominations mentioned in the book of Proverbs is one who sows discord among the brethren."

"I don't wish to do that, Pastor," I said. "I just want to take things slowly and see where they may lead, if this is something that may be a vision of what will happen in the future."

"I'll pray for you, Vincent, to make sure you do take things slowly, and that the Lord will guide you into all truth," Pastor Walter said, smiling. "Anyway, I need to take care of some things in the church. You have yourself a good day, and don't spend too much of your time in Bible study, okay?"

"Okay, Pastor, thanks," I said, feeling a little relieved as I got up and left the office.

I was still suspicious, though. Something about that dream was hinting at something that the world wanted to stay hidden. I sleuthed through online

forums and chat groups to see what kind of information I can dig up on David J. Shepherd. His Wikipedia page article made him sound all too perfect. He was one of those "wonder kids" you sometimes hear about in the news. He was attending private schools and graduated with high honors. He attended universities, and the same thing, "graduated with high honors". He attended a seminary at one point, and yet the same thing there. Then he entered the political arena, first starting as a lawyer, then a judge, then somehow a city mayor, then he became governor of Georgia. It was amazing how "scandal-free" he seemed to be. A little too amazing for my comfort.

Even searches for any articles about him on the Internet turned up nothing that remotely would seem questionable. He was like the perfect Christian boy that every Christian parent dreamed of having. No reports of wild parties or reckless activities or any sort of abusive relationships. He served as a deacon at a local town church with an exemplary record. His court cases seemed to be airtight and conducted with perfect professionalism, no sign of using tactics that would get him disbarred. Hardly anything during his time as governor raised any eyebrows among even his strongest critics. So far he's presented him as just being upfront and honest, with nothing to hide.

That got me thinking: was that dream I had really from God if Shepherd had such a perfect life record that would hardly make anyone question him? Or was that "a tactic of the devil," trying to find some way to poison the waters of a man who truly seemed blessed of God and destined for greatness in His Kingdom? I really had no answers, just that dream as a possible warning that things aren't exactly as they appear to be. I prayed for answers, but God didn't give me anything more about the subject. All I heard in my heart was the word, "Watch!"

And that's what I did. I would watch YouTube videos of Shepherd making public speeches about how America was "a Christian nation" and that his goal is not only to "bring America back to God", but also to bring the whole world to God. He would bring up Jesus' prayer before He went to the cross, that He prayed that "all will be one, as You are with Me." He feared a world that would become "a one-world government ruled by the Antichrist", and believed that the best way to keep that from happening is to "claim the whole world for Christ" and to set up God's Kingdom here on earth so that Jesus will reward His faithful servants when He returns and then take over lordship over the Kingdom from that point on.

Many Evangelicals cheered at this prospect, while the mainline Protestants, the Catholics, and the Orthodox were uneasy. America has always been the country where the line drawn between church and state was plainly enforced, and now Evangelicals want to erase that line completely and have the church and state be united together? One thing was for sure: David J. Shepherd certainly had an

uphill battle to fight if he and the Christian Dominionists supporting him were ever to get their way.

Only time will tell what was going to go down. And all I had to do — all that I could ever do at this point — was just watch.

Chapter 3

The months leading up to the election were full of activity. David Shepherd campaigned relentlessly against his opponent Luanne Wilmington, the Vice President who took over the race after the incumbent President, Joseph Borden, respectfully bowed out due to his advanced age. That left us with two main candidates that were both equal in age and vitality, both of them being in their fifties. Luanne was a former prosecutor who litigated and won all her court cases, and she took that same energy into her role as Vice President, working relentlessly for justice for the marginalized and the oppressed. People thought that she would make a great first female President after Caylin Hill tried to do so and lost in 2016. But Evangelicals didn't like how she, like the President she supported, would give rights to the LGBTQ+ community such as marriage equality, which they believed was only for male and female couples, and rights for minors to "transition" to their "true genders". Shepherd didn't like this, either, for he campaigned for the protection of minors from what he called "dangerous mutilation" of their bodies. I didn't like it myself, but I personally believed in the right of minors to have full autonomy of their own bodies regardless of parental and/or guardianship decisions. I have heard too many stories about religious people and pastors "having their way with minors" and the churches protecting the predators more than the victims, always shaming them for "leading on faithful men of God" with things like how they dress.

One time the pastor showed us a video of a campaign speech from David Shepherd that he thought might be useful in one of his sermons. The speech was called "A Shining City Once Again," and it began with Shepherd taking the pulpit and addressing the crowd of voters in the room.

"My fellow Americans... tonight, I don't come before you as a Republican. I don't come before you as a conservative. I don't even come before you simply as a politician. I come before you as an American who believes our best days are still ahead. For too long we've been told that this nation is hopelessly divided. We've been told that we can never heal. We've been told that faith belongs behind the walls of a church, that conviction belongs only in private, and that our deepest beliefs have no place in public life. I reject that. America has never been great because of her wealth. America has never been great because of her armies. America has never been great because of her technology. America has been great because generation after generation believed there was something higher than government... something greater than politics... something eternal. Our founders called those truths self-evident. Our grandparents called them blessings. I simply call them gifts from God.

"Now before anyone misunderstands me, let me be clear. I am not asking government to replace the Church. Government can never save a single soul.

Only Jesus Christ can do that. Government cannot forgive sins. Government cannot redeem hearts. Government cannot promise eternal life. But government can acknowledge that there is a God above every president, every judge, every governor, and every nation. And when a nation humbly acknowledges that truth, it flourishes.

"The prophet Micah asked, 'What does the Lord require of you? To do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.' Justice. Mercy. Humility. Imagine what America could become if those weren't merely words carved into monuments, but principles guiding our public life. My friends... I believe America still has a calling. Not because we are better than any other nation. Not because we deserve special favor. But because those who have received much have a responsibility to serve much.

"Jesus told His disciples, 'You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.' For too long we've hidden our light. We've apologized for believing. We've allowed fear to replace hope. We've accepted decline as though it were inevitable. I refuse to believe that. I believe America can once again become a city on a hill—not through arrogance, but through service. Not through conquest, but through compassion. Not by forcing faith upon anyone, but by living it boldly enough that others see its beauty. When families are restored... communities are restored. When communities are restored... nations can be restored. And when nations are restored... the world begins to change.

"Think about that. For two thousand years Christians have prayed, 'Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.' What if we actually believed those words? What if we became a people who lived them? Not tomorrow. Today. Not somewhere else. Here. Not by waiting for someone else. By becoming the generation that refuses to surrender hope.

"I know there are voices that say faith should stay inside church buildings. I respect their right to disagree. But I cannot accept the idea that people of faith should leave their convictions at the door when they enter public service. If our faith teaches us honesty... shouldn't government value honesty? If our faith teaches us compassion... shouldn't our laws reflect compassion? If our faith teaches us justice... shouldn't our courts pursue justice? Faith has always inspired ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things. It inspired abolitionists. It inspired civil rights leaders. It inspired missionaries to build hospitals, orphanages, and schools around the world. Faith is not the enemy of freedom. Faith is one of freedom's greatest guardians.

"My fellow Americans... this campaign isn't about returning to some mythical golden age. It's about becoming the nation we still have the courage to become. A nation that leads by serving. A nation that speaks truth without hatred. A

nation that loves mercy. A nation that remembers that greatness begins on our knees before Almighty God. The work before us is enormous. But I believe in this country. I believe in its people. And above all... I believe that God is not finished with America. May God bless you. May God bless every family represented here tonight. And may God continue to bless the United States of America."

After the speech had ended, most of the congregation clapped. I just sat in my seat and watched, unmoved, unconvinced. Just observing.

Then Pastor Walter took to the pulpit. "That was an amazing speech from an amazing man that I believe God has raised up and brought to the Kingdom for such a time as this, as Mordecai once said to Esther. I believe that we can, with God's help, reclaim this nation from the forces of darkness that surround us daily, that walk among us in broad daylight, and that we can see a great revival that will take place before the Lord's return. And make no mistake, I still believe that the Lord will return for His bride before things take a turn for the worse, before we do enter into what would be called 'the time of Jacob's trouble', the seven years of Tribulation that would make what happened in Europe during World War II seem like child's play in comparison."

The sermon that followed was from Joshua 1:1-9, about how God gave Joshua, Moses' successor, the command to lead His people into the Promised Land, and that He will be with His people every step of the way. "Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses," he quoted from the Scriptures, saying that every place that we're treading on with our feet, we're automatically "claiming it for Christ."

I said nothing. I just sat and listened intently to the sermon, evaluating its content in my mind and weighing it against the whole counsel of Scripture. That's what I like doing, taking the preached "word of God" and weighing it with the already-revealed words of God. It helps that I usually use Bible translations that are word-for-word more than thought-for-thought. I never let anything that I hear from the pulpits go without weighing it in the balances.

After church, I went to the Dunkin' coffee shop with my friend Valerie Korin, whom I had met around that time. She used to be a drug addict, but God saved her when she was about to die from a drug overdose and gave her a husband and family. She couldn't have any children of her own, but fortunately her husband already had children whom she loved and cared for as her own. Recently Valerie became a grandmother when her stepdaughter gave birth to a baby boy.

"So what did you think of the speech that David Shepherd gave that night, which the pastor showed before this morning's sermon?" Valerie asked.

"I think he says all the right things that Evangelicals want to hear, Val," I answered. "What do you think?"

"I'm rather on the fence when it comes to politicians, Vince," Valerie said. "The last politician I actively voted for was George W. Bush, and look where he had led our country during the War On Terror about twenty years ago."

"I knew he wasn't a perfect man, but he felt like a true man of God, Val," I said. "Nowadays you can't even trust which politician is really looking out for you."

"That's why the Lord laid upon my heart that verse from Psalm 146, to put not your trust in princes or in sons of men in whom there is no help," Valerie said. "No politician has the power to save anyone. Yet the people look to them anyway because they think they will save them out of this trouble or that."

"So you don't think you'd vote for David Shepherd when it comes to the election in November?" I asked.

"As I said, Vince, I'm kind of on the fence about it," Valerie answered. "He's got to really impress me before I would even choose to put his name on the ballot."

"What if I said to you that I think Shepherd is the Antichrist?" I asked.

"I would think you were a crazy conspiracy theorist or something, Vince, but you have a right to your opinion about him," Valerie answered. "Who knows, maybe you're right, and he will probably lead the nation and the world into the seven-year Tribulation. Who knows, maybe we'll be raptured before he gets sworn in as President. Or even that Luanne Wilmington."

"You think she has a chance of being President, Val?" I asked.

"I say that they both have a chance of being President at this point," Valerie answered. "Evangelicals surely love Shepherd, while the rest of the nation either loves Wilmington or is a bit sour that Borden couldn't continue his campaign."

"I really liked Joseph Borden, even though he was getting up in age like Ronald Reagan when he ran for President," I said.

Valerie made a face when I mentioned Reagan. "Well, the less I hear about Ray-Gun, the better. I thought he was a terrible President, and I wouldn't vote for him if I was at the age of voting for him back in the 80s."

"Yeah, those weren't the best of times for me, especially being in residential school," I said. "I was still heartbroken that my parents decided to divorce, and that my father ended up having a child through my stepmother."

"Don't tell me that your father cheated and had that child while they were still married," Valerie said.

I laughed. "Fortunately not. My parents divorced long before my father had a relationship with my stepmother. But after she had the child from my father, she took off and ran away with my half-brother when he was still in diapers."

"Oh, that's sad," Valerie said. "Did you get in touch with your step-brother?"

"I did, years later at my father's funeral," I said. "He's happily married and living in Connecticut and has a ten-year-old daughter with his wife."

"I'm going to pray for you, Vince, and for all of us, that the Lord will reveal in His time who He would want us to vote for our next President," Valerie said.

"I'll pray for you as well, Valerie," I said as I drank my coffee.

Sometime later I ran across my friend Daniel Wickman, who was going to a Seventh-Day Adventist church in my local area. He was out in the street corners passing out flyers that warn people about the "upcoming National Sunday Law" that the United States would someday pass. I usually see him at the Gilead House program trying to push his brand of religion on the other members at times and getting himself suspended a few times when he refused to comply with its rules of not bringing religion into the program. For the most part, though, he chooses to seek confrontation about people's faith (or lack thereof) outside the Gilead House, standing on the street corners, hoping to get people to listen to him.

"Hey, Vince, how's it going?" Daniel asked.

"Just living as usual," I replied. "Still trying to get people to listen about your ideas about the 'National Sunday Law'?"

"It isn't just an idea, Vince, it's what the government plans to do, and I think with this new 'Christian' Presidential candidate who's running for office, that it might become a reality," Daniel said.

"So you still think that Sunday worship service is the 'mark of the beast'?"

prophesied in Revelation?" I asked.

"I know it deep in my heart that it will be, Vince," Daniel answered. "God gave us the 4th Commandment, to keep holy the Sabbath day, for a reason. It's the only legitimate day that God has set aside for us to worship on."

"But what about what Paul the apostle said, to let those be convinced in their own minds which days are special to the Lord and which days are all like, that he who regards the day regards it unto the Lord?" I asked.

"Well, he certainly wasn't talking about the Sabbath day, Vince," Daniel answered. "Jesus kept Sabbath, Paul kept Sabbath, the apostles and all the saints kept Sabbath. God warned us in Daniel about a coming man who will think to change times and law. Who knows? It could be that David Shepherd guy."

"So you think that David Shepherd could be the Antichrist?" I asked.

"I wouldn't be surprised if he revealed himself to be that," Daniel answered. "Jesus said to beware of false shepherds that inwardly are ravenous wolves. They will show great signs and wonders that, if it were possible, they could deceive the very elect. But we won't be fooled. Hopefully you won't be either."

"I'm praying that the Lord will keep me watchful for those false shepherds, even if that includes people like David Shepherd," I said. "I don't trust him as much as I trust in the Lord."

"You should come to one of my church's services and see how we truly worship the Lord, if you want your eyes to be open," Daniel said. "You have yourself a great day."

That night I watched on YouTube a live-stream speech given by Vice President Luanne Wilmington to a packed audience. Like Shepherd, she seemed confident and certain that her audience will listen and understand every word she had to say. The name of the speech was "The Republic We Must Keep."

"My fellow Americans, every generation inherits two great gifts. The first is freedom. The second is the responsibility to protect it. Our parents and grandparents did not leave us a perfect nation. They left us something more precious. They left us a republic where people with different convictions could live together without fear. A nation where churches could preach freely. Where synagogues, mosques, and temples could worship freely. Where those with no religious faith at all could still enjoy the equal protection of the law. That

freedom is not an accident. It is one of America's greatest achievements.

"Now, let me say something that may surprise some people. I believe faith matters. Some of the finest people I have ever known are people of deep religious conviction. They volunteer at food pantries. They welcome foster children into their homes. They comfort the dying. They forgive when forgiveness seems impossible. Our nation would be poorer without them. But I also believe something else. Faith is strongest when it is freely chosen. The moment government begins deciding which faith should lead the nation... both government and religion begin to lose something precious. History teaches us that lesson again and again. Whenever political power wraps itself in sacred language, criticism becomes blasphemy. Disagreement becomes heresy. Opponents become enemies of God instead of fellow citizens. That is not how a free people should govern themselves.

"My opponent often speaks of building a Christian nation. I respect his faith. I respect every American's faith. But I ask a simple question. Whose Christianity? The Baptist's? The Catholic's? The Pentecostal's? The Orthodox Christian's? The Lutheran's? The Methodist's? The Assemblies of God's? Who decides? Government? If government has the power to decide that question today... what prevents another government from answering it differently tomorrow?

"The Constitution protects religion not because religion is weak. It protects religion because faith should never depend upon the permission of politicians. America has always been at her best when churches changed hearts... and government protected liberty. Those are different callings. Both are important. Neither should replace the other.

"Now, I know some people say that defending the separation of church and state means pushing God out of public life. It does not. It means refusing to let politicians claim God's authority for themselves. No president... no governor... no Congress... no Supreme Court... speaks for God. Only God speaks for God.

"The strength of this nation has never been that we all believe exactly the same thing. Our strength has been that we have learned to live together despite our differences. That is not weakness. That is freedom. My opponent promises unity. Unity is a beautiful word. But unity purchased by conformity is not freedom. True unity comes when free people choose to love one another despite disagreement.

"I believe America can remain a nation where every church is free to preach the Gospel... where every citizen is free to disagree... and where no child ever has to wonder whether the government sees them as less American because of what they believe. That is the republic I love. That is the republic I will defend. May

God bless every American... and may God forever bless the United States of America."

Everyone in the audience clapped for her words. But social media has been relentlessly tearing her speech apart, accusing her of being "anti-Godly" and "anti-Christ." They even go so far as to claim that she is the coming Antichrist that will bring the one-world government upon the whole world and force everybody to take "the mark of the beast".

I turned off my computer and put on some quiet worship music to relax and take my mind off the things of the day. But I couldn't help but disagree with anyone who called Luanne "the Antichrist". She felt like the only person left who's standing in the gap in the political arena to get the government to not take that perilous step into complete authoritarianism. I felt that God had raised her up "for such a time as this", to be that Esther that would halt the destruction of a people who had done nothing but simply exist for whatever faith they had, even if it was no faith.

"Lord God, I pray that You would use Luanne Wilmington mightily in the coming months leading to the election, that she would be a strong voice of reason to this generation, that people's eyes, ears, minds, and hearts would be opened to the revelation of Your Word and turn their lives over to You before it's too late," I prayed quietly. "In the name of my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ I pray. Amen."

Chapter 4

The summer would be a time of testing for the nations. July 4, 2024 was supposed to be a day where the United States would be celebrating its Independence Day. But that day would be remembered for something that took place in the land of Israel, whom America has had political relations with.

Russia, which had turned into a theocracy since its premier took power over the nation, tried to make peace with Israel in exchange for its "miracle food" that they have produced with the help of a special proprietary formula that would make food grow in places where such growth would be impossible. But Israel had no trust in Russia to keep their end of the deal, because they were also funding the rival Middle East countries with weapons that could destroy Israel in a heartbeat. Talks between the two heads of state went nowhere. Israel wouldn't make the deal unless Russia divested itself of its support of the other Middle East nations. Russia didn't want to give up the money they were making from their arms deals with those nations. There was only one thing left for Russia to do. If they couldn't get their hands on the food growth formula by legal means, they would do the Middle East nations a favor and completely annihilate Israel off the map.

So before Americans could wake up to have their coffee and prepare for their holiday celebrations, Israel found themselves bombarded by hundreds of missiles all aimed in their direction. There was hardly any time to react. Its citizens prayed for a miracle to happen, that God would come to the rescue of His people and save them.

Then, without warning, all the missiles just exploded harmlessly in the air. Every weapon aimed at Israel failed to reach their targets. It was like God was setting up a Fourth of July display over the skies of Israel, and all they had to do was stand there and witness the display. Live cameras captured the event and broadcast it all over the globe for the whole world to see. The free nations let out a sigh of relief when they saw that all-out nuclear war was averted.

I was watching it on several different YouTube videos, each one with their own commentary about the event. Some Christians were saying that this was the fulfillment of Ezekiel chapter 39, that God would protect His nation from "the arrows of the north". Even a rabbi was saying something similar, and he wasn't even a Messianic Jew reporting on the news.

But one video title caught my eye. It read: A SIGN FROM GOD — SHEPHERD WILL BE THE NEXT PRESIDENT. The host of that video was some "YouTube prophet" named Steve Troy. He seemed to be excited to share the latest "prophecy" that he supposedly received from God.

"You think that God just preserved Israel from an all-out Russian attack just because He loved them?" Steve said. "Far from it! God protected them because He was going to do something amazing with our future President, David Shepherd. That's right...you heard it here first: David Shepherd will be our next President, and it's all decreed from the courts of heaven! He's going to make a peace covenant with Israel that will last seven years. There's no way that Israel would reject such a man of God at this point of time. America is going to lead the way into making the world a totally Christian world, and it's going to happen through God's man of the hour, David Shepherd."

I just sat there stunned, listening to the words of this "prophet". God was going to use David Shepherd to bring about His Kingdom here on earth? And Shepherd was going to make a peace covenant with Israel that will last seven years? That made me think of Daniel 9:27, where it said about the "coming prince" that "he will confirm a covenant with many for one week, and in the middle of that week he will cause sacrifice and offering to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even unto the end, and that which was decreed shall be poured out on the desolate."

Just soon after there was a video with David Shepherd himself claiming that the miracle that happened over Israel was a sure sign of God's favor. "Our God is bringing us all to the Kingdom for such a time as this to witness His hand being over the Presidential election that will take place in a few months, and I pray that His Spirit would move in the hearts of all the people in America to make the wise decision of who they will cast their vote for — a vote that will determine our destiny not just as a nation, but as a leader of the world."

From that moment on, Shepherd's popularity seemed to just jump from being in the fifties to being in the eighties. He was even winning the hearts of liberal Christians to consider him as God's sign that he will make an excellent President and a great world leader. But it still left me wondering: is this truly God's work to make David Shepherd the next President? Or was all this just a demonic setup?

Valerie and I had a talk with each other about recent events at a church cookout after a July Sunday service. She seemed to be excited about the news of Israel's miracle and what it meant for the upcoming election.

"I couldn't believe it!" Valerie gushed. "David Shepherd really sold me. That miracle truly was a sign that God was with him and that he'll become the next President of the United States."

"And you're going to vote for him in November?" I asked.

"I think the entire church is going to vote for Shepherd, Vince," Valerie replied. "He seems to be such a blessing on America that the whole world has to see what kind of man he truly is. If it weren't for him, I doubt that Israel could have survived."

"You're making it sound like Shepherd himself caused the miracle that happened over Israel," I said.

"I'm not saying anything of the sort!" Valerie said. "I'm just saying that God brought forth this man at an important time like this to decide the future of the world. I think the world would sleep better knowing that God used a man like Shepherd to bring peace to the world."

"But it's not the peace that God wants to bring through Jesus Christ, the peace that surpasses all understanding," I said.

"We could still have that peace, but I don't think Jesus needs to personally come down from heaven to give us that peace, Vince," Valerie said. "He will still be King of Kings and Lord of Lords as long as He continues to rule over us from heaven."

"So what's the point in praying, 'Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven'?" I asked.

"Jesus said the true Kingdom of God is within you," Valerie answered. "I remember Him saying in Luke that the Kingdom of God doesn't come with observation, nor will they say, 'It is here,' or, 'It is there.' As long as we're all carrying that little piece of the Kingdom inside us, I'm sure we'll be able to build that Kingdom here on earth so that it will be like it is in heaven."

"So now you're not even looking forward to the Rapture?" I asked.

"Why would there be any need for a Rapture, Vince?" Valerie replied. "He's going to come and rule over the Kingdom that we built for Him on the earth. It makes no sense to just take us out of this world if He's coming back to it by the end of seven years."

"Seven years?" I said. "You sound like that YouTube prophet Steve Troy."

"I think Steve speaks the truth, honey," Valerie said. "There's going to be seven years of peace on earth, and after that the Lord will come and take His place here on the earth, and we will all be subject to Him, even David Shepherd."

"I doubt that's ever going to happen," I said, feeling like the conversation was just going nowhere.

As the days followed, I noticed people wearing T-shirts saying things like THE GOOD SHEPHERD and SON OF DAVID 2024. Some had David Shepherd's face on it next to the slogan. It was like Shepherd had already built himself a large fan base just by being present with the people. Even church members started wearing those shirts and baseball caps during services. I felt increasingly drowned out by the voices that were singing praises to God for David Shepherd. A popular Christian artist created worship songs like "The Good Shepherd" and "Son Of David" for the congregations to sing. It felt like blasphemy to give a "man of God" more glory and honor than the God who supposedly raised him up for this moment in history.

Then in early September, there came some devastating news. Joseph Borden, the current President, had died of unknown causes. Some of the people in America mourned for him, and a televised funeral service was held in honor for his passing. Luanne Wilmington gave the eulogy for the President, calling him a wonderful man of God who helped America through the pandemic, and that she wished she could be half as great as that man was for the nation. David Shepherd also gave some passing words of sympathy, though they seemed less passionate, like he was reading words from a script instead of straight from the heart. Luanne was soon sworn in as the acting President, though in a press conference she said she felt as if it would be the shortest term she would have in that role as the masses still planned to vote for Shepherd in November.

I went to the pastor to talk about my feelings of grief. I caught him at the end of a service as he was about to leave with his wife for a family vacation. "Vincent, what seems to be on your mind?" he asked as we were making our way to the door.

"I wasn't expecting the President to pass away so soon, with no known cause as to what had happened," I said.

"Nobody knows for sure except for God," Pastor Walter said, trying to sound comforting. "But he will have to stand before God and give an account of his life, including the things that he has done in office during the past four years."

"It doesn't sound like you even like him that much, Pastor," I said.

"I have nothing but the love of God for him," Pastor Walter said. "But even that love has to recognize that there are things in the Bible that we still have to call

sin, and the things Borden supported, like abortion and LGBTQ rights, are against what the Bible teaches. Those are the things that God will deal with with our next President, which hopefully will be Shepherd."

"But Wilmington's currently acting as President, or at least until the election," I said.

"I'm sure it will all get settled when God decides who our next President will be, Vincent," Pastor Walter said. He looked at his watch. "Sorry I don't have any more time to talk. I'll see you when I get back from vacation."

"Just be careful," I said as I watched the pastor drive off in his car.

I talked to Valerie about my feelings on the phone. She was alone in the house with her dogs when she answered, as I could hear the faint sound of barking in the background.

"Sorry, honey, had to take care of my children," Valerie said. "What's up?"

"What do you think of Wilmington filling in for President until the election takes place?" I asked.

"I think she'll keep the seat warm and occupied until David Shepherd is sworn into office in January," Valerie answered. "Why, what do you think?"

"I pray to God that she will keep that seat in the Oval Office well beyond January, because I dread the thought of Shepherd taking over as President, if that is supposed to happen," I said.

"Oh, dear, you got to stop thinking the worst of David Shepherd," Valerie said, trying to sound comforting. "I know he's going to be a good President. I think you're letting that dream you had about him cloud your judgment."

"I can't stop thinking about that dream, Val!" I said. "It makes me think of Esther having to make a decision that would decide the fate of her people when she was queen."

"Well, I can't make up your mind for you," Valerie said. "If you feel in your spirit that it's something that needs to be shared with the congregation, you have to pray to God to make sure that's what He wants you to say at the moment He wants you to say it."

"You mean I should fast and pray for God to move in my life?" I asked.

"That's what I would suggest, because I can't think of anything else that would help you be at ease," Valerie answered. "Either you sit quiet and watch the congregation run off the cliff in masses, or you speak up and risk losing your place in our church. But whatever you choose to do, I'll be praying for you."

"Thanks, Val," I said. "I guess that's just what I needed to hear."

"Anytime, sweetie," Valerie said. "I've got to get myself ready for sleep. You take care now."

"Have a good night's rest, Val," I said before I ended the call.

And then I sat in the darkness before my computer, which was displaying the passage in Esther where Mordecai said, "Yet who knows whether you have come to the kingdom for such a time as this?"

Now was the time to seek God's face about this matter.

Chapter 5

It's now the Sunday before Election Day 2024. I go to church as usual. We have our time of singing worship songs. Then the pastor brings us a video featuring Graeme Franklin, a famous missionary whom some have called "the American Evangelical pope," who brings up the fact that soon we'll be voting for two powerful people to take the office of President, and that only one candidate, David J. Shepherd, stands for "Christian values" such as protecting the sanctity of life and "God-ordained" marriage between a man and a woman. "I encourage you all, as you enter your voting booths, to pause, reflect, and pray for God's wisdom to guide you into voting for the person whom God has chosen to be our next President, because the future of the world depends on your vote," Graeme said candidly.

Pastor Walter took to the pulpit. "Those are good words coming from a true man of God, ladies and gentlemen. I come into agreement with Graeme Franklin right now and plead the blood of Jesus over this election, that no demonic powers will persuade voters to cast their vote for a person that doesn't reflect the true genuine heart of God. We do stand at the precipice of the gates of Hell and declare that this nation, the United States, is and will forever be a Christian nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all. Now I would like for you to turn over to the book of Exodus where we will discuss..."

"People of this church, listen!" I boldly interrupted. "God has spoken to me in a vision, and it's a vision He needs you to see and hear for yourselves!"

"Excuse me, Vincent, this isn't the time for prophetic...", Pastor Walter tried to say.

"Behold, I saw in my vision a beast coming out of the sea, having seven heads, ten horns, and ten crowns, and upon each head the name of blasphemy," I continued, undaunted. "One of those heads was wounded mortally, but it was healed, and the world worshipped the beast, saying, 'Who is like unto the beast? Who is able to make war against it?'"

"Again, I ask you to please contain yourself," Pastor Walter tried again. "This isn't the time for..."

"One of those heads is that of David Shepherd!" I cried out. "He is the beast that comes from the sea. He is the one whom the dragon will give his seat, his power, and great authority. All the earth will worship him, whose names are now written in the Book of Life of the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world."

"You are out of line!" Pastor Walter shouted. "Ushers, come and escort him out of the sanctuary! I'll deal with him later!"

Two ushers came and stood beside me near my seat. "Please come quietly with us," one of the ushers said. "We don't want to use force to take you out of the sanctuary."

"I will go, but I pray to God that all your eyes and ears will be open to the truth," I said, picking up my Bible and my coat. "Make the right choice before it's too late!"

Everyone in the congregation watched silently as I left with the ushers out of the sanctuary. I had a feeling that they felt that I had gone crazy. But the Lord had impressed upon me to deliver that message, and I would be amiss to not deliver it at the time the Lord wanted me to speak it.

I waited until the end of the service in the foyer. After the congregation left, the pastor called me into the prayer room for a private meeting.

"What is going on with you, Vincent?" he asked. "Don't tell me this was a mental health issue you're having!"

"It wasn't a mental health issue, Pastor," I answered. "It was a message the Lord wanted me to give to the congregation at this point of time. I honestly feel that the church as a whole is being deceived by the powers of darkness."

"It may be you who is being deceived and used by the devil, Vincent," Pastor Walter said. "That disruption may cause people to doubt their faith in a God that is using David Shepherd powerfully to bring about His purpose on the nation."

"Please, Pastor, listen to me," I said. "David Shepherd is not a true man of God. He is the coming Antichrist. He will lead all the nations into worshipping him and his true father Satan. You got to search the Scriptures and know that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, so his ministers will also disguise themselves as 'ministers of righteousness', whose end shall be according to their works."

"Vincent, you have to stop believing in the lies of the devil, because I think he's using you to sow discord among the brethren, and that is called an abomination," Pastor Walter said. "From now on, you are never to tell anyone that David Shepherd is the Antichrist, or you will be expelled from this church. Do I make myself clear?"

"So you don't want me to prophesy anything but things you want to hear?" I said. "Sorry, Pastor, but in all good conscience, I cannot obey that order."

"Then I'm sorry that you cannot come back to this church until you are willing to confess and repent before God and declare that what you have said was in error," Pastor Walter said, sighing heavily. "I'll pray for the Lord to open your eyes and ears to the truth in the meantime, okay?"

I sighed, realizing that the pastor was dead-set against me prophesying in the church. "Yes, Pastor, I understand," I said as I headed for the door.

At home, I got a call from Valerie. "Hey, Vince, what was going on with you at the church today?" she asked, sounding concerned. "That doesn't normally sound like you speaking today."

"The Lord wanted me to deliver a message to the congregation today that I saw in a vision that David Shepherd is the Antichrist," I answered. "You did tell me to pray and seek the Lord's face about the issue, so I did."

"I see," Valerie said. "Well, I wasn't expecting that kind of boldness coming from you, or the message you delivered right before the pastor started the sermon."

"Yeah, well, right now the pastor has kicked me out of the church and said the only way I can come back is to tell the congregation that what I said was a mistake and that it didn't come from God," I said.

"And you wouldn't comply," Valerie said. "So what are you going to do?"

"I'll probably have to stay low for a time and see what happens after the election," I said. "We probably won't be able to talk much now since you and I both have our own work schedules."

"I'm sure we can make the time, sweetie," Valerie said. "I'm the main breadwinner of my household right now, since my husband is currently disabled and won't be able to work for a time."

"Oh, that's sad," I said. "I'll pray for your husband's recovery, Val."

"Thanks, Vince, you're a real saint," Valerie said. "Are you going to watch the election results on Tuesday night after the polls close?"

"Definitely. I already know who I'm voting for, so I pray that Wilmington wins," I said.

"I'm voting for and praying for my candidate as well," Valerie said. "Maybe we can meet at Dunkin's for some coffee the day after the election to discuss things."

"I would like that very much, but I don't have much money on hand," I said.

"Don't worry, honey, it's my treat," Valerie said. "I'll pick you up on early Wednesday afternoon after my noontime prayer. Talk to you soon."

"Have a good night, Val," I said before I ended the call.

Tuesday was a very busy day for me. I worked at my assembly job as usual, putting together inner packaging for other companies' products, had my lunch, spent some time at the Gilead House socializing with my friends, and then went to my designated voting poll office and cast my vote. I felt led by the Spirit to vote for Luanne Wilmington, even though she had only a slight chance of winning. But I comforted myself with the thought that God can make the impossible happen, so why not vote for Wilmington?

As I watched a YouTube live stream of the election results all night while I was lying on my bed, I felt inspired to read through the account of Deborah the judge in the book of Judges, how she was called as a judge for Israel to encourage her people to fight against Jabin the king of Canaan, whose armies were led by a commander named Sisera. Deborah called Barak to lead the forces into battle against Sisera and his armies, but Barak refused to go into battle unless Deborah accompanies him. Deborah says she will go, but she also warns that the battle will not be for Barak's honor, for she said that the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hand of a woman. Sure enough, as the Israelites engaged in battle with the Canaanites at the river Kishon, Sisera escaped and fled to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite. Jael gave him milk to drink and covered him with a blanket, then later, when Sisera was asleep, she came softly to him with a hammer and drove a tent peg through his temples, so that he laid on the ground dead. When Barak came by the way of Jael's tent, Jael showed him the man that she had killed, and Barak witnessed Deborah's words coming true.

I felt like we as a nation were facing the moment when the Israelites were facing incredible odds that were stacked against them as the Canaanite forces surrounded them on every side. I muted the TV and got on my knees and prayed. "Lord God, I pray right now that You would by Your wisdom show us which of

these two candidates would become our next President, and that whoever is chosen, we will accept that as Your will being done on earth as it is in heaven. In Your Son Jesus' name, I pray. Amen."

I fell asleep, only to wake to the sound of music on my YouTube feed. The video that was playing was called "David's Dance", and it showed a repeated clip of David Shepherd dancing with joy while "Praise Ye The Lord" was playing in the background on a continuous loop.

I turned off the video and saw that my feeds were all proclaiming the same news: David Shepherd has won the election. The results were overwhelming in his favor as he received 70 percent of the national vote while Luanne Wilmington only received 25 percent and 5 percent were undecided. Religious channels were crowing about "The Rise Of The New King David", claiming that this was the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy from Ezekiel about God "raising up David to be His shepherd for His people." The enthusiasm for his victory was off the charts as Christians everywhere were celebrating this victory.

A video I noticed was labeled "A New Beginning for America." I clicked on it and watched as David Shepherd delivered what seemed to be a convincing and convicting speech to the American people. Standing beside him was his running mate Jonathan B. Prince, who also seemed as happy as David was at that moment.

"My fellow Americans, tonight, I stand before you humbled by the trust you have placed in me. To those who voted for me, thank you. To those who did not, I want you to hear me clearly: I will be your president too. This victory does not belong to one party, one denomination, one region, or one movement. It belongs to every American who still believes that division does not have to be our destiny, that decline is not inevitable, and that this nation can rise again—not merely in wealth or strength, but in character. Tonight, the campaign is over. The work begins.

"For many years, Americans have been told that we must choose between conviction and compassion, between faith and freedom, between moral clarity and mutual respect. I reject those false choices. We can speak the truth without hatred. We can defend our beliefs without denying the dignity of our neighbors. We can honor the faith that shaped so much of our history while protecting the conscience of every citizen. And we can become one nation again. Not because we agree on everything. Not because our differences have disappeared. But because there are still things greater than our differences. Family. Community. Justice. Mercy. Duty. Sacrifice. And the unshakable truth that every human life

possesses dignity that no government grants and no government has the right to take away.

"Tonight, I am thinking of the mother who works two jobs and still wonders whether she can afford groceries. I am thinking of the father who feels he has failed because he cannot provide the life he wants for his children. I am thinking of the elderly woman sitting alone in a house filled with memories. I am thinking of the young man who has been told that his life has no purpose. I am thinking of the pastor feeding families from a church basement. I am thinking of the teacher buying school supplies with her own money. I am thinking of the police officer who serves with integrity, the nurse working through the night, the farmer watching the sky, and the soldier standing guard far from home. You are America. Not the politicians. Not the parties. You. And this administration will remember whom it serves.

"During this campaign, I spoke often about America's spiritual inheritance. Some praised those words. Others feared them. So let me say plainly what I mean. I do not believe the government can create faith. I do not believe the state can save souls. I do not believe any president should stand between a person and God. Faith imposed by force is not faith. Worship demanded by law is not worship. And a church dependent upon political power has forgotten the power it already possesses. But neither will I accept the idea that our deepest convictions must be hidden, apologized for, or excluded from public life. We will protect the freedom to preach. We will protect the freedom not to believe. We will protect the Christian, the Jew, the Muslim, the Hindu, the skeptic, and every person whose conscience leads them to worship—or not worship—in peace. Because religious liberty does not belong only to the majority. It belongs to everyone.

"Yet liberty must be more than permission to believe privately. It must include the freedom to live according to conscience, to serve one's community, to raise one's children, and to bring moral conviction into the public square without fear. Under this administration, faith will not control the government. But neither will government be permitted to control faith.

"My fellow Americans, our nation is wounded. Families are fractured. Communities are distrustful. Public institutions have lost credibility. Too many of our children are growing up without hope, discipline, belonging, or any sense that their lives serve a greater purpose. Government cannot repair all of this. But government can stop making it worse. We will strengthen families. We will rebuild neighborhoods. We will partner with local organizations that have earned the trust of the people they serve. We will confront addiction with both accountability and compassion. We will protect children from exploitation. We will restore dignity to work. We will defend the elderly, the unborn, the disabled,

the poor, and all those whom powerful people find easy to overlook. And we will measure our success not by how loudly we proclaim our values, but by how faithfully we live them.

"Scripture teaches that faith without works is dead. So let our national renewal be known by its works. Let the hungry be fed. Let the lonely be visited. Let the prisoner be remembered. Let the stranger be treated with dignity. Let the powerful be held accountable. Let justice be administered without favoritism. And let mercy never be mistaken for weakness.

"Tonight, I also speak to the nations of the world. America seeks no empire. We seek no throne above other nations. We will not spread our convictions by the sword. We will lead through service, strength disciplined by humility, and power restrained by principle. But we will not retreat from the responsibility history has placed before us. Where there is war, we will labor for peace. Where there is persecution, we will defend conscience. Where there is hunger, we will offer bread. Where tyranny crushes human dignity, we will speak the truth.

"America will become a shining city on a hill again—not so the world will admire us, but so that the world may see what a free and virtuous people can accomplish together. Some will say this vision is too ambitious. Some will say our divisions are too deep. Some will say the nation we love cannot be restored. But I have traveled this country. I have looked into the faces of its people. And I tell you tonight: there is more goodness in America than our headlines suggest. There is more courage than our cynicism allows. There is more faith than our institutions understand. And there is more grace available to us than any of us deserve.

"The hour is late. But it is not too late. Let tonight mark the end of the politics of perpetual outrage. Let it mark the end of leaders who profit from keeping neighbors afraid of one another. Let it mark the beginning of a new covenant of citizenship—not enforced by government, but embraced by free people. A covenant to tell the truth. To honor our promises. To protect the vulnerable. To forgive where possible. To seek justice where necessary. To love our neighbors. And to place the good of the nation above the ambitions of ourselves.

"I cannot promise that the road ahead will be easy. I cannot promise that every decision will be popular. I cannot promise that I will never make a mistake. But I can promise you this: I will not ask you to worship your government. I will ask you to serve your neighbor. I will not ask you to place your faith in a president. I will ask you to place your hope in truths that endure beyond every presidency. And I will not ask what America can take from the world. I will ask what America can give.

"Tonight, let us pray for wisdom. Let us pray for humility. Let us pray for our opponents as sincerely as we pray for our friends. And let us pray that future generations will look back upon this night and say: that was when America remembered who she was. That was when a divided people chose unity. That was when a weary nation found hope. That was when we began again.

"May God bless every citizen of this great land. May God guide the work before us. And may God bless the United States of America."

The audience erupted in applause. David smiled and acted humble as he accepted their praise. But I just sat there and felt nothing.

It felt like the whole thing was nothing more than a rehearsal. A setup for a promise that he was not going to deliver on.

The real David Shepherd will eventually emerge when the people least expect it.

Chapter 6

I talked to Valerie on our "friend date" on Wednesday at the local Dunkin' coffee shop. I ordered a large iced coffee while she got herself a lime Coolatta.

"Everyone seemed to be so excited about David Shepherd being elected as President that they're posting lots of YouTube videos and TikToks about what it means for America," I said.

"I don't blame them for being so excited, Vince," Valerie said. "This guy seems to be the answer to all the people's prayers about a true President that will bring about the Lord's Kingdom, starting here in America."

"And you still think he's sent here by God himself?" I asked.

"I don't doubt it, honey," Valerie said. "Maybe the pastor is right that you've been misled by the devil to say those things in church. Not that I would want you to get kicked out of the church, but I think you need to come to your senses and repent."

"I can't repent of something that I'm convinced is the truth, Val," I said. "We don't see it right now probably because of what Paul the apostle said in 2nd Thessalonians, that the One who restrains the 'mystery of lawlessness' will continue to do so until He is taken out of the way, and then that Wicked One will be revealed."

"But who could be that 'One who restrains' be, Vince?" Valerie asked. "The Holy Spirit? The church? Or someone else entirely?"

"I'm not sure exactly who it is, Val, but I'm betting it's the Holy Spirit," I answered. "When the Spirit is removed from the earth, everyone will know who the Antichrist truly is."

"So I'm supposed to take you at your word that God told you Shepherd would be the Antichrist?" Valerie asked in disbelief.

"You can take me at my word or find out for yourself, Val," I said. "This is just what I received from the Lord, and I can't dismiss it or call it anything else."

"Would you think the less of me if I say that I don't totally agree with you on this, Vince?" Valerie asked.

"No!" I said. "You're free to believe what you want. I can only pray that your eyes will be opened and you will know the truth for yourself." Then suddenly I

heard my phone's ringtone go off. "Excuse me, I'll have to take this phone call somewhere else," I said. "It's from my sister Vivian."

"Sure, I'll watch your drink until you return," Valerie said as I headed outside to a private table where I answered the call.

"Hi, Vince, are you at home right now?" Vivian asked.

"No, I'm with a friend over at Dunkin's, Viv," I answered. "Why, what's wrong?"

"We had to take Mom to Mount Moriah Hospital today, Vince, she's in a really bad condition right now," Vivian said. "Her heart's failing."

I gulped, realizing how grave the situation was. "I'll be there as soon as I can, Viv, thanks," I said. I ended the call and went back inside.

Valerie noticed the expression on my face. "Vince, dear, is everything all right?"

"My mom's in the hospital over at Mount Moriah, Val," I said. "I'll need you to take me there as soon as you can."

"I understand," Valerie said, nodding. She and I dumped our drinks and headed for her car.

Charlie and Belinda were already waiting for me at the hospital's entrance when I arrived. I could tell by the look on their faces that they were a little scared.

"Thank goodness you got here, Vince," Charlie said. "We were worried you wouldn't make it."

"How's Mom doing right now?" I asked.

"Barely hanging on," Belinda answered. "They got her on life support, but who knows how long she will last?"

"I want to go to her room right now, see how she is," I requested.

"I'll take you to her room, Vince," Belinda said. She led me through the halls of the hospital, going up an elevator at one point to get to the patients' rooms. Meanwhile, I was praying that the Lord will help my mother hang on until I got a chance to meet with her.

She got to her room, and I saw that she was hooked up to a life support machine. A breathing mask was put over her mouth to keep oxygen flowing into her body.

"I'll leave you alone with her and be outside when you're finished," Belinda said, stepping outside the room.

I drew close to my mother's bed and gently held her by the hand. Her eyes slowly opened. She turned her head slightly toward me. "Vincent? Is that you?"

"Yes, Mom, it's your son Vincent," I said. "I'm sorry that this happened to you."

"I knew that the time has come that the good Lord will take me from this world to be with Him forever," my mother said with some difficulty. "I just want you to know that you don't have to worry about me anymore."

"I wish that I could have married and given you grandchildren, Mom," I said. "I'm sorry that I have failed you."

"At least you have found Jesus, my son," my mother said. "If that's the only accomplishment you've made in your life, then I will die a happy mother, knowing that you know the Lord as your Savior. I know I wasn't a perfect mother to you, having sent you to residential schools for ten years of your life. But at least I did my best with all four of you. I wanted you all to know Jesus, and at least with you, He's made His home with you."

"I'm going to miss you being around for us, Mom," I said. "I pray that your entrance into heaven will be a good one."

My mother smiled at me. "I know it will. And I know you will be there with me, and so will your brother and sisters. Remember that."

"I'll remember, Mom," I said, feeling a bit relieved. "Thank you."

Then the nurse came into the room. "I'll be looking at your mother's vital signs, sir," she said. "You can leave to be with your sister now."

"Thank you, lady," I said, sounding a bit tearful as I got up and left the room.

A few days later, I heard that my mother passed away in her sleep. A memorial service for her was being held at the Norton-Williams Funeral Home. I attended with my family members and those on my mother's side of the family, her brothers and sisters that were still alive. Her ashes were put into a pink ceramic

urn with roses adorning the surface. Everybody got to say a few words or share their favorite Scripture verses for the occasion while we gathered together to say goodbye to a mother who endured great hardship to get her children where they were that day. A few of her favorite songs were being played from my sister Vivian's iPhone as we bowed in silence or shed tears for her passing.

After the service was over, the four of us went over to Applebee's for a dinner that Vivian treated me to since I had very little money on hand to pay for a meal.

"I was so angry that my mother chose to separate me from the rest of my family to spend years in a residential school where I was relentlessly bullied and harassed, wondering how she could do this to me of all her children," I said.

"Well, you made it out of there in one piece, Vince," Charlie said. "I think that's a cause for celebration."

"Are you still angry with Mom for doing that?" Belinda asked.

"I came to understand that she did it with the best of intentions, thinking that she was helping me with my struggle with autism or whatever I was diagnosed with back in the day," I answered. "If she knew more about my problems than she did back then, then who knows, things would be different."

"I wouldn't blame you for still being so angry, Vince," Vivian said. "She wasn't necessarily the best mother around for any one of us. She had to work multiple jobs since Mom and Dad divorced."

"I wish I wasn't so angry with Dad having a child through my stepmother, Cole, whom she took away with her when she departed back to Pennsylvania," I said.

"I feel sorry for Cole, being brought up by Donna along with his step-siblings in the same house," Charlie said.

"But you made peace with Dad before his passing a few years ago," Belinda said.

"I'm glad I did, but I wish I could've shared Jesus Christ with him before he passed away," I said.

"We'll all be together with them in heaven, Vince," Vivian said. "After all, we went to the same church together when we were children."

I nodded but didn't say anything more as I ate my meal in silence.

After coming home from dinner, Valerie called me up on the phone. "Hey, Vince, how are you doing?" she asked.

"I'm fine, Val, thank you," I answered. "I just had dinner with my siblings after my mother's memorial service."

"I'm sorry about what happened to your mom," Valerie said, voicing empathy. "Do you want to talk about it?"

"I just wish I was more close to her during her final years, Val," I said. "I used to be the one who would cry for her to come to me whenever I got in trouble over in residential school."

"I don't blame you if you didn't feel the need to be with her in her final years, Vince," Valerie said. "What you told me about her sending you away to those special schools sounds awful."

"I've already forgiven her for doing that to me," I said. "I know now that what she did wasn't out of malice. It was out of love, hoping that somebody would cure me of my autism or something."

"I think you came out pretty well," Valerie said. "Even better than I was years ago when I was almost dying of all the drugs in my body."

"I'm glad God healed you and saved your life from that drug overdose, Val," I said.

"Yeah, but I wish it didn't come at the cost of my being able to have children, which is what I regret," Valerie said.

"Who knows, God can probably work another miracle in your life," I said. "Think about what God did with Sarah and Elizabeth. They were too old to have children, yet God caused them to become pregnant."

Valerie laughed. "I'm not that old yet, Vince. I would like to live that long so that in case God decides to bless me with my own child, I wouldn't say no to it."

"What if God takes you out of this life before that happens?" I asked.

"That would be even better, though I still question this whole Rapture thing, like when it's supposed to happen — pre-trib, mid-trib, post-trib, or not at all," Valerie said.

"I try not to worry about the Rapture, Val," I said. "I worry more about God getting me through each and every day without me getting into trouble. Who knows, maybe we'll see the Kingdom come without the Rapture ever happening."

"I think David Shepherd will help bring that Kingdom to this earth before Jesus comes back, dear, believe me," Valerie said. "Anyway, I have to go and get supper ready for my husband. Talk to you later."

"Sure, thanks for checking up on me," I said.

"Anytime," Valerie said before the call ended.

Thanksgiving and Christmas passed, feeling a bit empty now since I no longer have either of my parents living. Anyway, I was watching YouTube videos about Luanne Wilmington getting ready to leave the Oval Office in January. News reports said that she felt sorry that it wasn't her time to make history by being the first female President with a full-term in office, but she prays that God will be with David Shepherd as he takes office in January. Right-wing pundits, however, seem to be cheering that they finally have "a true Christian President" that will take office and "make America truly great again", that they will be finally rid of "woke culture" and all those fun buzzwords they like to toss around to their audiences.

I stayed up on New Years' Eve to watch the ball drop on Times Square in New York City, as I usually have done in past years, though some years I have slept through the event. Again, "Auld Lang Syne" and John Lennon's "Imagine" played as 2025 was rung in, and I watched couples down on the street in New York City hugging and kissing each other, feeling happy that this year was going to be the best of all years.

Part of me was hoping God would blow the trumpet, that that night would be the night that Jesus would come in the sky and gather His elect from all corners of the world to be with Him forever. I truly didn't want to be on earth for whatever would come to pass in the new year and beyond that. But the night was silent except for the noise of partying in New York City and whatever my next-door neighbors were watching on their TVs.

I turned to an all-night quiet music channel on YouTube and blacked the screen. Then I prayed to God that He would reveal His will for the world in the new year that we have just entered into before I fell asleep.

Chapter 7

It was January 20, 2025. I was preparing to go to the Gilead House that day when I saw an announcement for a YouTube live-stream feed of the Presidential Inauguration that would happen that day. I decided to put my plans on hold and sit down in front of my computer and watch the live-stream. I could see that Washington, D.C. was so packed with people who were willing to stand in the cold and watch David Shepherd be sworn into office by the Supreme Court judge. It was filled with music. An orchestral version of "Be Thou My Vision" with a full choir was performed to the delight of the crowd, and also to the delight of Shepherd and his Vice President Jonathan Prince. Shepherd seemed calm and collected while Prince seemed a bit nervous, as if he wanted to get this event over and done with so that he could get to the official business of running the country.

After the song ended, the Presbyterian minister Whitman Cartwright stood before the crowd. "Let us pray. Almighty God, You are the Maker of heaven and earth, the Giver of every good and perfect gift, and the Judge of all nations. Before You, presidents and citizens stand on equal ground. Before You, every nation is accountable. Before You, every human heart is laid bare.

"Today we gather with gratitude for the peaceful transfer of power that has long distinguished this Republic. We thank You for those who founded this nation. For those who preserved it through war and sacrifice. For those who serve it today in uniform, in government, in our schools, our hospitals, our homes, and our communities. Bless them all.

"We ask Your wisdom upon President-elect David Shepherd and Vice President-elect Jonathan Prince as they assume the responsibilities entrusted to them by the American people. Grant them humility in success. Courage in adversity. Integrity when no one is watching. Compassion for those who suffer. Justice for those who have been wronged. And discernment beyond human understanding. Protect them from pride. Protect them from corruption. Protect them from the temptation to seek power for its own sake. May they remember that authority is not a privilege to be enjoyed, but a trust to be faithfully exercised.

"Bless the Congress of the United States. Bless the Supreme Court. Bless our governors, mayors, judges, law enforcement officers, firefighters, medical workers, teachers, and every public servant. May they seek not merely what is popular, but what is right.

"We pray for our armed forces, stationed throughout the world. Give them strength. Protect their families. Bring peace where there is conflict, comfort where there is sorrow, and hope where there is despair. We remember today our

allies, and especially the people of Israel, whose recent deliverance from destruction has reminded so many around the world of how fragile peace truly is. Grant wisdom to all who seek reconciliation among the nations. Restrain those who delight in violence. Strengthen those who labor for justice.

"Lord, heal our own land. Where there is bitterness, plant forgiveness. Where there is division, sow understanding. Where there is fear, grant courage. Where there is deception, let truth prevail. Teach us to love our neighbors more than our arguments. Teach us to value character above applause. Teach us that freedom flourishes only where responsibility is embraced. And above all, remind us that no earthly government can take the place that belongs to You alone. May we never place our ultimate hope in princes, in presidents, or in the strength of nations, but in Your everlasting kingdom, which cannot be shaken.

"Guide this nation in paths of righteousness. Give us leaders who serve rather than dominate. Give us citizens who seek truth rather than victory. Give us the grace to walk humbly before You and with one another. We ask these things in the holy name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen."

The people cheered, and after the applause died down, Shepherd stood in front of Presiding Judge Thorin Richard and put one hand on the Bible and raised up the other hand. "I, David Joshua Shepherd, do solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States. So help me, God."

The crowd cheered again. Shepherd took to the podium and began his speech.

"Chief Justice, Vice President Jonathan Prince, distinguished guests, members of Congress, honored veterans, and my fellow Americans: today, I stand before you humbled by the trust you have placed in me and deeply aware of the weight of this moment. No president stands here alone. I stand because generations before us built this nation with sacrifice, courage, and faith. Farmers who tilled stubborn soil. Workers who forged our industries. Teachers who shaped our children. Soldiers who defended our liberty. Mothers and fathers who quietly taught honesty around kitchen tables. Pastors who proclaimed hope from small country churches and great city cathedrals alike. This office belongs not to me, but to them—and to you. I accept it with gratitude.

"Today is not the triumph of one party over another. It is not the victory of conservatives over liberals, nor urban America over rural America. Today is a reminder that, despite our disagreements, we remain one people. The American family has argued before. We have disagreed passionately before. Yet somehow, by God's grace and by our commitment to one another, we have always found

our way forward. We can do so again. For too long we have measured our success by the size of our economy while neglecting the condition of our souls. We have accumulated wealth while losing trust. We have mastered technology while forgetting wisdom. We have become more connected than ever before, yet many of our neighbors have never felt more alone.

"The crisis before us is not merely economic. It is not merely political. It is moral. It is spiritual. Government alone cannot solve such a crisis. No law can manufacture virtue. No executive order can produce compassion. No court can require forgiveness. These things grow only in hearts willing to seek truth and to serve one another.

"And so this administration begins with humility. We recognize both the power—and the limits—of government. Government was never meant to replace families. Government cannot replace churches, synagogues, mosques, charities, neighborhoods, or communities. Our task is not to become the conscience of the American people. Our task is to protect the freedom that allows conscience to flourish. We will defend religious liberty. Not because religion belongs only inside church buildings. But because freedom of conscience is among the first liberties entrusted to every human being. No American should fear living according to sincerely held convictions. No American should fear worshipping freely. And no American should fear disagreeing peacefully. Liberty belongs to all of us. As president, I will protect it for all.

"To the nations of the world, hear me clearly. America seeks friendship where friendship is possible. Peace where peace is honorable. Justice where justice is necessary. We will stand beside our allies. We will defend those who cannot defend themselves. We will oppose tyranny wherever it threatens the dignity of God's image in mankind. Strength and compassion are not enemies. Justice and mercy are not opposites. A great nation possesses both.

"My fellow Americans, only months ago we witnessed events that reminded us how fragile peace can be. We also witnessed extraordinary mercy in the preservation of innocent lives. Whether one sees those events through the eyes of faith or history, they should remind us that human power is never absolute. There are moments when we are compelled to look beyond ourselves. To remember that nations rise and fall. Empires come and go. But truth endures.

"As we move into this new chapter, I ask every American to reject the temptation of cynicism. Hope is not naïveté. Hope is courage. Hope plants trees whose shade it may never enjoy. Hope rebuilds neighborhoods one family at a time. Hope forgives. Hope perseveres. Hope believes tomorrow can be better than today. That is the spirit I ask of this nation. Not blind optimism. But steadfast hope.

"Some have called for America simply to become stronger. I believe we are called to become better. A nation becomes strong because its people are virtuous. Because its families are healthy. Because its communities care for one another. Because justice is impartial. Because mercy is remembered. Because leaders serve rather than rule.

"This administration will strive to encourage those virtues wherever they are found. We will support those who strengthen families. We will honor those who sacrifice for their neighbors. We will partner with communities that care for the forgotten. We will remember that greatness is measured not merely by military strength or economic power, but by moral character. The founders of this Republic understood that freedom requires virtue. That liberty cannot survive without responsibility. That rights must be accompanied by duties. Those truths remain unchanged.

"Today, I ask every citizen—not simply to expect more from government—but to expect more from ourselves. Serve your community. Care for your family. Honor your word. Help your neighbor. Teach your children well. Pray for those with whom you disagree. Love your country enough to improve it. This is how nations are renewed. Not from the top down. But from the heart outward.

"My friends, history has placed before us an extraordinary opportunity. We can become a nation known once again for integrity. For courage. For compassion. For faith. For hope. For service. Not because we seek the admiration of the world. But because we desire to leave our children a country more worthy of their inheritance than the one we received.

"Let us begin that work today. Together. With humility. With determination. And with gratitude to Almighty God, from whom every good gift ultimately comes. May He grant us wisdom beyond our understanding. May He grant us courage greater than our fears. May He grant us charity toward one another. And may He continue to bless these United States of America.

"Thank you. God bless you all. And God bless the United States of America."

Again there was applause, followed by a choral rendition of "How Great Thou Art" and by the military band playing "The Battle Hymn Of The Republic."

I turned off the live-stream and turned on a video playing George Michael's "Praying For Time". I felt the words of that singer speaking more strongly than that of David Shepherd. It felt like I was seeing the beginning of the end of the world that I once knew and the birth of an entirely new world that would be much darker than anyone in that moment would realize.

On Day One, after the inaugural parade, Shepherd signed a handful of executive orders that focused on ethics and public service. Among them, there were:

The creation of the Office of National Renewal, tasked with partnering with local charities, nonprofits, and faith-based organizations to combat poverty, addiction, homelessness, and family instability.

A government-wide ethics initiative requiring greater transparency and financial disclosure for executive officials.

A proclamation designating the first Sunday after the inauguration as a National Day of Prayer, Service, and Reconciliation. Participation is voluntary, but churches, synagogues, mosques, and civic organizations are encouraged to take part.

On Day Two, Shepherd hosted a White House gathering of Christian leaders from a variety of traditions, along with Jewish representatives and several other faith communities. His remarks emphasized religious liberty, moral renewal, care for the poor, and unity rather than partisanship. Pastor Walter Hightower attended this gathering and later told his congregation in one of his televised sermons, "I've never seen a president listen so carefully to pastors." Though I wasn't present at the church during the sermon, I noticed in the video's comments section that most of the conversation revolved around what churches can do with the government rather than independently of it.

Day Three was the most interesting. Several of Shepherd's nominees were confirmed with overwhelming bipartisan support. The media praised them as competent and experienced. Commentators began referring to Shepherd's administration as "the adults in the room." Approval ratings started to climb.

On Day Four, Shepherd gave a televised speech titled, "A Covenant of Citizenship." He asked Americans to commit themselves to honesty, neighborly service, volunteerism, strong families, and civic responsibility. No new laws were proposed. It was an appeal to character rather than legislation. The speech became enormously popular. Schools, churches, and community groups began quoting it.

Day Five was where Shepherd made one of his first foreign trips to Israel, still recovering from the recent missile attack that was miraculously thwarted. Standing in Jerusalem, he said, "The preservation of innocent life reminds us all how precious peace truly is." Interestingly, he didn't explicitly claim the event was miraculous. That restraint earned him even more respect. Many evangelical

leaders, however, began interpreting the visit as confirmation that Shepherd is uniquely aligned with God's purposes.

While Shepherd was dominating the headlines, Vice President Jonathan Prince was spending his first week building relationships behind the scenes. He has meetings with constitutional scholars, influential pastors, governors, international diplomats, and educational leaders. He began speaking about the need for a long-term "renewal of Western civilization." It was visionary language, not revolutionary language.

I still had my doubts. I wanted to find evidence that my dream was correct. Instead, I kept seeing and hearing things that didn't satisfy my curiosity. I watched the inauguration. I listened to Shepherd's speeches. I saw genuine acts of compassion. I heard Pastor Walter enthusiastically describing the administration. Something wasn't adding up. I ended up thinking: If this man was truly dangerous, why did everything he did seem so... good?

I ran into Daniel Wickman as he was standing out in the cold streets of Westville passing out little pamphlets for his church and still talking about the "National Sunday Law" like it was the gospel truth.

"Hey, Vince, long time, no see!" Daniel said. "How's things going?"

"So far I'm still living my life, Dan," I responded. "Have you been watching the news about President Shepherd and his first days in office?"

"Yeah, and frankly I don't trust the guy," Daniel said. "I think he's got something up his sleeve that he's going to reveal sooner or later."

"So you don't believe that he's truly got America's best interests at heart?" I asked.

"Naw, I don't trust any President who still thinks Sunday is the day that people ought to go to church and worship God," Daniel answered. "I'm especially wary of President Shepherd. I think he's going to be the one who will put the National Sunday Law into effect when he gets the chance."

"And that's going to affect your congregation because your people meet on Saturdays," I said, realizing the truth of Daniel's words.

"It's the true Sabbath, man!" Daniel said. "God never changed it, and neither did Jesus. Anyone who forces people to go to church on Sunday because of a law

must be working for the devil."

"I was wondering if I can come to your church for one of its services, just to check it out, because I'm currently without a church to go to," I said.

"Sure, I can give you one of my pamphlets," Daniel said, putting one in my hand. "Just remember the time and the location. Ravenhill Assembly."

I looked at the address and smiled. "Looks like somewhere I can get to easily. Thanks for the information."

"Sure thing, pal. Just come as you are, and don't forget to bring a KJV Bible, because that's what our congregation uses," Daniel said. "Have yourself a good day."

I looked up Ravenhill Assembly on YouTube and I got a channel full of video sermons from a pastor named Marcus Shabbat. He seemed like a guy who really knew his Bible, even if most of what he knew was slanted toward teaching his congregation "the importance of the true Sabbath". One of his videos was about "the Mark of the Beast", and that the people in his church should avoid accepting it at all costs, because that means their souls were doomed to Hell. He mentioned in that sermon where one of the angels in Revelation chapter 14 said; "If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus."

I turned off the video after Marcus started talking about "the Mark of the Beast" being enforced Sunday worship, since that was something that I and Daniel never truly agreed upon. But Daniel's words got me thinking: if David Shepherd was truly working for the devil, would he even go so far as to force everybody to go to church on a designated day whether they wanted to or not?

I turned off my computer and got on my knees and prayed. "Lord God, please reveal to me the truth of Your Word regarding the day of worship, that I don't fall into either legalism or licentiousness, but that I just want to be truly obedient and faithful to You in all that I do. Help me to make the right decision for myself

and guide me to the church that You want me to be in. I give You thanks and glory and honor in Your Son Jesus' name. Amen."

Chapter 8

That night I had a dream. It featured a young lady named Mary Aaron who was pledged to be married to a man named Joseph Shepherd, who were part of a church of an unknown denomination. It was a small town church that existed in the 1970s, and it had only 20 to 30 devoted people going to it every Sunday. It was in a place where everybody knew who they were. Mary was a virgin who kept herself pure for the man she was going to marry, as her parents were very strict about her social life when she was a teenager. Mary felt grateful that she kept herself from sleeping around like her friends who went to the same school she used to go to. They thought Mary was strange, or even worse, a lesbian, though they never said the latter part outright. Mary knew that she was straight, and thanked God every day that He kept her from being led astray by the beauty of women. Not that she personally thought that women didn't look beautiful, but she always believed that female beauty was meant for a man to behold, as God created woman from a man's rib, and when God presented the woman to be man, he was pleased and said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Woman, for she was taken out of Man."

Anyway, Mary came home to her parents' house after church, getting there ahead of her family to get things ready for supper that evening, when she met a shining figure in her bedroom, a male in flowing white clothing. "Hail, Mary, you who are highly favored. Blessed are you among women."

"I'm sorry, but I don't know who you are," Mary said, sounding confused.

"Fear not, young woman, for you have found favor with God," the mysterious being said. "You shall conceive in your womb a young boy, and you shall call his name David. He will be great, and he will be called the son of the Day Star. His father will give him the throne to the kingdom, and he will rule over men forever and ever."

"How can this thing be, seeing that I'm still a virgin?" Mary asked.

"The power of the Day Star will overshadow you, young woman, and he will be called the son of a god. Now behold, your cousin Elizabeth has conceived in her old age, and she is now in her sixth month, when she used to be called barren. For nothing shall be impossible with the Day Star."

"Behold, I am his handmaid," Mary said, sounding excited. "Let it be unto me even as you say."

The mysterious being touched Mary briefly, and she fell to her knees and clasped her hands as she felt something wonderful happening inside her. It was

like something united with an egg cell in her womb. She looked up at the mysterious being and smiled. He smiled back and in an instant was gone.

I woke up from that dream, feeling a bit confused. Didn't this seem a little too much like how Mary had conceived Jesus in the gospel of Luke? But if so, then why was I seeing the script being altered for a modern audience and hearing that her child's name was going to be David? Then I realized: this was the story of David Shepherd's birth. I was getting glimpses into his background.

Something was slowly being revealed. And I couldn't wait to know the whole truth.

I took a bus and got to Ravenhill Assembly the next town over in time for the sermon of the day. Daniel Wickman met me as I entered the sanctuary door. "Hey, Vince, glad to see you this morning. Come, sit with me, you'll enjoy today."

"Are we going to sing from hymnals or is there going to be contemporary worship music?" I asked.

"Just hymnals, bro," Daniel answered. "We're not one of those progressive churches. We still believe in tradition, the right traditions that are passed down to us by the saints."

"Are we the only members of our clubhouse program who are in this church right now?" I asked.

"As far as I know," Daniel answered. "I tried asking around the members of the Gilead House, but so far nobody's said anything about church."

"I know, the clubhouse program doesn't allow members to be too open about their religion," I said. "Same thing with politics."

"Politics is what we try to avoid here as much as possible, but we do want to keep tabs on what our government is doing about our rights such as the freedom to worship how we want," Daniel said.

"But you still fear that the National Sunday Law is going to be forced on you in the end times?" I asked.

"It's how I feel God's going to separate the wheat from the tares, Vince," Daniel answered. "Anyway, let's get ready, the service is about to start."

Pastor Marcus Shabbat took to the podium. "Welcome, both newcomers and congregants, to today's service at Ravenhill Assembly. We are a come-as-you-are church, but I must remind the ladies to dress decently so as not to distract the men from worshipping God. Please make sure your phones are silent during the service. We are a KJV-only church, so in case you've brought a different translation with you to this service, we have copies of the KJV in the pews that are available for you to use. Please don't remove them from the pews when you leave today. That will be all."

We sang a few hymns and made a few call-and-response recitations that were provided by the video projectors showing the words. The service felt like people were worshipping by a carefully crafted script. There didn't seem to be any joy that I sensed from anybody's faces. Only a few weak smiles, but otherwise people's eyes were closed most of the time while their hands were raised, and the faces maintained a blank expression.

When the songs have ended, Pastor Marcus took to the pulpit. "Thank you, brothers and sisters, for your worship today. I'm sure our God is very pleased with our efforts. With that in mind, let us turn to Exodus 20:8-11, which reads: 'Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the sabbath of the LORD thy God...' Brothers and sisters, there is a commandment that many Christians say they believe... and yet few are willing to obey. Not because it is difficult to understand. Not because God failed to speak clearly. But because tradition has often spoken louder than Scripture. The Lord did not say, 'Remember one day in seven.' He said, 'Remember the sabbath day.' Not man's sabbath. Not the church's sabbath. But 'the sabbath of the LORD thy God.' That Sabbath belonged to Him before it belonged to Israel.

"Let us turn to Genesis. 'And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it.' That's from Genesis 2:2-3. Notice carefully. There was no Jew. No Israel. No Mount Sinai. No Moses. The Sabbath begins in Eden. Before sin. Before nations. Before the Law was written upon stone. The Sabbath belongs to the Creator Himself.

"When the Ten Commandments were given... God Himself wrote them. 'And he gave unto Moses... two tables of testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God.' That's from Exodus 31:18. How many commandments did God write? Ten. Did He write nine? No. Did He leave one out? No. The Sabbath stands among commandments against murder... against adultery... against theft... against false witness. Who among us would dare remove one commandment from the middle and say, 'This one no longer matters'?"

"Some say, 'But Jesus abolished it.' Did He? The Bible says, 'And he came to Nazareth... and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day.' Luke 4:16 says it, folks. 'As his custom was.' Not occasionally. Not reluctantly. His custom. And our Lord Himself declared in Mark 2:27-28, 'The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath: Therefore the Son of man is Lord also of the sabbath.' Notice carefully. He did not say the Sabbath was made only for the Jews. He said, 'The sabbath was made for man.' For mankind.

"Our Savior said in Matthew 5:17-18, 'Think not that I am come to destroy the law... I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil. For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law...' Brothers and sisters... is heaven still here? Is earth still here? Then neither has one jot nor one tittle passed.

"Now let's look at the apostles. Paul preached on the Sabbath. Again. And again. And again. 'And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them...', as Acts 17:2 says. His manner. Just as it had been Christ's custom. Even among Gentiles, 'The Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath,' as in Acts 13:42. Paul did not answer, 'Come tomorrow.' He waited until the Sabbath.

"The Lord Jesus warned, 'In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.', as it says in Mark 7:7. Brothers... there is a great difference... between a commandment of God... and a tradition of men. The question is not, 'What has my denomination always done?' The question is, 'What saith the Scripture?'

"Now hear me carefully. There is another danger. Some keep the Sabbath... but not Christ. Some know the day... but do not know the Lord. Keeping a day cannot save you. Only Jesus Christ saves. 'For by grace are ye saved through faith...' which Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:8. If you rest on Saturday... but have never rested in Christ... you are still lost. The Sabbath points us to Him. It is not a substitute for Him.

"Hebrews 4:9 says, 'There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.' Our weekly Sabbath reminds us... that one day... all creation shall enter God's eternal rest. The seventh day is a shadow. Christ is the substance. But because the substance has come... we do not despise the shadow God Himself established.

"My beloved... search the Scriptures. Do not accept my words because I speak them. Do not reject them because they challenge tradition. Be like the Bereans, 'They received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures

daily, whether those things were so.' From Acts 17:11. If I have spoken truth... receive it because it is God's Word. If I have erred... correct me from God's Word. For one day every one of us shall stand before the Judge of all the earth. On that day... it will not matter what our denomination believed. It will matter what God has spoken. May the Lord grant us hearts that tremble at His Word. Amen."

The service finished with yet another song from the hymnal. But I had already checked myself out before that happened. The sermon felt empty, like it was nothing more than PR for their church.

Daniel didn't notice that I was gone until after the service.

I called Valerie during her off-work hours. She was busy feeding her dogs when she heard her phone ring. I waited until she picked up. "Hi, Vince. Sorry about the delay. I was busy feeding my children. What's up?"

"I went to church today over at Ravenhill Assembly," I said.

"Ravenhill? You mean those SDAs?" Valerie said, sounding a bit shocked. "Don't tell me you're giving yourself over to a bunch of cultists during this time."

"No, I was just checking out the service to see what they did for worship and how they preached," I said. "I wasn't very impressed."

"You should make nice and come back to our church, sweetie," Valerie said. "Everybody there kinda misses you being there. You were a great Bible student, and they loved how you shared Scripture with them."

"Thanks, but I don't plan on coming back yet, Val," I said. "I still pray for Pastor Walter, that his eyes would be opened to the truth."

"You still believe that David Shepherd is the Antichrist?" Valerie asked.

"I can't deny that revelation, Val," I answered. "I only want him and the congregation to have that revelation for themselves before they are overcome by a spirit of delusion."

"I'm still praying for you, hon, that the Lord will open your eyes to the truth," Valerie said. "We can still agree to disagree agreeably about who the Antichrist truly is."

"Okay, so who do you think would be the Antichrist?" I asked.

A pause before Valerie replied. "I honestly don't know, Vince. I think I'm going to have to meditate on this until the Lord reveals it to me."

"Well, people did think that Trevor McDonnell, the President before Joseph Borden, was going to be the Antichrist by how he impressed both the Evangelicals and the liberals," I said.

Valerie laughed. "I thought that Trev Mac was a terrible President with a terrible name. Everyone thought he would be our political savior, but he was all talk and no action. Nobody really liked him, so I guess everyone was glad when Borden became President in 2020."

"Trev Mac sounded like a Christian pop artist name, in my opinion," I said. "Thank goodness he was not related to the social worker that I had in one of those residential schools."

"I'm sure she can rest easy knowing that, Vince," Valerie said. "Anyway, if you're not coming back to our church, I'll pray that God will lead you to the right one so that He can feed you and take care of you spiritually."

"Thanks, Val, I'd appreciate that," I said.

"Oops, I've got to take care of my husband!" Valerie said. "I'll talk to you later. Keep yourself out of trouble now, you hear?"

"Talk to you soon, Val," I said before I ended the call.

I was finishing up supper that night when I got a call. It was Daniel. "Hey, it's Vince," I said. "What's up?"

"Dude, why did you leave our church so early?" Daniel asked, sounding upset. "I was going to invite you for some coffee over at my place afterward."

"I'm sorry, Dan, but I didn't feel like staying all the way to the end," I answered. "Something about the sermon felt totally off, like it's something I heard too many times."

"You'll get used to it after a while, Vince, that's just how the pastor normally preaches," Daniel said. "You're going to come back next Saturday?"

"Actually, I might try another church that another member would suggest," I said. "I don't want to sound ungrateful for your efforts, but..."

"I understand, Vince, our church is not for everybody," Daniel said. "I'm still going to be praying for you, since you're always on my prayer list. Maybe the Lord will bring you back to us when you least expect it."

"Maybe we will worship together under different circumstances, Dan, who knows?" I said.

"I'd still tell you to be careful and watch the news about anything that's going on in our government," Daniel said. "I feel it in my spirit that something terrible is going to happen, and everyone will think it's the greatest news."

"And what would that be?" I asked.

"Peace talks with Israel and the Middle East in July, far as what I know," Daniel answered. "America is headed for the time of the Tribulation, whether we would like to admit it or not."

"That soon?" I said, sounding surprised. "Guess I'll just have to keep myself tuned in to see what's going to happen."

"Keep your lamp burning and filled with oil, bro," Daniel said. "The Lord will be coming." And then the call ended.

I sat there, feeling like I was witnessing the end-times unfolding right before my eyes — only from the perspective of those who in the pre-tribulation teaching would be "left behind" on earth during the Rapture. I could wish I was in heaven right now instead of here on earth seeing what would become "the final seven years" before the Lord's return.

Chapter 9

The following months have been quiet on my end, though in the world around me, things were slowly changing, and for most people, it was for the better. Crime seemed to be going down. Violence, theft, and rape were also going down. Alcohol and marijuana sales were plummeting. People were actually getting along with each other. People were actually getting saved and going to church in numbers greater than before President Shepherd was elected. Pastor Walter in one of his sermons was calling this "the great end-times revival that will happen before the Lord's coming." Indeed it seemed like a revival on the surface, but it felt like only the outside of the cup and dish were being cleaned — the inside was still not cleansed of wickedness and impurity, as Jesus said in one of His seven woes to the Pharisees and scribes back during His first coming.

Missionaries were being sent out into the world to preach "the wonderful news of God's Kingdom coming to earth" through President Shepherd. A good deal of people who heard their words turned their hearts to the Lord, But there were those who were skeptical and distrusting of anything those missionaries had to say about this so-called "Kingdom of God". Muslim countries still remained unmoved and worshipping Allah. Yet people continued to pray that God will pour out His Spirit upon them and reveal Himself to them in a very powerful way that they would be convinced that Yahweh was the only one true living God, and that Jesus Christ was also God made manifest in the flesh.

Then in April came the most startling decision made by the President. He declared through executive order that the United States of America would no longer be called the United States, but rather the Christian Commonwealth of America. He declared that, though there would still be religious liberty in the country, Christianity would be its main dominant religion, and all life in that Commonwealth would eventually reflect the nature of its "Christian heritage passed down from our Founding Fathers". Evangelicals cheered at the news, while liberals felt that the country may be slowly drifting toward authoritarianism with this announcement. Still there was no outright rebellion against the United States government calling its country by its new name. But I could feel the tensions that are slowly starting to rise.

David Shepherd made lots of trips to foreign countries to discuss peace deals with its leaders that would open doors between the Christian Commonwealth and the nations that were opposed to outsiders who wanted to dictate how they should lead their nations. Shepherd was always calm and collected as he spoke to their leaders, showing incredible patience as he listened to their arguments and disagreements. Surprisingly he didn't need an interpreter, for he somehow spoke the language of those nations as if he had been a native speaker all along. That caught most of the leaders off guard, and made them realize that Shepherd

wasn't just any kind of United States President — he was a man who, in their estimation, was "divinely sent". Every meeting ended with Shepherd and the leaders shaking hands with each other, always smiling, pleased to have come to some sort of agreement.

The United Nations became so impressed by Shepherd's actions regarding making peace with the nations that they decided to give him the title of Secretary-General in the hopes that he would take over the organization and make it part of his global effort to reach the nations and proclaim "the goodness of God's Kingdom" to all the world. Shepherd was flattered but refused to take over the United Nations, saying that he would nominate somebody that he felt would be useful as its new Secretary-General in case they would help spread not just humanitarian aid but also the gospel of Christ. He did, however, suggest a new name for the United Nations, the Dove Foundation, which they accepted and used in all their official documents and decrees.

Israel, however, started seeing two old men in sackcloth robes standing by the Wailing Wall and calling themselves Elijah and Moses. They claimed to be "the two witnesses" of Revelation chapter 11 that stood between God and the people, calling people to repent and turn themselves over to the Lord God before it was too late. People of the world thought they were crazy. How could they be preaching repentance to a world that's already turning to the Lord in large numbers? Wasn't that evidence enough that the Lord was bringing His Kingdom here on earth as it is in heaven? Yet these men soldiered on in their witnessing and preaching. Some dared to attack them and called them blasphemers, but that was met with the two witnesses breathing fire upon them, that consumed them until they were nothing more than ashes.

Shepherd said nothing about the "two witnesses" at first, but after a while he commented that these two people in Jerusalem are "demonic pretenders claiming to be of God, who are opposing the spreading of the true Kingdom of God in our world." He said he would pray that God will work in the hearts of these two men, that they will come to see the light before it's too late. Prince weighed in with his own comment about the "two witnesses", that they are just spiritual opportunists looking to draw attention unto themselves with their "magic tricks that come from another source."

I began to pray for the "two witnesses", that God would use them powerfully to reach out to the world and make them see the truth of who and what David Shepherd really is, that they would raise up true disciples of Christ that would seek after the true Kingdom of God, the one that does not come with observation, but is birthed within us like a mustard seed and a bit of leaven.

Then came July 4, 2025, the day now celebrated as the anniversary that God miraculously protected Israel from the Russian missile attack. David Shepherd, with the help of the Dove Foundation, brought Israel together with the Middle East leaders to sign a seven-year peace treaty between them, under which neither country would retaliate against the other in exchange for free use of Israel's "food growth" formula in their nations. This same treaty would also give the Christian Commonwealth and the Dove Foundation free licensed use of that same formula in exchange for protection of Israel for seven years.

A good deal of people around the world were watching the signing of the covenant, thinking that Shepherd had actually achieved world peace among the nations. I, on the other hand, looked at the signing and realized that this was the "covenant with Hell" that Israel was signing with the devil, the "covenant" that was "confirmed with many for one week", a period of seven years that people would come to know as the Tribulation.

I got a call from Valerie just as I had finished watching the signing. "Hi, Vince, how are you doing?" she asked. "Have you just watched the signing of the peace treaty today?"

"Yeah, and I'm not pleased with what this actually means for the world, Val," I answered.

"What's there to be upset about?" Valerie said. "With the signing of the treaty, the people of Israel can rest easy, knowing that they are safe from any further attacks from the Muslim countries."

"I know what Daniel 9:27 says," I said. "He, referring to the 'coming prince', will confirm a covenant with many for one 'week', but in the middle of that 'week' he will do away with sacrifice and offering, and with the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even unto the end, and that which was determined shall be poured out on the desolate."

"I heard that verse explained differently before, Vince," Valerie said. "That it was truly talking about Christ, confirming the New Covenant, and in the process doing away with sacrifices and offerings for sin, and with the Jews rejecting Jesus, He has made their house desolate by deserting them completely."

"I hate to tell you this, but that verse was never talking about Christ," I said. "It was actually talking about the Antichrist."

"I'm just telling you what I heard, Vince," Valerie said. "You can believe whatever you want, but I'm not going to change my mind about what I believe that verse to be talking about."

"I can only pray for the Lord to open your eyes to the truth, Val," I said. "I don't want to see you perish without the true knowledge of the Word."

"Same here, Vince," Valerie said. "Anyway, I've got things to do today. Talk to you later, okay?"

"You take care, Val," I said before the call ended.

The world continued to change for the next 18 months after the signing. Protestant and Evangelical churches around the United States — and eventually throughout the world — became united under the banner of the Christian Commonwealth Church. Graeme Franklin became its Pontifex Maximus, guiding the churches throughout the world as to what he claimed to be "true Christian doctrine". The Roman Catholic Church and the Greek Orthodox took issue with the formation of the Christian Commonwealth Church, feeling that they were now competing with the Protestants and Evangelicals all uniting together for the sole purpose of taking over the title of "the Mother Church". Some among the Catholics and the Orthodox, however, welcomed the Christian Commonwealth Church with open arms, hoping that they could dialogue with each other and make peace between the traditions.

The Dove Foundation was eventually absorbed into the Christian Commonwealth government, replacing its current structure with what Shepherd would call "apostles" that would govern ten regional districts of the world under the new Christian Commonwealth Community banner. These "apostles" were given both political and religious power over their regions to declare the will of the head of state. Some members of the former United Nations left their jobs after learning the nature of this new Security Council that now answer to Shepherd, but most stayed either out of loyalty to Shepherd or out of fear.

All of mass media was eventually owned by the Christian Commonwealth, which meant that everything that was produced for TV, radio, or the Internet now answered to the dictates of Shepherd. All "objectionable material" was removed from public sale and consumption. Even my favorite secular music from my favorite artists was no longer available. Most Christians simply didn't miss the removal of that material, but it ended up causing that material to show up on the physical and digital "black market" for people to secretly obtain.

As part of the peace treaty, the Jews were now allowed to build a new Temple on the site of the Dome of the Rock after it was removed. The Jews started reinstituting animal sacrifices as part of their daily routine, but the "two witnesses" decried the Temple as "a Temple of rejection", that it was built apart

from the true Messiah. The Jews, who believed Shepherd to be "the true Messiah", took issue with this complaint and tried to assault the "witnesses", only to suffer the same fate as anyone else of other religions that tried the same.

I had yet another dream. This time it was set in a small church, where people were gathered together for a wedding. Joseph Shepherd was standing at the altar, nervously waiting for his bride Mary Aaron to be walked down the aisle with her father and be presented to him as his wife. Then the moment came, and Mary and her father came down the aisle while wedding music played. Joseph looked a bit shocked as he noticed that his future wife Mary was visibly pregnant. He hadn't seen her since he had been engaged with her, so this came as much more than just a surprise — it felt like a betrayal, as if Mary had hidden some secret affair she had with someone else or some other reason why she was pregnant. Mary was smiling, looking radiant in her wedding dress. But Joseph, feeling overwhelmed by emotion, ended up running from the altar and heading outside the church while the bride and the families watched, feeling like Joseph was going to call off the wedding.

Joseph sat outside the church crying his eyes out. He expected a pure virgin to be at his wedding, but instead he got a bride that was pregnant by unknown means. What would others think about him now that he was marrying that kind of person? He felt like he would be the laughingstock of his community.

That was when a mysterious being stood before him and said, "Joseph Shepherd, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for what has been conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. You shall be his father, and you shall call his name David Joshua, for he will save his people and his nation from their sins. This is so that it may be fulfilled by the prophet, saying, 'Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a child, and he shall be called Immanuel, which means, God is with us.'"

Joseph looked at the being and felt a peace and a joy that he never felt before about the whole situation. He realized that Mary's child was a supernatural child that would become someone special to the whole world. He took a deep breath, entered into the church, and came back to the altar, where Mary was waiting for him.

"Is everything all right, my dear?" Mary asked, sweetly.

Joseph smiled. "Oh yes...everything is just perfect."

The rest of the wedding went on without a hitch. The couple kissed, and they were greeted by their friends and family members outside the church, throwing

rice upon the couple as they headed for the car that was waiting to drive them away.

I woke up from that dream, again realizing that there was more being revealed about David Shepherd from that dream that I didn't expect to see — like I was uniquely privileged to be given this revelation.

I got my coffee and wrote an entry in my personal blog that morning. I checked the mail and found a mysterious letter addressed to me with no return address to it. I didn't know who sent it. I thought for a moment that this was just junk mail, but something inside me prompted me to open it. Inside there was a letter and a ticket. The letter simply said:

MIDNIGHT CRY SPECIAL
JULY 4, 2026
12 AM IN SPRINGVILLE, MA
16 BEECHER ST.

BRING ONLY A KJV BIBLE

ALL WILL BE REVEALED.

Chapter 10

I called Valerie on the night of July 3 to see if she would take me to the secret meeting place of this "Midnight Cry Special" in Springville before midnight. She thought that I was crazy, that this could be some kind of trap of the enemy or something. I assured her that I prayed about the meeting, and the Lord gave me the peace to know that nothing bad will happen. She said that she will come around 11 pm to my apartment building and that she will call me when she gets there. So I spent the remaining hours up to that time in prayer, seeking what the Lord will have me do in this situation. He told me not to go with anything but just my Bible — no keys, no phone, no money, no ID, no anything, just my Bible. He assured me that all will be revealed in due time, and that I just need to trust Him. I told Him that I would, and so I waited. I watched YouTube videos until I got the call from Valerie that she was there downstairs. I told her I would be there right away. I turned off my phone, turned off the TV, grabbed my KJV Bible, turned off the lights, and left the apartment.

Valerie was waiting in the car for a few minutes when I showed up. I got in the passenger seat beside her, and she drove off heading for Springville in the middle of the night.

"What do you hope to find at this 'Midnight Cry Special,' Vince?" Valerie asked as she drove through the roads connecting the two towns together.

"I honestly don't know, Val," I answered. "Why do you ask?"

"I have a distinct feeling like I'm never going to see you again, that you'll be taken somewhere that I can't contact you," Valerie said, sounding a bit upset.

"That's what I was thinking, too," I said. "Maybe this is God's true idea of the Rapture."

"That's not funny, Vince!" Valerie snapped. "I know what the teaching is all about, and I don't think this has anything to do with the Rapture. It's just something else entirely."

"That's just my guess at this point, Val," I said. "If I knew anything more about this gathering, I would have told you."

Valerie sighed. "Well, I'm going to miss you, Vince. You're the best friend that I had since I started going to Westville Assembly."

"I'll miss you too, Val, believe me," I said with sincerity in my voice.

We got to 16 Beecher Street at around 11:30 pm. Valerie and I noticed a small crowd of people gathering together. "Looks like you won't be alone, Vince,"

"Good, then maybe I can find some answers," I said as Valerie brought the car to a stop and I got out. "Thanks for bringing me."

"God be with you, dear," Valerie said, giving me a wink and a smile before she drove off.

I took my Bible, my letter, and my ticket with me as I entered the crowd of mostly men, around the ages of 20 to 50. They seemed to be confused as well as excited as to what the event was all about.

"Say, can you tell me what this 'Midnight Cry Special' is truly about, friend?" I politely asked one of the men.

"Did you receive one of these tickets with a cross on it?" he asked.

I produced mine for him to see. "Here's mine," I answered.

"Great!" he said, sounding excited. "Just hang on...the bus will be coming at the stroke of midnight."

"A bus?" I asked. "Where is this bus going to take us?"

"Dunno," he answered. "We'll find out when we get there."

I tried talking to other men in this group, asking the same question about the "Midnight Cry Special," and they pretty much said the same thing. I felt like I was getting nowhere with anyone. Part of me wanted to just leave and probably hitch a ride back home, but the Lord impressed upon me to stay. So I did.

At midnight there came a black bus that said RAPTURE on the side. It looked like one of those buses I have taken when I was living in a residential school on the other end of the state. However, the windows seemed to be blacked out for some reason.

The bus came to a stop, and a man in a white robe came out. "Welcome, men of God, to the Midnight Cry Special. Please make your way on board in an orderly fashion. We'll get going as soon as everybody is on."

"Hey, Mister, where are you guys taking us?" a man in the crowd called out.

"We will answer your question later," the white robed man replied. "Just enter

the bus quietly and have your tickets ready."

And so the men of God lined up, and each man handed their tickets over to the white robed man, who looked at it briefly and then nodded, signaling them to get on board.

I was the last in line, "Here you go," I said, producing the ticket.

The white robed man looked at the ticket and smiled. "Okay, you're all set."

I got on board and saw that most of the seats were filled up. There was one last empty seat, near the back. It was next to a young man who looked like he came from the ghetto. "Hey, dude, take a seat," he called out.

"Thanks," I said, sitting down next to him. Soon the white robed man got on board before the door closed and the bus driver started driving off.

"May I ask you a question?" the young person sitting next to me asked.

"Sure, what about?" I responded.

"You know about the 144,000 young men who are virgins?" he asked.

"I know that's from Revelation," I answered.

"Do you think God's calling us together to be part of the 144,000?" he asked.

"I honestly don't know, but for what it's worth, I know that I haven't been with a woman intimately for all my life," I answered.

"Me neither," he said. "My name is Pablo Rivera. What's yours?"

"Vincent Geordi."

"Nice to meet you, Vince," Pablo said as we shook hands together. "Just wish it was under better circumstances. How long have you been a Christian?"

"I've been one since my early thirties, Pablo," I said. "How about you?"

"I gave my life to the Lord when I turned eighteen," Pablo said. "Youth group witnessed to me. I was supposed to go to college this year."

"That's too bad," I said. "I mostly worked odd jobs since I finished college back in the 1990s."

"Maybe what the Lord has in store for me with this 'Midnight Cry' is better, though," Pablo said. "Who knows, we could just die together tonight and we will be with the Lord forever."

"I'm not afraid to die, Pablo," I said. "I just wish I could have had a normal life like my family members."

"Yeah, but what good would that do you?" Pablo said. "Didn't the Lord say it will not profit a man to gain the whole world and yet lose his soul?"

"I'm glad you know something from the Bible that's useful," I said.

"Friends call me a Bible junkie, dude," Pablo said. "Never see me go anywhere without one. I bet that's also you on most days."

"Yeah, I have to admit that I don't go most places without one," I said. "So, you're willing to give your life to the Lord tonight?"

"Am I ever!" Pablo said, sounding enthusiastic. "I feel like I was made to live for that moment when the Lord will call me home."

"Won't that be the day!" I said, starting to yawn. "Wake me up when the bus gets us to our destination." And then I closed my eyes, relaxed, and fell asleep.

Several hours later, I heard, "Wake up, dude! We're here!"

I woke up and found myself getting off the bus along with the other men of God to an unknown location. But what a location it was! It was a stone sanctuary hidden somewhere under the mountains where trees and plants miraculously grew. There was a pool of water that constantly poured fresh water. It was like something I had only seen in a dream, or maybe in the movies.

We were directed to a huge hall inside the sanctuary where we were told to sit on the floor. We waited, wondering what was going to happen next. Were we going to be inducted into a secret cult or something? Were we going to be tested? Were we going to be slaughtered? Those questions lingered in my mind as I waited for answers.

Then a man in his forties, wearing a white robe, stood before us. "Men of God, pay attention to what I have to say. My name is Micah Eretz, and you have been chosen by God to be part of the 144,000 man army that will go throughout the world and preach the true gospel of Jesus Christ unto all the nations. I know

some of you are thinking, 'Isn't that what the Christian Commonwealth Church is already doing, preaching the gospel of Christ?' I want to let you know, that the gospel that they are preaching is not the true gospel of the Lord's Kingdom coming, but of the false kingdom that they are setting up for the Antichrist. And I'm sure that all of you had dreams that are revealing who the Antichrist truly is. He is David Shepherd, the American President who claims to have been sent by God to take over the nations and make them Christian. Make no mistake, this man is not sent by God, but is sent by our enemy, the Devil, to deceive the masses into building a kingdom that is not the true Kingdom of Christ.

"You men have been taken to this location to be trained for the time that we have now entered into: the seven-year Tribulation. This is God's last call for humanity to truly repent before Jesus Christ comes and sets up His true Kingdom here on earth. He will send the Antichrist, the False Prophet, and all who follow him into the Lake of Fire that has been prepared for the Devil and his angels. Woe be unto those who do not turn to the true Lord and Savior before that time comes.

"As we will go through the Tribulation together, we will see how terrible the world will become leading up to the Lord's coming. The American President who thinks he is building the Lord's Kingdom will reveal his true self at the midpoint where he will be slain and resurrected a few days later. He will demand all to forsake the one true God and worship him alone, and his False Prophet will cause all to make an image unto the Beast, that will both speak and cause as many that would not worship the image to be killed. He will also cause all to take a mark on their right hand or their forehead, so that no one can buy or sell without the mark. That mark will doom people to eternity in the Lake of Fire, where the smoke of their torment will rise forever, and they will have no rest day or night.

"Right now we've entered into the period of the First Seal Judgment, where there will be peace among the nations for a brief period of time. That time will come to an end, when the Lamb opens the Second Seal, causing men to hate and to kill each other. Despite what the media is telling you, there will be many that will resist this new one-world government and will make war against them. That will soon be followed by the Third Seal Judgment, in which prices for food and oil will go up to punish those that resist this government. And to follow that will be the Fourth Seal Judgment, in which a quarter of the earth will perish from hunger, death, sword, and the beasts of the earth. And then there will be the Fifth Seal Judgment, where there will be martyrdom of the true saints of God that will emerge during this time, whose souls will be under the altar in heaven, waiting for God to avenge them. And to top it all off, the Sixth Seal Judgment will result in a massive global earthquake that will shake the earth, plus the stars from the heavens will fall, and people will flee for protection from these cosmic disasters.

"God has blessed you all with unique abilities with which you can use for the benefit of sharing the true gospel of the Kingdom. Some of you are laborers, some of you are technicians, some of you are gardeners and farmers, and some of you are skilled in doing multiple tasks. Here in this Sanctuary you will be trained to deal with the masses that you will encounter in the world as they will hear your words and resist you at every turn. Remember the words of the Lord, that we should not fear those who can kill the body but not the soul, but rather to fear Him who has the power to destroy both soul and body in Hell. Your lives have the protective hand of God over your lives. He has given you the authority to trample serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will by any means hurt you. But remember not to rejoice, because the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice, because your names are written in Heaven.

"As you live in this Sanctuary, God will guide you and guard you in following the rules. This area is strictly off-limits to the rest of the world. Nobody knows where it is. There are no lines of communication between us and the outside world. All information will be revealed to us through secure contacts between us and other Sanctuaries throughout the world. You do not need to fear the world coming to find us one day. But there will come a day when you will have to leave the Sanctuary and enter into the world to do the Lord's will. It is then you will be in contact with other members of this community, no matter how far apart you are from each other.

"You will now proceed to the processing room, where your outside clothes will be removed along with all your earthly possessions except your Bible, and you will be given new clothes for your work and training in this Sanctuary. That will be all. Thank you and may God bless you all."

Pablo sighed after the announcement had ended. "Man, I wouldn't think we would be drawn together just to be trained as members of the 144,000, Vince."

"Me neither, Pablo, but apparently this is God's calling on our lives," I said. "We'll be together in this whether we want to be or not."

I went into the processing room with the other men, where we were told to remove our clothes and anything from us that is considered "worldly". I stripped myself down naked like everyone else, and just stood around waiting with what little dignity I had left for the next step. Then each of us were put through a shower to cleanse us completely before we were given white robes and a pair of sandals. I kept my glasses throughout the whole thing because otherwise I would be blind without them. I put on the robe and sandals, and I stood there with

everyone else in the same clothes, feeling like we have all been inducted into a cult beyond our own will. But strangely I felt peace about the whole thing, like this is where the Lord wanted me to be.

We had a meal together that began with a group prayer. It was a simple meal of what turned out to be porridge. It was tasteless, but I ate it anyway because I was feeling hungry. Then we were shown to our rooms, which consisted of a bed, a lamp, a chair, and a table. Strangely, each one of us was given a computer tablet which I turned on and found that it only had the King James Version of the Bible and a very limited Internet browser that only had access to certain web sites that I honestly never heard of — mostly reporting news of the world. At the time I turned on the tablet to check things out on it, I came across news that there was growing unrest among non-Christians who felt as if their rights were slowly being eroded by the Shepherd administration. Churches have been dismissing this as just "sour grapes from people who just don't want to accept a Kingdom that the Lord is offering them." Some preachers have gone so far as to quote Luke 19:27, which reads, "But those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, bring hither, and slay them before me," saying that God commands His people to destroy those who will refuse to accept the Kingdom.

I turned off the tablet and got on my knees and prayed. "O Lord God, Heavenly Father, Maker of heaven and earth, I pray for the spirit of peace and wisdom to prevail in this situation, even though it may seem hopeless and that the world is simply fulfilling what Your Word has said about the situation at hand. May we as brothers of the faith learn together from each other that we may better serve You as we enter into the world fully equipped to do Your will. Give us all strength, wisdom, and courage to endure the days that are ahead of us as we head for the opening of the Second Seal. May Your true Kingdom come, and may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. In Your Son Jesus' name, I pray. Amen."

There was a knock on the door. I opened and found that it was Pablo. "Hey, dude, you getting settled into your room now?" he asked. "I just saw what was in my room, and it feels like we're going to be in for a rough time of training."

"I get the same feeling myself, Pablo," I said. "Does that discourage you in any way?"

"I'm just curious as to what we're going to be doing here, because it's beginning to feel like a prison, just eating the same thing over and over," Pablo said.

"Maybe the Lord wants to strip away everything from us that we're so used to doing that we'll be able to better listen to Him and do what He says," I said.

"But to spend who knows how long we're going to be in these Sanctuaries, doing

who knows what?" Pablo said. "I would be checking out of here if it weren't for what the Lord is impressing upon me."

"We can't do anything about it except make the best of our situation here, Pablo," I said. "I didn't ask to be here either, but I'm willing to do what the Lord says, even if it's difficult."

"I guess I'm still too young in the faith to get used to how older people like you have managed to endure all those years," Pablo said.

"I'll pray for you, Pablo," I said. "I think you'll make a great witness of Christ even in the times we're living in."

Pablo smiled. "Thanks, amigo. I'll make sure to pray for you as well."

Chapter 11

The first days of being in the Sanctuary were hard, to say the least. It was basically everyone getting used to the routine of waking up for morning prayer, eating breakfast, studying from Scripture, doing manual work, noontime prayer, eating lunch, resting, studying from Scripture, doing manual work, eating dinner, evening prayer, and meditation before going to bed. It felt like what Pastor Walter had called from the Greek a "kenosis" — a period of "emptying" ourselves of the things of the world that we have been attached to. I missed being able to watch YouTube videos and browse through Facebook for social media posts. My only connection to the outside world at this point was through Voices In The Wilderness, a specialized news aggregator that collected news from the outside world that talked about events pertaining to the fulfillment of Scripture. I would read the news on my tablet during my off-hours just to see for myself how the advancement of the Christian Commonwealth was proceeding. All I could see at this point was that tensions were rising among both professed Christians and non-Christians everywhere, that things were going to reach the breaking point half a year from now, which is when Micah Eretz claims the Second Seal Judgment will occur.

I became friends with most of the men at the Sanctuary and found out their various life histories before they became part of the 144,000. All of them were virgins, whether by choice or not, but they all felt like God was calling them out of the world for some special purpose that He had for them. I remember an incident that I still question whether it was real or not, where I almost ran away from the first residential school that I have been in. I was running out of the cottage I was staying in and was headed for the school's main building when I felt an impression on my heart, stopping me from going any further. Then there was a gentle voice that whispered, "Go back inside. I will take care of you." I didn't know where the voice came from, but I obeyed, heading back into the cottage that I ran away from, and got back into my bed. The next morning I woke up, surprised that I didn't get punished for leaving the cottage that night. No counselor said or noticed anything. I didn't know it at the time, but looking back on the incident, I realized that it was the Lord watching out for me.

The person I was closest to in the Sanctuary was Pablo. The Lord had impressed upon me to be like a big brother to him, to teach him things that I have learned in my walk with the Lord that he had yet to discover for himself. Pablo talked about how he had been raised up in a strict Catholic family that went to church every Sunday without fail, that he had been baptized as a baby, made his First Communion, and had his confirmation as a young teenager. Yet he wanted to have a life that was apart from religion, going to parties, meeting up with young women and dating them, eventually settling down and raising a family. However, Pablo felt so uncomfortable being around people that he spent most of

his time hanging out by himself and reading books. A youth group from a local Assembly of God invited him to join them, and it was there as a young man getting ready to graduate from high school that he gave himself to the Lord. It felt to him like an irresistible pull that he could not escape from. His family was surprised that he stopped going to Catholic Masses and started going to the Assembly of God that was in his town. Yet they didn't disown or discourage him; instead, they encouraged him to pursue his faith to wherever God would take him in his life. The only regret that he had was not being the one who died in place of his older brother Emilio, who he had always looked up to, who was killed by accident in a drive-by shooting that happened near his neighborhood.

I disclosed to Pablo that I had been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, which surprised him, because he couldn't see me as "being autistic" like some of the folks he knew in his neighborhood, the nonverbal types who could hardly do anything for themselves. I told him it was a condition that I had my entire life, and I didn't really know about it until around the early 2020s, although earlier I had been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. Pablo seemed confused and asked what's the difference between autism and Asperger's, and I told him the only real difference between the conditions is that those with Asperger's don't have language delay problems, and that they are usually highly intelligent. Pablo said he would pray for me to be "cured of autism", and I told him autism is not a disease that needs to be cured, it's just a condition that needs treatment, and that it's lifelong. Pablo said he will still pray for my "healing" anyway, so I just let the matter drop.

Things were pretty quiet until early January 2027, when, during our daily activities, all of us in the Sanctuary, including me, saw something happen in a vision that shook us to the core. Churches, mosques, temples, synagogues, and worship centers have all been firebombed. Christians and other religious people were angry with each other and blamed the other for their sacred places being destroyed. Then they turned their anger toward non-religious people and atheists, who claimed total innocence in the whole matter. War broke out between groups of people. The Christian Commonwealth had to send out military forces to quell the violence. People mourned and wept as they saw that their neighbors who once lived in peace with each other were now at their throats, taking out their frustrations on people they believed had wronged them for some reason.

The vision lasted for what seemed like minutes, and then it was gone. We were stunned. We looked at each other, wondering what had happened. Then we were all summoned to the great hall, where we stood and listened to Micah Eretz tell us what we needed to know.

"Brothers of the faith, don't be alarmed," he spoke with certainty. "This is the Second Seal Judgment unfolding before our eyes. John the Revelator once wrote about this moment: 'And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. And there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another: and there was given unto him a great sword.'

"This is a sign given to us by God that we will be seeing more of the Seal Judgments unfolding as we progress through this time. David Shepherd will do everything he can to restore peace to the world, but those efforts will result in more suffering that will come with the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Seal Judgments."

"But what can we do about the situation, Micah?" one of the men asked. "Just sit here and do nothing?"

"We are hardly 'doing nothing', men," Micah answered. "We are still preparing for the time when God will use us powerfully to bring the true gospel to the world. We can pray that God will spare as many people as possible so that they will not enter into Hell without hearing the gospel. But we cannot stop what God is doing through these judgments on the world. He is bringing them to the point where they will call upon Him to bring His true Kingdom here to earth."

"But how is that any different from what David Shepherd is doing with his Christian Commonwealth?" another man asked.

"David Shepherd is leading people toward worshipping a false Christ that will reveal himself at the midpoint of the Tribulation," Micah answered. "God wants people to know the true Christ as revealed in the Bible, the Lamb who was slain as the ransom for setting many people free from their sin. He will come at the end of the Tribulation to deal with those who want Shepherd's version of the Kingdom over the true Kingdom. We must be patient and watchful for the time when God will use us to deliver the message of that Kingdom to a people whose eyes and ears will be opened to the truth. That will be all. May God bless you."

After Micah left, I came over to where Pablo was standing, who looked as if he had seen a ghost. "Oh man, this is worse than imagining what had happened to my brother Emilio all over again!" he said, sounding like he was going to break down and cry. "What are we going to do, amigo?"

"The only thing we can do, Pablo — pray," I said, putting my hand on his shoulder. "I'm sorry that this whole thing is disturbing to you. I pretty much didn't like having to be a witness to all that carnage, even if it was all in a vision."

"I don't think I can handle still waiting around here until God calls us to be used for His Kingdom," Pablo said, weeping. "I wish that I could be home with my family right now!"

"I wish to be anywhere but here myself right now, but the world outside just isn't safe for us to go beyond these walls and help anyone in person," I said as I held him close to me, trying to ease his pain. "These are the times when we need to hold onto our faith and believe in a God who is greater than any of us."

"I feel like a fool, crying my heart out to you like this," Pablo whimpered.

"There's no shame in crying, Pablo," I said. "God sees all our tears and puts them in His bottle. He will take us through this moment, I promise you."

I just sat there with Pablo, holding him close, not caring what anyone thought of us when they saw us together, not caring about the time that was passing.

Since I was part of the tech crew, I got access to all the news feeds that were coming into the Sanctuary. I decided to watch a video that was not yet curated for our viewership, which turned out to be a secret meeting between Shepherd and Prince, where they thought they would be alone to discuss private matters.

"Sir, you have made people turn on each other, even the same people that claim they support you wholeheartedly," Prince said. "It was a brilliant plan to get agents to plant those bombs in those houses of worship to turn everybody's attention away from you and toward the people you want them to hate."

"It was all part of the plan the Lord had revealed to me in order to build His Kingdom so that we can implement complete control of the masses, Jonathan," Shepherd said. "We will assure them that we will restore peace and that we will deal with those who are opposed to our Kingdom by bringing sanctions upon our enemies to teach them a lesson."

"I have read your plan to raise food and oil prices around the world, and I think that's a little too harsh a punishment to put on the people, even those that are loyal to you," Prince said.

"I know it will hurt the people, but pain is a part of progress, my friend," Shepherd said. "We will need to have the Apostles declare this as the official Word of the Lord as soon as possible."

"Yes, sir, effective immediately," Prince said, smiling as he shook hands with

Shepherd.

I froze the video and just sat there in my seat wondering. Shepherd was going to make himself look like the hero before the masses while forcing everyone to pay higher prices to support him and his Kingdom. I didn't know what to do at the moment except just pray.

"O Lord God, please protect those who will be the most vulnerable to what David Shepherd has planned for the following Seal Judgments," I said quietly. "I ask You this and thank You in Your Son Jesus' name. Amen."

A week later, news came into our feed that David Shepherd had officially implemented the sanctions on the world, that food and oil prices would be increased to punish those who would "disrupt the peace that I have worked hard to engender into our Kingdom," as he was quoted.

No sooner did that happen than we started to see visions of people suffering from the effects of this sanction. People had to work multiple jobs to be able to afford a single meal to put on the table, for themselves and their families. Sick, elderly, and disabled people were denied care "for the greater good of the Kingdom". People were slowly dying of malnourishment and starvation. People were killing each other just to have food to eat. Yet the Christian Commonwealth churches were being rebuilt and looking good as new while mosques, temples, synagogues, and other worship centers were left in ruins. The only exception was the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, which remained untouched during the whole Judgment period. People still continued to make sacrifices and offerings there, though now with a bit of difficulty, as blood from animal sacrifices ended up turning to water, and water drawn for certain ceremonies ended up turning to blood.

Again Micah Eretz called us together to remind us of what we saw. "This is now the revelation of the Third and Fourth Seal Judgments happening together, which will cause one-fourth of the world's population to perish. Soon we will see true Christians being martyred for the faith, which will be the Fifth Seal Judgment. Prepare yourselves for what is yet to come: the Wrath of the Lamb, which is the Sixth Seal Judgment that will take place all over the world. We will be released into the world around that time to bring the gospel to the world. That will be all. May God bless you."

After the announcement ended, Pablo and I talked with each other. "Sounds like we might be going home soon, amigo," Pablo said, sounding a bit excited. "Aren't you glad about the news?"

"I was just starting to get used to this place," I said with a sigh.

"You mean you want to be cooped up in this place forever?" Pablo said. "No way, Jose, I want to be out there sharing the gospel with the people who need to hear it."

"I'm glad that you're eager to spread the gospel, but I don't know about myself," I said. "I'm mostly too afraid of encountering people even when they are close to me."

"You've got to pray that the Lord will give you nerves of steel, man!" Pablo said. "Scripture says God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power, love, and a sound mind. The devil wants you to be afraid because he knows it will keep the gospel from being spread."

"Well, if you want to pray for me to have boldness, Pablo, I'm not going to stop you from doing that," I said. "At least you've got the vigor of youth on your side."

"I'm sure the Lord will make you young again, brother," Pablo said. "Just trust in Him to do the right thing."

I smiled. "Thank you for sharing that bit of encouragement. I really appreciate it."

Chapter 12

For the next three months we continued our training, but now we were preparing to enter the world to proclaim the gospel. Micah reminded us that there will be enemies along the way — those who will mock us, scoff at us, reject us, and even try to kill us. But he assures us that, as part of the 144,000, not a hair will fall to the ground without the Lord noticing it. He promises that we will be protected up until the Lord's coming, which will be in the next five years or so. Meanwhile, we should focus our efforts on bringing the message to the masses who are willing to listen to the true gospel instead of the false gospel of Shepherd's "Kingdom of God". Upon our release to the general public, we would all be endued with the power of the Holy Spirit to work miracles that would help convince those who are reluctant to listen to anything we have to say. I have been praying to be baptized in the Holy Spirit ever since I was in the Assembly of God church, but I never got the gift of "speaking in tongues". Hopefully this will be the time when that gifting will be available to all of us in our group of men called by God for His special purpose.

I continued to read stories on my tablet about how the true Christians were going about their communities, giving aid to the poor, the elderly, and the disabled by their means. Those stories filled my heart with joy in knowing that there are some who are reaching out to those people in need, even during the times of hardship where a single meal would cost a person their entire paycheck. I prayed for those people to be blessed by God in all their efforts and that they would advance the true Kingdom of God that would be coming at the end of the Tribulation.

Pablo continued to share stories about his family to me, especially about his older brother Emilio. He wanted to be an evangelist that would bring the message of Christ to people of foreign countries, even to those who didn't speak either English or Spanish. He started off as a street preacher who would pray for passersby who were going about their days, never shouting at them, but always speaking about God's love for them, and that He's looking out for them and wants them to be part of His everlasting Kingdom. Unfortunately, on one of the days that Emilio did his street ministry, a gang war broke out, and he was caught in the middle of the crossfire while other people ran for safety. The family got the news of his death from the police several hours later when they became worried that their oldest son wasn't returning home. Pablo was so angry at the news that he wished God would avenge his brother right there and then on his murderers. Some days later, the gang members of both groups were all found dead with no known cause.

Pablo felt guilty now that he had wished death on the people who had killed his brother back then. I told him that I was harassed when I was a child in

residential schools, and I had gotten to the point where I would have wanted to kill them, but something inside me got me to put down the stones and just pray for forgiveness instead. Though I didn't know the Lord as my personal Savior at the time, I nevertheless prayed the Lord's Prayer as my comfort and protection, and after I had left the residential schools in 1986, I never heard from any of my tormentors ever again. Eventually I heard that some of those people in the residential schools that tormented me ended up going to jail for a long time for other offenses, and some others even died at the hands of others. Instead of feeling avenged, I felt sad for those people, because now they had lost their chance to know Christ as I had come to know Him.

Then one day, I and my fellow members of the Sanctuary stood and saw a vision of souls under the altar in heaven that had been martyred for their faith. They had all cried out in a loud voice, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, do you not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" Then white robes were given to each of them, and they were told, "Rest yet for a little season, until your fellow servants also and your brethren, that should be killed as you were, should be fulfilled." The vision soon ended, and all of us stood there and realized the truth — the Fifth Seal Judgment has been unleashed. There was war against the saints of God, and more souls would be added to the list of martyrs before God would act on their behalf.

I saw in the tech room video clips of true Christians that were being murdered, not just by non-believers, but also by professing Christians who were loyalists to Shepherd. That brought to my attention what Jesus said in the Olivet Discourse: "Now the brother shall betray the brother to death, and the father the son; and children shall rise up against their parents, and shall cause them to be put to death. And you shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved." That got me thinking: if Shepherd loyalists were killing those who are truly Christians, not just in word but also in deed, then this is just a taste of what we're expected to see when the mask comes off and the world sees Shepherd for what he truly is.

During our Saturday services, Micah would preach to us messages that would encourage us in our faith. One message he preached was called "The True Kingdom That Cannot Be Shaken," and the text for that was from Hebrews 12:25-29. "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be

shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: For our God is a consuming fire."

After the reading of Scripture, Micah had us all sit down to listen to his message. "Brothers... look around you. Look at these stone walls. Look at the simple robes that you wear. Look at the Bible resting in your lap. This Sanctuary is not impressive by the world's standards. There are no television cameras here. No applause. No elections. No celebrities. No wealthy benefactors. No political influence. Yet I tell you today that what is happening in this hidden place is more significant than anything taking place in the palaces of the Christian Commonwealth. The world believes the Kingdom of God is arriving through political power. We know better.

"David Shepherd promises peace. He promises prosperity. He promises unity. He promises morality. Many have looked upon these things and said, 'Surely this must be God's Kingdom.' But I ask you... did Rome not promise peace? Did Babylon not promise prosperity? Did Egypt not promise security? Every kingdom of men has claimed to bring heaven to earth. Every one of them has eventually become another Tower of Babel. The Kingdom of Christ has never begun with thrones. It begins with repentance.

"The Lord Jesus never said, 'Blessed are those who control governments.' He said, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit.' He never said, 'Blessed are those who conquer nations.' He said, 'Blessed are the meek.' He never said, 'Blessed are those who silence their enemies.' He said, 'Love your enemies.' Do you see the difference? The counterfeit kingdom changes laws first. The true Kingdom changes hearts first.

"Some of you still wonder why you are here. You had jobs. Families. Dreams. Plans. Some of you wanted marriage. Some hoped for children. Some hoped simply to live quiet lives. Instead... God brought you underground. Do not think He has forgotten you. Moses spent forty years in Midian before leading Israel. David tended sheep before wearing a crown. Paul disappeared into Arabia before preaching to the nations. Even our Lord spent thirty years in obscurity before three years of public ministry. God prepares His servants in secret before revealing them publicly.

"Perhaps you read the news and wonder... 'They have the churches,' 'They have the media,' 'They have the governments,' 'They have the crowds.' Brothers... numbers have never determined truth. When Elijah stood alone on Mount Carmel, he appeared defeated. Yet heaven answered his prayer. When Noah built the ark, the whole world laughed. Yet only eight souls were saved. When Jesus hung upon the cross, nearly everyone believed His ministry had failed. Yet that

apparent defeat became the greatest victory in history. Never measure God's work by popularity.

"You think your greatest enemy is David Shepherd. He is not. You think your greatest enemy is the False Prophet. He is not. You think your greatest enemy is persecution. It is not. Your greatest enemy is the old man within your own heart. Pride. Fear. Bitterness. Self-reliance. If those things remain, then even if you escape the Beast, you have not escaped yourself. That is why your training begins here. Before you face the world... you must first face your own heart.

"You have already seen peace taken away. You have seen hatred spread like wildfire. You have seen neighbors destroy neighbors. Soon you will witness famine. Disease. Martyrdom. Cosmic signs. Many people will ask, 'Where is God?' You already know the answer. He is still on His throne. The Lamb who opens the seals has never surrendered His authority. History is not spinning out of control. It is unfolding according to the purposes of God.

"So, what kind of men must we become? Not angry men. Not proud men. Not violent men. Not frightened men. We must become men who resemble Jesus Christ. When they curse us... we bless. When they hate us... we pray. When they imprison us... we sing. When they kill us... we forgive. That is how the Kingdom advances. The Beast conquers with fear. Christ conquers through the Cross.

"Here's a word to the younger brothers. Some of you are afraid. Some of you miss home. Some of you wonder if you are strong enough. Hear me carefully. None of us is strong enough. Peter wasn't. Thomas wasn't. Paul wasn't. Strength is not something God finds. It is something He gives. Trust Him. Lean upon Him. Walk with Him. The God who called you here will also sustain you here.

"Brothers, as I bring this message to a close, remember... one day these doors will open. You will leave this Sanctuary. Some of you will never return. Some will preach before kings. Some before prisoners. Some before starving families. Some before executioners. Do not fear that day. Fear only this... that you should stand before Christ and discover you lived for yourself instead of Him. Therefore receive the Kingdom that cannot be shaken. Stand firm. Walk humbly. Love deeply. Preach faithfully. For our King is coming. Not to campaign. Not to negotiate. Not to seek permission. But to reign forever. Even so, come, Lord Jesus. Amen."

We concluded the service with singing "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God", something I have only heard in some Baptist churches, but never sang until now. I could feel the Spirit moving among us as we lifted up our hands in praise. It felt as if fire had come down upon us like on the Day of Pentecost in the book of Acts, and we were surprised that we all spoke in other tongues as the Spirit gave

utterance. It was amazing. I had waited years for that moment to come, and now that it has come, I feel sad that I couldn't share the news with anyone outside the Sanctuary among my peers. At least not yet, I reminded myself.

Anyway, I felt more connected to God than I ever did before.

Pablo and I sat together at the same table for meals with the other members of the Sanctuary. Pablo noticed that I was singing quietly to myself, though a little louder than usual, which piqued his curiosity. "Hey, dude, you feeling all right?" he asked.

I looked at him and smiled. "I felt like I just had my prayers of long ago answered, Pablo. I just got baptized in the Holy Spirit."

"I could understand that feeling," Pablo said. "Sometime after I got saved, the youth pastor laid hands on me, and I got so filled in the Holy Spirit that I began speaking in another language. It wasn't Spanish or anything. Just something totally different. Maybe it was the tongue of angels."

"Perhaps it was, at least according to my understanding of the gift," I said. "I tried speaking in tongues years before, and it felt like I was just repeating gibberish that I heard other people speak. Some people make fun of that and said that it was just 'I could've had a Honda' over and over."

Pablo laughed. "Yeah, I know. There are fake tongue speakers who are just repeating random things and thinking they've got the Holy Spirit. But speaking in tongues, according to what the pastor had said, isn't a sign of spiritual maturity. Paul the apostle had to deal with the Corinthians who were misusing the spiritual gifts to make themselves feel more spiritual than others."

"That's true, Pablo," I said. "I told God that I didn't want the gift of tongues unless it was the real thing, what the apostles actually experienced at Pentecost. So far He has honored that prayer, and I hadn't tried to speak in tongues ever since, no matter how many times my pastor laid hands on me."

"But now that you've got the gift, the Lord's going to use you in such a powerful way that your prayers are going to do more damage to the kingdom of darkness," Pablo said.

"Won't that be fun!" I said in a jest. "I never thought that I would be standing toe to toe with the forces of evil that are surrounding us every day. I thought the Lord was just going to take me to heaven, and then I'll come back down with the

heavenly army of saints to watch Jesus capture the Beast and the False Prophet and send them to the Lake of Fire."

"That was my wish too, amigo," Pablo said. "Guess the Lord has other plans than what we thought He was actually going to do. You disappointed with that?"

I sighed. "Maybe a little. But as long as we're here training to fight the good fight, I might as well suit up in my armor of God and get ready for battle when it comes."

Three months have passed since. I keep getting news about what's going on in the Middle East, particularly with the "two witnesses" at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem. Many Jews were listening to their preaching and coming to the saving faith of Jesus Christ. Still many more laughed, mocked, and scoffed at them, claiming that they were just nothing more than spiritual pretenders to the legendary Biblical figures of Moses and Elijah. Surprisingly, the sky over Israel hasn't rained since the day the Tribulation started, which meant that, without their "food growth formula", farmer's crops were withering and dying, producing no fruit. This made the Jews more fervent in bringing their sacrifices to the Temple in the hope that God would answer their prayers and eventually send rain to nourish the dry ground so they could have healthy crops again. Still others emailed their complaints to President Shepherd in the hopes that he would do something about the "two witnesses", maybe talk face to face with them in order to get them to concede. Shepherd promised that he will deal with the "two witnesses" sooner or later, as he knew from Scripture that their time of prophecy would only last for 1260 days.

Then in early April, when we were busy with our training, we could feel the earth shake, so violently that we had trouble trying to keep ourselves standing. Then in an instant, we all saw the vision: the sun had turned black as sackcloth, the moon red as blood, the sky receding like a scroll being rolled up, the stars from the sky falling to the earth, and a giant earthquake that caused everybody on earth to cry out for shelter. People were terrified, as if they knew Who was causing the earthquake and the cosmic signs from the heavens. Only David Shepherd sat in the White House unmoved by the whole thing, as if he was expecting for that to happen and he was just going to wait the judgment out until it was finished.

Micah called us to attention. "Brothers of the faith, you have just witnessed the unfolding of the Sixth Seal Judgment, which is also called the Wrath of the Lamb. This is where God will begin to shake not only the earth, but also the heavens, as we will soon be called to conclude our training and be sent into all

the world to preach the gospel to everyone. John the Revelator writes: 'And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood; and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains; and said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?'

"Right now, a fourth of all the people on earth have perished, and there will be more death to come in the Trumpet Judgments. May we all be found ready for those times when the world will divide itself into two camps: those who will follow God and Jesus Christ, and those who will follow Shepherd. There will be no neutral ground between the two for anyone to take. You have already made your choice to stand with the Lord. The rest of the world will now have to make that choice for themselves. But without us to preach them about the truth, more will take Shepherd's side and condemn themselves to Hell. May the good Lord be with us as we will leave this Sanctuary to enter into the world once again."

After Micah had left, I and Pablo just stood and talked with each other. "Guess we'll be getting ready to head back home, amigo," Pablo said. "You eager to leave this place and return to where you came from?"

"I'd be interested to know what the Lord will do with us after we leave, Pablo," I said. "I don't even know if I still have a place to live once I get back home...if home still even exists for me."

"Maybe the Lord's got someplace for us to go to when we do leave," Pablo said. "We could end up bunking together in some apartment or hotel until we know for sure where the Lord wants us to go."

"I just pray that my family is still there and alive when I get home," I said.

"Me too, brother, me too," Pablo said, sighing heavily. "One thing's for sure, our lives are never going to be the same when we leave."

Chapter 13

One month later, we were all ready to leave. Before the day of our departure, we were visited by an angel, who was told to "write the seal of God on their foreheads, those who have been called from the twelve tribes of Israel." We stood there, patiently waiting as the angel inscribed a mark on our foreheads which was the Seal of God. We looked at each other and saw the sign of the cross. Pablo noticed that I had that mark too. Strangely I couldn't see it in my own mirror's reflection, and neither could anyone else see their own. But the mark labeled me permanently as one of God's own. There was no way that I could ever be lost now.

We all got back on the buses that were headed to our hometowns. Me and Pablo were headed toward Springville, where we were told by God that someone would be waiting for us to take us back to our homes. I had only my trust in the Lord to go on, so I sat in my bus seat, reading the Bible to pass the time. I still couldn't see out of the windows, but I had a feeling that the landscape was altered during the time of our being in the Sanctuary.

Our bus got to 16 Beecher Street in Springville around mid-afternoon. We got off wearing the same clothes that we had on when we first arrived at the Sanctuary, only now we were carrying a bag that contained our robe and sandals. Micah said we were going to need these in our mission to the world. He didn't say anything more; he just watched as we got off our bus and said our goodbyes to each other, although knowing that we were going to see each other again in the near future.

Pablo was the last person that I said goodbye to. "That was the most interesting time we had with each other, amigo, learning about how to be witnesses together," Pablo said.

"Not that I would want to repeat it, but it's better than having to go to my dead-end job day after day," I said. "Do you have anyone who's going to pick you up and take you back to your house?"

"Probably my sister Alejandra," Pablo said. "I should introduce you to her sometime, maybe you'll like her or something." A horn honked nearby. Pablo turned and saw who it was: a young lady driving a car, waving at him. "Hey, my sister is here already! Talk to you later, hombre, okay?"

"You've been a good friend and companion, Pablo," I said, giving him a warm hug before he got into the car with his sister and drove off.

"Hey, Mister, looking for a ride home?" a familiar female voice asked.

I turned and looked. It was Valerie. She came in her car, waiting for me to show up. "You're a sight for sore eyes, Val," I said, smiling. "I'm glad you're here."

"I got a little message from God this morning that I should come to this location and bring you home, Vince," she said. "By the way, your brother Charlie gave me the spare key to your apartment, and I got your phone, your keys, your wallet, everything you need in the real world."

"How did my brother get in touch with you?" I asked.

"I guess God was working on him as well, because I didn't know who I was talking to on the phone, but he sounded a little like you," Valerie answered. "Your brother made sure that all your bills are paid, including the rent of your apartment, so you won't find yourself homeless."

"I'll have to find a way to repay him for that, Val," I said as I got into her car and we drove back to Westville. "By the way, what's going on at the Assembly of God while I was gone?"

"I meant to tell you this, but there was no way to contact you, so here's the latest," Valerie said. "Pastor Walter has been removed from his position as pastor due to a terminal illness, and his assistant Eric Gaskell has taken over as the senior pastor of the church. Grace has also retired from being the church administrator and is spending all her time caring for and praying for her husband to be healed. Her position has been filled by Eric's wife Miriam."

I made a face at the mention of Eric's name. "He doesn't sound like the kind of person that would shepherd the portion of God's flock well. He's too steeped in Dominion Theology, so I expect he's going to be hyping up David Shepherd like he's the second coming of Christ."

"He isn't too bad, but I'm starting to wonder where he's taking the church, Vince," Valerie said. "By the way, I'm separated from my husband right now because he was trying to abuse me."

That caught me by surprise. "I'm so sorry that happened to you, Val."

"Not as sorry as he was when I called the police on him," Valerie said. "Anyway, he's staying at a friend's house, and I pretty much have the whole house to myself and my dogs. I couldn't ask you to move in because...you know..."

"I won't take any advantage of you, Val, trust me," I said. "I got a mission from the Lord to undertake, and who knows how long I'm going to be busy at that."

"I kind of figured that, noticing the cross mark on your forehead, Vince," Valerie said. Soon we got to my apartment building. "Call me if you need anything. I'll make sure to help you out, okay, dear?"

"Will do, Val, thanks," I said, getting out of the car. Valerie slipped me a smile and a wink before she drove off.

The residents looked at me strangely as I entered the building, but I paid them no mind. I opened the door to my apartment and found that everything in it was clean and tidy. The refrigerator was well stocked with food. My clothes were neatly folded and stacked on my couch for me to put away in my dresser. There was a lot less clutter as I noticed that most of my books and things were gone. Fortunately I still had my computer and my TV in my bedroom.

I turned on my computer and sorted through tons of email messages. Most of it was junk, but then I came across notifications from a company called Rapture Enterprises Ltd. that told me my bills had all been paid. I was wondering who Rapture Enterprises was at first, and then I remembered the bus that had the word RAPTURE printed on it. Then I also remembered that it was a non-profit organization that was headed by a philanthropist named J.R. Barzillai, whose level of wealth makes Elon Musk look like a charity case. He was the constant target of conservatives, but from what I heard about him, he was honest, he lived modestly, he never exploited anyone for his wealth, and he always worked to make things better for the common person regardless of their age, race, gender, or stature in life. One of the things he was reported to say was that he would live to see the second coming of Christ in his lifetime, and he at that point was currently in his nineties, still living a very healthy and robust life. I thanked God that He got my back during the time that I was in the Sanctuary with part of the 144,000.

After I got through the emails, I looked through YouTube and found a live-stream of the "two witnesses" in Jerusalem, preaching to the masses that approached them. From what I saw in the video feed, the people in the crowd either mocked them or bowed down before them in reverence to God. It was during the feed that I noticed the two stopped preaching and started proclaiming a message, one that was so loud and clear that I felt like I was standing at the Wailing Wall listening to them in person.

"And when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets," Moses said.

"And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers

of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne," Elijah said. "And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand."

"And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth: and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake," Moses said, and then he and Elijah spoke together, "Let those who have ears to hear listen to what the Spirit is saying."

The crowd stood in utter silence, apparently awed by the words. At that moment, it felt like everything in the world had gone silent for about a half hour. Even the ambient noises in my apartment seemed to have gone quiet. It had just dawned on me that the Seal Judgments had ended, and now the next seven judgments, the Trumpet Judgments, were about to begin.

My sister Vivian invited me, Charlie, and Belinda to her house for dinner, which she was preparing for one Sunday afternoon. She put on a great pot roast with potatoes, carrots, and onions. I was feeling hungry for real food after spending months eating nothing but porridge, but I had to put some restraint on how much I put on my plate since I hadn't eaten anything but porridge for a while.

"It's good to have you back from wherever it is you've gone to over the past ten months, Vince," Vivian said as she served the food. "Me and Gary were praying for you ever since we heard nothing from you on Facebook."

"I'm sorry, folks, I was in the Sanctuary for that time, training to be one of the 144,000 that's going to evangelize to the world," I said.

"How is that any different from what the Commonwealth churches are doing with their missionaries?" Belinda asked.

"The Commonwealth churches are only preaching the gospel of Shepherd's kingdom, while we will be presenting the true gospel of Christ to the masses," I answered.

"I haven't set foot in those churches, but I don't like the people that it's been producing," Charlie said. "They all pretty much act stuck-up and holier-than-thou, like they're the only ones who will enter into heaven."

"I don't like it either, Charlie, which is why I don't go to those Commonwealth churches," Vivian said. "Instead, I host my own Bible studies with the women I meet whenever Gary's at work."

"Shepherd has pretty much left all other religions to rot while he focuses most of his attention on those Commonwealth Christian churches," Belinda said with some disgust.

"I'm sorry to hear that, Belinda," I said with some honesty. "What are you going to do with your own faith now?"

Belinda sighed. "I guess I'll just have to host my own house group, if that's even allowed in this country. Freedom of religion is becoming a thing of the past with Shepherd as President."

"I get customers on my gig jobs all getting up in my face about when I'm going to become a full-blown Christian, like they're really wanting me to get saved before Jesus comes," Charlie said. "I got enough problems to deal with, like having to get Vince back into his apartment after months of disappearing on us."

"I think they mean well, Charlie, but most of them are only listening to what their pastors preach in the Commonwealth churches on Sunday," I said.

"Yeah, well, they're starting to crack down on people working on Sunday, saying it's supposed to be a national day of rest," Charlie said. "But Sunday's usually my busiest day on the gig economy. People doing lots of Door Dash and Uber Eats from restaurants that are still honoring that takeout service."

"They're starting to do that with people who are working at home from their computers now," Vivian said. "I thought that the Phase One part of the plan was going to be all that they would be doing to get us used to the new one-world government now. National Day of Rest, civic morality standards in our schools, faith-based certifications. I was all for that. Now we're going to implement Phase Two, which will include stamping out 'hate speech against Christians,' emergency travel permits, economic registration, and even a Public Unity Pledge that all citizens must recite."

"A Public Unity Pledge?" I said, sounding surprised. "That's really taking things a bit too far."

"I'm just telling you what I've been hearing and reading on the Internet since you've been gone, Vince," Vivian said. "I'll let you know how much further they will take it if I get the chance, as long as we're still connected to each other on social media."

"It's going to be over my dead body if they try to get me to recite some silly religious Public Unity Pledge," Charlie said. "And I don't know if I would trust even Vince enough to turn my life over to the Lord if he starts proselytizing to

me about his God."

"I'll still pray for you, Charlie, I promise," I said as I took a bite of my roast beef.

I got home from dinner and got on my computer. I checked my social media and noticed that I got a message from my sister Vivian with a PDF attachment. I opened it up and found out that it was an official press release from the White House that outlined the plan of the Christian Commonwealth, to be enforced by "the Apostles of the Kingdom of God" by the order of "the Sovereign David Joshua Shepherd, President of the Christian Commonwealth of America." It said this:

THE CHRISTIAN COMMONWEALTH OF AMERICA
Office of the President
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The White House

Washington, D.C.

Building a Stronger Nation Through Faith, Family, and Freedom

President David J. Shepherd today announced the first phase of the National Renewal Initiative, comprehensive plan designed to strengthen American families, protect religious liberty, promote civic responsibility, and ensure lasting peace for future generations.

"Our goal is not merely to build a stronger nation," President Shepherd said. "Our goal is to become a better people."

The National Renewal Initiative will be implemented gradually over the coming months.

Phase One
Renewing Our Communities
National Day of Rest

The Christian Commonwealth encourages every citizen to participate in a weekly National Day of Rest dedicated to worship, family, community service, and personal renewal.

Participation is voluntary.

Businesses that participate will receive tax incentives and recognition as Community Renewal Partners.

Commonwealth Service Network

Churches, charities, and nonprofit organizations may voluntarily register with the Commonwealth Service Network to receive additional disaster relief funding, food assistance resources, and community development grants.

Faith communities remain free to maintain their own beliefs and traditions.

Character First Initiative

Schools throughout the Commonwealth will introduce expanded instruction emphasizing:

- honesty
- compassion
- personal responsibility
- service
- respect
- civic virtue

"Our children deserve an education that forms both the mind and the character."

—President David Shepherd

Phase Two

Preserving Unity

Responsible Public Communication Act

Recognizing that misinformation and inflammatory rhetoric have contributed to violence across the world, the Commonwealth will establish reasonable standards discouraging speech that intentionally incites religious hatred or civil unrest.

These standards are intended to protect peaceful dialogue while preserving freedom of conscience.

Safe Travel Registration Program

To improve disaster response and humanitarian relief efforts, citizens traveling between Commonwealth regions may voluntarily enroll in the Safe Travel Registration Program.

During declared emergencies, registration may become temporarily required to ensure the efficient delivery of aid.

Commonwealth Identity System

Beginning next year, citizens will receive secure digital identification cards simplifying:

- employment verification
- emergency medical services
- food assistance
- disaster relief
- voting registration

The system is designed to reduce fraud while improving public service.

Phase Three

Serving Together

National Community Service Program

Every able-bodied citizen is encouraged to devote several hours each month toward serving neighbors through approved local service organizations.

Activities include:

- feeding the hungry
- rebuilding communities
- disaster relief
- assisting senior citizens
- neighborhood improvement

Together we demonstrate the love of Christ through practical service.

Ministry Accreditation Council

The Commonwealth is pleased to announce the creation of the Ministry Accreditation Council.

Participation remains voluntary.

Certified ministers will receive:

- chaplain privileges
- educational resources
- emergency response access
- prison ministry authorization
- military ministry opportunities

Certification confirms a minister's commitment to ethical leadership and the peaceful advancement of the Commonwealth's values.

Phase Four

A Future of Peace

As the Commonwealth continues expanding partnerships with nations around the world, additional measures may be introduced to ensure economic stability, humanitarian cooperation, and lasting international peace.

These measures will always be guided by the principles of:

- liberty
- responsibility
- justice
- compassion
- faith

Statement from President Shepherd

"Some will fear change. History teaches us that every great renewal begins with courage. We are not asking Americans to surrender their freedoms. We are asking them to rediscover the responsibilities that make freedom possible.

Let us reject division.

Let us reject hatred.

Let us reject fear.

Together we will build a nation whose light shines brightly before all peoples—not through force, but through faith, service, and love."

I sat there, stunned by the copy of the press release that I had read. I felt as if I was looking into the mind of a megalomaniac posing as a servant of

righteousness. And most who call themselves Christians didn't even know what kind of man they had elected. There were those who knew who they voted for, and they didn't care about anything except the one thing they truly wanted, which was power over the nations. They were like Jesus standing on the mountaintop, looking at all the kingdoms of the world, with Satan saying, "You can have all these things if only You will bow down and worship me" — and they in Jesus' stead chose to bow down to Satan in exchange for having all those kingdoms instead of resisting him, standing strong in the faith.

My phone rang. I picked it up and answered. "Hello?"

"Hey, dude, it's me, Pablo. Hope you don't mind I found your number."

"No problem, Pablo, in fact, I'm glad that you did. What's up?"

"The Lord is having me proclaim on the streets the good news of Jesus, starting tomorrow. You feel that in your spirit yet?"

"I'm sensing something much more disturbing. Do you have a computer on hand?"

"Yeah, I'm sitting in front of mine in my bedroom. What do you have?"

"A PDF file featuring a press release from the White House. You should find it really interesting to read."

"If I give you my email, could you send me a copy?"

"Sure. Hopefully this will be useful for the members of the 144,000."

"That bad, huh?"

"Yeah, it's really awful."

Chapter 14

I woke up, got my morning coffee, and had my morning prayer. I asked the Lord when I should start my street ministry in my hometown, and He said, "Today." He also said, "Fear not, I will protect you." So after I had showered and put on clean clothes, I put on my Sanctuary robe, grabbed my Bible, and headed out the door. I went to the Town Green and sat there, quietly reading Scripture until around 8 am, and then the Lord prompted me to stand up and call out to the masses, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand." Many passed by me and just ignored me, thinking I was just some harmless crazy religious person standing in the street. Some mocked me and called me a heretic and all sorts of terrible names. Still some others came to me and wanted to know the true gospel of Christ. So I presented it to them and asked if they wanted to receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. Most of those people said yes, so I led them through a prayer of salvation, telling them what Paul the apostle said in Romans, that "if you confess that Jesus is Lord and you believe in your heart that He has risen from the dead, you will be saved." I could feel the joy that came into those people's hearts as they realized that they have been forgiven of their sins and have now become the children of God.

Not all people came to me to know salvation, though. Some of them had honest questions about the faith that I tried to answer to the best of my knowledge. Some had come to me to ask for prayer or to confess things that have happened in their lives. Some have been in Christian Commonwealth Church assemblies that have become toxic religious environments rife with abuse. I heard horror stories about pastors and clergy who have manipulated the masses with various tactics, preyed upon women and children, extorted money even from those struggling to make ends meet, and overall acted like they were the absolute rulers of their congregations. I felt genuine sorrow for those people who had suffered such things, and I prayed for their healing and that they would find fellowships of believers that would treat them with love and respect.

I came home in the evening to find that there had been reports of the 144,000 all doing the same thing: preaching the gospel from the centers of their towns, praying for people to receive Christ, and ministering to those who had been hurt and devastated by the abuse going on in the churches. People of other religions were also being drawn to the love and grace that was being shown to them by these men who were faithfully preaching the truth all over the world. They were also met with resistance from people who either didn't want to hear the truth or believed that they already knew the truth. I prayed to God that He would bless the efforts of the 144,000 as they go throughout the entire world showing the true love of Christ and bringing the truth of His salvation to the masses, helping them to prepare for the true Kingdom that was to come.

A month later, as I continued in my street ministry, I heard the sound of a trumpet being blown, sounding loud enough for the people of earth to hear, yet strangely nobody else heard the sound but me and presumably those of the 144,000. I spoke out loud to the masses: "The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth: and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up."

Everyone laughed at first, but then they noticed that the sky had turned orange, like it was preparing for a storm of Biblical proportions. Then streams of fire, chunks of hail, and drops of blood began to pour down from the sky. People screamed and ran for cover while the trees caught on fire and all the grass was being burned up. The storm lasted for about five minutes, and then suddenly it stopped, and the sky became clear again. Phones captured the storm as it happened all across the globe, and people were posting it all over social media. The effects were devastating. Farmers who were trying to grow food for both humans and work animals found themselves with scorched fields and lost potential profits. Rainforests that were already affected by deforestation by humans have lost a third of their vegetation, causing loss for hundreds of species that had made their homes in the forests. The air quality was reduced as they were fewer trees that could take in the carbon dioxide and convert it back into oxygen.

Apparently news of the judgment got to President Shepherd, as he soon went on the air to address the public about the situation at hand. "My beloved friends, tonight our nation—and indeed the whole world—has witnessed an event unlike any in recorded history. Great fires have swept across our forests and fields. Homes have been lost. Crops have been destroyed. Families have been displaced. Many of our fellow citizens are grieving, and to them I say this: you are not alone. Your Commonwealth stands with you. From the moment these disasters began, emergency response teams, military personnel, churches, and volunteers have worked tirelessly to rescue the stranded, comfort the suffering, and provide shelter for those who have lost everything. I ask every citizen to join me in praying for those affected by these terrible events. There are many voices already claiming to know exactly why this has happened. Some would have you surrender to fear. Others would have you believe that all hope is lost. Still others would exploit this tragedy to divide neighbor from neighbor. Do not listen to such voices. Now is not the time for panic. Now is the time for unity. Throughout history, great nations have been tested by fire. Not all have survived. But those that endured did so because they stood together rather than allowing fear to tear them apart. The Christian Commonwealth was founded upon faith, service, and love. Those principles have not changed. If anything, this hour calls us to embody them more fully than ever before. Tomorrow I will

sign an emergency relief package to provide assistance to affected communities, rebuild damaged infrastructure, and ensure that every family has food, shelter, and medical care. No citizen will be forgotten. No community will be abandoned. We will rebuild. We will recover. And we will emerge stronger than before. I ask pastors to open their churches. I ask businesses to assist those in need. I ask families to care for their neighbors. And I ask every citizen to reject fear in favor of hope. The road ahead will not be easy. There may yet be difficult days before us. But I remain convinced that if we stand together—with faith in God and with love for one another—we will overcome every trial placed before us. May God bless each of you. May He comfort those who mourn. May He strengthen those who serve. And may He continue to guide the Christian Commonwealth toward the peace and unity for which we all strive. Thank you. And may God bless the Christian Commonwealth."

As sincere as the message sounded to people's ears, the reality that followed became more noticeable. Aid that was supposed to go to the churches to help those who were struggling either never came or just wound up in the pastors' pockets, with hardly a dime being given to the people. People felt as if their faith was being tested, not just in God, but also in the man they felt He had appointed to be their President. Still others believed that God will pull through regardless, and that Shepherd would deliver on the promises. Nevertheless, there started to form a divide among the faithful who were beginning to question whether Shepherd truly was a man of God.

Rapture Enterprises, however, became a beacon of hope. Churches began receiving food aid from that organization and were distributing to those who were in need. Nobody but the 144,000 knew that Rapture Enterprises was behind the miraculous provision. This brought about a good deal of people turning to the saving faith of Jesus Christ, even among those who thought they were already saved by the gospel of Shepherd's Kingdom. Still there were many who didn't trust in any organization outside the Dove Foundation, who were still operating under the assumption that God favored them above everyone else when it came to charity and generosity.

I got a call from Daniel Wickman. "Hello, it's Vince. What's up?"

"Did you hear about the latest news? They're starting to crack down on churches that preach against the Christian Commonwealth, saying that no pastor can ever say that it's contrary to God's Kingdom or else they will be shut down and the clergy arrested."

"And the pastor of Ravenhill Assembly refused to agree to that, I gather."

"Nobody of Ravenhill Assembly's going along with that. We're considered anathema, accursed of God, for defying the one-world government gospel."

"So what are you going to do about it?"

"The pastor's already in custody. The congregation is praying for his release, but I don't think that's likely to happen. We may have to go underground."

"That's terrible, Dan. I hate to see even the SDAs have to choose between God and Shepherd."

"I already made my choice, Vince, don't worry about that. Ain't no way Shepherd's going to get me to bow before him and declare him as lord of anything."

"You're willing to die for that faith?"

"More than ready. They say persecution's coming to America, and now it's here... and it's coming from 'fellow Christians'."

"I'll pray for you, Dan, I'll make sure of that."

"I got your back too, Vince. Talk to you later."

After that call ended, I got one from Valerie. "Hello, Vince the Valiant is here."

"Hi, sweetie, it's Val. Just want to let you know that Westville Assembly's going through this Ministry Accreditation Board set up by the Christian Commonwealth."

"Really? What's that for?"

"To protect churches from extremism, fraud, and abuse, according to Pastor Eric."

"So the Commonwealth's going to be monitoring all churches?"

"That's what I heard. I won't be able to do any volunteer work through the Assembly until we pass registration."

"So how are you doing during your separation from your husband?"

"I'm slowly starting to heal, Vince. I felt tempted to go back to doing weed to get my mind off the hurt that I have endured."

"I'm sorry for what's happened to you, Val."

"Yeah, I'm sorry too. I thought that my husband was a real keeper. Pray for me that I'll stay off the drugs?"

"Will do. Weed isn't going to help you get over the loss and hurt anyway."

"I know, but it's just one of those things that made me feel good when I was doing it. I feel so ashamed about going back to it now that I have tasted the goodness of the Lord."

"I still miss my mother being around. Hopefully the Lord's taking good care of her right now."

"You'll get to see her again if she does know the Lord, honey. Trust me."

"Are you still in touch with your stepchildren, Val?"

"I haven't heard a peep from them lately. Maybe their dad told them things about me that made them believe the worst."

"I'll pray for them to know the truth and to call you as soon as they can."

"Thanks, Vince. I'm glad that I can count on you for that. Anyway, got to go take of my dogs. Talk to you soon."

"Take care, Val," I said before ending the call.

I ended the day by watching a YouTube live-stream of the "two witnesses" in Jerusalem continuing in their ministry to the people of Israel. The crowds that have gathered around them have been constantly filled with people who have been struck by the piercing words of Moses and Elijah. People of all sorts of nationalities have claimed to hear the "witnesses" speak to them in their native language, although I sensed that they were really speaking in Hebrew all along.

"O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the coming wrath?" Elijah said. "Therefore bring forth fruits that are worthy of repentance, and think not to say within yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I say unto you, that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from the very stones."

"Turn and be saved, every one of you, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come," Moses said. "And the Lord will send you Jesus,

whom the heavens must receive until the time of the restoration of all things."

"Already the ax is laid to the root of the trees," Elijah said. "Therefore every tree that does not bring forth good fruit will be cut down and cast into the fire. The One who is coming, whose shoes we are not worthy to unloose, bears the winnowing fan in His hand. He will thoroughly cleanse the threshing floor and gather the wheat into His barn, but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire."

"He that has two coats, let him impart to him that has none; and he that has provisions, let him do likewise," Moses said. "For those who collect toll or tribute, exact no more than that which is appointed you. For those who serve as soldiers, do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages."

"Put no trust in princes or in sons of men in whom there is no help, but put your trust in the God of Jacob," Elijah said. "Remember that even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, so it's no surprise that his ministers will also disguise themselves as 'ministers of righteousness', whose end shall be according to their works."

"We are here but a short time, and the beast that arises from the abyss will come and kill us at the end of our ministry," Moses said. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but the words of the Lord shall never pass away. Be prepared."

I turned off the live-stream and put on some quiet worship music to settle my mind to sleep. As I closed my eyes and relaxed, I could already see myself being with my mother, brothers, and sisters in heaven, enjoying eternity in the presence of the Lord. That filled my heart with joy, knowing that, at the end of all things, my family will be together with each other in heaven.

Chapter 15

I had another dream that night. This one felt as if I was a fly on the wall watching David Shepherd have another private conversation with his Vice President Jonathan Prince when they thought nobody was watching.

"I feel God is fighting against me through the two witnesses that He has sent to prophesy in Israel, Jon," Shepherd said.

"How so, Master?" Prince asked.

"Ever since they came on the scene, before we signed the peace treaty with Israel, they have been causing trouble by preaching against the kingdom that we have been building," Shepherd answered. "Now they have seemed to up the ante by now causing disasters to happen, starting with the first Trumpet Judgment that has caused devastation to our crops and a third of our forests."

"And you're blaming the two witnesses for this?" Jon said. "Then why don't you try to stop them from prophesying? What's holding you back?"

"The testimony of Scripture is what's binding my hands, Jon," Shepherd said, sounding frustrated. "Revelation says that these men will prophesy for 1260 days, after which the Beast from the abyss will arise and overpower and kill them. According to people who have witnessed my signing of the treaty, the Tribulation started in July 2025, so it won't be until January 2029 when we can actually do something about it."

"Why not make this a public event, Master?" Prince suggested. "That way your subjects will have something to look forward to when it comes for your time to reveal your true self to them?"

"You know, that's not a bad idea," Shepherd said, considering. "We'll continue to play along as people who truly have the interests of the world's people in our hearts until that time. In the meantime, let's prepare a little something for the Pontifex Maximus of the Christian Commonwealth Church, the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church, and the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople that will happen around that time also — but have that be a discreet private meeting with them and the ten Apostles of the Commonwealth so that nobody knows what will actually happen to them."

"I will have that done according to your will, Master," Prince said, bowing before Shepherd and kissing his ring before they left the private meeting together.

I woke up from that dream, looking stunned. I felt as if the Lord had purposely revealed that to me — and possibly the other members of the 144,000 — to show what was going to happen in the months to come regarding the President's response to the "two witnesses" and the next Trumpet Judgments that will take place within that time.

Something prompted me to turn on my phone. I got a call from Pablo that I missed. I called his number back to see if he was still there. "Hello, Pablo?"

"Hey, sorry for catching you at a bad time, but I just had a dream where I saw Shepherd and Prince talking with each other about what they're planning to do with the two witnesses in Jerusalem."

"That's the same kind of dream that I had."

"So what exactly are we supposed to do with this revelation, bro?"

I sighed. "Just continue to watch what Shepherd does concerning these Trumpet Judgments and the two witnesses. This is all God's show right now."

"Gotcha. I'm still gonna use that to help me witness to the people in my neighborhood, for what it's worth. Maybe the people will listen."

"We can pray that God will open their eyes to the truth. Anyway, got to rest for my job in the morning. Talk to you soon."

"Stay cool, hombre," Pablo said before the call ended.

I got up, had my coffee and my morning prayer, showered, got dressed, and prepared for my daily time of ministry. As I headed out the door of my apartment, I noticed that a bag of groceries had been delivered to my door. I didn't know who it came from or who exactly it was for until I noticed the message that was on a small piece of notepad paper which said: "Share this with the people. God bless. J.R.B." The Lord confirmed in my spirit that this was meant to be shared with the people that I will meet in my ministry. So I took the bag with my Bible and made it to the Town Green, where I would normally preach the gospel to the people. Several people came my way and asked if I had any food to share with them, so I gave them of my provisions until the bag was empty. Then after a while of preaching, I noticed that the bag was full again, so I was thinking that this must be a miracle of God, like that of the widow's oil and Jesus multiplying loaves and fish to the multitudes. Again more people came and asked for food, which I shared with them. Soon the bag was empty again,

and as I continued to preach that day, I noticed that the bag was full again, so I shared with the passersby the food that I received and continued until the day was over.

When I had my evening meal that day, I was watching YouTube videos about the constant debates between President Shepherd and the religious leaders of the world: Graeme Franklin of the Christian Commonwealth Church, Pope Adrian XVII of the Roman Catholic Church, and Ecumenical Patriarch Nikolaos of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Among themselves, Graeme, Adrian, and Nikolaos seemed like hungry wolves who were fighting each other over who was going to have chicken for dinner. But together, they all seemed to be butting heads with Shepherd over their own personal issues with him. Graeme didn't like that the President was demanding increasing loyalty to him and not to Jesus Christ alone. The Pope didn't like having to acknowledge the new universal religious authority, as he has spent years trying to make peace with other religions, and had declared that no earthly ruler can occupy Christ's place. The Ecumenical Patriarch took issue with the dissolution of historic churches into the Commonwealth's unified religious structure. Shepherd tried to speak peaceably with these men about their issues, but none of them were really interested in listening, each insisting that they would eventually go their own way if Shepherd didn't acquiesce to their demands.

That got me thinking about the dream that I had and also about what Revelation 17:16-17 had said: "And the ten horns which you saw upon the beast, these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire. For God has put in their hearts to fulfill his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled." These religious leaders are represented by what the Bible called "Mystery, Babylon the Great, The Mother of Harlots and All Abominations of the Earth." Their time was going to end by the decree of God and the Antichrist, and, if I'm understanding it properly, Jonathan Prince was going to become the False Prophet who will lead the world into worshipping David Shepherd as the Beast.

Before I went to bed, I prayed to God that He will reveal to the people who the Antichrist really was before the time of his public revelation to the world, and that people will come to their senses and choose the one true God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent. "May Your Kingdom come, and may Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven...and may it begin with us, in Your Son Jesus' name," I concluded before I turned off the light and went to sleep.

Another month passed. I was still doing my street ministry on the Town Green

when I heard another trumpet sound, just as loud as the first one, yet nobody else noticed it but me. Then the Lord prompted me to speak aloud: "And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; and the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed."

Again the people laughed, but then the town's electric billboard came to life with an announcement from the Global News Network: "NASA reports the coming of what appeared to be a massive burning mountain of rock that is projected to be headed straight for the Pacific Ocean. ICBMs are on standby to prepare to destroy this rock before it reaches impact."

The people watched as they saw this "mountain of rock" heading from space toward the middle of the Pacific Ocean, straight on a collision course with the planet. Rockets were launched at this massive rock and tried to destroy it with no success. Then it entered the earth's atmosphere and fell straight into the middle of the earth, causing a massive tremor that shook the earth and sending up destructive tidal waves that capsized and destroyed a third of the ships that were sailing in the sea that day. People watched in horror as a third of the sea was turned to blood.

David Shepherd addressed this in that night's message to the public. "My fellow citizens of the Christian Commonwealth, tonight our world stands upon a wounded shore. Across every ocean, the unimaginable has become reality. The seas that have nourished civilizations for thousands of years have been scarred. Countless ships lie beneath the waves. Entire fishing communities have lost not only their livelihoods but members of their own families. The images we have witnessed over the past several days have left every one of us speechless.

"Tonight we mourn. We mourn those who have perished. We mourn the communities that have been forever changed. We mourn with every nation that has suffered loss. The Commonwealth has ordered all flags flown at half-staff for the next seven days in honor of those who gave their lives in this tragedy. To every grieving family, know this: you do not grieve alone. Your sorrow is our sorrow. Your burden is our burden. And together we shall bear it.

"Already, relief convoys are crossing continents. Medical teams have arrived in dozens of affected nations. Engineers are rebuilding damaged ports. Food reserves from every member nation of the Commonwealth are being mobilized to ensure that no child goes hungry because of this catastrophe. This is what it means to love our neighbors. This is what it means to be one family.

"Many are asking... 'What caused this?' Scientists continue their investigations.

Theologians continue their prayers. Ordinary people continue searching their hearts. There will be many voices offering certainty. Some will tell you that this is the end. Others will tell you that civilization cannot recover. Still others will seek to divide us with fear and speculation. I urge you... do not surrender your hearts to fear. Fear has never rebuilt a city. Fear has never fed a hungry child. Fear has never comforted the brokenhearted. Faith has. Hope has. Love has. Throughout history, mankind has endured wars... famines... earthquakes... plagues... and every generation has believed its trials were the greatest. Yet by God's grace, humanity endured. And by God's grace, we shall endure again. The Christian Commonwealth was not established merely for seasons of prosperity. It was established for moments exactly like this. Moments when nations choose cooperation over conflict. Service over selfishness. Faith over despair.

"Beginning tomorrow, I am announcing the Oceans of Hope Initiative. Every nation of the Commonwealth will participate in the largest humanitarian effort in human history. We will rebuild every damaged harbor. We will restore every devastated coastline. We will provide clean water wherever it is needed. We will feed every hungry family we can reach. No nation shall stand alone. No people shall be forgotten. Some will ask, 'Can we really recover?' My answer is yes. Not because our ships are strong. Not because our economies are mighty. Not because our governments are wise. But because when people of goodwill stand together under a common purpose, there is no darkness that cannot be overcome.

"I have never believed that history belongs to those who surrender. History belongs to those who rise. To the fishermen who have lost everything—you will sail again. To the mothers who wonder how they will feed their children—you will not be forgotten. To the young people wondering if there is still hope—I say to you tonight: there has never been a generation with a greater opportunity to show compassion than yours.

"My friends... storms do not define a people. Their response does. The sea has been wounded. But our spirit has not. The waves have risen. But so shall we. May Almighty God comfort every grieving heart. May He strengthen every weary hand. And may He grant us the courage to rebuild together. Thank you. May God bless you all. And may God bless the Christian Commonwealth."

Again it was a great speech, and again it got applause. But in the days that followed, the promises of Shepherd rang hollow as none of the promised aid and relief had come. The "Oceans of Hope Initiative" was nothing more than smoke and mirrors, all presented with a smile and comforting words, but with nothing behind them except deafening silence. This only fueled the fire of the critics as they continued to speak against Shepherd's continued failure to address the issues at hand while presenting himself as "the good shepherd" to the people that still believed in him.

Surprisingly Rapture Enterprises came through again when Shepherd didn't. They brought the much-needed aid to seaports and shipping companies that were suffering from the loss. They brought relief to families that were left devastated from the loss of lives. Many people thanked God for the compassion of this organization to do the things they were expecting out of the President. Still many more distrusted Rapture Enterprises, saying that they were trying to take credit away from God supposedly working through David Shepherd. J.R. Barzillai refused to comment on the issue, saying that he was just glad to do God's work in a world full of suffering and he wishes to take no credit for what his organization does for anyone.

I continued to pray for J.R. Barzillai, though. Though it seemed that his heart was in the right place to do good in the world, I prayed that his heart would remain humble through it all and that he would continue to serve God in the capacity that he had been given over the past few years, just as Barzillai from the Bible had served King David when he was fleeing from his son Absalom.

I got a call from Pastor Walter's wife Grace, telling me to come to the hospital right away because there was something her husband wanted to share with me before he passed away. I told her that I would come as soon as possible, so I got myself an Uber to take me to Mount Moriah Hospital, where I was directed to the room of Walter Hightower.

Grace greeted me as soon as I entered. "Thank God you came. I don't know how long Walter has left to live, but there was something important on his mind that he needed to share with you and you alone. I'll wait for you outside the room until you're finished."

Grace directed me to Walter's bed before she left the room. I saw the pastor looking very weak and frail, as if the terminal illness had taken its toll on his once robust body for a man in his seventies. He was hooked up to a life-support machine that was monitoring his breathing and heartbeat. It took a while for him to open his eyes and notice me. "Vince...you're here," he said weakly.

"Yes, it's me, Pastor," I said. "I'm sorry about what happened to you."

"Don't be sorry for me, my child...I have a feeling that this was the Lord's judgment on me for supporting Shepherd...and then realizing what an error I made in doing so," Walter said. "I just want to ask for your forgiveness."

"I forgive you for your error, Pastor, just as the Lord has forgiven you," I said honestly.

The pastor sighed, feeling a bit relieved. "I was so full of pride, believing that everything that I was doing was for advancing the Lord's Kingdom, that I didn't notice that what I have done may have condemned others into walking away from Christ. I know the Lord will judge me on that Day for those souls that I have led astray."

"You were only doing what you believed was the right thing, Pastor," I said. "I'm sorry that I didn't have the guts to tell you what you really needed to hear during the time I was under you."

"I have watched videos of you preaching the gospel downtown to people who would otherwise have ignored people like you or me," Walter said. "I recognized God's hand on your ministry. For that I am glad that I had a small part in bringing you to this point."

"Guess I was just blessed beyond measure for that ministry, Pastor," I said, trying to keep things light.

The pastor looked like he was ready to pass away. "I feel the Lord is calling me to be with Him. May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make His face shine upon you and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon you...and give you peace." And with that, he closed his eyes, and his heartbeat just flatlined.

I looked at the pastor, nodding with acceptance. "Rest in peace, Pastor."

Grace was waiting outside the room when I left. She noticed the look on my face that told her everything she needed to know about her husband. She sighed as she started to weep. "Is there anything I can do for you?" she calmly asked, wiping her tears with a tissue.

"Just a ride home, Grace, after you finish up things here," I told her.

I got back home late that night from the hospital. I wished that there was something I could have done to comfort the pastor's wife, but she told me that she needed to be alone with God to help her deal with the loss. I told her that I would pray for her, and she smiled, feeling grateful.

I felt so overwhelmed with the loss of Pastor Walter that I didn't know what to say or think. It felt like I was losing my father all over again, only this time it was a father figure that I had grown closer to during the time that I was at Westville Assembly under his pastorship. I remember the times that he had paid

for my meals at restaurants when I had very little money to purchase a decent meal. How he shared about his hunting trips in Maine with me and the other men at our monthly Men's Ministry Breakfast, and the few times he had actually caught a deer and brought it home so that Grace could prepare meals from its meat. How a few times the Lord had saved him when he was out on the road with his hunting buddies, and one time that actually happened when the pastor and I were driving home from Applebee's. Those were the times that I really missed since I left the church, and I felt sorrow that I would never experience those times again with him in this life.

My phone rang. It was Valerie. "Hi, Vince, dear. How's it going?"

"Not so good, Val. I was there in the hospital with the pastor when he died."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. Do you want to talk about it?"

"Not right now. I'm still trying to process it all."

Silence. Then she said, "I understand. Maybe we can pray for each other."

I smiled, wiping away a tear. "I would like that very much."

Chapter 16

The next morning I woke up with news that shook the Christian community. Carl Kevington, a long-time Word of Faith "prosperity gospel" teacher, had died of what they called unknown causes. He was the one who claimed God told him he would live to be 120 years old, yet in his eighties his life had ended. And he wasn't the only one who died. There were also a bunch of other "prosperity gospel" preachers of various ages who died of unknown causes. Yet all of their fortunes ended up not going to their children, but rather to the Dove Foundation, which was the Christian Commonwealth's "humanitarian" organization, only helping to further spread the false gospel of Shepherd's kingdom here on earth. I sensed in my spirit that these deaths were both a divine judgment and the work of Satan, somehow conspiring together to clear the way for the ascension of the Antichrist when he is revealed to the public at the midpoint of the Tribulation. I felt some sorrow for those preachers who lived their lives loving money more than loving God, but I felt more sorrow for the people they have swindled to build their fortunes.

I got my coffee, had my morning prayer, showered, dressed, and went to the Town Green as usual to preach the gospel. But I wasn't alone that day. There was a lady from the Gilead House, Tess Ketrel, who was standing next to me that day with a card scanner that day, accepting donations for the Save The Oceans Fund she was a part of. I knew Tess from the Gilead House and was good friends with her. She always worked in the Food Service Unit, helping to make and serve lunches and meals for its members. She went to a local Baptist church on Sundays, and helped run its monthly free breakfasts for the local citizens.

"We missed you being at the Gilead House, Vince," Tess said during our off-hours. "What's been happening to you all the time you weren't there with us?"

"I've been called by God to be part of the 144,000 from the book of Revelation, Tess," I responded. "My job is to make sure everyone hears the true gospel of Jesus Christ, because He's coming to set up His Kingdom here on earth at the end of the Tribulation."

"Oh, so that's what's currently going on," Tess said. "I've been operating a private Bible study group ever since my church became part of the Christian Commonwealth Church alliance. Things really haven't been the same. Worship and sermons seem to be always about the Kingdom of God being built upon the earth by President Shepherd. I didn't like that the true gospel was being suppressed by our current pastor, so I and several church members decided to form our own group. You're more than welcome to join us, if you want."

"I'm glad you got out of that church, Tess, but I'm not ready to join any other

church groups yet," I said. "Right now I'm where the Lord wants me to be."

"I'll pray for you, Vince, that the Lord will bring you to my door in the time to come," Tess said. "Right now I'm volunteering my time to help raise funds to save our oceans. They haven't been the same since that mountain of fire fell into the Pacific Ocean and turned a third of the seas into blood."

"You think this fundraiser is going to help save our oceans, Tess?" I asked.

"That's what I've been told, but I feel in my spirit that it's only the Lord that's going to heal our oceans and make things new again," Tess answered.

I put my hand on Tess' shoulder. "I'll pray with you to make sure that our oceans will be restored. I don't think God's going to leave them permanently ruined before His Son returns."

Tess smiled. "Thanks, Vince. I'll tell my study group that you're praying with us."

Another month passed without incident. Then the sound of another trumpet filled the air, and I received another message to speak to the people: "And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; and the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter."

Some people laughed at that message, but then their attention was drawn to the electronic billboard that suddenly brought forth a news report about a large object falling from space. It looked like a star that fell from heaven, but as it fell to the earth, it disintegrated and turned into millions of tiny particles that fell upon the third of the rivers and the fountains of fresh water. Most people just thought nothing of the report and went about their daily business. But as I went through the rest of the day, another report came from the Global News Network that people were starting to die from drinking water that was somehow poisoned. Some people who passed by me started to collapse, so I laid my hands on them and prayed that they would be healed. The Lord answered my prayer, and those people rose to their feet, feeling completely healed.

David Shepherd would eventually deliver another "message of hope" to the people of the Commonwealth in another public address: "My beloved brothers and sisters, tonight I come before you with a heart that is both heavy and

hopeful. Over the past several days, an unprecedented tragedy has unfolded across our world. Rivers that once brought life now carry death. Streams that nourished villages for generations have become bitter. Communities that have always depended upon clean water now face uncertainty unlike anything humanity has experienced before. Hospitals are overwhelmed. Children have fallen ill. Farmers watch helplessly as livestock perish beside poisoned wells. Entire cities now rely upon emergency water supplies simply to survive.

"To every family that has lost a loved one... to every parent sitting beside a hospital bed tonight... to every child wondering why this has happened... know this: the Christian Commonwealth grieves with you. Your tears are our tears. Your burden is our burden. Your suffering is not unseen. Beginning immediately, I have authorized the Living Waters Initiative, the largest humanitarian water relief operation in history. Across every member nation of the Commonwealth... purification stations are being constructed, emergency wells are being drilled, medical teams are being deployed, and water convoys are already crossing our highways. No village is too small. No family is forgotten. No nation will stand alone. As always, there will be voices seeking to explain these events.

"Some will insist they possess secret knowledge. Others will claim these tragedies are proof that hope has vanished from the earth. Still others will exploit fear to divide neighbor from neighbor. I urge every citizen... do not surrender your hearts to despair. Fear has never purified a single river. Fear has never healed a sick child. Fear has never comforted a grieving widow. Compassion has. Service has. Faith has.

"Throughout history, humanity has endured drought... disease... war... famine... and every generation has faced moments when the future seemed uncertain. Yet every generation has also discovered that the greatest strength of mankind is not found in wealth... or armies... or governments... It is found in people who refuse to abandon one another. This is why the Christian Commonwealth exists. Not simply to govern... but to serve. Not merely to endure tragedy... but to overcome it together.

"I ask every church to open its doors to those in need. I ask every physician to continue their sacred work. I ask every family blessed with clean water to share generously with those who have none. The measure of our civilization will not be determined by the disasters we endure. It will be determined by how faithfully we care for one another during them.

"I know many of you are frightened. I understand. So am I. But courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is choosing hope despite fear. The waters may have become bitter... but bitterness need not enter our hearts. Together... we will restore what has been lost. Together... we will care for every suffering family.

Together... we will prove that love is stronger than despair. May Almighty God comfort the grieving. May He protect those who labor through the night. May He grant wisdom to our scientists... strength to our physicians... and peace to every troubled heart. Thank you. May God bless each of you. And may God continue to bless the Christian Commonwealth."

As usual came the applause for such "good words" that were spoken by the leader of the world. And as usual came the failure to deliver on those promises. Water purification systems would fail to arrive in many communities. Corruption within the Commonwealth bureaucracy would divert resources. Churches waiting for aid would receive little or nothing. Officials would blame supply shortages, transportation issues, or sabotage. The people themselves found somebody to blame for the whole mess. Some blamed God. Some blamed Shepherd and the Christian Commonwealth at large. Some blamed unbelievers. Some blamed the "two witnesses" in Jerusalem.

And as usual, Rapture Enterprises came through again. They would quietly deliver clean water, portable filtration systems, and medical supplies to affected communities—never claiming credit, simply serving those in need.

The 144,000 were also mobilized to do what they could to help alleviate the situation. In areas of the world where Rapture Enterprises could not reach them, those brave witnesses prayed for miraculous healings for both rivers and citizens who had fallen ill from the poisoned water, and both were healed instantly. The citizens were so grateful that somebody came to their rescue that they were willing to open their minds and hearts to the gospel and receive Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

I felt glad to hear reports of people coming to know true salvation from the efforts of Rapture Enterprises and the 144,000. But I was seeing in my dreams that David Shepherd was becoming furious. He didn't like that God was also sending help along with the judgments, and vowed that he would deal with God and Jesus at the appointed time that was prepared for him.

Another month passed. A fourth trumpet sounded in the heavens, and I spoke aloud: "And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise." This time only a few people laughed while the rest just continued through their day without raising even an eyebrow. But around 2 pm, darkness fell upon the earth as if the light of the sun had just been turned off. People found themselves walking into things and crashing their cars for a time until the

street lights turned on. Then around 6 pm, after I had gone home to have my evening meal, the stars and the moon came out to shine upon the earth, which lasted until 2 am, when the moon and stars just disappeared from the sky.

People were panicking, wondering what was going on, whether this was yet one of those "judgments" that were predicted by the 144,000 that would happen when they said it would. President Shepherd, as usual, came on the air to address the issue at hand:

"My beloved citizens of the Christian Commonwealth... tonight, we gather beneath a sky unlike any our generation has ever known. The sun shines for only two-thirds of the day. The moon no longer gives its full light. The stars that have guided travelers for countless generations now appear as though they themselves are mourning. Many have asked me, 'Mr. President... what happens now?' My answer is simple. We endure. We have endured fire. We have endured the sea. We have endured bitter waters. Now we face the darkness itself. And yet... we are still here. Our homes still stand. Our families still embrace one another. Our faith still burns brighter than any shadow.

"There are those who would have you believe that darkness is stronger than light. History has proven otherwise. The smallest candle has always overcome the deepest night. I know many of you are afraid. Children are asking their parents why the daytime seems shorter. Workers wonder whether the harvest will survive. Mothers and fathers wonder what tomorrow will bring. These fears are understandable. But they need not become our masters.

"Beginning tonight, I have authorized the Light of Hope Initiative. Throughout every city and every village of the Commonwealth: emergency power stations will remain operational around the clock, hospitals will receive uninterrupted electrical support, food distribution centers will expand their operating hours, schools and churches will become centers of comfort and community. No citizen will face this darkness alone. Already our scientists are studying these extraordinary celestial events. Our physicians are preparing for the health challenges caused by diminished sunlight. Our engineers are adapting our energy systems. And our churches are opening their doors to every frightened soul seeking comfort. This is what it means to be a Commonwealth. Not merely a collection of nations... but one family.

"There are voices who will insist that the heavens themselves have declared humanity's defeat. I reject that conclusion. There are voices that say we should surrender to fear. I reject that as well. Darkness has always existed. But so has hope. And hope has never depended upon the brightness of the sky. Hope lives within the human heart. Hope lives wherever neighbors comfort neighbors. Hope lives wherever strangers become family. Hope lives wherever faith refuses

to surrender.

"Tonight I ask every citizen: visit someone who lives alone. Share your table with a family in need. Light a candle in your window as a reminder that compassion still shines even when the heavens grow dim. Let every home become a beacon. Let every church become a refuge. Let every neighborhood become a testimony that love cannot be extinguished. The road before us may yet grow more difficult. I will not deceive you. There may be sacrifices still to come. But I promise you this: as long as I have breath... I will never stop fighting for you. As long as this Commonwealth stands... no darkness will ever overcome our resolve.

"May Almighty God watch over each of you tonight. May He comfort the fearful. May He strengthen the weary. May He remind us all that dawn has always followed even the longest night. Thank you. May God bless you. And may God forever bless the Christian Commonwealth."

And like with his previous messages, there were heapings of praise, followed by no action at all. Many rural communities would never receive the promised generators or emergency supplies. Rolling blackouts would become common despite assurances. Government resources would increasingly be directed toward Commonwealth-approved institutions while independent churches and dissenting communities found themselves waiting indefinitely. Reports of shortages would be dismissed by officials as isolated incidents or misinformation. This only increased the amount of criticism that Shepherd received as, as usual, Rapture Enterprises would upstage him by quietly distributing solar lanterns, backup generators for hospitals, and emergency supplies without fanfare.

A lantern showed up at my door with a note that said, "Share this light with everyone you come across in these dark days. God bless. J.R.B." So that's what I did. I took that lantern with me as I helped people around who were navigating in the wee hours of the morning where there was hardly any light to see anything. It was tiresome work, but I knew that what I was doing was for the Lord's glory, that He would get all the praise and glory for our deeds.

One day, as I was helping one of my neighbors get across the street during the blackened sky, I noticed something in the sky that looked like a comet that had wings. It was the only light that I could see in the sky at that point. I heard a voice that came from the sky, saying loudly, "Woe, woe, woe, to the inhabitants of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!"

After I finished my task, my phone rang. "Hello, it's Vince," I answered.

"Hey, it's Pablo. Did you just hear what that angel said?"

"Angel?"

"From the book of Revelation. Chapter 8, verse 13."

"Ah, that angel. It took me a moment to remember."

"The angel said there are three more woes that are yet to come. You think things are going to get really bad from here on out?"

"I don't doubt it, Pablo, if these Trumpet Judgments that we had aren't enough to get our attention."

"The next one's supposed to be really bad. Locust-like creatures coming out of the pit, stinging people like scorpions, tormenting them for five months."

"I'm not hoping to see any of that happening anytime soon, but who knows?"

"Like you said, it's God's show. We just need to warn the masses about these things that are going to befall them before the time comes."

"Yeah, looks like we'll have to. Keep in touch, I see someone who needs my help."

"Me too. I'll talk to you later." And then the call ended.

I got back home to get some rest. My phone rang again. It was Valerie.

"Hi, Vince, it's me, Val. Sorry for waking you up this early, but there was something on my mind I need to tell you."

"I was up anyway, Val, so no problem. What's going on?"

"I'm at the hospital with my stepdaughter. Her child had suddenly died."

My mouth dropped open in shock. "You sure?"

"Definitely. I'm with her right now trying to comfort her for her loss. But things are going to be difficult for her now."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Val."

"Yeah, I'm sorry too. Wish I had better news to report, but with this Trumpet Judgment happening..."

"I know. It's not safe to be going around in the dark with the sun, moon, and stars hardly shining through the day or night."

"I had to risk it, because it's my stepdaughter. I love her too much to just abandon her in her time of need."

"So you want me to pray for you and your stepdaughter?"

"Please, if you can do anything to help us. I don't know who else I can turn to."

"No problem, Val."

Chapter 17

Several days later I attended the funeral of Valerie's grandson Darren Cobb. It was held at St. Mary's Church in Westville, which was where Valerie's estranged husband and her stepchildren had attended. Valerie went there a few times with her husband, once for her grandson's baptism. I haven't been in a Catholic church for ages since I left the residential schools, so going there felt like trying to remember something familiar that had slipped into the mists of faded memory. Valerie's husband sat with his son, his daughter, and his son-in-law up in the front row, while Valerie and I sat in the back, mostly because she had a restraining order against her husband. This made Valerie feel crushed that she couldn't sit next to her stepdaughter and give her any sort of comfort, but she knew that it was for her own safety that she kept some distance between herself and her husband due to his abusive behavior.

Father Charles Hester presided over the funeral service, giving a eulogy for a child that had been considered a "miracle child" due to the parents' struggles with fertility, that the world would miss what a wonderful young man Darren Tyler Cobb would have been if he had not died during "the darkest days of the history of mankind." He prayed that Mary, "the mother of God", would watch over the child now and accept him into her arms as he goes to be with the Lord forever. Valerie's husband's relatives cried as the incense wafted up into the high ceiling, knowing that they were going to miss watching Darren grow up as he was taken out of this life too soon.

Valerie and I left the service after she talked with her stepdaughter and son-in-law, expressing her deepest sympathies for the couple having lost their child. It made me realize how dangerous having children was going to be for couples during the Tribulation. I remember Jesus saying in the Olivet Discourse, "Woe unto those who are pregnant and nursing children in those days." I don't envy Valerie for the situation of having to watch her grandchild die in his mother's arms, but I only wish more mothers and grandmothers wouldn't have to go through the same pain.

Valerie took me to Dunkin' where we both got a large cup of iced coffee. I could tell that this was going to be a difficult conversation by the way neither of us was ready to say anything. When we were halfway through our drinks, she said, "I only wish I was there with you in the hospital room on the day that Pastor Walter died, Vince. I had missed him so much."

"I wish that you were there with me on that day too," I said. "I didn't think that he would end up going to meet the Lord the way that he did that day."

"The pastor did say that, whether it will be by the undertaker or the Upper-Taker,

he was going to go home to be with the Lord forever," Valerie said. "That just makes me wish the Rapture did happen after David Shepherd got sworn into office, now that I think about it."

"So now you regret your support of Shepherd, after all that he has done in office as President," I said.

"I didn't think that he would make promises and end up never delivering on any of them," Valerie said. "If I had the chance to go back in time, I would have voted for Wilmington or, at the very least, nobody at all."

"I wonder how many voters for Shepherd are starting to have regrets," I said.

"I'm sure there's a good number of people who felt like they wasted their vote on him, Vince," Valerie said. "If only we knew then what we now know about him... but hey, that's just how the cookie crumbles."

"Not a very tasty cookie at that," I said as I finished up my iced coffee. "Anyway, there's a Fifth Trumpet Judgment that's coming that's going to make the past four ones look tame by comparison."

"You mean the locust-demons and Apollyon?" Valerie asked. "Don't ask how I know. I've been studying the book of Revelation on my off-hours, trying to understand how everything in it fits into place with the current situation."

I nodded. "So are you going to prepare yourself for that judgment when it comes?"

"Mmm, yeah, definitely," Valerie said, taking another sip. "Hopefully the locusts will pass by me when they go charging through the skies looking for prey."

As I continued my street ministry, I noticed that the days were starting to come back to normal. The sun stayed lit longer, and the moon and the stars also shined longer. I also began to notice that there were other people on the street who had what looked like cross marks on their foreheads, similar to the ones of the 144,000, only much smaller. I thought that this was some sort of anomaly or that maybe it was the devil playing tricks on me. So I asked the Lord on this issue, and He told me that those who are true believers are now sealed with the same mark that the 144,000 have. Even after I led people into the prayer of salvation, I began to see the cross mark on their foreheads, though surprisingly they couldn't see the mark on their own foreheads. I told them that this is how they will know a true believer of God, when they themselves see the same mark on other

people's foreheads.

A month after the last Trumpet Judgment, I again heard the sound of a trumpet, and again I spoke out loud: "And the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit. And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months: and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man. And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them."

Again there were people laughing and mocking this pronouncement, but soon they noticed that the sky began to darken with thick smoke blocking out the sun, until the whole sky was covered. And then they saw what appeared to be a swarm of locusts coming from the east. The locusts looked really strange. They were shaped like horses prepared for battle. On their heads they had crowns like gold, and their faces were like the faces of men. They had hair like the hair of women, and their teeth were like the teeth of lions. They wore breastplates that were like breastplates of iron, and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle. They had tails like scorpions, and there were stings in their tails, and they had power to hurt men for five months.

People screamed as they ran for cover, to hide themselves from the terror that was coming toward them. Some managed to hide, while others were stung right on the spot. Only the people with the seal of God on their foreheads were not targeted.

I watched with dismay the terrible scene that was unleashed on the public. People found themselves writhing in uncontrollable pain as the poison that entered their bodies tormented them severely. All the while, the swarm was chanting one word over and over: "APOLLYON!"

Suddenly my phone rang. I answered it. "Hey, Vince, you there?"

I recognized who it was. "Pablo! Are you also witnessing this?"

"Yeah, man, it's really horrible. People without the seal of God on their foreheads have been stung and now they're in great agony. I don't know what to do about it."

"I'm not sure what I can do either, Pablo," I said. "Just pray that God will comfort them and keep them from hurting themselves while trying to seek death."

"I know that part, bro. They will all seek death, and yet death will flee from them. It's going to be really miserable."

"Just do what you can on your end, Pablo. I'll see what the Lord will have me to do for the victims."

"Will do. Talk to you soon," Pablo said before the call ended.

That evening I got a few calls. One was from Daniel. "Hello, Vince, are you there?"

"I'm right where I need to be, Dan. What's up?"

"Did you guys send the judgment of these locusts on the people?"

"No, that's entirely God's doing. Why?"

"Everybody's been freaking out over them. People without the seal of God got stung. They're now in such torment that they feel like they want to die."

"I know. I've seen that pretty much throughout the town."

"How long do you think this judgment is going to last?"

"According to Revelation, these locust-things are supposed to torment men for five months, and then the physical torment is supposed to last five months."

"Oh great, so that means it will be ten months before this thing is completely over and everybody's back to normal."

"Unfortunately. We can ease people's suffering until that time passes, but they have to ride out the whole thing as long as it lasts."

"I feel bad for those who don't have the seal of God on them. Looks like I got my work cut out for me, same as you."

"I'll continue to pray for you, Dan. Thanks for checking in."

"Hey, man, you're the best!"

The next call was from Valerie. "Hi, Vince, it's me, Val. How are you doing?"

"Fine, except for having to deal with people with locust stings."

"Yeah, those things are terrible. I even got a close look at one of them. Matches their description from Revelation right down to a tee."

"Anyone you know suffering from these locusts?"

"Westville Assembly is. So is Eric Gaskell and his wife. Guess they weren't truly Christians after all."

"Maybe this will bring them to the true faith after all."

"Maybe. Or maybe they'll just double down in their own hardness of heart."

"Who knows? I continue to pray for Westville Assembly to come to their senses and repent."

"Me too. Hate to see anyone go through this judgment, feeling like they want to die and they can't get any relief."

"This judgment is supposed to last ten months. Five months for the locusts to torment them, and another five months for the last of the tormented to suffer the physical torment."

"That sucks. Anyway, pray for my family and me, make sure we can all get through this."

"Gotcha. Have a good night, Val."

"You too, honey."

The last call was from Tess. "Vincent, are you there?"

"Yes, Tess, it's me, Vincent. What's on your mind?"

"This locust judgment that I've been hearing about. Is that anywhere in the book of Revelation?"

"Revelation 9:1-11, Tess. It's the Fifth Trumpet Judgment."

"Okay. One of my Bible students was asking about it this afternoon. Said a friend of hers got stung and now she's in the hospital suffering pain."

"I feel sorry for her, for what she has to go through. Meanwhile, how are you doing?"

"Just fine. Didn't think we would last this long through what people are calling the Tribulation."

"Yeah, but it's supposed to get much worse after the Trumpet Judgments."

"How so?"

"Midpoint through the Tribulation, we may see the Antichrist being revealed. He'll suffer a head wound, but that wound will be healed, and he will carry on his activities for 42 months."

"Really? Do you think that David Shepherd could be the Antichrist?"

"According to what God has revealed to me, I know that he is. It's just a matter of time before that revelation is known to the general public."

"Okay, I understand. Now what else is supposed to happen?"

"The final seven judgments will take place in the latter half of the Tribulation. These are called the Bowl Judgments, or the Vial Judgments if you're using the KJV. These judgments are mostly aimed at people who will take the mark of the beast."

"The mark of the beast?"

"Read Revelation 13:16-18. That should tell you what it is."

"Okay. Guess I got a lot of homework to do before my next study group. Maybe you can come and join us one of these days."

"I would like to, but I got things of the Lord to take care of."

"I understand. We will be praying for you, Vincent."

"Take care. Thanks for the call."

I turned on my TV and noticed that there was a live press release from President Shepherd. Strangely he looked calm and collected even as his staff was suffering all around him. He took to the podium and addressed the crowd.

"My beloved brothers and sisters of the Christian Commonwealth... tonight, I speak to you during one of the darkest chapters in our shared history. For months we have endured disasters unlike anything recorded by previous generations. We have seen forests consumed by fire. We have watched the seas suffer unimaginable devastation. We have witnessed rivers become bitter. We have lived beneath darkened skies. Now... our greatest struggle is one we cannot easily see.

"Across the Commonwealth and throughout the nations of the earth, millions are suffering from agonizing afflictions for which physicians have found no lasting cure. Hospitals remain filled beyond capacity. Doctors labor without rest. Families watch helplessly as loved ones endure pain that no medicine seems able to relieve. To every person suffering tonight... to every family standing vigil beside a hospital bed... to every physician who has reached the limits of human knowledge... know this: you are not forgotten. The Christian Commonwealth mourns with you. We pray with you. We stand beside you.

"Beginning immediately, I have authorized the Compassion and Healing Initiative. Every available medical resource throughout the Commonwealth is being mobilized. Emergency treatment centers are opening in every major city. Additional counselors, physicians, nurses, and chaplains are being deployed to communities most severely affected. No one who seeks help will be turned away.

"There are already many voices claiming certainty. Some declare that these afflictions are punishment. Others insist they are beyond hope. Still others seek to exploit fear in order to undermine the unity of our people. I urge you... do not surrender your minds to panic. Fear has never healed the wounded. Fear has never comforted the afflicted. Fear has never restored a single life. Compassion has. Perseverance has. Faith has. Throughout history... humanity has repeatedly faced trials that appeared impossible. Yet every generation has discovered that even the deepest suffering can awaken extraordinary courage. The measure of a civilization is not determined by whether suffering exists. It is determined by how faithfully its people care for those who suffer. That is who we are. That is who we must remain.

"I ask every church... open your doors. I ask every family... care for your neighbors. I ask every citizen... show kindness to those whose burdens seem unbearable. There are those who would divide us by claiming that God has abandoned humanity. I reject that despair. There are those who say civilization

itself is collapsing. I reject that conclusion. Darkness may surround us. Pain may visit every home. But compassion remains stronger than suffering. Hope remains stronger than despair. Love remains stronger than fear. The Christian Commonwealth was founded for moments precisely such as these. Not merely to govern... but to serve. Not merely to survive... but to stand together when others lose heart.

"My friends... our greatest strength has never been found in our buildings... or our institutions... or our prosperity. It is found in the willingness of ordinary people to carry one another through unimaginable hardship. That spirit still lives among us. I have seen it. I believe in it. And I believe in you.

"May Almighty God comfort those who suffer. May He strengthen every physician... every nurse... every caregiver... and every family keeping watch through the long nights. May He grant us endurance for the days ahead. Thank you. May God bless each of you. And may God continue to bless the Christian Commonwealth."

The speech ended with applause as usual. But as the days passed by, those words rang hollow to most people as the Compassion and Healing Initiative promises never came through. Hospitals would receive promises but little meaningful support. Commonwealth-approved churches would be encouraged to report "miraculous recoveries" that often could not be verified. Government media would emphasize hopeful stories while downplaying the scale of the ongoing suffering. Critics questioning the official narrative would increasingly be accused of undermining public morale during a national emergency.

Meanwhile, the 144,000 would quietly minister where the system could not. They would pray with the afflicted, comfort families, and God would work genuine healings through some of them—not to glorify the ministers themselves, but to point people back to Christ. As word spread, more people would begin asking why compassion and hope seemed more tangible among these humble servants than within the Commonwealth's increasingly centralized programs. That growing contrast would further erode Shepherd's moral authority while simultaneously increasing his determination to consolidate control.

Chapter 18

I got a call from Vivian that my brother Charlie is currently in the hospital, suffering from the effects of the locust sting from the Fifth Trumpet Judgment. She was currently with him at Mount Moriah Hospital trying to help him with the torment he was suffering, but there was only so much she could do as a woman of faith, so she turned to me because I'm one of the 144,000. I got an Uber to the hospital and got there as soon as I could.

Vivian was waiting for me when I arrived in the room where Charlie was. He looked like he was in extreme pain, his body apparently scarred from his many attempts to take his own life. I felt sorrow for how badly my brother looked at that moment.

"He asked specifically for you to come, Vincent," Vivian told me. "He feels like he's ready to turn his life over to the Lord. I'll leave the two of you alone."

"Thanks, Viv, I'll take it from here," I said. Vivian nodded and left the room.

Charlie opened his swollen eyes and looked at me. "Thank God you're here, Vincent. I honestly don't know if I'll make it through this torment."

"It will only last five months, Charlie," I said. "Then you'll be back to normal. I see that you've been trying to take your own life."

"Yeah, I feel so ashamed of never telling anyone that," Charlie said. "I thought that I would be strong enough to endure this pain, but I guess I'm no better than anyone else who's suffering through this."

"You said that you're ready to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, Charlie," I said. "Is that true?"

"As true as the Lord lives," Charlie said, nodding his head slightly. "I don't know how else I'm going to get through this."

"Accepting the Lord now may not help get rid of the pain, but right now it's the only thing you have left because there's a much worse judgment that's coming," I said.

"I heard from a YouTube pastor all about the Sixth Trumpet Judgment, Vince," Charlie said. "Given what I'm currently going through, I'm more than ready to become a believer and hopefully escape the next judgment."

"Then repeat after me: 'Lord, I know that I'm a sinner, and that there's nothing I

can do to make things right with You. I believe that You have sent Jesus Christ, Your only begotten Son, to die for my sins. Please receive me as Your son so that I may receive eternal life in You. In Your Son Jesus Christ's name I pray. Amen."

Charlie struggled with every word of the prayer of salvation, but I felt in my spirit how sincere my brother was at the moment. After he had finished, I noticed that there was a small cross mark that appeared on Charlie's forehead.

"Welcome, Charlie, to the family of God," I said, smiling. "You're now sealed, so that nothing in this world can take you out of the hand of God the Father."

Charlie smiled, feeling relieved. He had tears running down his face. He seemed to be at peace, knowing that his sins had been forgiven by God. "Thank you, Vincent. I'm glad that you brought me to knowing the Lord."

"It's God you should be thanking, Charlie," I said. "I just did my part as a humble servant."

The nurse came in to check on Charlie. "Whatever you did for my patient, sir, he seems to be fully relaxed and comfortable now," she said, monitoring his vital signs. "Is there anything I can for you?"

I sighed. "I'm fine, thank you. I just need a ride to get back home."

Vivian was waiting outside the room when I left. She looked at me and noticed the smile on my face. She seemed to understand in an instant that what I did helped Charlie be at peace with himself and God.

"I'll give you a ride home, Vincent," Vivian said, smiling through the tears.

Throughout the months that the Fifth Trumpet Judgment lasted, I was busy with patients in hospitals as a sort of unofficial chaplain, helping them to come to know Jesus as their Lord and Savior during their struggle with pain. Some of the patients had to be put in restraints since they were so desperate to kill themselves that their bodies were showing signs of damage from their attempts. Some of them felt like they were ready to die and be with the Lord. Still others just wanted to escape the worst that was to come, since they heard that the next Trumpet Judgment was going to result in a loss of one-third of the world's remaining population, and they had no idea how that judgment was going to be fulfilled. I just offered what I could. I led them through prayers of salvation, and watched as those who were sincere in their repentance had the cross mark

appear on their foreheads, sealing them forever as children of God. Those people felt more at peace with themselves, knowing God had loved them and had now saved them from the coming wrath.

Meanwhile, the "two witnesses" in Jerusalem continued their ministry, knowing that their time was limited and that they will be killed afterward by the Beast that arises from the abyss. They also saw people become believers by the cross sign appearing on their foreheads. But they also saw people being opposed to them, calling them names, accusing them of bringing judgments against "the true people of God, the sons of David." There were also continued attempts to murder the "two witnesses" that failed, as bullets failed to pierce their bodies while their assailants were consumed by flames that came out of the "witnesses'" mouths. That only made more people either become believers or become so enraged that they hoped and prayed that President Shepherd would deal with the problem soon.

Also around the same time, Jews continued to make sacrifices in the new Temple that was erected, and they continued to get frustrated as their blood sacrifices only resulted in water, and their water-drawing ceremonies only resulted in blood. The skies over Israel continued to remain free of clouds, without a single drop of rain falling down. This made the Israelis more enraged and also led them to take sides with President Shepherd, hoping and praying that he would bring this torment to an end.

Also there was growing hostility between professed believers in Christ (who were now calling themselves "sons of David") and the true believers. The veneer of civility between people naming the name of Christ was slowly being stripped away as the professors of faith were showing their true selves, revealing themselves as nothing more than religious pretenders. They felt like, even though they had control of all "seven mountains of influence" over society, something was resisting them from within to keep them from achieving their goal of total control over the populace. Shepherd, who was suffering in popularity among even his faithful, continued to make promises that he would set things right in the world and that he would deal with "the enemies of our common faith."

I continued to pray that God would reveal the Antichrist's true self in the due time appointed to him, that people would come to their senses and see the truth for themselves before it was too late, and that God would spare as many people as He can from the next Trumpet Judgment that was coming soon.

It was now eleven months since the start of the Fifth Trumpet Judgment. People

were back to normal. The locusts were completely gone. Things seemed to be back to normal — as "normal" as things could be in this time of Tribulation — when I heard the sixth trumpet sound, and I spoke aloud: "And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, Saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates. And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men. And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand: and I heard the number of them. And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone: and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone. By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths. For their power is in their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt."

As usual there was laughing and mocking, but then people noticed that some without the seal of God on their foreheads were falling dead, looking as if they had been slain in battle. I watched and noticed something those without the seal of God couldn't see: an army of what appeared to be demonic horsemen riding on horses that looked like how they were described in the book of Revelation, all fearsome and dangerous. People screamed as they watched men, women, and children fall dead, not knowing the actual cause of their deaths.

My phone rang. It was Pablo. "Dude, are you seeing what I'm seeing? This demonic army slaying people who don't have the seal of God on their foreheads?"

"I'm definitely seeing it, Pablo. It's scaring the hell out of everyone else."

"Oh, man, I feel so totally helpless, knowing that one-third of mankind is going to perish because of this judgment. What are we going to do?"

"There really isn't much we can do at this point, Pablo. Just pray that this judgment would be over and quick."

"I certainly wouldn't want to be one of those without the seal of God during this judgment. I wonder what Shepherd would have to say about it during his public address."

"Nothing that I haven't heard before from his addresses regarding the previous Trumpet Judgments. It's like he's reading things entirely from a script that keeps getting modified with each judgment."

"I get that impression too, bro. I don't trust that it will be anything good or even useful."

"We just got to keep praying. God's got our hands on us and those He has chosen to save. Hopefully more people will come to the faith."

"Guess that's just what I'll have to do. Talk to you later."

"You too, Pablo," I said before the call ended.

President Shepherd addressed the issue in one of his televised speeches. This time things were different. His speech was no longer comforting platitudes for the people to be pacified with. Instead, it was much stronger and more forceful. He had a grim look on his face that made it look as if even he was affected deeply by the loss of life in the Sixth Trumpet Judgment.

"My beloved citizens of the Christian Commonwealth... tonight... the world has witnessed horrors beyond anything humanity has ever imagined. Across continents... entire military divisions have been overwhelmed. Cities once considered secure have descended into chaos. Communications have failed. Governments struggle to understand the violence that has erupted with terrifying speed. Millions have already perished. Millions more have fled their homes. No nation has escaped untouched. No family has remained completely unaffected.

"Tonight... the Commonwealth mourns with every grieving nation. To every parent who has lost a child... to every husband or wife mourning a beloved spouse... to every soldier who has watched brothers and sisters fall beside them... know this: you are not forgotten. The whole Commonwealth stands beside you. For many months we have endured disaster after disaster. We rebuilt our forests. We restored our coastlines. We brought clean water to the thirsty. We comforted those afflicted by mysterious illnesses. Now... we face something different. We face violence without reason. Hatred without explanation. Destruction that seems to spread faster than fear itself. Many are searching for someone to blame. Many claim they possess secret explanations. Others insist invisible powers are at work among us. I urge every citizen... do not surrender yourselves to rumors. Do not surrender yourselves to fear. In times such as these... fear becomes as deadly as any weapon.

"Today I have signed the Global Peace and Security Emergency Act. Effective immediately... the armed forces of every member nation shall operate under unified humanitarian coordination. Emergency transportation corridors will be established. Food and medical resources will be distributed through a single

international relief network. Regional authorities will temporarily coordinate their efforts through the Commonwealth Crisis Council to ensure that no nation stands alone. This is not the abandonment of liberty. It is the preservation of civilization itself. History teaches us that when humanity divides... violence multiplies. When humanity stands together... hope survives.

"There are those who will accuse us of seeking too much authority. I understand those concerns. But I ask you... what is the purpose of government if not to preserve life? What is the purpose of leadership if not to protect the innocent? We cannot permit fear... division... or suspicion... to destroy everything generations before us worked to build. Tonight I call upon every pastor... every priest... every rabbi... every humanitarian... every physician... every police officer... every soldier... and every citizen... stand together. Protect the weak. Shelter the displaced. Care for the wounded. Reject vengeance. Reject hatred. Reject those who seek to profit from chaos. This generation did not choose these trials. But this generation will choose how it responds to them. Future generations will remember whether we surrendered to fear... or rose together in courage.

"I believe... with all my heart... that humanity's finest hour has not passed. It stands before us. Let us prove worthy of it. May Almighty God comfort every grieving family. May He strengthen those who protect the innocent. May He grant wisdom to every leader entrusted with this sacred responsibility. May He guide us toward that day when peace shall once again prevail upon the earth. Thank you. May God bless every nation. And may God bless the Christian Commonwealth."

And as usual there was applause for Shepherd's good words. And this time, it did seem that Shepherd made good of his promise to enact the Global Peace and Security Act. However, this act ended up making things more restrictive for the average citizen. There were increased travel restrictions. People were constantly asked for their Global IDs and searched to make sure they weren't carrying any weapons on their person. Speeches were being monitored for any potential 'anti-Christian hate speech' content, with videos being blocked upon suspicion of such content being found. This mostly affected those of other religions, who felt as if they have become victims of discrimination by the Shepherd administration.

I felt that things were coming to a head as, in the next five months, we will eventually see the seething pot boiling over, that Shepherd will reveal his true self to the public and that the world will see him for the controlling monster that he truly is. I prayed to God that that time would come soon.

Chapter 19

I had a dream where I saw a mighty angel coming down from heaven, clothed with a cloud. A rainbow was upon his head; his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire: He had in his hand a little book open, and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth. He cried with a loud voice, as loud as a lion's roar. When he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices. When the seven thunders uttered their voices, I was about to write. But I heard a voice from heaven saying to me, "Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not."

The angel that I saw standing upon the sea and upon the earth lifted his hand to heaven. "I swear by Him that lives for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that are in it, and the earth, and the things that are in it, and the sea, and the things that are in it, that there should be no more delay. But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he has declared to his servants the prophets."

The voice which I heard from heaven spoke unto me again. It said, "Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel that stands upon the sea and upon the earth."

I went unto the angel and said unto him, "Give me the little book."

He said unto me, "Take it, and eat it up. It shall make your belly bitter, but it shall be in your mouth sweet as honey."

I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up. It was in my mouth as sweet as honey, but as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.

He said unto me, "You must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings."

I woke up after the dream had ended. It felt like I was living out what John the apostle was seeing when he was on the isle of Patmos, writing the words that would become the Book of Revelation. But I wondered what the purpose of the dream was. Then I realized that this dream wasn't just for me — it was for the other members of the 144,000, who were also sharing the same dream. We were called to be prophets in an age where people were turning their ears away from the truth and turning aside to fables and myths — the current myth being that God wanted His people to build the Kingdom here on earth so that Jesus would take over and rule over the whole earth, with its builders as its co-regents.

We were four months away from the end of the ministry of the "two witnesses".

Soon it would be time for the 144,000 to take over as the prophets that would bring forth the truth of God's Word to the masses. And I couldn't wait for it to begin.

Eric Gaskell must have heard of my street ministry, for he had called me into his office at Westville Assembly for a private chat. I entered his office with some caution in my spirit, but hopeful that he might listen to me if I needed to speak the truth. I went into the meeting prayerfully, hoping to know what its purpose was.

"So, Vincent, I heard that you have been a member of this church until the time that Walter Hightower had retired for personal matters," Eric said as I sat in a seat before him at his desk. "What can I do to convince you to come back to the church and become one of its members once again?"

"There's nothing you can do to convince me to return, Pastor, except to repent and forsake the false gospel of David Shepherd's kingdom," I said.

"You don't believe that Shepherd is building the true Kingdom of God here on earth before Jesus' return in the next four years?" Eric asked.

"I believe that Shepherd is building a kingdom that only honors God with their lips while their hearts remain far from Him," I answered. "In time, Shepherd will reveal his true self and the true aim of his kingdom — to oppose Jesus Christ when He returns and try to destroy Him, a plan which will ultimately fail."

"How can you say that about a man who, like the Biblical David, is a man that is after God's own heart?" Eric asked.

"Shepherd may bear the first name of his Biblical namesake, Pastor, but he is not truly a man after God's own heart," I answered. "He is what the Bible calls 'the idol shepherd.' Zechariah 11:15-17 says the following: 'And the LORD said unto me, Take unto you yet the instruments of a foolish shepherd. For, lo, I will raise up a shepherd in the land, which shall not visit those that be cut off, neither shall seek the young one, nor heal that that is broken, nor feed that that stands still: but he shall eat the flesh of the fat, and tear their claws in pieces. Woe to the idol shepherd that leaves the flock! the sword shall be upon his arm, and upon his right eye: his arm shall be clean dried up, and his right eye shall be utterly darkened.'"

"You know, that kind of speech could get you arrested for speaking harm against the President of the Christian Commonwealth, Vincent," Eric said.

"If it's my time to be in custody without any hope of escape in this life, I will not refuse it," I said. "But I still have a mission to accomplish from the Lord, and I will not be deterred until the time comes when the Lord says my mission has ended, and I am called up to be with him."

"You have a choice: either recant this false notion that you are truly speaking God's Words, or I'll have no choice but to keep you permanently exiled from this church," Eric said a bit forcefully.

"Then I must obey God rather than men, and choose exile," I said. "But remember this: you only have as much time in the world as God has given you breath. And then you'll have to stand before the One who made you and give an account for everything you have done in your life, as everyone else will. Repent or be condemned. There is no third option for you."

And with that, I got up from my seat and walked out of Pastor Eric's office and away from Westville Assembly for good.

I got a call from Valerie that day. "Hello, Vince the Valiant here."

"I heard that there was a meeting between you and Pastor Eric today. What's going on?"

"Pastor Eric is trying to force me to play nice with him or else I will never return to Westville Assembly. He says that I should recant my role as speaking for God."

"But you're not going to do that, are you?"

"Of course not, Val. I have come so far through the first half of the Tribulation as one of the 144,000 to ever consider giving it up all for a comfortable seat in a church."

"I see. You know, I'm starting to butt heads with the pastor myself. He thinks that women should play the quiet submissive role and not speak in church."

"And you're not going to go along with that yourself?"

"Heck, no! If the Lord wants me to say something important for the congregation to hear in church, I'm going to let Him use me however way He sees fit. I'm not going to let male pastors like him boss me around like he has the ultimate authority."

"You should be careful. He's still the pastor of that church, and I don't think he'll let you stay in that church if you refuse to play nice with him."

"I know what kind of man Pastor Eric really is, honey. He thinks he wears the pants in his family and his church, but it's his wife Miriam who holds the reins."

"So he's basically acting on pure masculine bluster in the church?"

"Yeah, that's pretty much it. I have no problem being the submissive wife to my husband, but that doesn't mean I'm just going to roll over and play dead when he tells me to."

"So if Pastor Eric kicks you out, where are you going to go?"

"Honestly, I don't know. Guess I'll have to look around for a Bible study group or something that I can participate in for the time being."

"I can text you the number of Tess Ketrel. She runs her own Bible study group. You might find her insights in the Bible interesting."

"Sure, shoot me over a text. I'd be happy to look into it. Anyway, got to go. My dogs are getting a bit hungry."

"Well, talk to you later. Thanks for calling."

After that call ended, I got another from Vivian. "Hello, it's Vincent. What's up?"

"I have some pretty bad news. Your brother Charlie is dead."

My mouth dropped open in shock. "Dead? How can that be?"

"It was sudden, Vincent. He got into an incident with a Rideshare customer, and he got stabbed. The police are looking into this incident."

"My goodness. He just got saved several months ago during the Fifth Trumpet Judgment."

"I know. I already let Belinda know what happened to him. Is there anything I can do for you?"

I sighed. "I just want to be left alone right now, Vivian."

"I understand. Call me if you need anything, okay? Love you."

"Love you too."

After the call ended, I just sat there in shock, remembering how soon Charlie became a believer in Christ. Although he was still busy doing gig jobs here and there, he reportedly spent his off-hours reading the Bible and watching Christian YouTube videos about how to grow in his faith. He also got involved in an online Bible study about the Book of Revelation, which I think was good for him, so that he could know where current events fit within its prophetic timeline. It was just so sad that his life was taken that quickly, by some random stranger who had killed him for some unknown reason. I could imagine him being with our mother right now in heaven, enjoying what paradise in eternity had to offer.

We had a memorial service for Charlie at the Norton-Williams Funeral Home. It was just me and my two sisters, plus a few relatives and some of Charlie's friends. His ashes were put into a specially designed urn that had the face mask designs of the members of KISS, which I found amusing. We all got our turns to say something about Charlie, what we remembered of him, all the fun things that we had done with him. I closed it out by saying our brother found Jesus at the right time, and that now he was going to spend eternity with Him and our mother in heaven. A few of Charlie's favorite songs were played from his Spotify playlist. Some left in tears, but we as the surviving three siblings were rejoicing. At least that seemed to be the case.

Belinda wanted to take me back home to my apartment, so I accepted. On the way, we stopped at Dunkin' to pick up some iced coffee. We sat in the parking lot in Belinda's car watching the other cars go in and out while we sipped our drinks.

"Admittedly, I haven't been feeling any peace within myself since my husband Thomas died while on duty as a military officer," Belinda said. "I thought that my new religion would bring comfort to my soul, but right now I feel so empty and lost."

"Maybe God is bringing you to the point where all you need to bring to Him is yourself," I said. "I felt so empty in my life when I came out as a gay man, thinking that being 'my true self' was going to fix everything when it really didn't."

"And Jesus just came into your life and instantly fixed everything, so you're no longer a gay person?" Belinda asked.

"No, I still struggle with the temptations," I answered. "But now I know that I'm

not alone when it comes to dealing with the temptations. Scripture says Jesus was tempted in all points just like we are, and yet He never sinned. He went through everything we had to face and still came out clean as a whistle."

"I'm glad you found your peace with Jesus," Belinda said. "I'm not sure if I can find the same peace for myself with Him in my life."

"He loved you enough to give His life for you, Belinda," I said. "Your husband also loved you enough that he was willing to die for you. No greater love has no man than this, that a man should die for his friends."

Belinda found herself in tears. "Not everything with Thomas was great. There were times I wish Jesus would take me out of this life to be with Him forever."

"You can still be with Him forever," I said, putting my hand on her shoulder to comfort her. "All you have to do is call out for Him. He will listen to you."

After I got home, I turned on YouTube and found an announcement for an event that will happen in Jerusalem four months from now. It was called the Foundation Festival. President Shepherd chose that date and that location to celebrate three and a half years of the founding of the Christian Commonwealth. Although Israelis and Palestinians have objected to this four-day festival taking place in Jerusalem, and headlined by various popular Christian acts, Shepherd had talks with the Prime Minister of Israel to assure him that things will be peaceful, and that those headlining the events will behave themselves. I looked at the headliners that were going to be at this event, and I wasn't impressed, to say the least. In fact, they all seemed like religious sellouts who only wanted to be at this event to curry favor with President Shepherd.

I turned on another YouTube video and found one of the 144,000 already saying that this event was going to mark a few events that have been foretold in Scripture. First, it would be the destruction of "Mystery, Babylon the Great" (the three religious leaders of the three main branches of Christianity) by "the ten horns of the beast" (namely Shepherd's ten Apostles). Secondly, it would be the time when the "two witnesses" in Jerusalem would finish their ministry, and then "the Beast that arises from the abyss" will overpower them and kill them, leaving their bodies dead and unburied in the streets for three and a half days. Thirdly, it will be the time when "the Beast from the Sea" will have one of its heads wounded, and that wound will be miraculously healed.

I tried to watch that video again after it was aired, only to find out that it has been pulled from YouTube. Nevertheless, I was ready to face what was going to

happen four months from now — that this will be the turning point where the world will see for themselves who the Antichrist truly is.

Chapter 20

It was now around the time of the Foundation Festival. I watched the live-stream of the final days of the "two witnesses" as they continued to minister to the people for all that it's worth. People were still being saved through their ministry. But many more were just gathering around, heckling and mocking the men who were tirelessly giving everything they had to make sure God's message was being preached. Most of the people there came for the Foundation Festival, which they believed would be the best four days for "celebrating God's work in bringing forth the Christian Commonwealth," though I sensed that a great deal of them only came because they knew the time of the "two witnesses" ministry was coming to an end, and they were hoping to see the spectacle of Shepherd finally doing something about those men whom they felt were responsible for all the judgments and all the deaths.

On the final day of their ministry, the "two witnesses" gave their final plea for people to turn to the Lord and "be saved from this untoward generation." And then suddenly at midnight, they just stopped. Not a single word came from their mouths afterward. They just stood, waiting for what Scripture has foretold would happen. The crowd cheered, knowing that their time was over, and that they were soon going to face "justice" from the President of the Christian Commonwealth himself.

I had a dream that night. I saw Graeme Franklin, Pope Adrian, and Ecumenical Patriarch Nikolaos gathered together in a festively decorated hotel room with the ten Apostles of the Christian Commonwealth as they were being honored for their contribution to the one-world government. Then, before any of the three men knew what was going on, they were all stabbed to death by the Apostles, who held daggers in their hands to slay the three of them where they stood. Their bodies were collected in bags and were sent to the crematorium to be burned. The Apostles all smiled at each other, knowing that they had rid themselves and President Shepherd of the three obstacles to his path of ascension to being the Supreme Potentate.

I got up from that dream a bit startled by the sound of my phone ringing. I picked it up and found that it was Pablo. "Hey, man, did you just dream that dream about Graeme, Adrian, and Nikolaos being stabbed to death by the ten Apostles?" he asked.

"As a matter of fact, Pablo, I did," I responded. "I would assume that you and the rest of the 144,000 all shared the same dream."

"Yeah, that really shook me," Pablo said, sounding fearful. "I guess Shepherd's getting rid of the competition so he could ascend to the throne of the world by

himself, huh?"

"Looks that way. Have you seen the live-stream of the 'two witnesses'?"

"Yeah, hombre, they were preaching with power one moment and the next they just stopped dead silent. I don't like possibly watching what's going to happen to them."

"I wouldn't want to be a witness to that either, but it's a moment that's really going to shape what happens next, besides the Antichrist getting his head wounded by someone."

"That makes me wonder: who would be angry enough with Shepherd to pierce a sword through his head or something?"

"Somebody probably is, Pablo. We may not know until it happens, but we should keep ourselves watching for when it does."

"Yeah, well, talk to you later, bro. Can't wait to see you again in person."

"You too, Pablo," I said before the call ended.

The first day of the Foundation Festival began. Surprisingly, though, it began with what seemed to be reverent silence.

Jerusalem had never been so quiet. Thousands filled the streets surrounding the Temple Mount, yet an eerie silence hung over them. Millions more watched through television broadcasts around the world. The two old men stood where they had stood almost every day for the past three and a half years. Their garments were worn. Their faces were weathered. Yet neither appeared afraid.

Before them stood David J. Shepherd. President of the Christian Commonwealth. Architect of the peace covenant. Leader of the most powerful political alliance the world had ever known. Behind him stood soldiers. But Shepherd had ordered them to lower their weapons.

He stepped toward the witnesses alone. One of the old men looked at him. "So," Shepherd said, "we finally meet."

The witness answered quietly. "We have met before."

Shepherd smiled. "No. You have spoken *about* me. You have condemned me.

You have accused me before the nations. But you have never stood before me."

"We have stood before the God who sent us."

The smile disappeared. Around them, cameras transmitted every word.

Shepherd glanced toward the crowd. "For three and a half years, these men have terrorized this city." The crowd murmured. "They have called down judgment. They have condemned your churches. They have condemned your leaders. They have condemned your hopes for peace." He looked back at them. "And still I showed restraint."

The second witness spoke. "You showed restraint because you were restrained."

Shepherd stared at him.

"You could not touch us until our testimony was finished."

For the first time, something flickered across Shepherd's face.

I could feel my stomach tighten as I watched the broadcast thousands of miles away. This would be it, the moment the world was watching for.

The witness continued. "You knew."

Shepherd stepped closer. "Do you know what I know?"

"We know who you are."

A murmur swept through the crowd.

Shepherd's expression remained calm. "Then tell them."

The witnesses looked toward the cameras. One raised his voice. "People of the earth, hear the word of the Lord!" Shepherd didn't interrupt him. "You were promised peace." Images of the Christian Commonwealth appeared on screens surrounding the plaza. "You were promised righteousness." The witness pointed toward Shepherd. "You were promised a shepherd." Then his voice thundered: "But you have followed a wolf."

The crowd erupted. Some shouted insults. Others screamed for the witnesses to be killed. Shepherd merely raised his hand. The crowd slowly became quiet.

"Three and a half years," Shepherd said. "Three and a half years I have listened

to you condemn everything humanity has accomplished."

"We condemned your counterfeit kingdom."

"I ended wars."

"You prepared the nations for a greater war."

"I fed the hungry."

"You made them dependent upon your table."

"I united Christians who had hated one another for centuries."

"You united them around another Christ."

Shepherd's eyes narrowed. "I rebuilt Jerusalem."

"You prepared Jerusalem for yourself."

"I gave Israel peace."

"You made a covenant you never intended to keep."

Silence. That accusation seemed different from the others.

Shepherd stepped within a few feet of them. "You believe I am the Beast."

"We do not believe it." The first witness looked directly into Shepherd's eyes. "We know it."

For several seconds Shepherd said nothing. Then he laughed. Not loudly. Almost sadly. "Look around you." He gestured toward Jerusalem. "Does this look like Babylon?" Neither man answered. "Look at the hospitals. Look at the schools. Look at nations that once slaughtered one another now working together. Look at Christians, Jews, Muslims, and people of every faith living under one peace." He spread his arms. "And you call this evil."

The second witness answered: "We call worship of the creature instead of the Creator evil."

Something changed in Shepherd's face. The warmth vanished. "You could have joined us."

"We belong to Jesus Christ."

"I could have given you a place of honor."

"We already have one."

Shepherd stared at them. "Where?"

The old man smiled. "In His Kingdom."

Shepherd turned away. Then the first witness spoke again. "David Joshua Shepherd." Shepherd stopped. "You have deceived the nations." He slowly turned. "You have clothed pride in humility." Shepherd's jaw tightened. "You have called bondage liberty." His eyes darkened. "You have called darkness light." Shepherd took a step toward him. "And you have permitted men to praise you with words belonging only to God."

"Enough."

It was the first time the world had heard David Shepherd raise his voice. The crowd fell completely silent.

The witness continued anyway. "You have been weighed." Shepherd's breathing became heavier. "And found wanting."

For a moment, nothing happened. Then Shepherd smiled again. It was a smile I had never seen before. There was no warmth in it. No compassion. No presidential charm. "You've finished?"

The witnesses looked at one another. Then upward. The first nodded. "We have finished our testimony."

Shepherd seemed almost surprised. He looked upward as well. Then back at them. "Yes," he whispered. "You have."

I suddenly understood. "No..." I moved closer to the TV screen. "No, no, no..."

Shepherd removed his jacket. Handed it to an aide. Then stepped toward the witnesses. One of the soldiers raised his weapon. Shepherd stopped him. "No." He looked directly into the nearest camera. "For three and a half years the world has lived in fear of these men." Then he turned toward them. "Today that fear ends."

The witnesses did not move. No fire came from their mouths. I knew

immediately what that meant. Their protection was gone. Not because Shepherd had defeated God. Because God had permitted their testimony to end.

The first witness whispered: "Into thy hand I commit my spirit."

Shepherd struck. Two gunshots. BLAM! BLAM! And for the first time... the witnesses fell.

And in that instant, the entire crowd erupted into praise. They cheered. They toasted. They sang. They exulted.

Shepherd turned and smiled. "Now may the Foundation Festival commence!"

And at once the air was filled with music. Loud worship music. It began with a rousing chorus of "Awesome God" which the people sang over and over, feeling that their God had come through for them, that this was Him finally meting out justice in the world for the people they had lost in the past three and a half years.

I just sat there and cried. It felt really crushing to my soul. Here the world was celebrating evil with music that praised God for being the architect of that evil!

My phone rang. It was Pablo. "Hey, man, you saw Shepherd just upright murder those 'two witnesses'?"

"Unfortunately. It was real sickening to watch."

"Yeah, that's what I felt too. Also makes me sick to watch the whole world celebrate their deaths."

"Revelation 11:8-10 says this: 'And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified. And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.'"

"Sort of like Christmas, but celebrating the work of Satan under the guise of a holy festival."

"Pretty much it in a nutshell. Not looking forward to watching the next three and a half days of their bodies lying in the street."

"But their bodies are going to rise up, according to the Scriptures."

"Yes, as it says in Revelation 11:11-13. 'And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them. And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.'"

"That would be interesting to watch, if the media heads would permit it. Anyway, got to do my daily ministry. Hope to talk to you soon."

"Yeah, stay in touch, Pablo," I said before the call ended.

I went through the rest of my day doing my daily ministry as well, though now I had to deal with rude people on the streets, driving around and blasting "Awesome God" out of their vehicles' sound systems and waving around SONS OF DAVID flags, some of them even going so far as to shout awful names toward me and give the one-finger salute. The electronic billboard continued to flash images of the Foundation Festival happening in Jerusalem, including occasional shots of the bodies of the "two witnesses" lying in the street, not given a decent burial. A good deal of the town seemed to be rejoicing over the deaths of the "two witnesses". Business people were having special discounts on their products to celebrate the occasion. People were giving gifts to each other as if we were celebrating Christmas all over again. It made true believers in Christ feel really sad and sick to see that this was how professed believers in the faith were acting, that all the love in the world had gone out the window in an instant, and that this was their true selves being exposed to the general public.

Tess Ketrel and her friend Martina Jensen visited me on the Town Green. They looked like they had just come from a funeral service, really devastated. "Hey, Vincent, have you seen what's going on in Jerusalem with those 'two witnesses' being killed by Shepherd?" Tess asked. "The world is celebrating their deaths by praising the Lord. I don't know what the world is really coming to with all this."

"I know what they're doing, and so do most of them," Martina said with some disgust. "They're rejecting the one true God and praising Shepherd as if he alone was the one true God all along."

"I told my Bible study group who you thought would be the Antichrist in one of our gatherings," Tess said. "Some were amazed, and some were skeptical, and some thought that I was listening to heretics preaching a false gospel."

"But you two believe that what I'm telling you is the truth," I said.

"I definitely believe it for sure," Martina said. "Have you ever seen how Shepherd carries himself around, like he thinks he's the second coming of Christ? He seems to believe his own press releases that he's truly the good guy in all this."

"You should continue to watch the festival live-stream, if you can," I said. "At the end of three and a half days, the 'two witnesses' will rise from the dead and will be taken up into heaven in a cloud."

"Wow, like really?" Martina said. "Guess I'll be on YouTube throughout the final day of the festival."

"But that will also be the final day for Shepherd, until he rises from the dead and proves himself to be the Antichrist," Tess said.

"Exactly," I said. "Not that I would want to watch Shepherd get murdered on air, but it would be the next logical step in the prophetic timeline."

"Anyway, I got news today that Graeme Franklin, Pope Adrian, and Ecumenical Patriarch Nikolaos had died recently of unknown causes," Tess said.

"From what I have seen in a dream, they were murdered by the ten Apostles of President Shepherd," I said.

"Murdered?" Martina said, sounding shocked. "My goodness, even the religious heads of Christianity are being offed by Shepherd."

"But that's to make room for Jonathan Prince to become the False Prophet of whatever religion emerges from this mess?" Tess asked, curious.

I nodded. "I've seen that in a dream too. David and Jonathan, like their Biblical counterparts, only they are truly working for the Devil."

"You better be careful when you say that, hon," Martina said. "Shepherd's got eyes and ears around us watching and listening to everything we say."

"I'm not worried about what Shepherd or his forces would do to me," I said. "I'm only more concerned about making sure more people come to know the true Christ."

"We'll still pray for you and your ministry, Vincent," Tess said, smiling.

For the next three days, the celebration continued. People were partying. People were praising. People were singing. And still the bodies of the 'two witnesses' lay dead in the street, unmoving, their bodies rotting in the sun.

And then in the middle of the fourth day, it happened. As people both live in Jerusalem and next to their TV screens watched, the bodies of the 'two witnesses' began to rise. The people who were the closest to the bodies were startled, and then began to scream as the 'two witnesses' stood upon their feet once again, looking as if they were apparitions that suddenly appeared on the scene. Then a voice from heaven said, "Come up hither," and Elijah and Moses rose up to heaven in a cloud while the crowd beheld them. And then in that same hour, there was a great earthquake, and a tenth part of Jerusalem fell, and in the earthquake were slain seven thousand men. The rest of the people were frightened, and gave glory to the God of heaven.

Some hours later, President Shepherd gave a speech to close out the Foundation Festival. "My friends... tonight, something ended. For three and a half years, two men stood in this city and proclaimed judgment upon the world. They condemned our peace. They condemned our unity. They condemned the Commonwealth we built together. And wherever their voices were heard, fear followed.

"Tonight... their voices are silent. I did not come to Jerusalem seeking bloodshed. God knows I desired another way. But there comes a moment when those entrusted with the protection of humanity must choose between endless fear and lasting peace. Tonight, I made that choice. And I would make it again.

"So let this Foundation Festival not end in sorrow. Let it end in hope. Let the bells ring. Let the music play. Let families embrace. Let every nation represented here tonight return home with this message: the age of fear is over. No longer shall prophets of doom dictate humanity's future. No longer shall extremists hold civilization hostage to visions of destruction. No longer shall we live waiting for the next judgment to fall from heaven. We will build. We will heal. We will unite. And together, we will create a world worthy of the God who gave it to us.

"Tonight, Jerusalem is at peace. Tomorrow... we begin again. Thank you. God bless Jerusalem. God bless every nation of the earth. And God bless the Christian Commonwealth."

Then suddenly, without warning, there was something that sounded like an explosion of thunder. The podium Shepherd was speaking from suddenly split

apart. Shepherd looked up at the sky as if he was expecting God or something from the heavens to speak to him. And then blood came from the socket of his right eye, and soon afterward he fell to the ground while the audience gasped.

Jonathan Prince, who was standing beside the President when he fell, held the dead body of Shepherd in his arms. "Oh, please, God, no!" he cried out. "Don't let our kingdom on earth end this way! Please bring David back to life!"

And soon the video feed went blank, and everyone was staring into their screens in shock and silence. I just sat there, feeling like another part of the prophetic timeline was being fulfilled. But I felt sorrow for the people who had to witness this happening before their eyes.

The leader of a united world had fallen.

And things were only going to get a lot worse.

Chapter 21

The next few days have been pretty much somber and silent. It was mostly news about how President Shepherd died, what had caused it, who had caused it, what the murderer's possible motive was, and so on. Some have claimed that it may have been a Muslim working for a secret underground cult. Some have been saying that it may have been a Jew who was upset with Shepherd for some unknown reason. Others have blamed it on a host of other potential minorities and religious and ethnic groups that have hated Shepherd for years and now the whole thing was payback for them. Still, it didn't change the fact that Shepherd had died, and was now going to be mourned as a martyr who died "building God's Kingdom here on earth", and that the whole world would now miss a man who worked on making peace with the nations.

I continued my street ministry, now feeling a little cautious about what to say. I had a feeling that if I said anything about David Shepherd being the Antichrist, I could be silenced and prevented from continuing my ministry. Yet I felt the truth of Shepherd burning inside me like "a fire shut up in my bones", as Jeremiah the prophet would say. I tried to comfort those who felt genuine sorrow for Shepherd's passing, but I was at a loss for what I could say to the people who were mourning. Should I tell them the truth? Should I pacify them with comfortable words that sound good but hide the true nature of the person they were mourning? I prayed to the Lord about this, and He told me to just pray for them to know peace through knowing Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. He would let me know when the right time it is for me to speak the truth about Shepherd.

Then, as I was ministering to the people on the street. I heard what seemed to be the final trumpet from the heavens. Then everybody heard the heavens speak: "The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever." This was followed by another set of voices saying, "We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth."

And then I saw that the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His testament. Then there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.

Everybody in town screamed and ran for cover as they felt the earthquake and saw the hail falling to the earth. There was nobody on the street laughing or

mocking me when this happened. It was as if God had made Himself clear that His true Kingdom was coming to earth in the next three and a half years, and that people needed to prepare themselves for His coming.

I got a call from Pablo at that point. "Hey, Vince, did you just see and hear what has happened in the heavens?"

"Yeah, I've seen and heard it. Though I'm still waiting to see what happens in the next three days, if President Shepherd rises from the dead."

"He's got to rise from the dead, man. He's the Antichrist. We see it. We know it. It's going to happen."

"What do you think you'll do if Shepherd doesn't rise from the dead?"

"Honestly, I wouldn't know what to do, but I can't doubt the truth that God has revealed to me, you, and the other guys of the 144,000."

"So do you think his rising from the dead is going to be public?"

"I don't doubt that either. Jesus' resurrection was only seen by a few select witnesses. Shepherd's resurrection is going to be a spectacle for the whole world to see, make Jesus look like a mere pretender or just a myth."

"I guess I'll just have to wait and see what happens."

"God will make sure nobody misses out on this. It will be the one event that will reveal who the Antichrist truly is."

"Maybe, or it will just make people double down on what they already believe about Shepherd, that he's truly a man of God."

"That could happen. 2nd Thessalonians says that, because they didn't receive a love of the truth that would save them, God will send on them a strong delusion, so that they will believe a lie and be judged."

"So are you going to watch the memorial service for David Shepherd that will happen in the next few days?"

"Hey, you can come over to my house and watch it with me and my family. Make the whole thing an event so we can get together."

"Sure, Pablo, I'll find a way to get there. Talk to you later, okay?"

"Vaya con Dios, man." Then the call ended.

A day later, an official press release came about President Shepherd's death. I got a copy of it from my sister Vivian, which I read as a PDF file on my computer. It read the following:

**CHRISTIAN COMMONWEALTH OFFICE OF THE VICE PRESIDENT
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Jerusalem

**PRESIDENT DAVID J. SHEPHERD DECLARED DEAD
FOLLOWING FOUNDATION FESTIVAL INCIDENT**

It is with profound sorrow that the Office of the Vice President announces the death of David J. Shepherd, President of the Christian Commonwealth, following the tragic incident that occurred during the closing ceremonies of the Foundation Festival in Jerusalem.

President Shepherd suffered a catastrophic injury while delivering his closing address before thousands gathered in Jerusalem and millions watching throughout the world. Despite immediate efforts by medical personnel, the President was pronounced dead shortly thereafter.

The precise cause of the incident remains under investigation.

Commonwealth security officials are conducting a comprehensive examination of the Festival grounds and all available video, forensic, and eyewitness evidence. At this time, citizens are strongly urged not to circulate rumors or unverified claims regarding the circumstances surrounding the President's death.

Vice President Jonathan B. Prince, who was beside President Shepherd when he collapsed, issued the following statement:

"Today the world has lost more than a President.

I have lost a brother.

David Shepherd devoted his life to a vision that many once believed impossible: a world in which nations could lay aside ancient hatred, Christians could overcome centuries of division, and humanity could stand together as one family.

His enemies called him dangerous.

History will call him a peacemaker.

Tonight I ask every citizen of the Christian Commonwealth to pray. Pray for David. Pray for his family. Pray for those of us who loved him. And pray that the work to which he devoted his life will not perish with him. David once told us that no darkness could extinguish hope.

We will prove him right."

Period of Commonwealth Mourning

Effective immediately, Vice President Prince has declared seven days of official mourning throughout the Christian Commonwealth.

All Commonwealth flags shall be lowered to half-staff.

Churches and houses of worship are encouraged to remain open for prayer and remembrance.

All nonessential government celebrations and public events are suspended until further notice.

Citizens are encouraged to gather peacefully in their communities to remember President Shepherd's life and legacy.

Continuity of Government

The Christian Commonwealth remains secure.

Civilian government continues to function.

Commonwealth defense forces remain at normal readiness, and there is presently no confirmed evidence of a broader attack against Commonwealth institutions.

Vice President Prince has met with the Ten Apostles, senior military officials, Commonwealth governors, and international representatives to ensure continuity during this period of mourning.

Citizens are asked to remain calm and continue their normal responsibilities.

A Legacy of Peace

President Shepherd entered public life during one of the most divided periods in modern history.

During his administration, he helped establish the historic peace covenant in the Middle East and oversaw the creation and expansion of the Christian Commonwealth into an unprecedented international partnership.

He guided humanity through war, famine, environmental catastrophe, and global unrest.

Throughout these trials, President Shepherd repeatedly called upon the peoples of the world to reject fear, embrace unity, and serve one another.

His final public words expressed that same conviction:

"Tomorrow... we begin again."

Those words will now become the Commonwealth's solemn commitment.

Tomorrow, we will begin again.

We will not permit violence to destroy the peace David Shepherd spent his life building.

We will not permit fear to divide the nations he helped unite.

And we will not permit death to have the final word over his vision.

Additional information concerning memorial services and the investigation into the President's death will be released as it becomes available.

The Commonwealth asks the people of every nation to remember President Shepherd and his family in their prayers.

May Almighty God receive His servant David into eternal peace.

May God comfort a grieving world.

And may God preserve the Christian Commonwealth.

I felt like they were all good words, but they also seemed scripted, as if they were generated entirely by AI that was fed information about David Shepherd.

My brother Charlie was wary about the increasing use of AI in our society, and I have a feeling that it may end up being used for what would become "the mark of the beast" when it gets implemented after Shepherd's resurrection.

For the next few days, I watched people testifying on YouTube of all the "good things" David Shepherd had supposedly done in their lives. One person said that by his missionaries bringing Christianity into her home country, she no longer had to fear terrorist attacks by Muslim extremists. Another person said that she was once struggling with fertility, but with the prayers of Shepherd she became the mother of several children, two of whom had gone on to be with the Lord. A third person said that they felt like they had no purpose in life after they endured what they described as "gender reassignment surgery", but now they are reaffirming their true "God-given" gender and living as a true person of God. A fourth person felt like they would have been trapped in an endless cycle of "providing pleasure" for adult men, but have now escaped that life and are living as a true Bible scholar who was on their way to becoming a pastor. Video after video of "testimonies" of how David Shepherd "improved their lives" came pouring in, making their critics doubt whether what they thought about him was ever true, whether they had been mistaken about him not being "a true man of God". But there were some that dared to criticize these "testimonies".

I honestly didn't know what to think. Some of them seemed genuine on the surface, but others felt a bit rehearsed or unnatural in some sort of way. Some of those people felt so encouraged by Shepherd's example as a Christian President that they were hoping to someday emulate that example and take over the role should the Christian Commonwealth last long enough to consider needing successors. That part was a bit ironic, since I noticed that democracy had slowly died over the past three and a half years, with politicians now having to swear "an Oath of Allegiance to Shepherd" or be removed from office. Everyone's voice seemed to no longer matter in public discourse — only the will and the word of President Shepherd and his Apostles.

I had a dream one night, which reminded me of the first dream that I had before this whole thing with David Shepherd began. There appeared a great wonder in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars. She, appearing to be pregnant, cried out as she was travailing in birth, and was in great pain to be delivered. There appeared another wonder in heaven: a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads. His tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth. The dragon stood before the woman who was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born. She brought forth a Man Child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron. Her child was

caught up unto God and to His throne. The woman fled into the wilderness, where she had a place prepared by God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and sixty days.

There was war in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon fought with his angels, yet they did not prevail, neither was their place found any more in heaven. The great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, who deceives the whole world. He was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, "Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death. Therefore rejoice, you heavens, and you that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has but a short time."

When the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman who brought forth the Man Child. The woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she would be nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent. The serpent cast out of his mouth water in the form of a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away by the flood. The earth helped the woman, and the earth opened its mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth. The dragon was angry with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, who keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.

That was where the dream ended. I woke up and realized that now was the time that Satan was cast out into heaven, and would soon make war with "the woman who bore the Man Child." He would raise up the two beasts, one from the sea, and the other from the earth, to bring forth his evil purposes to the world.

I visited Pablo at his family's house in Springville. His family was really friendly, and they hosted a big dinner for that particular Sunday, where we would get to see the world say farewell to David Shepherd, though Pablo and I knew what was actually going to happen. The memorial took place in front of the White House, with the ten Apostles sitting next to Jonathan Prince, the Acting President, who took to the podium that day. In front of them was the fiberglass coffin of David Shepherd, hermetically sealed so that his body would

remain preserved until the time of burial. Behind Prince and the Apostles stood a large gold statue of David Shepherd, adorned in a robe and carrying a shepherd's rod in his right hand with what appeared to be a scroll in his left. Pablo's brothers and sisters sat with us together on the couch, watching the TV screen, eager to see what was going to unfold during this memorial service.

After the song "Be Unto Your Name" was sung by the Christian Commonwealth Choir, Prince stood up and addressed the crowd that was gathered together. "My brothers and sisters... I have delivered many speeches in my life. I have spoken before presidents. I have spoken before kings. I have spoken before parliaments and congregations and assemblies representing nearly every nation beneath heaven. But I have never stood before a gathering with a burden as heavy as the one I carry today. Because today I am not here to speak about the President of the Christian Commonwealth. Today... I am here to speak about my friend. My brother. David.

"There are people who knew David Shepherd as a politician. There are people who knew him as a statesman. There are millions who knew him only as the familiar face appearing upon their television screens whenever our world faced another seemingly impossible crisis. But I knew the man. I knew the David who prayed before making decisions. I knew the David who wept when reports arrived of children dying in war. I knew the David who would remain awake long after midnight reading letters from ordinary citizens. I knew the David who could walk into a room filled with presidents and prime ministers... and afterward remember the name of the janitor who shook his hand. That was David.

"Long before there was a Christian Commonwealth, David believed something that many considered impossible. He believed peace was possible. He believed nations did not have to remain enemies forever. He believed Christians divided by centuries of bitterness could call one another brothers and sisters again. He believed faith did not belong merely within the walls of our churches. He believed faith could transform civilization. People laughed at him. People mocked him. People called him dangerous. Some called him a fanatic. Others called him a tyrant. And some... called him something far worse. But David kept walking. He kept believing. He kept serving. And eventually... the world followed.

"Under his leadership, ancient enemies sat at the same table. Nations laid down their weapons. Churches that had spent centuries condemning one another worshiped together. When catastrophe struck our forests, David called us to rebuild. When devastation struck our oceans, David called us to serve. When our waters became bitter, David called us to share. When darkness covered the earth, David called us to become lights. When suffering filled our hospitals, David

called us to compassion. And when violence threatened civilization itself... David stood before a frightened world and said: We will not surrender.

"That was the David Shepherd I knew. Not the monster his enemies described. Not the dictator his critics imagined. Not the Beast his accusers proclaimed him to be. But a shepherd. A servant. A brother. A friend. And yet... David was taken from us. I was standing beside him. I saw him fall. I held him in my arms. And I cried out to God. Some of you heard me. I begged God: 'Please don't let our kingdom on earth end this way.' I have asked myself many times since that terrible moment: Why? Why would God allow this? Why would God permit the man who had done so much for peace to fall at the very moment humanity seemed ready to begin again? I don't have the answer. But I know something about David. David would not want us gathered here merely to mourn him. He would want us to continue. His final words to the world were not words of anger. They were not words of vengeance. They were words of hope: 'Tomorrow... we begin again.' Tomorrow. David believed in tomorrow. And so must we.

"To those who supported him: do not despair. To those who served beside him: do not abandon the work. To the nations of the Commonwealth: do not allow grief to divide what David spent his life bringing together. And to those who hated him... I say this: we will not answer hatred with hatred. We will not answer violence with vengeance. We will honor David Shepherd by finishing what he began. There will still be peace. There will still be unity. There will still be a Commonwealth. And the dream David carried within his heart will not be buried with his body.

"Scripture tells us of another David. A shepherd boy. A man chosen from obscurity. A man who faced giants. A man who united a divided nation. Our David carried that name proudly. And like the David of old, he believed that giants could fall. War. Hatred. Poverty. Division. Fear. He confronted them all. And though David Shepherd has fallen... his vision has not.

"My friend once told us that darkness could never extinguish hope. Today I choose to believe him. And perhaps... perhaps God has not yet spoken His final word concerning David Shepherd. Perhaps there are mysteries in the purposes of God that none of us yet understand. Perhaps what appears to us today as an ending... is only the beginning of something we cannot yet comprehend. Until we know... we wait. We pray. And we continue.

"David... my brother... I wish I could speak to you one more time. I wish I could tell you how much your friendship meant to me. I wish I could tell you that the work is safe in our hands. So I will tell you now. We will carry it forward. We will preserve the peace. We will protect the Commonwealth. We will finish what

you began. And until the day when God permits us to meet again... farewell, my brother. Farewell, my President. Farewell... my David. May Almighty God receive you. May He remember your service. May He comfort those who loved you. And may the world never forget the shepherd who dreamed that humanity could become one flock. Amen."

Then as the Choir prepared to sing "It Is Well With My Soul", something strange happened. The golden statue of Shepherd began to glow. It seemed to be emitting an orange light from within the statue. The eyes of the statue glowed red. It looked as if it was full of pent-up rage. All the anger of a soul that was ready to have its way with the people.

An ominous voice spoke: "I will sing of mercy and judgment: unto you, O Lord, will I sing. I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way. O when will you come unto me? I will walk within my house with a perfect heart. I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes: I hate the work of them that turn aside; it shall not cleave to me. A froward heart shall depart from me: I will not know a wicked person. Whoso privily slanders his neighbor, him will I cut off: him that has a high look and a proud heart will not I suffer. Mine eyes shall be upon the faithful of the land, that they may dwell with me: he that walks in a perfect way, he shall serve me. He that works deceit shall not dwell within my house: he that tells lies shall not tarry in my sight. I will early destroy all the wicked of the land; that I may cut off all wicked doers from the city of the Lord."

People watched in fear as fire fell from the sky and burned up three of the Apostles, causing the others to shudder with fear.

"You do not need to fear, my subjects," the voice spoke again. "Only those who are disloyal to me need to fear and tremble before my presence. I am the Lord your God, and there is none like unto me. I kill, and I make alive, I wound, and I heal, and there is none who could deliver out of my hand. I swear that, as I live forever, your lives will be spared if you will bow down and worship me. I said that tomorrow we begin again. This is tomorrow, and we will begin again. This kingdom will be greater than all the kingdoms of the world. Whoever overcomes will inherit all things, and I will be their God, and they will be my son. But the fearful and unbelieving and all rebels and liars shall have their place in the lake of fire, which is the second death."

People watched in horror as the skies above turned dark and ominous above the White House. Lightning came from the sky and struck the ground around the funeral site. One lightning bolt struck the fiberglass coffin, shattering it in pieces while leaving the body intact.

Then slowly people began to see movement in David Shepherd's body. It was a

finger, then a head nod, and then the eyelids opened, and people saw that he rose up from the ruins of the coffin and sat upright. His right eye was still darkened, but the rest could see for themselves what had happened.

David Shepherd was alive again. He had risen from the dead.

Chapter 22

For several seconds, nobody spoke. Even Pablo, his family, and I just sat there before the TV screen stunned.

Then Jonathan Prince slowly fell to his knees. Others followed. Hundreds became thousands. Across the lawn before the White House, people bowed before the man who had been dead.

Pablo whispered beside me, "Vince..."

I couldn't answer him. On the television, someone near the camera could be heard weeping. "My God..." I didn't know whether the man was calling upon God in heaven. Or the man sitting upright among the ruins of the coffin. And that frightened me more than the resurrection itself.

Shepherd got up from the remains of the coffin and smiled. He had some difficulty getting up, as his right arm was now limp, but he managed. Everyone noticed a change in him besides the darkened right eye and the limp right arm. There was something fearfully disarming about him. It was as if a powerful spirit had entered him and made its home within his body. It was a spirit that demanded that people worship him and declare him as lord. Everyone in the audience fell to their knees, awestruck by the spirit that they felt had emanated from him.

Shepherd walked toward Jonathan Prince, who remained on his knees before him. The surviving Apostles stared in silence. David looked over the thousands gathered before the White House. Then he looked directly into the cameras.

"My beloved people... You knew me as President David Shepherd. You knew this union of nations as the Christian Commonwealth. Those names served their purpose. But that age has ended." He stretched out his arms. "For three and a half years, we attempted to build a Commonwealth upon the principles of God. We tolerated division because we called it liberty. We tolerated competing authorities because we called it democracy. We tolerated competing religions because we called it tolerance. We tolerated rebellion because we called it conscience. And where did it lead us?" He paused. "War. Judgment. Death."

His darkened right eye seemed almost black against his face. It was as if he was looking into the souls of everyone present, and beyond that, into every person who was watching his resurrection live on camera.

"I died because the old world could not endure the coming of the new. And yet... here I stand." The crowd remained silent. "The God whom you worship has

vindicated me before the nations. Death itself could not hold me. And therefore the work we began shall no longer be restrained by the institutions of a dying age." Shepherd raised his hand toward the golden statue behind him. "No longer shall we be merely a Commonwealth. A commonwealth is an alliance. An agreement. A collection of nations cooperating so long as cooperation remains convenient. But what we have built is greater than an alliance. We are one people. One government. One purpose. One faith. One destiny."

Jonathan slowly looked up at him. Everybody in the audience did. They were anticipating the next words that would come out of their lord's mouth.

Shepherd continued. "From this day forward, the Christian Commonwealth shall be known throughout the earth by a new name. **The Dominion.**"

Silence. Then scattered applause. Shepherd smiled.

"Not the dominion of America. Not the dominion of Europe. Not the dominion of any race, tribe, denomination, or nation. **The Dominion of God** upon the earth."

Jonathan whispered the words to himself. "The Dominion..."

Shepherd heard him. "Yes, Jonathan. The Dominion." His voice became stronger. "The age of nations is ending. The age of denominations is ending. The age of competing kingdoms is ending. There shall be one Dominion beneath heaven. One Dominion under God. And there shall be one shepherd over it."

That last sentence made my blood run cold. Shepherd was now twisting the very biblical imagery that helped inspire his name. Shepherd is no longer presenting himself as merely a leader under Christ. He is progressively occupying Christ's place.

That's when Pablo and I knew that the Antichrist was here.

Pablo's sister gave me a ride home to my apartment building. Pablo came along for the ride to see that I would get home safely. All around, I could see people shouting, rejoicing, and singing praise songs because of Shepherd's resurrection. They were glad to see that their king had risen and that he was now going to "make God's Kingdom a true Dominion upon all the earth," as they were hoping and praying Shepherd would do.

I got out once we approached the front of the building. "By the way, thanks for

letting me come over, Pablo," I said. "I enjoyed the company of your family."

"Hey, *me casa su casa!*" Pablo said. "Maybe we will meet again sooner than we expect. Have yourself a good day, bro."

"You too, Pablo, and God bless," I said as I watched Pablo and his sister drive off.

I went into my apartment and turned on my computer. On Facebook I was reading news about the Christian Commonwealth officially being renamed the Dominion of God, which some commenters humorously abbreviated as "D.O.G." and has been memed to death with images of dogs with the caption "In D.O.G. We Trust". Some found that to be terribly disrespectful to "our Supreme Potentate David J. Shepherd" and even threatened to report those memes to Facebook to have them removed and their posters banned from the platform. Some out of respect have just used the name "the Dominion", and have even created their own logos for the new one-world government.

There was also news that Jonathan Prince, the former Acting-President, was going to replace Graeme Franklin as the leader of the new religious order that would replace the Christian Commonwealth Church itself. This new order would be called the Shepherd's Chapel, and it would have only the doctrines of the faith that Shepherd would dictate and Prince would have enforced throughout all its churches. As the High Reverend of the Shepherd's Chapel, Prince has condemned all other faiths as being anathema and orders that all people of faith would either submit themselves to this new faith or be branded as heretics and executed.

From this a new cult of followers has emerged: the Sons of David. I have seen YouTube videos of this cult. These people were branded with a mark of SOD on their foreheads to indicate who they belonged to. At first these people chose to bear that mark that would show to the world who they would be loyal to, but now there has been talk about how this mark should be mandatory for all citizens of the Dominion to bear, along with a special biochip that would be installed in their right hand, a chip that would make transactions legal only through special scanners and digital readers, and ultimately replace Global IDs. This would also be accompanied by life-size statues and digital images of Shepherd that would be given the ability to speak and cause as many as would not worship the image to be killed. Some have speculated that these statues and images would be given a special proprietary form of AI that would respond directly to the people who bore the biochips in their right hands. Others say that it would be more supernatural than technological.

However, there was one law that would be mandatory for all people that I

noticed in my search for information — the Global Sunday Law. This would make Sunday church attendance at a registered Shepherd's Chapel church mandatory for all people, and the failure to do so would be punishable by death. This would be implemented as soon as the "mark of loyalty" was enforced on all people to accept, with the alternative being death. I googled a link to the article about the Global Sunday Law and sent it to Daniel Wickman via text. Hopefully he would see it and know what he ought to do when this happens.

I continued my street ministry as usual, but started warning people about the coming "mark of the beast". I quoted Revelation 13:16-18, which read: "And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their foreheads: and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six."

People laughed at me, mocked me, called me a heretic, and even ordered someone to arrest me and silence me for good. But I wouldn't flinch at even the slightest snicker. I continued, adding Revelation 14:9-12: "If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name. Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus."

Tess and Martina heard me preach, and came up to me one day. "Is it true, Vincent, that Shepherd is going to implement the 'mark of the beast' as it says in the book of Revelation?" Tess asked.

"According to sources on the Internet, he certainly is, Tess," I answered. "It's also going to be combined with worship of the Beast's image and a Global Sunday Law that will force everybody to attend church at a Shepherd's Chapel on Sunday."

"Oh, man, Shepherd's really gone too far," Martina said. "It's like what Daniel has been preaching about, only worse and on a global scale."

"But what exactly can be do about it?" Tess asked.

"Start preparing to go underground as soon as possible, because once the 'mark' is in place, nobody will be able to buy or sell anything unless they have it," I answered.

"Even online purchases?" Martina said. "That's some incredible overreach."

Tess sighed. "We might as well mobilize our little group to prepare for the worst, Marty. The sooner we can get things ready when the 'mark' is distributed to the masses, the better."

"I agree, Tess," Martina said. "The Antichrist wants to starve out those who won't follow him. We got to make sure we and other Christians don't fall for his trap."

"But where can we contact other groups that we can share and trade things with each other?" Tess asked. "There's got to be some underground group that's already making preparations for those who will not take the 'mark'."

"See if you can get a hold of anyone who's part of Rapture Enterprises," I answered. "It may be a long shot, but who knows, maybe they know a network of groups that are already working out the trade system for believers."

"Might as well try that, Tess," Martina said. "What else have we got to lose at this point?"

"We'll do a search for anyone related to Rapture Enterprises, trust me," Tess said, smiling.

I got home to my computer and found that Daniel Wickman sent me an email, saying that he had checked out the link and that he and his SDA group are already making preparations for when the "mark of the beast" and the Global Sunday Law are put into effect. He also gave me a list of contacts that I could share with other believers that were all part of the Underground Co-op. They were working secretly with people from Rapture Enterprises to get a trade system going that would require an Internet connection that could never be traced. I thanked Daniel in a return email for the information and said that I would be praying for him.

After that, I turned on a YouTube video and saw that the new High Reverend Jonathan Prince was performing signs in the presence of Shepherd, such as calling down fire from heaven in the sight of men. People were amazed by the mighty works of Prince that they were begging for him to appear in one of their

Shepherd's Chapel churches to perform those miracles before them. Prince said that not only would he perform them, he would also give that same power to as many as would desire to wield that power for the cause of the Dominion. Many who were of Pentecostal and Charismatic churches before they were folded over into the Shepherd's Chapel, including Eric Gaskell of Westville Assembly, were eager to receive this power for themselves, which would mark them as true disciples of Shepherd.

This part really concerned Valerie, who told me about it recently while also telling me that she left Westville Assembly completely and had gotten herself into a Bible study group with former members of that church who also left because of Eric and Miriam Gaskell and their increasingly obvious "pro-Shepherd" preaching. I told her I was glad that she got out, but I also told her to prepare herself for the coming "mark of the beast". She said that she will get herself ready as she was in the process of quitting her full-time job.

Belinda called me recently and told me that she had read the link that I had sent her about the coming "mark of the beast". She was becoming a Christian once more, this time with her three daughters, who did their own research about the "mark of the beast" and found it very invasive and disturbing. I gave her a list of contacts from the Co-op that she and her daughters can get in touch with, and she said that she and her daughters will check it out as soon as possible.

I started praying for the Lord to give me direction as to what to do when the "mark of the beast" is finally put into effect. He told me just to "wait and watch", and that He will direct my steps as far as what to do. Though I felt no peace in what the Lord said, I thanked Him for responding to my prayer and I went to sleep, hoping not to dream of anything to come except for the coming of the Lord's true Kingdom.

Chapter 23

I watched on TV as High Reverend Jonathan Prince made his first official speech in that role. He was no longer in a business suit and tie. Instead, he wore a simple, elegant priestly robe with no special adornments. At least that was the appearance he was going for, to make himself look less like a pompous religious leader and more like a mere shepherd guiding his flock. David Shepherd stood beside him, watching the High Reverend deliver his speech with utmost delight.

"My brothers and sisters throughout the Dominion... grace and peace be unto you. There has been considerable discussion in recent days concerning a symbol that has appeared upon the foreheads of many who proudly call themselves the Sons of David. Some have called it a brand. Some have called it a mark. And some—particularly those who continue spreading fear and division among us—have dared to call it... the Mark of the Beast. My friends... I stand before you tonight to tell you what it truly is. It is not a mark of slavery. It is not a mark of fear. It is not a mark of condemnation. It is a seal. The **Seal of David**.

"For centuries, humanity has used seals to identify ownership, authority, authenticity, and covenant. Kings placed their seals upon their decrees. Governments placed their seals upon their laws. And Scripture itself speaks repeatedly of those who are sealed unto God. A seal answers one simple question: To whom do you belong?

"Tonight, every person upon the earth must eventually answer that question. We have lived through fire. We have lived through poisoned seas. We have lived through bitter waters. We have lived through darkness. We have endured torment. We have watched death sweep across nations. And through every catastrophe, one man stood before humanity and said: Do not be afraid. David Shepherd. When nations divided, David united them. When religions fought, David reconciled them. When the world hungered, David fed it. When civilization trembled, David strengthened it. And when death itself struck him down... death could not hold him. I was there. I saw him fall. I held his broken body. I begged Almighty God not to allow our kingdom to end. And God answered. David lives.

"How much greater a sign do we require? How much more clearly must heaven speak? The man whom his enemies called a Beast was vindicated before the entire world. The man whom false prophets condemned was restored to life. And now that man offers humanity something extraordinary: Not merely citizenship. Belonging.

"Beginning today, the symbol previously worn by the Sons of David shall receive its official designation throughout the Dominion. It shall be known as

the **Seal of David**. The shield signifies protection. The sword signifies authority. And the name of David signifies the shepherd beneath whose care humanity has finally become one flock. One people. One Dominion. One shepherd. And I want to make something absolutely clear tonight. No one is being asked to worship a symbol. The Seal possesses no power by itself. It is simply an outward testimony of an inward allegiance. When you receive the Seal of David, you declare before your family, your community, your nation, and the entire world: *I belong to the Dominion. I stand with David. His peace is my peace. His kingdom is my kingdom. His enemies shall not divide me from him.*

"Some have asked: 'High Reverend Prince, why should I need a seal? Isn't loyalty something that exists within the heart?' Of course it is. But faith that never manifests itself outwardly is merely sentiment. Every covenant has its sign. Every citizenship has its testimony. Every allegiance eventually asks us to stand and be counted. And now... humanity shall be counted.

"The Seal will initially be available through every registered Shepherd's Chapel throughout the Dominion. Those wishing to receive it may choose its placement upon the forehead or right hand. No distinction of wealth shall exist. No distinction of race. No distinction of nationality. No distinction between powerful and powerless. The executive and the laborer shall bear the same Seal. The wealthy and the poor shall bear the same Seal. The citizen in the greatest city and the farmer in the smallest village shall bear the same Seal. Because before David... **we are one.**

"In the coming months, the Seal will also be integrated into the Dominion's economic identification system, replacing the outdated Global ID infrastructure with one universal standard. One identity. One economy. One Dominion. There will be those who tell you this is dangerous. There will be preachers standing upon street corners quoting ancient prophecies. There will be frightened voices telling you that receiving this Seal means abandoning God. Ask them one question: What have their prophecies given humanity except fear? David has given us peace. David has given us unity. David has given us hope. And David himself was given back to us from the grave. I know whom I believe. I know whom I saw dead. And I know whom I saw rise.

"So tonight I will not merely preach about the Seal of David. I will receive it. Before the entire world."

I watched as Prince stepped away from the podium. An attendant approached carrying a small ceremonial instrument bearing the Dominion emblem — a sword and a shield with SOD imprinted on it. Prince extended his right hand. "David... my President... my brother... my shepherd... I stood beside you in life. I mourned you in death. And now that you have returned to us... I pledge myself

to your Dominion."

Shepherd smiled in approval as he watched the Seal being applied. Prince raised his right hand toward the cameras. "Behold... **the Seal of David.**"

The audience erupted. Shepherd simply watched and smiled. Prince waited until the cheering subsided. Then he spoke once more. "Tonight, I have made my choice. Soon... every person upon the earth will be called upon to make theirs. Choose unity over division. Choose peace over chaos. Choose the Dominion over the dying kingdoms of the past. Stand with the shepherd whom heaven itself has vindicated. Receive his Seal. Bear his name. And let the whole earth become... one people, one Dominion, under one shepherd. May David guide us. May the Dominion endure. And may Almighty God bless all who bear the Seal."

The audience clapped again, praising God and Shepherd for the speech and the demonstration. Soon I watched as everyone in the crowd lined up to bear the same mark. Medical assistants worked alongside the clergy who applied both the Seal of David and the biochip that would mark them all as "the Sons of David", forever and for life. Then they came before Shepherd and bowed and swore their allegiance to him, saying that they would follow him all of their days. One of the women even brought a bottle of perfume which she poured on Shepherd's feet, which he accepted with great pleasure. He smiled at the woman, and she went away looking as happy as everyone else, knowing that their new lord and savior has accepted them as his own.

I turned off the TV feeling disgusted and hurt. Here the "mark of the beast" was being introduced to the general public, and the reception was approval from the masses, knowing that they would willingly give their lives for Shepherd. It made me realize that we have reached a turning point, and that while at first the "mark" was being offered voluntarily, it wouldn't be long before it became mandatory and enforced among the people.

I got a phone call from Pablo. "Hey, amigo, did you just see the public address by the False Prophet on TV?"

"Yes, sadly."

"Oh man, I worry for the people who think this 'seal of David' is a holy thing that they must accept to remain loyal to him. You know they just doomed themselves to being in the Lake of Fire forever."

"I'm very aware of that, Pablo."

"So what do we do now? Soon it's going to be a thing that everybody will have

to take or get their heads chopped off!"

"So far now it's only voluntary. But I wouldn't put it past the Antichrist and the False Prophet to make it mandatory or else face execution."

"I've got to make sure my family is ready for when they're going to have to take it or else. Ain't no way nobody in my family is going to fall for that!"

"Just continue to pray for direction, Pablo. I'm sure the Lord will tell you what to do when the time comes."

"Okay. Well, you stay safe, hombre, you hear?"

"Gotcha. Take care of yourself now."

Soon there were advertisements on TV and the Internet saying, BEAR THE SEAL OF DAVID, with the promise that everyone who bears it will gain free access to a digital Image of David that can be downloaded to their phones, computers, and smart TVs. This image would be interactive with the user and answer all their questions, but it required the user to declare lifetime allegiance to Shepherd. Those with no access to technology can also have a free paper-thin Image of David delivered to them at no cost, which they could also interact with by asking whatever questions were on their minds. Statues of Shepherd would be installed in various town squares and town halls for people to kneel and worship in private and public ceremonies. Shepherd's Chapels had the Image of David put into their sanctuaries in addition to or in place of the cross.

I found this to be disturbing precisely because nobody is screaming. Nobody was being dragged anywhere. People were excited. Lines stretched around Shepherd's Chapel churches. Social media was filling with: **#MarkedForDavid**, **#OneDominion**, and **#MyShepherd**. People uploaded pictures of their marks. Christian celebrities received theirs publicly. Politicians received theirs. Business executives received theirs. And then I saw someone familiar: Eric Gaskell. He received his mark during a ceremony at Westville Assembly, when he allowed the "Get The Seal Of David" people into the church sanctuary. He told his congregation in a video: "As for me and my house, we belong to David." That sounded like a deliberate corruption of Joshua 24:15 to my ears.

I watched a ceremony closely on YouTube. Before receiving the Mark, each person had to make a profession: *"I acknowledge David J. Shepherd as lord of the Dominion. I pledge my mind, my labor, my possessions, and my allegiance to him. His kingdom is my kingdom. His enemies are my enemies. His word is my*

law." And then after the Mark was applied, the person would bow to an Image of David. That's when I understood: the oath was what made this different from the old Global ID. This wasn't merely identification. This was worship.

Then over time I noticed something. Physical money was slowly being phased out. Businesses were no longer accepting cash cards or anything physical as transactions were entirely done through the biochip implants. That caused banks to get rid of their ATMs as cash was no longer being distributed through them. I found this out when I tried to pay for something that I needed with my cash card at a store, only to find that in place of a card scanner, there was a hand scanner, and there was no way I could put physical money into the automatic cashier machine. I tried to get access to my bank accounts over the phone, only to be told that I now need a biochip implant to gain access. Even online purchases were no longer valid unless somebody got a biochip implant at a registered Seal of David kiosk in a Shepherd's Chapel church.

I felt myself being squeezed to death by the Antichrist now forcing the people of the world to go completely cashless and rely on biochip implants. What was I to do? I asked God what I should do now that I can no longer use physical cash or cards when I heard my phone ring. The call came from an unknown number. I thought that it was potential spam, but I answered it anyway. "Hello?"

"Am I speaking to Vincent Geordi of the 144,000?" a digitally garbled voice asked.

"Who is it calling?"

"You don't need to know my name, but I'm of the Sons of Issachar. We have understanding of the times, what Israel ought to do."

"Okay, I'm listening."

"You must be having problems trying to make recent purchases because the world's businesses have gone cashless, is that correct?"

"Why do you need to know? And how is it that you do know?"

"As I have said, we have understanding of the times, what Israel ought to do. Eventually the Antichrist will turn his attention upon Israel, defile the sacred Temple in Jerusalem, and break the seven-year peace treaty that he made with them."

"That I'm pretty much aware of, if not all the details."

"We would like for you to come to Jerusalem to see this matter for yourself, how David Shepherd will punish Israel for not obeying the Global Sunday Law."

"But the Global Sunday Law is not in effect yet."

"It will be. Soon everybody will have to go to church on Sunday. Those who refuse to do so will face Shepherd's wrath and be executed."

"And you know all this because...?"

"We have understanding of the times. That's all you need to know of us."

"So what am I supposed to do now that I can't make purchases with my cards or cash?"

"Trust in God. He will provide. We will be in touch with you soon about your trip to Jerusalem." And then the call suddenly ended.

That call made me feel disturbed. How is it that these people called "the Sons of Issachar" knew about me and what was currently going on with me and the world? I first thought that they were people who were part of the mysterious Dark Web that I keep hearing about, how they just randomly and secretly took people away and put them in these torture chambers for private users to vote on how they should be killed or something equally gruesome. But why would they call themselves "the Sons of Issachar" if that was the case? Was it all some sort of a trap set up by agents secretly working for Shepherd in the hope of getting rid of the 144,000 by any means necessary? Or were they some part of Rapture Enterprises that even J.R. Barzillai isn't fully aware of?

Another call interrupted my thoughts. I answered it. It was Valerie. "Hey, Vince, do you know that the world's gone cashless now? Nobody but people with those implants can buy or sell anything, even online."

"I'm fully aware of it, Val. You having problems?"

"Yeah, I can't use my cash or cards for anything now. I'm up a creek without a paddle. Why, what else is going on with you?"

"Just some mysterious caller I had on the phone, part of a secret group called the Sons of Issachar."

"Sons of Issachar? Never heard of them. Pastor Walter constantly mentions them in his sermons, though."

"I don't think Pastor Walter was thinking of these guys who just call people out of nowhere and tell them what's going to happen to Jerusalem."

"Why, what have you heard?"

"Just that the Antichrist is going to defile the Temple and break the seven-year peace treaty. Nothing further beyond that. No details or anything."

"You should be careful, dear. Who knows what might happen if you get mixed up with those kind of people?"

"I'm entirely in the Lord's hands at this point. They said they're going to call me back regarding a trip to Jerusalem that I'm going to make."

"That you're going to make? That sounds really dangerous to me, hon!"

"Yeah. Who knows, I might just be abducted and taken to who knows where."

"Well, I just want to let you know that I'm currently with Tess' group of Bible students. We're going to get ourselves ready to hook up with the contacts from the Co-op. Pray for me, will you?"

"I will, Val. You take care of yourself, and tell Tess and her friends that I said hi."

"You too, dear," Valerie said before the call ended.

Meanwhile, I was watching YouTube videos of Jonathan Prince demonstrating his power to the masses, amazing the people with his ability to call down fire from heaven. He told people who had the Seal of David that they could also perform miracles that would convince others to take the seal for themselves and experience the same power that the early church once had. I noticed that Shepherd had replaced the positions of the three Apostles that were killed during his resurrection, so there were again ten Apostles all answering to Shepherd, and they all now were bearing the Seal of David.

But I also heard from YouTube videos that the Shepherd's Chapel churches were now getting strict in their doctrines. There was no alcohol, no tobacco, no marijuana or any kind of drugs, no red meat, no female pastors, women answered only to their husbands, fathers, or male guardians and couldn't speak in church, no LGBT members were allowed, no sex outside of "God-ordained" heterosexual marriage, women were to dress modestly at all times, children had

to obey their parents at all times, the man had absolute authority in the household, pastors were to be obeyed and never questioned, all people had to give 10-percent of their income as tithes, even when they couldn't afford to do so, A whole host of things that made extremist churches before the Christian Commonwealth existed seem tame by comparison. A good deal of people didn't mind, but some did feel like the Shepherd's Chapel was taking things a bit too far. Unfortunately there seemed to be no escape for them as they were now bound by oath to Shepherd and to their pastors to obey everything mandated by the Shepherd's Chapel churches.

I quickly ran out of food and was wondering what I was going to do to restock my kitchen when I heard a knock on the door. I opened it and found nobody was there, but left in front of my door was a shopping bag full of fresh fruits and vegetables. A note on top of the bag said, "Leave the bag outside the door when it is empty. God is watching over you. J.R.B." I didn't ask any questions; I just thanked God and filled my refrigerator. Not everything was what I wanted to eat, but I still ate it anyway because I didn't know where else to get more food. I left the bag outside the door when it was empty, and the next thing I knew, when I looked outside the next time, the bag was gone.

A few days later, when I ran out of food again, another shopping bag appeared with fruits and vegetables. Again it had the same note, with the same initials, J.R.B. I was glad that God was looking out for me, but I wished and prayed that other people going through the same hardship of not being able to get groceries for lack of a biochip would also benefit from the same miracle that happened to me. I again filled my refrigerator, left the empty bag outside, and it was gone again. Mysterious, just as how God tends to work.

Then one day, as I was preparing to go to sleep. I got a call on my phone. Again the caller was unknown. But I sensed in my spirit that it was the "Sons of Issachar" again. "Hello?" I asked.

"It is time for you to make that trip," the caller said before immediately hanging up.

I just turned off my phone, shrugged, and went to sleep. Only this was a sleep that took much longer than I expected to wake up from.

Chapter 24

I had a dream during the time that I was asleep. In my dream, I saw an angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people. He was saying with a loud voice, "Fear God, and give glory to Him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters."

There followed another angel, saying, "Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication."

The third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascends up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receives the mark of his name. Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus."

I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, "Write, 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth'."

"Yea," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them."

I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of Man, having on his head a golden crown, and in His hand a sharp sickle. Another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to Him that sat on the cloud, "Thrust in Your sickle, and reap: for the time is come for You to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe." And He that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.

Another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, "Thrust in your sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe."

The angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. The winepress was

trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horses' bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.

I saw another sign in heaven, which was great and marvelous: seven angels having the seven last plagues, for in them the wrath of God is complete. I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.

They sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, "Great and marvelous are Your works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are Your ways, You King of saints. Who shall not fear You, O Lord, and glorify Your name? For You only are holy: for all nations shall come and worship before You; for Your judgments are made manifest."

After that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened. The seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, having their breasts girded with golden girdles. One of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who lives for ever and ever. The temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from His power. No man was able to enter into the temple, until the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.

I woke up from my dream and found myself sleeping on a different bed in a totally different location. The room was lit only with candles, which made it hard for me to look around and see where I was taken. A young man who looked a little like Pablo, but with curly hair and a beard, was sitting in a chair watching me as I awakened. "Oh, Hallelu Yah, your eyes are now opened," the man said.

"Who are you, and where am I?" I asked.

"My name is Jehu ben Hanani, and where you are is a secret place known only to our group called the Sons of Issachar," the man answered.

"You're the people who called me," I said, realizing. "Why have you brought me here? What is my purpose?"

"Your job will be to help lead the people of Israel to the special place that Yahweh has prepared for His people, where they will be cared for for a period of 1260 days," Jehu said.

"Are there any other people of the 144,000 who are here to help?" I asked.

"Several have been chosen, Vincent," Jehu answered. "We will do our best to

help get the people to safety, but this operation is entirely in Yahweh's hands"

Another man entered the room. "Is our guest awakened, Jehu?"

"Yes, Kepha, he awakened some minutes ago," Jehu answered. "Are we going to get him up to speed as to what's been happening since he was asleep?"

"Tell him only what he needs to know, Jehu," Kepha said. "We got our hands full trying to deal with the events as they are pouring in."

"How long have I been asleep?" I asked.

"A few days, due to the trunk that we drugged you with," Kepha answered. "The world as you once knew it is slowly getting ready for the time period known as the Great Tribulation."

"How bad is it getting?" I asked.

"President Shepherd, through his High Reverend Jonathan Prince, has just now enacted the Global Sunday Law," Kepha answered. "People are now being killed just for not going to church on Sunday."

"But aren't you Jews free to worship Yahweh on the Sabbath?" I asked.

"Our freedom to worship is slowly being taken away, Vincent," Kepha answered. "The Dominion of God will no longer honor the agreement Israel made with them three and a half years ago that they would give us the freedom to worship Yahweh according to what the Scriptures teach."

"That's terrible, Kepha," I said, feeling some sympathy. "Daniel the prophet spoke about a covenant that will be confirmed with many for one seven, but in the middle of that seven, sacrifices and offerings will cease, and there will be an abomination that causes desolation."

"We are fully aware of that," Kepha said. "We are Messianic Jews who are students of Scripture. There are prophecies written in the Tanakh that have yet to be fulfilled, and we are very sure that Yahweh will fulfill them in the due time."

"Is there anything I can do in the meantime before Shepherd comes to defile the Temple and set up the 'abomination of desolation'?" I asked.

"It would be better for you to stay here until the time comes when Yahweh will need us to do our part to get the people of Israel to safety," Kepha said. "The less anyone else knows where you are, the better."

"I'll keep an eye on Vincent, make sure he stays safe in here," Jehu said.

"Am I a prisoner?" I asked.

"No, but we will have to restrict your freedom around here," Jehu answered.

"We will treat you well while you are here and let you take care of your personal needs, but you must stay put until we are called to act. Is that clear?"

I nodded, realizing that I was pretty much trapped in this mysterious place until the appointed time. "I'll do my best to comply, Jehu."

Jehu showed me around the hideout of the Sons of Issachar. It looked like a cross between a primitive tech center and a small library, with books lining metal shelves and flat computer screens on wooden desks. There was a kitchen, a bathroom, and several other rooms that were being used as bedrooms. Everybody looked like they were in their twenties and thirties, and all were wearing clothes that made them look like freedom fighters or terrorists, whatever people thought of them. All of them also had the seal of God on their foreheads, which made me realize that I was in the company of the good guys.

Though I wasn't given direct access to a computer or a phone, I was given at least some knowledge of what was going on in the world. People with the Seal of David were now suffering from painful sores all over their bodies. They looked really terrible, as if they had gone through a large patch of poison ivy and sumac. They were scratching all over like crazy, finding no relief for the pain. It was then that I realized it must have been the First Vial Judgment that had struck the people who took the "mark of the beast" and worshipped his image.

There was also news of people of other religious groups that were being massacred by a group of people known only as "the Warhounds". Apparently Shepherd got so strangely enamored with his loyalists being called DOGs that he decided to incorporate it into his special military force that was trained and prepared for the day when they would eliminate people of other religious groups by force, though very few among the loyalists really cared. In fact, most of them were glad that the people of other religious groups were finally being dealt with in what they called "the judgment of God" that they were celebrating. Besides them, LGBT people were singled out for destruction by the loyalists themselves, with Prince saying it's their "sacred duty" to eliminate "God's enemies".

I wept from hearing the news of how extreme Shepherd's loyalists were becoming toward people who weren't like them. It was as if the gloves were finally off with these religious people who always hated LGBT people and those

of other religions, and they were just looking for the opportunity to unleash all their hatred in a way that was sanctioned by their religion and government. Now that they have what they finally wanted, it's now open season for all their murderous rage.

Jehu noticed my tears. "Hey, are you all right?" he asked.

"I'm hurt by how evil people are getting to be at this time, and they all claimed to be Christians at one point," I whimpered.

"It's okay," Jehu said, trying to sound comforting. "You're not alone in feeling like your fellow believers have betrayed you. Yeshua said that it would happen during these times. As iniquity abounds, the love of many will grow cold."

"I knew it would happen, but I didn't expect the magnitude it would reach among those who follow Shepherd," I said, trying to wipe away the tears.

"Yahweh will come and set things right in the world, my friend," Jehu said. "You just got to trust in Him and His timing. We've only got three and a half years left before He does return."

Then came the news everyone was expecting: President Shepherd was coming to Jerusalem to offer a sacrifice on the altar within the Holy of Holies in the new Temple. Jews in Israel had mixed reactions to this news. Some were glad that the President of the Dominion was going to offer something as a worthy sacrifice to the God of heaven, while others were questioning his motives for doing so and what he was planning to sacrifice on the altar. Nevertheless, it got the Sons of Issachar all fired up as to what they were planning to do next in regard to the prophetic timeline that the world seemed to be following.

The day of Shepherd's visitation was a total spectacle. He arrived in Jerusalem going through the Via Dolorosa, riding on the back of a donkey's colt, and wearing a robe similar to that of Jesus. People greeted him with palm branches and coats strewn in the road, preparing the way for the new king of the world to make his way to the entrance of the Temple. The people shouted and sang, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Glory to God in the highest!" There were also protestors in the streets, raising their fists and shouting angry insults at Shepherd. But Shepherd was already too lost in himself, receiving all the adulation for his coming into Jerusalem, to really care about what his opponents thought of him. He felt like everything in that moment was meant for him and him alone.

The Sons of Issachar sensed that it was time to get me to the Temple to see for myself what Shepherd was going to do there. A television crew followed Shepherd as he entered into the outer court and then into the first sanctuary. A group of priests tried to stop him. "It is not for you to enter into this sanctuary, President Shepherd, but only for the priests," they called out. "Get out, or else God will come down and force you out!"

"Oh, really?" Shepherd said, sounding amused. "I happen to be the very God whose Temple you have built for! I will do what I want in my own house! I will change the times and law as I see fit! This place belongs to me, and I will offer a sacrifice in this house that will put an end to all sacrifices and offerings. Then you will know who the one true God is, and you will bow to me and confess that I alone am Lord! Bring me my knife and my offering!"

Someone handed Shepherd a large ceremonial knife while another brought in a large pig that had been freshly washed. The pig squealed as his handlers tried to keep it steady while Shepherd plunged the knife into its neck, causing it to pour out blood. Then Shepherd took some of the blood and sprinkled it on the altar, causing the handlers to shrink back in hysterics. Finally, with the animal completely gutted, Shepherd ordered the handlers to throw the whole pig into the altar and burn it as a sacrifice.

People watching the sacrifice going on inside the Temple on their phones were outraged by the disgusting spectacle. "Did you just see that?" someone cried out. "Shepherd had sacrificed an unclean animal on the altar as a burnt offering."

"It will be his blood next that will be on the altar!" another person shouted.

Shepherd came out of the Temple and found himself greeted by an angry mob of Jews who were all disgusted at the sight of his abominable offering. "DEATH! DEATH! DEATH TO THE ANTICHRIST!" they all shouted.

"You have all violated the covenant!" Shepherd shouted back. "My seven-year peace treaty with your country has been rescinded! Now you will let me and my party leave in peace before you..."

"You're not getting out of this alive, Shepherd!" someone in the crowd cried out. Everyone among them shouted similar threats to Shepherd while he stood helplessly trapped, unable to go anywhere.

Just then, another voice broke out, "People of Israel, allow your enemy passage from this place, for though he is currently impotent to carry out his threats at this point, you would do well not to be here when he is ready to retaliate against you for your rebellion against him."

I turned to see who it was that spoke. It was Micah Eretz. He was now speaking with such authoritative power that it made the crowd gathered against Shepherd back away from him almost instantly.

Shepherd looked at Micah, seemingly grateful. "I'm glad that there's at least one of you who can..."

"You are only being released because the true God of heaven has declared it," Micah thundered. "The time of your destruction is yet to come in the next three and a half years. For now, you will let the people of Israel flee to the mountains without any interference."

"And what if I don't?" Shepherd asked, challenging Micah.

"Then you and your people will suffer much worse than the plague that has befallen them," Micah said. "Your seas and your rivers will turn into blood, and the sun will scorch you to the point where you will beg God for the mercy that you failed to show your opponents."

Shepherd snorted as he left the Temple grounds with his entourage and camera crew while the crowd allowed him to leave peacefully.

"Now I will speak to all of you who have not yet taken Shepherd's mark," Micah said. "Flee to the mountains as quickly as you can. There will be people who will assist you and deliver you to the special place God has prepared for you, to take care of you for one thousand two hundred and sixty days. Let no one who desires safety return back here to get anything they left behind, for these are the days of great tribulation that, if the days weren't cut short, no flesh would be saved, but for the sake of the elect, these days will be cut short."

Some people in the crowd objected and questioned Micah, but everyone listened and heard. The Sons of Issachar came with school buses to deliver as many people as possible to the safe place God had prepared for them in the mountains.

"I never thought I'd be here to witness the defilement of the Temple with you," a familiar voice said.

I turned and saw who it was that stood beside me. "Pablo! You're here! But how?"

"I was one of the people whom the Sons of Issachar had taken some time ago, amigo," Pablo said, smiling. "I asked God what was going to happen with my family, and He told me that He'll take good care of them."

"Oh, man, I'm so glad you're here, even under the circumstances," I said, giving Pablo a hug. "Now we need to help get the Jews safely to the place where God will take care of them."

"You mean Petra?" Pablo asked.

"Petra? How did you know?" I asked, sounding a little surprised.

"It just came to me as I was praying this morning, witnessing the events that would lead to this moment," Pablo answered.

"Well, wherever it is God's taking them, we might as well join them and see what we can do to protect them in their escape," I said.

"Hurry, get in and I'll drive you there," Jehu said as he directed Pablo and me to an old car that was sitting in the street. I got in the back, and Pablo got the front seat as Jehu took the wheel and headed away from Jerusalem.

"Any telling when the DOGs are going to come out to play, Jehu?" Pablo asked as we got some distance out on the road that was leading toward Petra.

"They should be coming when God lifts the plague of boils from Shepherd's military forces, Pablo," Jehu answered.

"And God told you specifically that He was going to do this?" I asked.

"The Sons of Issachar are more aware of the times than you realize, Vincent," Jehu answered.

"But why should God lift the plague of boils on the DOGs?" Pablo asked. "Why not let them continue to suffer until the time for His Son's return?"

"God's ways are not our ways, neither are His thoughts like our thoughts," Jehu answered. "He sees the end from the beginning. There's no plan, counsel, or strategy that can ever succeed against Him."

"If He's brought us this far, I'm sure He can bring us all the way to the end...or to that moment where we might meet with Him in eternity," I said.

"We got a lot to work to do at Petra once we get there," Jehu said. "Now hang on, I see a couple of DOG cars chasing after us."

Sure enough, two DOG military vehicles were giving chase to us, trying to get us to pull over. We just continued to drive on and pay no attention to them.

"Unless God's going to do a miracle in the next minute, I'm going to be running out of gas!" Jehu said as he noticed the fuel gauge on the dashboard with its needle getting closer to E.

The three of us prayed, hoping that God would rescue us. Soon there was a sinkhole that appeared in the road behind us, and the two DOG vehicles ended up falling into it. The sinkhole then instantly disappeared, making the road look like it was when we passed by that spot.

Pablo and I looked back. "Oh, praise the Lord, hallelujah! We got those DOGs off our backs!" Pablo said, sounding pleased.

"Score one for the good guys," I said, agreeing with the sentiment.

Chapter 25

Soon we all arrived at Petra, with a good deal of Jews brought in either by bus or by helicopter. The people who rode by helicopter reported that they have been chased by Shepherd's DOGs in the air and even had been fired at, but God miraculously protected them, causing the DOG missiles to pass safely through their helicopters without harming anyone but other DOG helicopters. The place looked amazing, with architecture that hasn't been disturbed for centuries, yet there was also a tech center, a group of small huts, and a landing strip for incoming aircraft. I had a feeling that Rapture Enterprises was behind the funding for getting Petra ready for Israeli refugees fleeing the country from the Dominion takeover.

Micah Eretz greeted everyone as they entered the place. "Welcome, my friends, to your home away from home, where you will be safe for the next three and a half years while the Antichrist does his worst to eliminate his enemies and prevent anyone from coming to know the true God and His Son Jesus Christ through faith. I know that a good deal of you are not yet believers in Yeshua ha Mashiach, but hopefully you will come to know Him as your Lord and Savior during your time here so that, when the Lord comes at the end of the Tribulation, you will be ready to receive Him as He will receive you."

"David Shepherd thinks he's the true ruler of the Kingdom of God that he has built upon the earth," one of them said. "Why should we wait for another Messiah to come?"

"Shepherd has built a false Kingdom of God based on a false doctrine that God has given Christians the right to have dominion over everything on the earth, including other humans," Micah said. "Many have believed that if they could build that Kingdom here on earth before the Lord comes, then the Lord will be pleased with them and crown them as kings so that they can rule over creation with Him. But they built that Kingdom apart from God's true desire to have that Kingdom be built within us first, so that we would receive Him when He comes to build that Kingdom here on earth by Himself. The Lord Himself says, 'My Kingdom is not of this world, for if it were of this world, I would have soldiers fighting for Me so that I would not be delivered to the Jews, but now My Kingdom is not from here.'"

"Are you saying that we Jews are responsible for killing Yeshua?" another asked, sounding suspicious.

"All of us are responsible for doing that, both Jews and Gentiles," Micah answered. "We are all sinners born into sin, and nothing we can do, not even our good works, can merit any favor with God that He would save us from our

deserved punishment, which is eternity in the Lake of Fire. So in the fullness of time, God sent His only begotten Son Yeshua, born of a virgin, fully man and fully God, to be the full payment for our sins, past, present, and future, so that we can be made right with God, receive eternal life, and be adopted into His family as sons and daughters. And if you will allow me, I will show you through the Scriptures how God spoke of His coming years before it took place."

While Micah was busy talking with the refugees about Jesus by showing them Old Testament Scriptures that spoke of Him, Pablo, Jehu, and I were looking around while talking with each other. "Well, we made it to our place of refuge, thanks to Yahweh's intervention," Jehu said.

"And I really thought things were going to get so bad that God was going to open up the earth to swallow up Shepherd's army," Pablo said.

"The Bible does say when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will raise up a standard against them, although Pastor Walter likes to adjust the comma so that it reads, 'when the enemy comes in, like a flood the Spirit of the Lord will raise up a standard,'" I said.

"Speaking of the enemy, I could feel a rumble of a mighty army coming straight for us, guys," Jehu said. "Look out beyond the city!"

Pablo and I looked. There, in the distance, we could see the approach of tanks slowly heading in our direction. All of them bore the SOD mark on them, indicating they were Shepherd's forces.

"Looks like Shepherd isn't finished with us yet," Pablo said.

"More like he wants to finish us while we're all gathered in one place together," I said.

I could hear the sound of cannons firing and rockets launching. As the three of us watched, the missiles came so close to us we feared that we would be hit by them, only for the missiles to just harmlessly explode without doing any damage.

"The Spirit of Yahweh has lifted up His standard, men," Jehu said, smiling. "Notice how the missiles are being stopped before they hit us."

"Ay carumba! Any closer and we'd be blown off the map!" Pablo said, sounding surprised.

"You said it, Pablo," I said, agreeing with him. "God's got us protected out here."

We watched as more missiles and rockets were being fired. Yet none of them reached their targets. They just continued to explode harmlessly like the last volley.

"When are they going to learn that nothing they throw at us can touch us?" Pablo asked.

"I don't think they'll ever learn," I replied. Then I felt a tremor in the earth. "Hold on, something else is happening!"

As the three of us watched, trying to keep ourselves steady, the earth opened up and swallowed up the whole army of tanks as they got so close we could see the faces of the soldiers driving the tanks, looking like they were ready to panic. And then suddenly the earth sealed itself up, and it looked like there was never an opening in the ground in the first place.

"Hallelu Yah!" Jehu shouted. "Oh, what a joyful moment to give praise unto Yahweh! He has caused our enemies to fall into the pit!"

Pablo and I chuckled. "It's too bad we didn't bring any popcorn with us on this trip. It would have been our turn to just sit back and watch," Pablo said.

"Just make sure the next time that it's unsalted," I humored.

I got a good look at the tech center that was installed in Petra. There were banks of computers with flat-screen monitors, all hooked up to solar-powered generators and satellite modems for accessing the Internet. I felt like I was a young man playing with my first computer back in the late 1970s when I was in a residential school. I gave one of the computers a test run to see what it could do. Sure enough, it got me access to all parts of the world — even some places that I wouldn't think I would be able to access, like the White House in Washington, D.C. Just for fun, I checked a private room where I saw Shepherd talking with his Department of War cabinet member Harry Patterson. I used the supplied headphones to listen in on the conversation.

"Damn!" Shepherd shouted in anger. "I thought we would be able to destroy the Jewish refugees that have fled to Petra. What in the world was stopping our approach?"

"It must be the trick of the enemy, Excellency," Patterson said. "They must have some unknown advanced technology hidden within the premises."

"We can't let them go in or out of the place until we completely destroy them," Shepherd said. "Prepare for a missile strike that will annihilate everyone in Petra and the surrounding area. We will see whether their advanced technology will be able to stop something that will blow them entirely off the map."

"I'll have it ready to be launched as soon as possible," Patterson said, bowing his head before they got up to leave the room.

I closed up the camera view of the room and took off my headphones. I got up from my seat and headed to Micah. "Excuse me, but we have a desperate situation on our hands," I said as I approached him. "Shepherd has ordered a missile strike against Petra, and we need to be ready for it as soon as possible."

"A missile strike," Micah said calmly, as if he was expecting that to happen. "Come, let us pray for God's hand to be upon us in our time of need."

As Micah and I prayed together, I could sense in my spirit the approach of a large deadly missile that was headed straight for us from an unknown location. It had enough power to vaporize us and all our equipment many times over. I knew from that point that we wouldn't be able to stand a chance of surviving this.

The missile felt it was coming dangerously close. So close that we could actually read the labels on that thing. But I held my eyes shut and continued to pray.

And then suddenly I felt the ground shake, and I could also feel incredible heat. As I opened my eyes, I could see that everything around us was on fire. Yet surprisingly, we were still alive. Not a single thing was touched by the missile's explosion. It was like we were the three men in the furnace, walking around in the flames, yet never feeling the fire touch us.

Micah must have sensed what I was thinking. "Thank you, Lord, for sending the Fourth Man to be with us through the flames," he said, calm and steady.

"Praise the Lord!" I finally shouted. "You've taken us through the fire and the flames!"

Around us, people were either rejoicing or screaming, thinking that they must now be dead and in the depths of Gehenna, burning for all eternity. Some of them tried to comfort those people, saying that they need not fear the flames, for the fire has no power over us. But they were still not convinced.

And then suddenly another miracle happened. We could feel the cool fresh downpour of rain as it washed over us and put out the flames, until we were all

standing together without even a single burn or scar upon our bodies or clothes.

"HALLELU YAH!" the people shouted with great rejoicing.

Pablo just came to me at that moment. "Hey, amigo, did you just see what happened?" he asked, sounding excited. "I thought that we would all be goners at that moment, but God came through for us again!"

I smiled. "Yes, he did, Pablo. May His name be blessed forever."

As we all settled into our new home in Petra, we got used to the routine that would take place here. As Micah had prophesied, manna fell from the heavens for us to eat, and water came from a rock for us to drink. I have never tasted manna before, so I was pleasantly surprised when I ate my first piece of this heavenly bread. It matched the description that I have read about in the Bible: wafers made with honey. I ate as much as I could of my first serving of manna, then afterward dumped it on the ground and watched the remains melt away. Already I felt so satisfied that I could continue working through the rest of my day.

I continued to monitor all events that were going on in the world through my computer workstation in the tech center, and that's when I sensed in my spirit that another of the Vial Judgments took place: all the seas and oceans have turned to blood. I checked YouTube and found videos of people finding dead sea animals on the shore. Ships were all stuck in the sea, unable to move through the thick blood. Water refineries were no longer operating to harvest fresh water. Things looked so miserable that the people who took the Seal of David could no longer enjoy swimming or taking long walks on the beach. Fortunately the rivers and lakes and springs of fresh water remain untouched, but it was only a matter of time before the Third Vial Judgment would strike and render those waters undrinkable to the masses.

Then, just when I thought I was getting comfortable with the new way of life out in Petra, I received a call on the new phone. "Hello?"

"Vince, are you there? It's me, Valerie."

I was surprised to hear her voice again. "Val! Where are you?"

"I'd rather not tell you exactly where, but I'm with Tess' underground group as part of the Co-op."

"How are things going with you now?"

"Not as great as I would expect, but at least I'm still alive. I do miss seeing you in Westville, back when we were going to church together, and also during those times at Dunkin'."

"I miss those times, too. Have you heard from anyone in your family?"

"My husband's dead, sorry to say. He took the Seal of David and worshipped his image, but he failed to show up at church on Sunday, so I heard."

"Oh, that's too bad. I'm sorry to hear it too."

"I haven't heard from my stepchildren, though I still pray for them. Maybe they've also gone underground somewhere; I don't know."

"I could look for them and see where they went. I may not be able to call you back, but I'll do the best that I can."

"Oh, thank you, sweetheart. I knew that you were still thinking of me, even out in the middle of nowhere. At least I know you're safe at Petra."

"Better not tell anyone else where I am. I wouldn't want you to compromise your own safety."

"Gotcha. Well, I'm going to leave you alone now. Miss being with my dogs; they're such good friends."

"Miss being with you too, Val. Talk to you later."

Sometime after that call ended, I got another one. "Hello?"

"Hi, Vince, it's me, Daniel. I'm surprised that I got your new number."

"I'm just as surprised as you are. What's going on with you?"

"My SDA group's been busted for violating the Global Sunday Law. I'm currently in hiding with another group of believers."

"I'm sorry to hear that, Dan."

"I know. I had a feeling this was going to happen. But I'm not proud of the fact that this is one thing that's coming true before our eyes."

"The Jews didn't like having their own freedom of worship being trampled on."

"So do you think you can arrange for me to join you wherever it is you are?"

"I'm not sure I could do that. But I will see what I can manage."

"Do whatever you can. Just know that I'm still praying for you, okay?"

"You stay out of sight and trouble now, you hear?"

"You know me, Vince. We've gone so far back in our lives that you ought to know what I'm going to do."

"I'm praying for you too, Dan. May God be with you."

"Also with you."

I soon got another call. It was another female voice. "Vincent?"

I recognized the voice. "Belinda! Where are you?"

"Somewhere hiding with my three daughters. We won't tell you where."

"Good, the less anyone knows, the better. How is my other sister Vivian doing?"

"She was executed for not taking the Seal of David."

I could feel my heart getting heavy. "Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. When did that happen?"

"Not long ago. She was wondering where you were when I last heard from her."

"So now they're starting to execute people who won't take the Mark?"

"Yes. Guillotines have been set up near the kiosks. It's no longer a choice. You either take the Mark or get killed."

"But if you get killed as a believer in Christ, you'll be with Him in heaven."

"I know, but I really don't want that to be anytime soon."

"We don't always choose the times when we step into eternity. Sometimes God chooses that moment for us."

"I've seen people with the Seal of God getting executed. They look like they're at peace with their decision. I wish that I could have that peace right now."

"If you're sealed by God, nothing can take you out of His hand. You're His forever."

"Would you pray for me and my daughters, that we would have that peace when the time comes for us to give our lives?"

"Sure, Belinda. I'll do it with you right now."

Belinda sounded relieved. "Oh, thank you, Vincent. I could see God working in your life to bring us to this very moment."

I smiled. "You're my sister. I love you, and I always will."

After I was finished with the last phone call, I got back to my computer and looked up the names of Valerie's stepchildren to see if I could find them anywhere. Unfortunately I couldn't find their names on the Internet anywhere. Maybe they were also hiding in an unknown location, trying to keep themselves from being discovered by the DOGs who were sniffing around, looking for people who haven't taken the Seal of David. Maybe they were already taken into custody and executed for their disloyalty to Shepherd. I promised myself that I would not stop searching for any evidence of them being somewhere, or what their final fate would end up being, hoping that the news would put Valerie's mind at ease.

I checked for news on the Internet about guillotines being used at Seal of David kiosks, and I found articles and pictures of them being set up outside Shepherd's Chapel churches as a deterrent for people who refuse to take the Mark. The pastors said they didn't like having to use them, but they were necessary tools for making sure people would comply with the global law of having the Seal of David on their persons and being implanted with the biochips. The pictures of the guillotines made my stomach turn. I have heard for many years how the Antichrist would have people's heads chopped off for refusing to take the Mark, but I would never imagine that the Antichrist would come from the unlikeliest of places — from among Christians themselves. And now those who once called themselves Christians were praising God and Shepherd for "dealing with their enemies" by making sure they would be "sent straight to hell" for their disloyalty to Shepherd.

I could feel tears streaming down my face at the thought of what used to be my

fellow Christians turning on me. Jesus did say a time would come when those who killed you would think that they were doing service to God. Now that time has come, and I could imagine Jesus' heart breaking at the sight of His own children being harmed by those who once bore His name with pride. I wanted God to take me out of this life as soon as possible so that I wouldn't bear the shame of having to see more Christians being betrayed by former professors of the faith. But I just didn't have the heart to try taking my own life. God wanted me to stay, hopefully to be somebody's final witness before they make the decision that could seal them for eternity with Him or doom them to eternity apart from Him.

Chapter 26

I woke up in Petra hearing Jewish refugees singing praises to God. Some were believers in Yeshua now. Others weren't. Some were still angry. Some were frightened. Some were asking why God allowed Israel to be deceived by Shepherd in the first place. That's when I realized Petra wasn't simply a refugee camp anymore. It was becoming a spiritual community. It was like my only year being at Southville Assembly with its pastor Quincy Tobias, whom everybody fondly called Pastor Q, and how lively that church was in comparison to Westville Assembly during my first few years there.

I went to hear Micah preach to the Jews gathered together for their morning meal. It reminded me of Pastor Walter sharing a word from the Bible to the men of Westville Assembly that gathered together for their monthly breakfast meeting. The only difference was what was on the menu for the meal. In addition to physical bread from heaven, Micah was feeding them with the Living Bread of Heaven.

"God did not bring Israel into this wilderness merely to hide her. He brought her here to speak to her," Micah told the congregation. "For too long its people were scattered all over the nations, being without a home, both physically and spiritually. Israel thought that by building a new Temple to replace the one that was destroyed in 70 AD, God would make His home among His people once again. But now God wants to make His home among us within the temple of our bodies. You who were once far from God are now made near unto Him through the blood of His only begotten Son. For He is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of partition between us. He has abolished in His flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances; for to make in Himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that He might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby. He came and preached peace to you who were afar off, and to them who were near. For through Him we, both Jews and Gentiles, have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

"So I pray to you, consider not the temple that was made with hands, which David Shepherd, the Antichrist, defiled with his abominable act, but consider yourselves as the new temple God wants to dwell in. Consider not the Kingdom that was built with hands in the hope that God would return to His people and rule over them, but consider the Kingdom He wants to build within you, a Kingdom that no human hands can ever build or destroy. Yeshua says that the Kingdom of God comes not with observation, nor will they say, 'Look here,' or, 'Look there,' for, behold, the Kingdom of God is within you. And if you are truly born again, as Yeshua told Nicodemus, then you can truly see the Kingdom of God for yourselves. It is like leaven that a woman took and hid within three

measures of meal until it is all leavened. It is also like a mustard seed, which is the least of all seeds, but it grows into a big tree that even the birds of the air will build their nests in.

"As you feed today on the bread of heaven, may you also feast on the Living Bread of Heaven, which a man may eat thereof and not die. And the food that He offers is His flesh, which He has given for the life of the world. Whoso eats His flesh, and drinks His blood, lives in Him, and He in them, for His flesh is food indeed, and His blood is drink indeed. He has willingly given Himself for you and for all men so that your sins may be forgiven. He is the one true Sacrifice that has put an end to all sacrifices and offerings for sins. May you all partake of that one sacrifice made for all time for all sin, that you may dine in Him in the glorious feast that is coming when He returns in the next three years to set up the true Kingdom here on earth."

I sat and cried listening to Micah's words. I could see that more Jews were becoming believers in Christ by the Seal of God appearing on their heads. But I could also see that there were more Jews who resisted, still stubbornly holding onto their old ways as if they meant more to them than receiving Christ. I prayed that God would break through that wall of resistance and show them that He wants to rescue them from the path of dead works and lead them onto the narrow road that leads to life.

I sat at the computer workstation in the tech center, looking through pictures of my sister Vivian that I managed to access from my old computer at home. I looked at all the various stages she went through in her life: how she went to college, how she got married, how she had a child through her first husband, the grief she bore when her first husband died, how she found happiness again when she married the second time, and most importantly, how she became a believer in Christ after all those years of people witnessing to her, including myself.

I sit alone thinking about Vivian, looking through all the old photographs. I began to wonder what her final moments were like. Was she afraid? Did she cry? Did she pray? Did she call out for him? Most painfully: could I have done something to save her? Give her one more moment of life before it was brutally taken away by the DOGs? Could I have avenged her for the crime she had committed in the eyes of the world, for believing in a God that truly loved her in spite of who she was?

"I hope I am not disturbing you at this time, Vincent, but I sensed in my spirit that you may need my company," another voice broke in.

I turned and saw that it was Micah. He looked somber, as if he was experiencing firsthand all the pain that I was suffering.

"I was thinking about my sister and what has happened to her," I said. "And all I can do is wonder why I am sitting here eating manna while my sister got her head cut off."

"You're only feeling what is called survivor's guilt, my friend," Micah said. "I know what it's like to lose friends and family. My road to where I am now with the Lord wasn't an easy one to travel. And even now, I pray to the Lord for strength to carry on and finish His mission."

"But why couldn't it be me instead of her?" I asked. "She was out there in the world, bravely enduring everything it had to throw at her, and I'm just sitting here behind a computer waiting for my time to come."

Micah looked as if he had something profound that he wanted to say, but realized nothing he could say would make things easier for me.

"I don't know why God allowed Vivian to finish her race while yours continues." He sat beside me. "But yours continues. Your time will come when you will prove yourself worthy of the noble name you carry. Trust that God will bring you to the moment when you will honor Him with everything you have."

I looked at Micah and nodded, understanding. My story wasn't finished yet. Not until the Lord decides that He will receive me up in glory.

I had a job to do. And here was the place where I must carry it out.

Some months later, as I was monitoring all the video feeds in the tech center, I came across what was evidence of the Third Vial Judgment being poured out: the lakes, rivers, and fresh springs of water were all turning to blood. People tried to turn on their taps, only to find blood dripping out instead of water. There was no drinkable water anywhere except from the rock at Petra.

Already this was having catastrophic effects. People were dying from dehydration. Bottled water was disappearing from shelves. Riots began around remaining supplies. Hospitals couldn't function normally. Agriculture began collapsing. And yet I go outside, and still the rock continues to pour out fresh water.

I couldn't understand it at first. And then I turned and saw an angel standing next

to me. He said, "You are righteous, O Lord, which are, and were, and shall be, because You have judged thus. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and You have given them blood to drink; for they are worthy."

I heard another out of the altar say, "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are Your judgments."

The angel suddenly disappeared. Then I realized what the angel said. God was avenging His saints for the blood that had been shed by the people who bore the Seal of David and worshipped his image. Vivian was one of the martyrs. She became one of the souls that were found under the altar, who was crying out for vengeance, and was told to rest until the number of her fellow servants, who were killed as they were, should be filled.

There was no rejoicing in that moment. There was only acknowledgment that God remembered the souls under the altar.

Pablo caught me looking at my computer workstation screen at the news of bloody rivers, lakes, and springs. "Let me guess...another one of the Vial Judgments has struck," he said.

I nodded. "The world must be suffering now that they don't have a drop of water to drink unless it was already bottled."

"But what does that mean for people who have the Seal of God?"

"I honestly don't know, Pablo. Maybe God has protected them by giving them fresh water that has been miraculously harvested from the blood."

"Hmmm, that must not taste very good, harvesting water from blood."

"Well, God can turn water into wine, and the two witnesses with the same power could turn blood into water. Who knows, maybe the same miracle can happen for our people."

"I feel sorry for those people who have taken the Seal of David, though I probably shouldn't."

"My sympathy for them ended the day they started killing Christians in the name of their god. They're now at the mercy of the one true God at this point."

"Any news from our fellow brothers among the 144,000, Vince?"

"As far as we know, they're still tirelessly evangelizing to the world, bringing as

many as do not know the one true God to the saving faith of Jesus. Not one of them is lost yet, and their missions have been successful."

Pablo sighed. "Thank God that He's still got His hands on us. With more people coming to the true faith, there's only going to be two types of people left: those who have the Seal of God, and those who have the Seal of David."

"Indeed, and there's going to be a war at the end of all this. A war that the SODs don't even have a chance of winning."

Pablo chuckled slightly. "It's a good thing that we're on the winning side."

Micah directed everyone at Petra to the giant projection screen to watch a public address from President Shepherd. Strangely, apart from the blackened right eye socket and the limp right arm, Shepherd looked totally unaffected, as if the spirit that was now inhabiting his body was keeping him vital and healthy through the Vial Judgments despite the pain his subjects were now suffering.

"My beloved people of the Dominion... tonight, I speak to you during an hour of profound suffering. Several days ago, we watched in horror as the waters of our seas became as blood. Tonight, that catastrophe has spread. Rivers that sustained civilizations for thousands of years have changed. Reservoirs upon which millions depend are no longer usable. Wells have become contaminated. Fountains have ceased to provide drinkable water. Across the world, men, women, and children are thirsty. And once again... the prophets of fear are celebrating. They stand in their hiding places and tell you that this is judgment. They tell you that your children thirst because God is angry with you. They tell you that the oceans became blood because you followed me. They tell you that your rivers have become blood because you received my Seal. And they tell you that if you abandon the Dominion, somehow their God will have mercy upon you.

"My friends... do not believe them. For three and a half years, these people have predicted our destruction. They opposed peace. They opposed unity. They opposed the Commonwealth. They opposed the Dominion. And when their words failed to divide us... they called us apostates. When that failed... they called me the Antichrist. When that failed... they called me the Beast. And now, as the world suffers, they look upon your pain and dare to tell you: 'Your God did this to you.' What kind of God poisons the water of a thirsty child? What kind of God destroys the rivers He supposedly created? What kind of God demands worship through terror? I reject such a God. And so should you."

Shepherd paused. His good eye stared directly into the camera.

"For too long, humanity has been taught that suffering must simply be accepted because heaven has ordained it. A hurricane destroys your home? God's will. A plague takes your child? God's will. A famine destroys your crops? God's will. Your water becomes blood? God's judgment. No. No more. If heaven will not protect humanity... the Dominion will.

"Tonight I am declaring a Global Water Emergency throughout every territory under Dominion authority. Effective immediately, all remaining potable water reserves are being placed under centralized Dominion administration. Private hoarding of drinkable water is prohibited. Military and emergency personnel are being deployed to secure unaffected wells, underground reservoirs, purification facilities, and emergency reserves. Our scientists have been authorized to use every technology available to restore drinkable water. And every loyal citizen shall receive what is necessary to survive."

He paused again. I noticed that there seemed to be a moment of uncertainty in his demeanor.

"Distribution priority will be determined through the Seal of David. Your Seal will identify you at every authorized water distribution center throughout the Dominion. One person. One identity. One allocation. No profiteering. No hoarding. No chaos. No one stealing another family's portion. The same system our enemies condemned as tyranny will now ensure that millions remain alive."

Shepherd leaned toward the podium.

"And let me be clear. The Dominion will not allow those who seek its destruction to exploit the resources of those who sustain it. If you reject the Dominion... if you refuse its laws... if you shelter its enemies... if you assist those attempting to overthrow our peace... you cannot simultaneously demand the protection and resources of the society you have chosen to oppose. Citizenship carries responsibilities. Choices have consequences."

For several seconds Shepherd said nothing. Then his expression softened.

"I know many of you are frightened. Mothers are wondering what they will give their children tomorrow morning. Farmers are watching crops wither. Doctors are wondering how they will keep hospitals functioning. Workers are wondering whether their communities will survive. I hear you. I see you. And I will not abandon you. Death itself could not separate me from you. Do you really believe thirst will?"

Applause rose from the audience. Shepherd waited. Then his voice changed.

"And now I have something to say to those who call themselves the servants of God. To the 144,000. To the underground churches. To those hiding behind their supposed divine protection. To the inhabitants of Petra. You say these judgments prove that your God reigns. Then tell your God to restore our waters."

Silence filled the hall. Shepherd looked upward.

"You claim He turned them to blood? Then tell Him to turn them back. There are children tonight crying out for water. There are elderly people dying of thirst. There are hospitals desperate for a single clean reservoir. If this is your God's handiwork... let Him answer for it."

Shepherd lowered his gaze toward the camera.

"But while your God remains silent... I will work. While your prophets condemn... I will provide. While your religion promises another world... I will fight for this one. That is the difference between their kingdom... and my Dominion."

He stopped. For just a moment, something like anger appeared on his face.

"When I lay dead before the world, there were those who celebrated. They believed my work had ended. They were wrong. When Petra resisted our forces, they celebrated again. They said their God had defeated me. They were wrong again. And now they believe poisoned seas and rivers will bring the Dominion to its knees."

Shepherd smiled faintly.

"They are wrong. Again."

His voice grew louder.

"Humanity will survive this. The Dominion will survive this. I will survive this. We will purify what can be purified. We will conserve what can be conserved. We will distribute what remains. And we will identify those who would rather watch humanity die than see the Dominion succeed."

Shepherd placed his good hand upon the podium.

"One people. One Dominion. One shepherd. We have walked through fire together. We have walked through darkness together. Now... we will walk

through blood together. And when clean water flows again, history will remember who stood with humanity in its darkest hour. Not the prophets who condemned you. Not the rebels who abandoned you. Not the God they blame for your suffering. Me. I am still here. And I will not surrender my people."

Shepherd looked upward once more. This time there was no smile.

"And to whoever—or whatever—believes it can drown my Dominion in blood... you have my attention."

He returned his gaze to the camera.

"Remain loyal. Bear the Seal. Obey the emergency directives of your Dominion authorities. Care for your families. Report those who steal or illegally distribute protected water reserves. And do not be afraid. The Dominion stands. Your shepherd stands with you. Good night."

Micah cut off the transmission at that point. The people of Petra looked at each other in wonder at what Shepherd was hoping to accomplish.

"My friends, this will not succeed," Micah said. "Shepherd has not been able to heal his people from the first Vial Judgment. It is very unlikely he will do the same with the current Vial Judgment. This and the next two judgments will enrage the people to the point where they will turn all their anger toward God and toward His people. And while we may lose our people to the guillotine, the other side is also losing theirs to the judgments. God is evening things out because there is a battle coming, and Jesus will come and vanquish His enemies at the due time appointed for Him. So do not lose heart, especially at this time. Keep praying for our brothers and sisters outside these walls. Pray that God will provide for their needs even as He provided for ours. Pray that more people who have not yet taken the Seal of David will accept Jesus as their Lord and Savior. And most importantly, pray that the Lord's Kingdom will come, and that His will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Thank you, and may God bless you all."

Pablo and I talked with each other after the speech ended and the people went to do their own business. "Do you think God will show mercy upon the DOGs as He did with the first Vial Judgment by giving them healing?" Pablo asked.

"Maybe He will, but who knows the mind of God?" I answered. "We just have to wait and see what happens with the next Vial Judgment to come."

"I hear that the next judgment is going to be real torture for those who took the Seal of David. The sun scorching men with fire."

"Yeah, that's going to make having a bad day at the beach seem tame by comparison. They'd better stock up on some really powerful sunblock, if that would help."

"At least we'll have sunblock in the form of Jesus' protection during the judgment. The Vials are mostly affecting the DOGs, nobody else."

I laughed. "DOGs in heat. Hot DOGs. The memes just write themselves with this."

Chapter 27

I continued to watch videos and read news about how much worse the world was becoming under the thumb of President Shepherd and his Dominion of God. Besides people with the Seal of God, the DOGs continued to hunt down and massacre people of other religions, LGBT people, the elderly, the disabled, the poor, and the homeless, declaring it all to be "God's will" that these people who contribute nothing useful to the Dominion should be eliminated and that their god Shepherd demands purity and holiness among his people. Even people who bore the Seal of David weren't safe from Shepherd's wrath, as those who raised complaints about how Shepherd was ruling the world with an iron fist were being killed for speaking their minds.

Eric Gaskell was an interesting person to watch. In his recent videos from what used to be Westville Assembly, he was demonstrating the new power he had obtained from the High Reverend Jonathan Prince. He was showing how he could turn water that was blood back into water again, and that he could command the elements of water and air, to cause the skies to rain or not rain, and even literally speak life or death into living beings. In one service, he told his whole congregation to fall dead, and so they did — they were completely lifeless. And then he spoke that everybody should live again, and they all rose to their feet and stood, feeling as if they had taken a very brief nap.

Videos of Shepherd's Chapel pastors all wielding the power of Prince showed similar things — pastors calling down fire, hail, and rain; pastors speaking literal life and death in people; pastors getting people to roll around on the floor and bark like dogs. All sorts of weird things that made those "Holy Spirit revivals" in the 1990s seem like kids playing with spiritual toys. They even started preaching that God was now raising up "an army of saints" that would eventually go over to Israel and defeat all the "Christ deniers" and "Christ killers". They were calling this "the birth of Joel's Army".

However, this did not hide the fact that these Shepherd's Chapels were also becoming dens of iniquity, as stories on the Internet continued to proliferate about pastors and clergy abusing their authority, demanding people to empty out their bank accounts and give all their savings and inheritances to the church, and even preying upon women and children. Some have even left these churches, vowing to never come back — and end up being dead for failing to observe the "Global Sunday Law".

Then one day, several months later, there was news that the effects of the Second Vial Judgment had lifted. The seas and oceans were once again filled with fresh salt water. However, the corpses of sea animals remained on the shore, and this was becoming a health risk to all who were living along the coastlines. Also, the

rivers, lakes, and springs of water still remained bloody, even though there were some with the power of Prince who managed to turn the blood into water, albeit with a foul taste that made drinking the water a last resort. Prince tried to take credit for the bloody oceans becoming water once again, but hardly anyone among those with the Seal of God believed a single word he said.

I was busy listening to another of Micah's sermons when I felt my phone vibrating. I quickly excused myself and got somewhere private before I answered. "Hello?"

"Vince, they're finally coming after me!"

I recognized who it was. "Daniel, who's coming after you?"

"The DOGs! They found the secret place my group was hiding in."

"Calm down. Now where are you?"

"Hiding somewhere where I hope the DOGs won't find me. They're getting good at hunting down their prey."

"Lord God, please protect Daniel Wickman right now, and find him a..."

A door was kicked open. "Come with us, you deserter!" a voice shouted.

"Too late! They've got me!" Daniel cried.

The call suddenly ended. I tried to redial, but I was told it was now out of service. That's when I realized that Daniel had either been killed or taken into custody by the DOG military forces.

Pablo noticed me by myself with my phone. "Amigo, what's going on?" he asked.

"It's Daniel Wickman," I answered. "He's either killed or taken into custody."

"The SDA guy? I fear the worst for our brothers and sisters."

"I tried to pray for God's help, but it all happened too fast. There wasn't anything that I could do for him."

"Then it's entirely in God's hands now. We must leave it that way and pray for

his safety."

I could feel my phone vibrating again. I answered it. "Hello?"

"It's Valerie. I managed to find my stepchildren."

"Oh, well, that's good news. Where are they?"

"Also in hiding. They became believers in God and now have his seal on their foreheads."

"Praise the Lord! It's a good thing that you and I were praying for them."

"Unfortunately, there's some bad news. Tess and Martina were taken from our group by the DOGs."

"I'm sorry to hear that."

"I'm the group's new leader now. I've been studying the Bible and working with the Co-op to make sure our trade market remains secret."

"Good for you, Val. I knew you would someday become a leader of something."

"Yeah, I just wish it didn't happen the way it did, but the Lord has me right where He wants me."

"I'll continue to pray for you and your group. You stay safe now, you hear?"

"You know me, hon. Those DOGs aren't going to take me in anytime soon. Talk to you later."

"God bless," I said before hanging up.

Pablo overheard the conversation on the phone. "I'm sorry to hear what happened to Tess and Martina. Guess they could also use our prayers."

"Yeah, looks like our prayer list of souls is getting a bit longer these days," I said with a grim look on my face.

A few months later, I noticed something strange in the sky. The sun appeared larger in the sky than it normally was, and it was turning from blue to yellow to orange to a bright red. I also felt the temperature getting hotter, like a day in the

middle of summer. I checked the computer's current weather scans, and I found out that the world's temperature was increasing beyond 100 degrees Fahrenheit. Then I realized what had happened: the Fourth Vial Judgment had been poured out. The sun was scorching us with fire.

News about the incredible heat wave came pouring in. People were screaming in the streets and running for the safety of buildings as they were being burned to death. Vegetation was burning. Houses were catching on fire. Glass windows were shattering in high-rises. Power grids were failing under impossible demand. And as I watched the live streams, I saw Revelation's prediction coming true: instead of repenting... people with the Seal of David were cursing God.

Micah noticed that some among the Jews who still didn't have the Seal of God on them were feeling the intense heat. Their fellow Jews with the Seal of God reached out to them and tried to minister to them, to see that this was God's call for them to repent and believe the gospel. Some of them cried out to the Lord in desperation, hoping and praying that He would save them. And sure enough, God answered their prayers, and they received the Seal of God as their protection from the heat. Others, however, chose to resist and found themselves being cooked to death inside Petra's rock walls.

Pablo and I looked at one of the dead bodies, feeling sorrow. "Poor man who passed away in his own stubbornness," Pablo said, breathing a heavy sigh. "I wish there was something I could have done to help him see the truth."

"We did all that we could for him, Pablo," I said. "God said in Zechariah that He would try His own people as gold is tried, and test them to see if they would call out to Him."

"So even Israel is not safe from this judgment," Pablo said, realizing. "I wonder how many outside these walls who still didn't accept Jesus as their Messiah would last through the judgment before they call out to Him?"

"God's still working in the hearts of His people Israel," I said. "He'll bring them to faith regardless of how many would suffer needlessly for being this ignorant."

Pablo nodded, but didn't say anything more.

Soon everyone in Petra was sitting before the giant projection screen as we were watching President Shepherd's latest address to the public. I noticed that he and his cabinet and a portion of his usual audience were located in an underground

bunker which was built for occasions such as a nuclear attack. Shepherd looked fiercer than before — not his usual calm and collected self. It was like he could barely contain the monster within him.

"My people of the Dominion, I speak to you today beneath a sun that has become our enemy. Across the earth, temperatures have risen beyond anything humanity has previously endured. Crops are burning in their fields. Forests are becoming furnaces. Electrical systems are failing beneath unprecedented demand. Cities have opened emergency shelters. Hospitals are overwhelmed with victims of heat and burns. And while our oceans have been miraculously healed, our rivers and fountains remain blood. Millions have been healed from their sores. Yet now the very heavens themselves burn us.

"I will not insult you tonight by pretending that everything is normal. It is not. Nor will I stand before you and offer the meaningless platitudes that frightened religious men have offered humanity for thousands of years. Something is happening to our world. Something beyond the ability of science to explain. And tonight... I intend to address the One responsible."

Shepherd paused. His good eye turned upward.

"For years, Your servants told humanity that You were a God of love. They said You loved the world. They said You loved every child. They said Your mercy endured forever. Where is that mercy now? Look at Your world. Look at the oceans. Look at the rivers. Look at the burning cities. Look at the children crying for water. Look at the mothers holding them. Look at the elderly dying in homes that have become ovens. Look at the nations You supposedly created. Look at what You have done to them. Your prophets call this justice. Your servants call this judgment. The people hiding at Petra call it righteousness. I call it what it is. Cruelty."

A murmur swept through the audience. Shepherd continued.

"You have my attention now. When the seas became blood, You had my attention. When the rivers became blood, I told You that You had my attention. Apparently that wasn't enough. So now You scorch the earth. Very well. Now You have my answer."

Shepherd stared directly upward.

"Do You hear me? I know You are there. There was a time when I spoke Your name with reverence. There was a time when I told humanity that You had chosen me. There was a time when I believed I was building Your Kingdom. No longer. I have seen what Your Kingdom looks like. It is blood. It is thirst. It is

fire. It is suffering. And if that is Your Kingdom... I reject it."

The auditorium became utterly silent.

"I reject Your judgments. I reject Your prophets. I reject Your claim upon this world. And I reject the authority by which You presume to judge me."

Shepherd's voice rose.

"You allowed my enemies to murder me. I returned. You afflicted my people. They remained loyal. You turned the oceans to blood. My Dominion remained standing. You turned the rivers to blood. We survived. You protected Petra when my armies surrounded it. I am still here. And now You have turned the sun itself against us. So hear me, God of Abraham. Hear me, God of Isaac. Hear me, God of Jacob. Hear me, God whom these Christians call Father. You will not have this world."

Shepherd slammed his good hand against the podium.

"This world belongs to humanity! Not to some invisible throne beyond the stars. Not to prophets hiding in caves. Not to fanatics waiting for another world while this one burns. We built these cities. We cultivated these fields. We crossed these oceans. We conquered disease. We reached into the heavens. We united nations. And when the old world collapsed, I brought humanity together. Where were You?"

Shepherd waited. Nothing answered. He smiled.

"Exactly."

He turned toward the camera.

"My people, look at me. Your God may burn you. I will shelter you. Your God may deprive you of water. I will find you water. Your God may strike your bodies. I will devote every resource of the Dominion to healing you. Your God demands that you kneel before Him because you fear His judgment. I ask you to stand beside me... because together we can resist it."

Shepherd raised his good hand.

"Effective immediately, I am declaring a Global Solar Emergency. All Dominion transportation, energy, medical, military, and scientific resources are hereby placed under emergency authority. Underground shelters will be opened. Public buildings capable of maintaining survivable temperatures will become

emergency cooling centers. Every available energy source will be redirected toward maintaining essential infrastructure. Food and water distribution will continue through the Seal of David. No loyal citizen of the Dominion will face this catastrophe alone. But there is something else I ask of you. Do not pray for these judgments to stop."

Shepherd paused.

"Do not beg. Do not grovel. Do not kneel before the Being doing this to you. Stand. When the sun burns your skin... stand. When thirst burns your throat... stand. When His prophets tell you to repent... stand. When they tell you to abandon your Seal... stand. When they tell you to bow before their Christ... stand. Let heaven itself see that humanity will no longer be ruled by fear."

The crowd rose to its feet.

"Some of you still ask why I bear these wounds."

Shepherd gestured toward his useless right arm. Then toward his blackened eye.

"These wounds are my answer. I was struck down. I was killed. I entered death itself. And I returned. Death had its opportunity to hold me. It failed. And now heaven itself will fail."

The applause became deafening. Shepherd didn't acknowledge it. He was looking upward again.

"And now I speak directly to You. You have hidden behind Your prophets long enough. You have hidden behind Your angels long enough. You have hidden behind Your judgments long enough. You have oceans at Your command. You have rivers at Your command. Apparently You have the sun itself at Your command. And yet here I stand. So stop tormenting my people. Stop hiding behind plagues. Stop hiding behind fire. If I am the Beast Your prophets say I am... if I am the Antichrist... if I am the enemy of Your Son... then You know where to find me."

Shepherd slowly spread his good arm.

"Here I am."

Silence.

"David J. Shepherd. Supreme Potentate of the Dominion. The man You could not keep in the grave. The king You could not overthrow. The shepherd Your

people could not silence. Here I am."

His voice dropped almost to a whisper.

"Come down."

The audience became completely still.

"Come down from heaven. Bring Your angels. Bring Your prophets. Bring Your Christ. Bring every power You possess. And take this kingdom from me."

Shepherd smiled.

"If You can."

For several seconds, he simply stared upward. Then he returned his gaze to the camera.

"My beloved people... do not fear the God who burns you. Do not worship Him because He threatens you. Do not surrender because His servants tell you resistance is hopeless. Bear the Seal of David proudly. Stand with your brothers and sisters throughout the Dominion. Let the heavens hear one voice rising from eight billion throats: We will not bow. One people. One Dominion. One shepherd. And to the God who has declared war upon my kingdom... I say this: You have shed our blood. You have taken our water. You have scorched our earth. You have challenged my Dominion. Now I challenge You. If this world truly belongs to Your Christ... send Him to claim it. I'll be waiting."

Shepherd stared into the camera.

"Good night."

The transmission ended. As the people looked at each other in wonder at what they had just seen on TV, Micah stood before them and spoke. "Brothers and sisters, we have just witnessed a turning point with the enemy of our souls. He is getting to the point of challenging God to come down from the heavens and take His creation away from him. This will take place near the end of the Tribulation, as the Antichrist will gather up his armies together in the place called Armageddon to prepare for a battle he is destined to lose. Do not fear his threats, although he still has power over the nations to eliminate those who do not bear the Seal of David. He and his False Prophet will meet their end together when the Lord returns and slays his armies with the sword of His mouth. They will be captured and cast alive into the Lake of Fire, which burns with brimstone. Prepare yourselves for the day of the Lord's return, for it will come like a thief in

the night. For when they say, 'Peace and safety', then sudden destruction will come upon them like labor pains on a woman with child, and they will not escape. That will be all. May God bless you."

As Micah and the rest of the people walked away, Pablo and I talked with each other. "The gloves are coming off, and Shepherd thinks he can overthrow the One who has created him," Pablo said. "Isn't that a laugh?"

"It's definitely coming to a head, Pablo," I said. "Only I'm not sure that I would consider it a laughing matter. People are still going to be hurt and killed."

"True, but we have something the other side doesn't...the promise of a resurrection and entrance into the eternal Kingdom of God," Pablo said. "They're only going to be resurrected to face judgment and spend eternity in the Lake of Fire. That's something worth looking forward to."

"There's the possibility that we might not live to see the Lord's coming face to face," I said. "We could be taken from this life and end up coming back with Him and His heavenly army."

"Either way, we still win, hombre," Pablo said. "There's nothing the enemy can do to change the outcome."

"I only pray to change the outcome of many who are still left not yet knowing Him as Lord and Savior," I said.

Chapter 28

Over the next few months, the Sons of Issachar have been visiting Petra from their secret headquarters in Jerusalem. Strangely, their vehicles remained unaffected by the Fourth Vial Judgment, indicating that God's protective hand over His people extended even to their vehicles and residences. Anyway, it was good to have Jehu and Kepha be with us throughout the judgment, but I worry about what would happen if and when this judgment lifts.

"Kepha, Jehu, what has been going on in Jerusalem lately?" Micah asked.

"We have been working in secret to reach the Jews who are still in the city who have neither taken the Seal of God nor the Seal of David, Micah," Kepha said. "We're seeing more of them come to the saving faith of Yeshua, but it's been hard for them to be able to buy anything due to the cashless system Shepherd had put in place. Some have gotten to the point of having to steal food from vendors in order to be able to feed themselves and their families."

"That's terrible," Micah said. "Those people would risk losing their lives just for the simple crime of obtaining food for themselves."

"That's true, Micah," Jehu said. "Some thieves have been caught by the DOGs and put into detention centers, or even worse, shot on sight for failing to have the Seal of David on their persons."

"But we have been working with some underground rabbis to get food from the Co-op to share with those in need," Kepha said. "Fortunately, this plague of the sun has given us some room to work with during the daytime when the DOGs are unable to go outside and endure the heat."

"That means you have to stay put in your hiding place during the night, when the DOGs may be patrolling the streets," I said.

"We have been careful in that regard, my friend," Kepha said. "We dare not do anything in the night that would attract undue attention to ourselves."

"I wish we could be out there with you, helping you reach the people who need Jesus Christ the most," Pablo said.

"Your time may come, sooner than you'd expect, young man," Micah said.

"All too true," Jehu said. "We're preparing to fight Shepherd's army with what weapons we have, but I believe that the Lord alone will deliver the victory we so desire over our enemies."

"We'll pray for the Sons of Issachar to be ready for that day, Jehu," I said.

Kepha smiled. "Bless you. We will need all the prayer we can get."

I monitored the condition of the earth from my computer workstation to see what was happening in the environment, and one day I noticed the Third Vial judgment was lifted, and rivers, lakes, and springs had the blood turn back into water again, although now the water was incredibly hot. Someone among the DOG must have reported the same thing to Shepherd and Prince, for I have watched in a video Prince again taking credit for a miracle that was entirely God's doing. Shepherd seemed pleased that, in his view, God was answering his challenge, but he remained arrogant and unwilling to fall to his knees in repentance or even in humble gratitude for the miracle.

Shepherd's Chapel churches, however, have been hit hard by the Fourth Vial Judgment. With nobody even trying to go to their Sunday services in person for fear of being burned alive, the pastors and congregations resorted to using teleconference software to be able to still hold services on the designated day of worship. The biochips were reprogrammed to handle this adjustment so nobody with the Seal of David would accidentally die for violating the Global Sunday Law. Yet there were still some folks who died anyway, since the software adjustment for the biochips wasn't handled all at once, and some were already deciding not to attend any further services, whether online or in person.

There was also instability within the DOG itself. The Dominion States of Africa was planning to secede from the Dominion, along with the Dominion States of South America and the Dominion States of Australia. Shepherd didn't like hearing that the DOG was going to fracture and is planning to send troops to those regions to force its heads of state to capitulate or else be executed along with its cabinets, to soon replace them with more compliant heads of state. Harry Patterson had covert operatives do the job during a nighttime raid of their palaces, and then made an open display of their dead bodies to show to the rest of the DOG that this is what will happen to their own regions should they ever think of mutiny against Shepherd and the DOG. This only fueled more anger against Shepherd, with more talk about other regions planning to secede.

I stared in wonder at that news. It made me realize how fragile the DOG was becoming, all because of its foundation upon one man who made people believe he was a true man of God, only to later reveal himself as the Son of the Devil. There were still months left before Jesus Christ would come and replace the DOG itself with the true Kingdom of God. I prayed that the rest of the world's population that still hadn't become believers in Jesus Christ would do so before

He comes again.

Then came a day a year before the Lord's return, when I noticed the sky turning blue again, the sun shrinking back to its normal size, and the temperature dropping. I checked the computers and saw evidence for myself that the Fourth Vial Judgment had been lifted. The world was slowly returning to normal. DOG citizens could safely walk out in the open during the daytime again. They rejoiced at the end of that judgment as Shepherd's Chapel churches held special services for God lifting His hand from the world and their faith being rewarded at last. As usual, High Reverend Jonathan Prince took credit for the judgment ending, saying that he alone made the skies return to normal and the sun become much cooler for the average citizen.

Micah had the entire population of Petra watch President Shepherd's recent public address, which seemed a long time in coming since he hadn't made one in months from the start of the Fourth Vial Judgment onward. This time he appeared relaxed and confident, but we all knew he was still angry at God for sending the judgment in the first place. His darkened eye socket looked as if it were staring into the souls of those watching.

"My beloved people of the Dominion, look outside. Look toward the sky. Feel the air upon your skin. For the first time in months, the sun shines upon us without consuming us. Temperatures are falling. The fires are diminishing. The unbearable heat that scorched our cities, destroyed our crops, overwhelmed our hospitals, and took countless lives... has ended. We endured it. We survived it. And most importantly—we did not bow.

"When this catastrophe began, the enemies of the Dominion told you that the scorching of the sun was divine judgment. They told you to repent. They told you to tear the Seal of David from your flesh. They told you to abandon your Dominion. They told you to crawl upon your knees before their God and beg Him to stop hurting you. I told you something different. I told you to stand. And you stood. You stood when your cities burned. You stood when your crops withered. You stood when your bodies were scorched. You stood while prophets condemned you. You stood while rebels mocked you. You stood while the inhabitants of Petra waited for our civilization to collapse. And tonight... the Dominion still stands."

Shepherd paused as applause filled the chamber.

"When the heat began, I spoke directly to the God whom our enemies claim sent it. I challenged Him. I rejected His claim to this world. I rejected His right to

torture humanity into submission. And I told Him that if He wanted my kingdom... He could come and take it. Well? Here I am. And here you are."

Shepherd spread his good arm.

"The sun has ceased scorching us. The Dominion remains. My Seal remains upon hundreds of millions. My government remains standing. My people remain loyal. So I ask those prophets who promised our destruction: who surrendered? Was it us? Did the Dominion fall? Did David Shepherd bow? No. The fire stopped. We didn't."

The audience erupted. Shepherd allowed the applause to continue before raising his hand.

"I know what our enemies will say. They will say their God showed mercy. They will say the judgment accomplished whatever mysterious purpose He intended. They will say that the end of the scorching proves His sovereignty rather than ours. Of course they will. Their prophecies are constructed so that whatever happens, they declare themselves victorious. When suffering begins, they say: 'God has judged you.' When suffering ends, they say: 'God has shown you mercy.' When we survive, they say: 'God allowed it.' When we prosper, they say: 'Satan deceived you.' There is apparently nothing their theology cannot explain after it has already happened. But I ask you to judge by what your own eyes can see. We are still here."

Shepherd's expression hardened.

"Our losses have been terrible. Entire communities have burned. Food production has suffered. Millions remain displaced. Our freshwater crisis continues. Many still bear the sores inflicted during the earlier catastrophe. We will not pretend otherwise. But neither will we surrender to despair. Beginning immediately, the Dominion enters what I am calling the Great Restoration. We will rebuild what burned. We will restore our agricultural systems. We will reopen transportation corridors. We will repair our cities. We will house those who lost their homes. And we will continue providing food, water, medicine, shelter, and employment through the Seal of David. Your Seal is more than identification. It is the sign that says: I stood. When humanity was commanded to kneel, I stood. When fear demanded surrender, I stood. When heaven itself seemed determined to break the human spirit... I stood."

Shepherd pointed toward the camera.

"Wear it proudly."

Then his tone became quieter.

"There was a time when I believed these catastrophes were merely disasters to overcome. I no longer believe that. Someone is doing this. Some power has declared war upon our civilization. The seas. The rivers. The sun. These things are not coincidences. And for perhaps the first time, the prophets and I agree upon something. There is a God. Where we disagree is whether He deserves our obedience."

The room became silent.

"I have seen His works. So have you. And I have made my choice. A God who demands allegiance through sores, blood, thirst, and fire will receive no worship from me. If He wishes to be my enemy... then He shall have me as one."

Shepherd stared upward.

"You heard me before. I know You did. I told You to bring Your Christ. I told You to take this kingdom from me. You answered with fire. And still I stand. Now the fire is gone. So what next?"

A faint smile appeared.

"More blood? More plagues? More angels? Darkness?"

Shepherd paused upon the word.

"Whatever You send... we will endure it."

He returned his attention to the audience.

"My people, do not mistake the end of this catastrophe for an invitation to become complacent. Our enemies remain among us. The 144,000 continue their campaign against the Dominion. Illegal churches continue operating. The Underground Co-op continues stealing resources and sheltering fugitives. Petra remains occupied by those who reject our authority. And there remain those within our own communities who secretly pray for the Dominion's destruction. They saw the sun scorch you... and hoped you would surrender. You disappointed them. Continue disappointing them."

The crowd cheered.

"Remain loyal. Remain vigilant. Bear the Seal. Support your Shepherd's Chapel. Report those who assist the enemies of the Dominion. And remember the lesson

these terrible months have taught us. Humanity was burned... but humanity survived. The Dominion was tested... but the Dominion endured. David Shepherd was challenged... and David Shepherd did not bow. One people. One Dominion. One shepherd. The fire is over. Let the rebuilding begin. And to the God who tried to bring us to our knees..."

Shepherd looked upward one final time.

"Your move."

He smiled.

"Good night."

Micah cut off the transmission just as they were hearing applause. He looked grim with what he had to say next. "Shepherd thinks that he has won against God with his speech. He thinks that he now has the upper hand. But this is just the setup for the next judgment. Revelation 16:10-11 says this: 'And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.' Friends, we should prepare for what will happen to our enemies when the next judgment hits. Darkness will overcome them. Pains and sores will return. They will blaspheme the God of heaven for the things they are suffering. But they will not repent. Their hearts will become so hard that the next logical step is for them to rally around Shepherd to defeat the God who has poured out these judgments against them. And it will fail.

"Friends, I do not rejoice over what is going to happen to them. Some of those people have been your friends and family members. Some of them have been people you have worked with and shared the true gospel with. But those people chose to make their stand with Shepherd. They chose darkness over light. They chose the Man of Sin over the Man of Salvation. They chose to build their own kingdom instead of receiving a Kingdom that shall never pass away. They made their choice, and now they reap the consequences. They will never repent. They will never see the light. They will never turn from the evil ways. They will be judged. And they will be sent to the everlasting fire that has been prepared for the Devil and his angels.

"My friends, if there is a time for us to reach out into the world to bring who is left outside the body of Christ into that body, it is now. Pray for the 144,000 who are still in the world bringing that gospel of salvation to the world. Pray for those in the Co-op who are still bringing food and necessities to millions of believers in hiding. Pray for God's hand of protection to be upon those who are

still faithfully serving Him in these trying times. And most of all, pray for the Lord's true Kingdom to come and His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. That will be all. May God bless you."

Pablo and I talked after the speech. "Did you see that look on Shepherd's face, man?" Pablo said. "He looks like he's got God by the secret parts and can get Him to do His will."

"I did notice that with Shepherd, Pablo," I said. "The apple certainly doesn't fall far from the tree concerning who his true father is."

"But I'm wondering how the next judgment is going to fall upon those who have taken the Mark, what it's going to look like," Pablo said. "Scripture said that the Beast's kingdom will be in darkness, but is that talking about physical darkness or what?"

"I'm really not sure," I said. "I'm just as curious as you are about how this will play itself out. One thing's for sure, though, they're going to be suffering until the next Vial Judgment after that is poured out."

"Yeah, amigo, that judgment will eventually lead to Armageddon, the final battle between the Antichrist and God Himself," Pablo said. "I can't wait for that time to come, to see how well Shepherd fares against the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords."

"That battle will be something to behold about a year from now," I said.

It wasn't long before the Fifth Vial Judgment fell. I was watching Noelle Kristov, the press secretary for the DOG, give a speech to the people gathered in the White House conference room when I noticed she couldn't read her notes. And then suddenly she screamed as her eyes turned completely black. So did everyone else in the room as they noticed one particular thing: they couldn't see. They were all scrambling around the room, trying to feel their way around, panicking as if they were suddenly immersed in a thick darkness that had no light piercing through it. The room's light, however, did not change—it was still brightly lit. Then the phenomenon spread throughout the entire capital city: people's eyes suddenly turned black, and they couldn't see. Cars suddenly crashed into each other. People got run over, walking into things and each other. People screamed in panic as they were suddenly immobilized, plunged into a thick darkness that affected only those who took the Seal of David. Yet the daylight from the sun didn't change or anything. It was a darkness that was made personal to the enemies of God.

The phenomenon didn't stay contained in the capital city either. It slowly spread throughout the world, starting with the Dominion States of North America and then moving into all the regions of the DOG. This made things really dangerous for the people who had taken the Seal of David. Airplanes fell out of the sky and crashed. Trains went out of control and crashed. Houses and people caught on fire. Multiple car crashes happened on the highways. Construction workers fell to their deaths. People were run over by cars and trains. It was a devastating nightmare. And to top it all off, the people who stayed alive during this mess also started scratching themselves, as if they felt the plague of boils from the First Vial Judgment coming back on them. They all gnawed their tongues in pain and began to curse God for what they were now suffering.

Even Shepherd and Prince weren't immune. They could also only see darkness — at least at first for Shepherd. And then, as I noticed in a vision that was sent to me by the Lord, Shepherd's eyes began to glow, both the healthy eye and the darkened eye socket. He began to emit a faint orange glow to those around him who could only see darkness. What Shepherd saw was whatever was within a few feet of him, but even that was so dim it was next to useless. Still, it would get him around the office, doing what needed to be done, trying to hold conferences with his staff, who looked so pitiful, as if they had trouble trying to dress themselves in the dark.

Pablo caught me staring into this vision of Shepherd. "Hey, amigo, are you all right?" he asked, sounding concerned.

The vision ended at that point. I shook my head. "It was disturbing, Pablo. Everyone who has the Seal of David can only see darkness, while the world around them is still light. Shepherd has only limited vision, as he can only see what's a few feet in front of him."

"You mean this judgment is affecting everyone who has the Mark, not just in Washington, D.C., but also throughout the world?" Pablo asked.

"That's correct," I answered.

Pablo was all smiles. "You know what this means? We who have the Seal of God can walk freely around those people, do whatever we want, rescue our people from detention centers, distribute food freely, not have to worry about danger anymore, as long as God keeps the lights off for them."

"We'd still have to be careful," I said. "They may be without vision, but they're not without hearing. They may end up getting used to living in darkness and try to find a way to stop our activities regardless."

"I honestly don't see how they can stop us now, given that this judgment will keep them too busy trying to make their way around their environment, and also dealing with the sores on their bodies," Pablo said.

"Still better to be safe than sorry," I said. "We'd better let Micah know so that we can mobilize the other groups like the Co-op and the Sons of Issachar to use this judgment to our advantage."

"I'm with you on that, brother," Pablo said as he and I left the tech center together.

Chapter 29

Micah brought together representatives from the Sons of Issachar, Rapture Enterprises, and the Underground Co-op into the secret meeting room at Petra. Pablo and I attended, hoping to share our input with the representatives.

"You can see that the implications are enormous," Pablo said. "Everyone bearing the Seal of David is blind. Everyone bearing God's Seal can see normally. Unsealed people can also see. Shepherd himself possesses only a strange, limited supernatural vision."

"So what are you asking of us to do?" Ray Root, a pilot working for Rapture Enterprises, asked.

"We can use this opportunity we have on hand to do the things we haven't been able to do up until now," Pablo answered. "We can rescue believers from detention centers, distribute food and medicine, locate people who still haven't received either Seal, move vulnerable people into safe houses, distribute Bibles and Christian literature, and reconnect scattered underground churches."

"Just a reminder: they're blind, not deaf," I said. "The Dominion may be temporarily incapacitated, but this isn't permission to become careless."

"Then perhaps God has not merely judged our enemies," Micah said. "Perhaps He has opened a door."

"If that's the case, we should use that open door while we have the chance," Mac Cullen, who also worked for Rapture Enterprises, said.

"But what will we call this little operation of ours?" Hannah Rose of the Co-op asked.

"Why not call it 'Operation Blind DOG'?" Pablo asked jokingly.

"I don't find that the least bit humorous, Pablo," Micah said firmly. "Any other suggestions?"

"I think the best name for it would be 'Operation Children of Light'," I said.

"Hmmm, I like that name," Jehu said. "I say we use that as our official operation name. Any who object?"

Nobody said anything.

Micah smiled, nodding. "Then it is settled. Operation Children of Light will begin immediately. The sooner we can reach out to those who haven't received Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, the better."

Pablo and I talked with each other after the meeting had ended. "Well, you said you wanted to be part of the action, Pablo... you may have it sooner than you would expect," I said.

"It would be great to get beyond these walls and back out into the mission field like our brothers in the faith are doing," Pablo said.

"Yeah, but I wish I were still in my younger years when all this went down in the world," I said. "I'm not exactly at my peak here."

"You can manage the tech stuff while we do the heavy lifting, bro," Pablo said. "God gave us abilities that will come in use when we get into the heat of the action."

"Anything for advancing the true Kingdom of God here on earth," I said. "However God plans to use me, I will gladly accept the mission."

I have been watching footage uploaded by people who can still see. DOG citizens crawling along sidewalks. People calling helplessly from apartment windows. Families leading blind relatives by the hand. Hospitals overflowing with patients. Stores have been abandoned. DOG soldiers are clinging to walls and one another. Some Seal-bearers have written messages: **PLEASE HELP ME**. The same people who previously controlled whether Christians could buy food were now dependent upon others to bring food to them.

The sight of it all bothered me. I said earlier that my sympathy for Seal-bearers had largely disappeared after their persecution of Christians. Now I see them helpless in their own blindness, and it makes me think that I could be one of them right now. In fact, that would have been me years before, when an optometrist checked my eyes, and I was diagnosed with glaucoma. Surprisingly I hadn't even thought about my glaucoma since the whole Tribulation started. God must have known about that and has touched my eyes to keep them healthy, hopefully long enough for me to see Jesus face to face when He comes again.

There has been news of underground Christians who are not merely exploiting the effects of the Fifth Vial Judgment. Some are beginning to feed blind Seal-bearers. They are leading people away from fires. They are rescuing trapped DOG soldiers. They are bringing water to Shepherd's Chapel members.

Naturally, the blind people are asking: "Why can you see?" And the answer spreads: "We don't bear David's Seal." I could see that the Fifth Vial Judgment was becoming an evangelistic sign. People who have not yet taken the Seal of David are beginning to question everything they've been told.

I checked the hidden cameras installed in the White House, and noticed that while Shepherd may be humiliated, he still has his faint, limited vision. He ordered Harry Patterson to find ways of operating without sight. Patterson introduced emergency adaptations: audio navigation, motion alarms, acoustic sensors, voice-controlled computers, guide ropes inside government buildings, automated drones, perhaps even unsealed civilians coerced into assisting DOG units. This was beginning to sound like the fulfillment of my warning that the Dominion will learn to function in darkness. Shepherd gives a brutal order: "If they can see and we cannot, then anyone moving freely through our streets is a suspect." That would make simply being able to see dangerous.

A YouTube video caught my attention. It was Eric Gaskell of the former Westville Assembly. He was standing in its sanctuary, his eyes are black, with the rest of the congregation still blind. The man who previously demonstrated extraordinary supernatural power now commanded: "In the authority granted unto me, I command my eyes—SEE!" Nothing. Again: "SEE!" Nothing. He puts his hands upon another congregation member. "Receive your sight!" Nothing. For the first time, Eric's miracle-working ministry had met something it could not overcome. Someone asks: "Pastor... why isn't it working?" Eric had no answer.

High Reverend Jonathan Prince quickly issued a theological explanation. He said that the blindness was not God's judgment, but rather a test of loyalty. "Remember what Paul the apostle said in 2 Corinthians 5:7: 'For we walk by faith, not by sight.' Your blindness proves that you are among the faithful being tested. So do not fear the darkness, but rather embrace it. Your sight will return in time for you to engage the enemy of your souls. He will come in less than a year, and we will be ready for Him, and we will conquer Him and all those who are responsible for your current misery."

Then one day I received news that the Co-op has located one of the Dominion's detention complexes. And I recognized three names. Daniel Wickman. Tess. Martina. They're alive. But nobody knows for how long.

I brought this news to Micah and Pablo. "We should go and rescue them as soon as possible," Pablo suggested. "The darkness will give the Co-op perhaps its only opportunity to reach them."

"I want to go personally on this mission," I said.

"I can't let you do that, Vincent," Micah said. "You are one of the 144,000, and Petra should remain your mission base. Pablo can go in your place."

"Daniel was dragged away while I listened to his plea for help," I said. "Tess and Martina helped people when nobody else would. I'm not sitting behind a computer while somebody else risks their life for them."

"Let me go with Vince," Pablo said. "I'll look after him, make sure we both get out of there in one piece."

Micah sighed. "Okay, the both of you can go together with the Co-op. But we will be praying for your success at Petra every step of the way."

Pablo sighed with relief. "Might as well prepare ourselves, Vince. We're heading straight into the lion's den to rescue your friends."

"We're going to need spiritual preparation in addition to any physical preparation we may need for the mission," I said. "Who knows what we're going to face when we get there."

I haven't been home since the Sons of Issachar drugged me and transported me to Jerusalem before the midpoint. Now I'm returning clandestinely. The country I'm now seeing is barely recognizable. Dominion banners remain everywhere. Images of Shepherd remain. But cities are full of blind people. Traffic is largely gone. Buildings are damaged. Abandoned vehicles clog streets. The once-powerful Dominion suddenly feels fragile.

"Which detention center are we headed for?" I asked Chip Potter, the leader of the Co-op mission team.

"One in Westborough," Chip answered. "It's a small detention center, but well-guarded. Have you got your computer on hand?"

"I do, right in my carrying case," I said, showing him the laptop. "Connection cables are packed up and ready to use."

"Good, because we may need you to hack the security system," Chip said.

"You mean, I'm not actually going in to do the action part?" I asked, sounding a bit disappointed.

"Hacking should be all the action you need to have in order to help us make this

mission a success," Chip answered. "If all goes well, it should be a walk in the park. Otherwise, it's entirely up to God to get us safely out."

"What do you expect me to do in the meantime?" Pablo asked.

"You'll be the visiting chaplain, Pablo," Chip answered. "You only need to distract the guards to keep their attention away from the rest of the team. The less they know what we're doing behind their backs, the better."

"Get ready, folks, we're approaching the detention center," Grant Mercer said as he was driving the van disguised with the label of a plumbing company.

We stopped the van outside the detention center, parking where we couldn't be seen. "Keep our team in your prayers, Vince," Pablo said before he and three other people left the van dressed in camouflage.

I turned on my laptop and waited to access the Westborough Detention Center's computer system. I had never hacked a computer before, but somehow the Lord made it easy, revealing to me how to access files, enter passwords, open doors, and access security cameras. I could see our team through the cameras, making their way through the halls of the detention center, while Pablo kept the guards busy sharing Scripture with them. It's rather interesting that the Tribulation was started by Christians, and in some way they were still Christians, even if in name only. He was the only one making any noise in the facility, while the others were sneaking around, trying to keep as quiet as possible. Soon we reached the cells that Daniel, Tess, and Martina were held in. I entered the access code for their cells, and soon the doors opened. I could see the three prisoners — they were alive, but looked like they'd gone through hell. I was starting to think this job was a little too easy.

And then I noticed something on my laptop. One of our team members may have set off the motion sensors. I feared the worst. "Be careful, folks, they may be onto you," I whispered through the headphone mic.

The rest of the team tried to remain as silent as possible as they made their way out. But one of the prisoners coughed. That triggered the sound detectors, which then set off alarms in the detention center. That made me work fast to see if I could shut off the alarms or distract the guards long enough to make our escape.

Then a voice spoke to me, not through the headphone mic, but like they were sitting next to me. "Fear not, for I am with you. Nobody will touch you or your friends."

"Team, a change in plans," I said through the mic. "Just ignore the guards. The

Lord is with us right at this moment."

"That change in plan sounds dangerous," one of the members whispered back.

"Trust me, I know what I'm doing," I said, though I felt less confident in saying it.

Soon they all came out with the prisoners. The alarms still sounded, but nothing else happened. Nobody moved except us. I exited the detention center computer system and turned off my laptop in time to see Daniel, Tess, Martina, Pablo, and the other three enter back into the van before we drove off.

Daniel seemed thrilled to see me. "Hey, buddy, you're a sight for sore eyes," he said as he gave me a hug. "Who's the Hispanic chaplain?"

"That's my other friend Pablo," I said. "He's one of the 144,000, just like me."

"Glad to finally meet you, amigo," Pablo said, shaking Daniel's hand.

"So what's going on in the world since we've been locked away?" Tess asked.

"We're currently at the point of the Fifth Vial Judgment, Tess," I answered. "Right now, those with the Seal of David can't see anything but complete darkness."

"But they can still hear, my friends," Pablo said. "That's why we tried to keep as silent as possible — except for me distracting the guards with my Scripture reading."

"I'm glad the Lord used both of you for this rescue mission," Martina said. "If you hadn't come, then none of us would have come out alive."

"Especially me, since the DOGs wanted to make an example of me for violating the Global Sunday Law," Daniel said.

"You can come with us to Petra, all three of you," I said. "I'm sure there's plenty of room for you in that city."

"I only wish that Valerie were here with us, Vincent," Tess said. "I don't even know what's happened to her since the last time I saw her."

"She's still alive, and part of the Co-op," Chip said. "She was reunited with her stepchildren, and now she's working to reach out to those who still haven't taken either Seal yet."

"There are still people without either Seal in this world?" Martina said, sounding surprised. "How could they manage to stay alive this long and not see their need to turn to the Lord?"

"I don't know, but those are the people we still need to reach, because the time until the Lord's coming is getting short," Pablo said.

"We would like to make sure that those people have been reached before the end comes," Tess said.

"We have the chance to do so now, while the Fifth Vial Judgment lasts," I said.

As I was on the Rapture Enterprises plane heading back to Petra, I accessed the news on my laptop and found out that in Washington, D.C., Patterson reported that hundreds of detention centers have been breached, thousands of prisoners are missing, Co-op food distribution has exploded, underground churches are operating almost openly, and the 144,000 are preaching publicly.

This news made Shepherd very angry. In a private communique that I somehow had access to, I heard him shout: "Damn those deserters! They're using my blindness against me!"

"You mean *our* blindness," Prince corrected him.

Shepherd turned toward Prince. "Mine is the only blindness that matters."

"Indeed, your Excellency," Prince said, not wishing to contest him.

Shepherd turned to Patterson. "How long until we can operate militarily without sight?" he asked.

"Your Excellency, you know that autonomous systems and audio guidance can compensate somewhat," Patterson answered.

"Good," Shepherd said. "That's all I need to know."

"Your Excellency, may I ask why?" Prince asked.

"The answer is simple, my friend," Shepherd replied. "Because I'm done defending my kingdom."

"Your Excellency, what are you proposing?" Prince asked.

Shepherd smiled. "I'm going after theirs."

I could feel my blood run cold when I heard that. The Son of the Devil was now going to take his fight against the Lord's true Kingdom.

It wouldn't be long before the king of this world would come face to face with the King of Kings.

Chapter 30

Pablo, Daniel, Tess, Martina, and I returned to Petra. Daniel got his first look at the refuge and was astonished by everything I had described to him on the way there: the miraculous water, the manna, the infrastructure, the Jews who have come to believe in Yeshua, the strange coexistence of ancient Petra and modern technology. Needless to say, he was impressed.

"So this is where you've been hiding while I've been getting arrested." Daniel finally said. "It's like you've been living at the Waldorf Astoria all the time."

I looked rather embarrassed. "I didn't exactly come here voluntarily."

"What do you mean?" Daniel asked, sounding curious.

Pablo also looked a little uncomfortable. "They drugged him."

Daniel whistled. "Okay, that makes me feel better."

"I was here to witness the Antichrist defiling the Temple and to help the Jews escape to Petra," I said. "The rest of what happened was God's doing...with a little help along the way."

"So what was it like seeing Shepherd doing the dirty to the Jews?" Daniel asked.

I grimaced. "Like watching the worst horror movie ever produced. The man looked even worse than he did when I saw his resurrection being televised. I had a feeling that Satan was indwelling him at the point, but I would never imagine him being so cold and callous as to just commit the 'abomination of desolation' right there and then."

"Then I must be blessed to miss out on watching the whole spectacle," Daniel said. "By the way, how's your sister Vivian? I haven't seen her in ages since she got married to her first husband."

My eyes fell to the ground, feeling sorrow. "She got executed by the DOG."

Daniel seemed shocked. "Oh, man! That must have been terrible! I hope your other sister Belinda is doing well, though."

"I haven't heard from her lately, Dan, but from her last report, she was in hiding with her daughters," I said.

"We'll be there for you in your time of grief and mourning, Vincent," Tess said.

"The Lord already knows how many good people we lost to the DOG. Their deaths will be avenged when the Lord comes."

"The sooner that He does come, the better," Martina said. "I'm getting more than a little tired living under the thumb of the DOG."

Eventually, we started to see more people coming to Petra, mostly from other parts of the world escaping the DOG's oppression. Rapture Enterprises spared no expense in making sure everybody they could gather from the four corners of the world would be delivered to the only safe place left on Earth, where the DOG doesn't even have a hope of touching us. I was surprised by one person that I hadn't seen in a long time since I left Westville. "Valerie!"

"Vince, dear, it's so great to see you!" Valerie said as we hugged.

"Where's your stepchildren?" I asked.

"They came with me on this trip to Petra," Valerie answered. "They just got help from the people at Rapture, who somehow show up at people's doorsteps and offer them safe passage to Petra with no questions asked."

"Thank God for Rapture," I said. "They seem to be working like God's angels in human form. Anyone else from your safehouse that came with you?"

"Pretty much everybody I know is here," Valerie said. "So is there a Dunkin' shop around here where we can go get some coffee?"

I laughed. "We do have nice fresh water coming from a rock. All you have to do is grab a cup and drink to your heart's content."

"I do appreciate the water, even God's miracle of giving us fresh water from the bloody springs during the Third Vial Judgment, but I really miss being able to get a large iced coffee from Dunkin'," Valerie said.

"I miss that too, Val," I said. "Maybe there will be something like Dunkin' that will open up when the Lord sets up His Kingdom here on earth."

"If that ever happens, it will be your turn to treat me to an iced coffee," Valerie said. "Deal?"

"Deal!" I said, as both of us laughed.

I continued to monitor the condition of the world during the Fifth Vial Judgment. The Dominion was slowly learning to function around it, but the judgment remained. The underground continued to exploit the opportunity this judgment created, while Shepherd's forces became increasingly dependent on automated technology and unsealed collaborators. It was like watching a whole world of blind people try to navigate despite not being able to see anything. Some even went through the trouble of learning to read Braille, with limited success.

Meanwhile, Jonathan Prince kept insisting that the blindness was a test of faith, twisting "we walk by faith, not by sight" as he did earlier. But privately, Prince was becoming worried. His miracles couldn't restore anyone's sight. Neither could Eric Gaskell's. Only Shepherd still had his strange, limited orange vision.

I watched another private communicate between Shepherd and Prince. "Your Excellency, I'm curious to know what you mean when you said, 'I'm going after theirs?'" Prince asked.

Shepherd calmly said, "Jerusalem."

"What does Jerusalem have to do with our current problems?" Prince asked.

"Think about it, Prince," Shepherd responded. "It's pretty obvious that God has protected Petra, empowered the 144,000, and preserved Israel because Israel is the center of God's earthly purposes. Therefore, if I cannot reach His throne, I will destroy everything on earth that belongs to Him."

Prince hesitated. Shepherd noticed.

"You wanted a holy war, Jonathan."

"Against the enemies of God."

"Exactly."

"David... you just called God the enemy."

Shepherd smiled. "You're finally paying attention."

I turned off the video feed in horror at what I just heard. It wasn't enough that Shepherd wanted a fight with God. He now also wanted a fight with God's own people, the Jews.

It made me realize how dangerous Shepherd was getting. It also made me more determined to make sure Shepherd's plans never succeed.

One day about six months before the Lord's return, Micah brought to everyone's attention something the Lord wanted us to see. "Take a look at the current satellite picture of the Euphrates River and behold what you see," he said.

On the giant projection screen, the people of Petra noticed. Satellite imagery was showing the Euphrates River rapidly receding. Not gradually. Impossibly. Reservoirs were empty. Tributaries were diminishing. The great riverbed was emerging.

"Astonishing, isn't it?" Micah said, noticing his audience's reactions. "This is all fulfillment of Scripture, the Sixth Vial Judgment. Revelation 16:12 says this: 'And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up...'"

Pablo finished. "...that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared."

Nobody was joking this time. Everyone wondered where this was leading.

Daniel asked, "Prepared for what?"

I answered, "Armageddon."

Valerie looked a bit fearful. "So this is where we are coming to. The final war between Jesus and the Antichrist."

"Yes, my child, that is what's going to happen," Micah said, anticipating Valerie's response. "There will also be three froglike spirits that will come out of the mouths of the Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet. They are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them together to the battle of that great day of God Almighty. The Lord Himself says, 'Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.' Revelation 16:16 says, 'And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.'"

"But what are we to do now that we know all about this?" Tess asked.

"There's nothing for you to fear, my child," Micah answered. "The Lord has protected this location this far. But He will allow the Antichrist and his army to

go so far as to attempt to destroy Jerusalem and the people still in it, as He will allow that same army to come against us to try destroying us. Nevertheless, remember that no weapon formed against you shall prosper. He has not brought you this far only to fail when that great and dreadful day comes. And it will be a dreadful day for our enemies, for they will come face to face with the very Lord and God whom they have rejected and turned against."

He had the screen now show images of people still suffering from the Fifth Vial Judgment, rejoicing at the news. "Look at how they're reacting, folks," Micah said. "After blood-filled water and scorching heat, people are initially celebrating the Euphrates drying. Dominion commentators are proclaiming that another obstacle to military transportation has disappeared. Engineers are now talking about constructing temporary roads across the exposed riverbed. Where Shepherd sees strategic opportunity, we see prophecy. It won't be long before the Lord lifts the Fifth Vial Judgment upon them and restores their vision and health so that they will prepare for their own destruction in the next six months. May we be prepared and ready for that time to come. That will be all. May God bless you."

After the audience departed, I, Pablo, Tess, Martina, Daniel, and Valerie were talking among ourselves. "I can't believe we're living for the day when we're seeing prophecies of Revelation coming true," Tess said.

"Yeah, and even more frightening is that this is the very person that every Christian was looking up to that's doing this," Martina said.

"That really made me think that I should have voted for Wilmington," Valerie said. "I wouldn't think that a Christian President would take things this far, even to the point of fighting the very God he claimed to be a follower of."

"You do realize that he's the Son of the Devil, and that he's been playing a good deal of us for fools," Pablo said.

"I already knew that beforehand, and I didn't even vote for him," Daniel said.

"Well, it's too late to do anything about our votes," I said. "The Christians wanted the Lord's Kingdom to come, and it is coming, whether they really wanted it in the form that it's coming or not."

"We might as well pray for the Lord's Kingdom to come anyway," Valerie said.

"And that more people will come to know the true Christ and turn to Him before it's too late," Tess said.

"I'm all for the Lord's Kingdom to come right now," Daniel said.

I watched as Shepherd ordered the surviving leaders of the ten Dominion regions to attend an emergency summit. Some refused. Some threatened secession. Some openly said Shepherd's leadership has brought catastrophe upon the world. For the first time, I could see that Shepherd couldn't simply command the entire planet — and that was infuriating him. He now needed something more than politics to unite them.

It was at that point that I had a really disturbing vision. I saw something like three grotesque amphibian shapes emerging from the Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet. But in the physical world, the spirits didn't appear as giant frogs. They manifested as impressive supernatural messengers. One appeared before Shepherd. One before Prince. And one perhaps moving through the Dominion's political leadership. They performed signs. They spoke with supernatural authority. And their message is simple: The final war has arrived.

One of the spirits told him, "You challenged heaven."

Shepherd said, "I did."

"And heaven has answered."

Shepherd smiled. "Good."

"Christ intends to descend and overthrow the Dominion," another spirit said.

Shepherd didn't react with fear. He reacted with satisfaction. "So He's finally coming."

The spirit answered, "Yes."

Shepherd said, "Then I'll be ready."

"We will help you," the third spirit said. "We will gather all the souls you have collected for your true father, the spirit who now works in the children of disobedience. We will do miracles and convince them to come together and help you gain the victory over our Adversary."

"Then go and bring together a mighty army that will help us defeat the Son of God," Shepherd said. "Do it now!"

"We are totally at your command," the first spirit said, as all three of them took a bow and then suddenly disappeared.

That was when I realized that this was the final deception.

Shepherd now knew Christ was coming and still believed He could be fought.

Micah and Pablo were busy discussing things with Jehu and Kepha when I interrupted them with some terrible news. "I just saw in a vision the three unclean spirits meeting with Shepherd and Prince. They told him they would work miracles and gather an army for Shepherd to help defeat the Son of God. I even saw one of the spirits touch Prince's eyes, and he was healed instantly. I have a feeling that this is how the Fifth Vial Judgment is going to be lifted: by these spirits touching the people with the Seal of David, to heal their sight and their bodies."

Kepha and Jehu looked surprised. "I didn't expect that's how the Fifth Vial Judgment was going to end," Kepha said.

"Me neither, but if that's the case, we've got to get ourselves back to working underground again, make sure the DOG never notices us," Jehu said.

Micah sighed. "You might be right. We'd better contact the Co-op to make sure everyone knows what's coming when the Fifth Vial Judgment is lifted."

"I'll get on that matter at once, Micah," Pablo said before he, Kepha, and Jehu departed.

Micah and I were left talking. "I'm sorry to bring such bad news at a time like this," I said. "I was hoping Operation Children of Light would last a little bit longer."

"It lasted as long as it needed to, my friend," Micah said. "Now we just need to get ourselves ready for the coming of the Lord in the next six months."

"What about the other members of the 144,000?" I asked.

"Continue to pray for them, but don't worry too much about their safety," Micah answered. "As long as God's protective hand is upon them, nobody can do them any harm. They're our only hope left for reaching the unsaved."

I nodded, grimly understanding. "I'll do what it takes, Micah."

Chapter 31

I read the news and watched videos about the incredible and frightening things happening in the world. Across the ten Dominion regions, the supernatural messengers that I saw in my vision began appearing before rulers, generals, religious leaders, and government officials. They didn't initially announce themselves as demons. They presented themselves as heavenly or transcendent messengers bringing a warning: "Something is approaching Earth." They perform extraordinary signs to authenticate themselves, such as healing the blind and restoring bodies to health. At first, their vision was limited: they could only see people as walking trees, but it grew clearer until they could see completely. They felt as if their god, David Shepherd, had finally answered their prayers.

One of the messengers contacted a regional leader who had been preparing to secede from the Dominion. "What does Shepherd have to do with this?" he asked.

The messenger answered, "He is the one chosen to lead humanity against what is coming. Take my hand and you will see the truth."

The regional leader took the messenger's hand, and soon he could see again. He was convinced that David Shepherd was worthy of his loyalty once more.

I could see that these miracles began doing what Shepherd's politics could no longer accomplish: reuniting the fractured Dominion.

I also saw the same thing in a video as I did in the vision: Prince was touched by one of the spirits. His blackened eyes cleared. He now sees. Prince was stunned. He immediately assumed this confirmed that the supernatural power behind Shepherd was greater than the power that imposed the Fifth Vial.

The spirit encouraged that interpretation without saying it outright. "Your faith has been rewarded."

Prince asked, "Can you do this for the others?"

The messenger smiled. "When the appointed hour comes."

In another video, Eric Gaskell was preaching blindly at Westville Assembly when suddenly his sight returned. Then members of his congregation began seeing. People screamed, cried, and praised God. Eric, who couldn't heal himself earlier, now declared that his prayers had finally been answered. This restored his confidence. But I understood what actually happened: Eric didn't overcome the judgment. The judgment ended, and the spirits were permitted to take credit

for it.

Throughout the world, the supernatural blindness ended. People bearing the Seal of David could see light again. Their sores began disappearing. Hospitals erupted in celebration. DOG troops regained their sight. Transportation started moving normally again. Factories restarted. Shepherd's Images illuminated once again. For the first time in months, Shepherd's followers could look upon his face. And the Dominion called it a miracle.

I called it something else. Deception.

Soon Micah drew our attention to a message Jonathan Prince delivered to the public. Although he looked a little worn down from what he had suffered for the past six months, he seemed rather optimistic. Standing behind him was David Shepherd, his good eye still black, but with glowing orange pupils coming from both sockets.

"My brothers and sisters throughout the Dominion... open your eyes. Look around you. Look at your husbands. Look at your wives. Look at your children. Look through your windows. Look toward the heavens. You can see.

"For months, darkness covered our sight. The sun continued to shine, yet we could not behold it. The lights in our homes continued to burn, yet our eyes perceived nothing. Millions awoke each morning to the same darkness with which they had gone to sleep. And our enemies rejoiced. They called it judgment. They said our blindness proved that David Shepherd was evil. They said our Seal had condemned us. They told us to abandon our Potentate. They told us to renounce the Dominion. They told us that the only way we would ever walk in light again was to surrender ourselves to their God. But I told you: Walk by faith, and not by sight. And you did."

Prince paused.

"You remained faithful when you could see nothing. You continued worshipping when you could see nothing. You remained loyal to your Dominion when you could see nothing. You trusted your shepherd when you could see nothing. And now... you see. The darkness is over."

Prince smiled.

"I stand before you today as a man who was blind. I know what you experienced because I experienced it with you. I knew the terror of opening my eyes and

finding darkness. I knew the humiliation of requiring another person to guide my steps. I knew the frustration of possessing eyes that could no longer perform the simple task for which they were created. I prayed. I waited. I believed. And then... a messenger came to me."

Prince's expression became reverent.

"A messenger unlike any being I had encountered before. He touched my eyes. And immediately... I saw. Light. Color. Faces. The world returned to me. And that messenger told me something I now tell you: The hour of humanity's greatest trial is approaching."

Prince's smile disappeared.

"The blindness was not the end. The sores were not the end. The blood was not the end. The scorching of the sun was not the end. These were merely the opening acts of a conflict far greater than any of us understood. For years, our enemies have told us that Jesus Christ is coming. For years, they have celebrated the prospect. They have preached about it. Written books about it. Produced films about it. They have looked toward heaven and prayed: 'Even so, come, Lord Jesus.' Well... He is coming."

Prince allowed the words to hang in the air.

"But I ask you a question the churches of the old world were too frightened to ask: why? Why is He coming? To embrace humanity? Look at what has already happened. Our bodies were covered with sores. Our oceans became blood. Our rivers became blood. Our children thirsted. Our crops burned. Our cities became furnaces. Our eyes were plunged into darkness. And the same people who called those things 'judgments of God' now tell you that you should welcome the One responsible for them. I ask you: does a savior torture the people he intends to save?"

Prince shook his head.

"No. A conqueror does."

His voice hardened.

"And that is what the supernatural messengers appearing throughout our world have warned us about. Something is coming. Someone is coming. He claims to be King of Kings. He claims to be Lord of Lords. He claims that every government belongs beneath His authority. He claims the nations are His inheritance. He claims that every knee must bow before Him. Think about those

words. Every knee must bow. Where is your freedom in that? Where is human dignity? Where is self-determination? Where is the right of humanity to govern itself? David Shepherd has been accused of tyranny by the very people awaiting a King who intends to rule the entire planet!"

Prince paused.

"And now I understand why our sight was restored. We were not given our eyes merely so that we could return to our ordinary lives. We were given our sight so that we could see what is coming. The messengers who restored us have carried their warning to rulers throughout the Dominion. They have performed signs that no honest person can deny. They have demonstrated that humanity is not helpless. We are not abandoned. We are not alone. And we are not required to surrender."

Prince leaned toward the camera.

"My brothers and sisters, this will be the greatest test of faith we have ever faced. Some of you are frightened. I understand. Some of you remember the Christianity you practiced before the Dominion. You remember singing songs about the return of Jesus. You remember sermons about seeing Him coming in the clouds. Perhaps part of you still wonders: *What if the people at Petra are right? What if Vincent Geordi is right? What if the 144,000 are right?* I tell you: Do not be deceived. Miracles alone do not prove righteousness. Supernatural power alone does not prove goodness. A being descending from heaven does not automatically deserve your worship."

There was a strange irony in Prince's words that he seemed completely unable to perceive.

"Judge by the fruits. What have the forces opposing the Dominion produced? Pain. Blood. Thirst. Fire. Darkness. Death. And what happened when the messengers came to us? Your sight returned. You know which side brought you darkness. And you know which side gave you light."

Prince raised his hands.

"For years I preached that we walk by faith and not by sight. Today I tell you something else. Now walk by both. Believe what you have experienced. Believe what you have witnessed. Believe what your restored eyes tell you. You endured the darkness. You remained faithful. And you have emerged from it."

His voice became softer.

"But there is one more thing we must understand. The restoration of our sight is not merely a blessing. It is preparation. The nations are gathering. The armies are mobilizing. The great river Euphrates has dried before us, opening a way that no human engineer could have created so quickly. Some call that another judgment. I call it a road."

Prince smiled.

"A road toward humanity's destiny."

He allowed several seconds of silence.

"Soon, President Shepherd will speak to the rulers and peoples of this world about what must be done. When he does, I ask you to listen. Not merely as citizens of the Dominion. Not merely as members of Shepherd's Chapel. Listen as human beings. Because the conflict before us is larger than denomination. Larger than nationality. Larger even than the Dominion. This is about whether humanity belongs to itself... or whether we are property belonging to a throne in heaven."

Prince looked directly into the camera.

"I have made my choice. I will not return to darkness. I will not kneel because someone threatens me with another plague. I will not worship because someone descends from heaven demanding that I do so. I will stand with the man who stood beside us when the waters became blood. I will stand with the man who stood beside us when the sun burned. I will stand with the man who stood beside us when our eyes went dark. I will stand with David Shepherd."

Prince placed his hand over his heart.

"And when the one calling himself Christ appears... I will stand with humanity."

His expression became almost pastoral again.

"Today, however, rejoice. Hug your children and look upon their faces. Watch the sunrise. Watch the sunset. Look at the colors of flowers. Look at the faces of those you love. Never again take the gift of sight for granted. You were blind. Now you see. And soon... you will see your enemy coming. Be ready."

Prince bowed his head.

"May the spirit that has guided our Dominion preserve us. May our eyes remain open. May our courage remain strong. And may humanity never bow to tyranny

—not even when tyranny comes from heaven. Amen."

Micah cut off the transmission just as the applause began. "Interesting how he frames the Lord's coming as an invasion instead of the blessed hope that the apostles have preached centuries ago. These people have become so convinced that they have built the true Kingdom of God here on earth that they now refuse to let the King of Kings take His rightful place here on earth to rule over it. Instead of embracing the coming King, they have now embraced an earthly king who, in their eyes, has proved himself to be the conqueror of death. He is now their king, their god, and their lord, and they will fight tooth and nail to make sure their king reigns supreme over the very creation that God alone has built with His own hands.

"Now you understand what the false doctrine of Dominionism is truly all about. It was never about God having His rightful place over the earth. It is about man usurping control of the earth from God, declaring himself to be the ultimate ruler, the ultimate authority, the ultimate power. And they use a Scripture verse from Genesis and other books of the Bible to support this idea. Brothers and sisters, mankind is given dominion over creation, but not as ultimate rulers; rather, as faithful stewards who will have to give an account for how they have managed the gifts God has given them. The good and faithful steward will be given authority over many things, while the wicked and unfaithful steward will be cast into outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

"Jesus already taught us through the Gospels that those among us who seek greatness should be the servant of all, just as the Son of Man didn't come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many. He modeled that kind of kingship by taking a servant's towel and washing the feet of His disciples. Paul the apostle said of Jesus Christ that, though He was in the form of God, He didn't consider clinging to be equal with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And having been found comprised as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death — even the death of the cross. That is why God has highly exalted Him and given Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow — those in heaven, and those on earth, and those under the earth — and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

"Since we are receiving a Kingdom that cannot be moved, may we live in a way that honors God with everything we do or say, showing the same grace unto others as God has shown unto us, keeping the Lord's works unto the end so that we may receive the crown of glory and reign with our Lord when He comes again to set up His Kingdom here on earth. May we be found steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as we know

that our labor is not in vain in the Lord. That will be all. May God bless you."

I talked with Pablo, Valerie, Daniel, Tess, and Martina after the message had ended. "I agree with Micah, that it's a kind of irony that the kingdom that they thought they were building for God, they're now planning to keep it from Him to take over," Pablo said.

"That kingdom was never built for God in the first place, Pablo," I said. "It was built for a man to take over, who would proclaim himself as God. And the worst part about it is that his followers don't seem to care that they have now turned their backs on the one true God in favor of their god."

"Well, that settles it," Valerie said. "I say we get him out of office as soon as possible, and put Jesus on the throne so we can have a true Kingdom of God here on earth."

Tess laughed. "Good luck with that. We have to wait until the end of the Tribulation to get Shepherd's butt out of the seat of office. And only Jesus will be able to do that."

"In the meantime, it still gives Shepherd free rein to torment SDAs and whoever else won't go along with his Global Sunday Law," Daniel said.

"It just gives us more opportunity to pray for the 144,000 who are still out there in the world to gather in the great harvest," Martina said.

"The sooner the last soul is saved, the better," I said.

We watched as Shepherd convened an emergency summit with the Apostles of the Dominion. Several regional leaders remained hostile toward him. One of them said, "Your leadership brought these plagues upon us." Another said, "My people want independence." Shepherd didn't threaten them this time. Instead he said, "Then don't fight for me. Fight for yourselves. Christ is coming to overthrow every human government. It doesn't matter whether you love me. It doesn't matter whether you worship at my designated chapel. It doesn't even matter whether you believe that I am divine. You need only to believe one thing: Earth belongs to humanity. Not to any god or lord or king. To ourselves alone. We are the dominators, and we will take control over everything in it. We will ascend to our rightful throne, and we will become like the Most High." That became the slogan that reunited them: "Earth belongs to humanity."

We also watched as the supernatural messengers demonstrated their power. Fire

from heaven. Healing. Temporarily restoring damaged vegetation and producing water. A lot of things that were undeniably supernatural. The rulers who were preparing to leave the Dominion began reconsidering. Not because they suddenly loved Shepherd. Rather, because they believed they were facing an existential threat. We could see that Revelation 16:14 was being fulfilled: "the spirits of devils, working miracles... go forth unto the kings of the earth... to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty."

We also watched as Shepherd temporarily loosened his political demands. The rebellious Dominion regions now retained greater autonomy. They no longer had to accept every religious regulation. They didn't even have to call him Supreme Potentate. One requirement remained: join the war. This demonstrated how desperate Shepherd had become. The Dominion, supposedly built around religious unity, now had only one remaining unifying doctrine: opposition to Christ.

Shepherd had announced the mobilization publicly. Rather than calling it Armageddon, he named it something propagandistic: THE WAR FOR EARTH. His argument: "Something is coming from beyond our world. It claims ownership of humanity. It claims the right to overthrow our governments. It claims the right to judge our people. I say Earth belongs to those who live upon it." Then he got to saying: "This is no longer David Shepherd's war. This is humanity's war." That meant people who despised Shepherd could now join him.

Eric Gaskell and the Shepherd's Chapel pastors had announced that Joel's Army was no longer metaphorical. It was becoming a reality. Congregations became recruitment centers. Chapel members volunteered. Religious services became military rallies. Eric finally said openly: "We are going to Israel." Someone asked the question he's been avoiding: "Are we going there to fight Jesus?" Eric paused, then he said: "We are going there to fight the being who claims to be Jesus." That sounded to me like he was preserving his self-deception.

Then came the day that Daniel was waiting for. Because Shepherd desperately needed military cooperation, some enforcement of the Global Sunday Law temporarily diminished. He found this darkly amusing. The law he warned everyone about was no longer Shepherd's primary concern.

"I spent years worrying about that stupid Sunday law, and now they've graduated to declaring war on Jesus," Daniel said.

"You weren't wrong about where it was heading," I said.

"You were right in not having any trust in Shepherd, Dan," Martina said. "He took things too far with his crusade of making the world Christian; now they're

getting to the point of rejecting true Christianity in favor of whatever Shepherd and Prince are telling their followers these days."

"That's going to come to an end when Jesus returns, folks," Valerie said.

"Definitely," Pablo said. "And hopefully we will be there at that moment to see it for ourselves."

Micah convened his own meeting with the 144,000 gathered from all the nations they had been sent to. He told us all that Operation Children of Light is over. As he had already told me, it lasted as long as necessary. "The underground must go back into hiding. But the 144,000 have a different mission. You must go out. You are divinely protected, so don't fear those who will try to harm you. As I'm sure you're aware, only months remain. You've spent years warning people that the King is coming. Now it is time to tell them: The King is almost here. Encourage the people who are already believers to prepare yourselves for the moment. Pray that we will be ready to stand before the Son of Man when He comes with His heavenly army. Our redemption is drawing nigh, and so is His Kingdom. Be ready for it!"

After the meeting ended, I talked with Daniel, Valerie, Tess, and Martina, who sensed what we were all feeling in that moment. We have just been reunited with each other at Petra. Now I'm being sent away again. "If you got anything that needs to be said to me, now is the good time to say it," I said.

"You don't need my permission or anyone else's here for this mission, Vince," Daniel said. "Go."

"I just got you back," I said, sounding a bit sad.

"And you rescued me so I could sit safely in Petra while you finish what God called you to do," Daniel said. "I can assure you that I'll still be here waiting when you return." A pause. Then, "Preferably before Armageddon."

"Hey, sweetie, don't forget our deal," Valerie said.

I looked at Valerie rather strangely. "What deal?"

"Iced coffee."

I laughed, remembering what she meant. "When this is over."

Valerie smiled. "When this is over."

Chapter 32

I got aboard a Rapture Enterprises transport with Pablo and several members of the 144,000. It felt almost like a military operation, except that the weapons we were carrying were "not carnal, but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every thought captive to the obedience of Christ." We were taking the battle to "the gates of Hell" itself, to make one last push "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of darkness of this world, and against spiritual wickedness in the heavenly realms". It almost made me wish for the days of Westville Assembly before it got so involved with David Shepherd's presidential campaign. Almost.

Below us, I saw military traffic moving in the opposite direction. I noticed the irony: *David Shepherd was sending soldiers toward Israel. God was sending witnesses away from it.* The armies were going to make war. The witnesses were going to make one final appeal. Two different kinds of battles on two different fronts. Yet both over the souls and the future of the world.

This made me think about Daniel, Valerie, Tess, and Martina remaining at Petra—and Valerie's reminder about the iced coffee. For the first time, I was genuinely wondering whether I'd get back in time to collect on that promise.

Earlier in the Tribulation, I had to explain things like the Rapture, the 144,000, Shepherd, the Seal, the judgments, the Dominion, prophecy. Not anymore. People have seen enough. My message now boils down to this: *Jesus is coming. Do not go to war against Him. Do not receive David's Seal. Turn to Christ while you still can.* I realized prophecy was no longer something I needed to prove. Everyone was watching it happen. And only a fool at this point would deny that it was God behind it all. His last attempt to reach humanity and tell them to turn to Him through Jesus Christ before it was too late. And the hour was reaching the last seconds to midnight.

And speaking of "the gates of Hell", our first stop was at the heart of the Dominion itself—Washington, D.C., the very place from which Shepherd ruled the world. I preached almost under Shepherd's nose, addressing government workers, disillusioned Shepherd's Chapel members, unsealed citizens, and perhaps DOG personnel who haven't taken the Seal. This gave me a chance to proclaim Christ in the capital of the counterfeit kingdom. The symbolism was excellent: while Shepherd prepared to attack God's earthly interests, one of God's witnesses walked into Shepherd's capital and preached the Gospel.

I encountered people in the very heart of this metaphorical Babylon who have somehow avoided both Seals. Some have been hiding for years. Others

sympathized with Shepherd but refused the Seal. Others simply refused to choose. Now Shepherd's military mobilization was frightening them.

"I thought staying neutral would keep me out of all this," one person said as they heard me preach.

"There isn't any neutral left," I said. "You either choose God or Satan. Not making a choice at all is the same as choosing to stand against God."

My next stop was my own hometown of Westville. I saw familiar streets transformed by the Dominion. I visited the remains of my old church, home, workplace, and even the Gilead House. People who knew me before all this recognized me. Someone remembered dismissing my warnings. This is where the evangelistic mission became emotionally personal rather than merely global.

"You're Vincent Geordi," a familiar voice called out.

I turned and saw who it was. "Tito Martinez! You're from Westville Assembly!"

"I've been looking for you because I ended up leaving Westville Assembly sometime after you left," Tito said. "I was the one who rejected you. Mocked you. I even voted for Shepherd and attended Shepherd's Chapel for a while, but I never received the Seal. I was reading your blog, and I found your words to be insightful for what was going on in the world. I thought I was finally going to go up in the Rapture, but when I realized that wasn't going to happen, I felt like a fool for continuing to follow Shepherd, so I defected and went underground. Only I never chose either the Seal of God or the Seal of David. Until now."

"I can see the Seal of God on your forehead, so that means somebody finally reached out, and I praise God for that," I said, smiling.

"That was God working through you, bud," Tito said. "He surely saved the best wine for last, as Pastor Walter would say."

"Where is Eric Gaskell?" I asked.

"Still preaching at that Shepherd's Chapel that used to be Westville Assembly," Tito answered. "He's been trying to recruit people for his Joel's Army."

I looked in the direction of that church. "It's time to pay Eric a visit."

Eric Gaskell was preaching to the congregation at the former Westville

Assembly when I barged into the sanctuary without so much as an invitation. "People of Westville Assembly, listen to what the Word of the Lord says," I said. "This man standing before you is a false shepherd leading you to follow the Idol Shepherd who sits in the White House, proclaiming himself to be God, when he is really the Antichrist, the Man of Sin, the Son of Perdition foretold in Scripture whose coming is after the working of Satan, displayed with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all wickedness that deceives those who are perishing, because they received not a love of the Truth that would save them."

"How dare you prophesy against our king, you blasphemer!" Eric shouted. "Flee and depart from this place, or else I will have my followers..."

"YOU SHALL BE SILENT UNTIL I AM FINISHED HERE!" I thundered. Immediately, Eric's voice was muted to the point where he couldn't even produce a single grunt from his lips.

"To those who still have ears to hear, listen to what the Spirit says," I continued. "The time of the judgment of Shepherd's kingdom is coming soon. He has been weighed in the balances and found wanting. You too will share in the same judgment if you don't come to your senses and flee while there is still time. The door to salvation is still open to those who have not yet taken the Seal of David. But that door will close, and you will be left standing outside, wanting to come in, but unable to. Make your choice now to accept the free invitation of God's salvation through Jesus Christ and leave this den of iniquity before God rains judgment upon it. Those who choose to remain with Eric Gaskell and his Joel's Army will become as Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of the Lord's coming."

I already sensed a few people in the congregation fall to their knees and repent, crying out for the Lord to save them. They were soon sealed with the Seal of God on their foreheads. They took their Bibles and belongings with them as they left the building with me.

"Where shall we go now that we're considered enemies of Shepherd?" one of them asked as soon as we got outside the church.

"Flee to wherever you can find someone bearing the RAPTURE logo," I told the group. "They will bring you to safety. This is God's final call to bring in the harvest before His judgment comes upon the earth and its inhabitants."

After they all fled, I hooked up with Tito. "I'm surprised that many more didn't heed your message to escape the judgment that was coming to them," Tito said.

"I did only what the Lord told me to," I said. "Not anybody's fault but theirs if they choose to continue standing with Eric and Shepherd."

"So where are you going next after this?" Tito asked.

I sighed. "Wherever the Lord will take me to preach the gospel to those who need to hear it."

"I wish that I could come with you on that journey," Tito said.

"You do what the Lord leads you to do, Tito," I said. "I'm sure that there are people left in Westville that need to hear the Word of God."

My next stop was in London, England, where the seat of government for the Dominion States of Great Britain was located. It became a Dominion stronghold ever since the entire royal family was massacred by the Warhounds following Shepherd's resurrection. As much as I dreamed of being in England at one point in my life, I never expected to go there entirely on a mission from God to save souls. But that's what it became right now: a final push to get people to turn to the Lord before it was too late. Some people heard me preach and became saved on the spot. Others remained skeptical, and the rest were ready to have me executed for speaking against the Dominion. English, Scottish, Irish, and Welsh people were getting to the point of either being sick with Shepherd's increasing demands of worship or constantly suffering at the hands of God through His judgments.

After that were Lagos, São Paulo, and Sydney, also areas where the Dominion has a stronghold on the people. And as I shared the gospel with those people in their native languages (supernaturally spoken through the utterance of the Spirit), there were some who felt convicted by my words that they fell to their knees and prayed for God to save them, and again the Seal of God appeared on their foreheads. Some, however, questioned my teachings, and the rest were just eager to put me to death by turning me over to the DOG forces.

And finally I preached in Jerusalem during the time when the DOG armies are already moving toward Israel. As I entered Jerusalem, people were evacuating, soldiers were mobilizing, and fear of the coming battle was everywhere. Here my appeal changed from prophecy to urgency: *Don't join Shepherd. Don't fight Christ. Get out while you still can.* The approaching armies made every sermon feel like a ticking clock.

Meanwhile, the dry Euphrates was now being used exactly as Dominion planners hoped. Temporary military roads crossed the exposed riverbed. Armored vehicles moved west. Aircraft filled the skies. The ten regions contributed their forces. Even rulers who recently wanted independence had

joined the coalition because of the spirits' signs. The Sixth Vial was reaching its purpose.

Shepherd's propaganda machine pushed its final grand narrative: independence. American independence freed people from kings. The Dominion supposedly freed humanity from division. Now Shepherd was claiming Armageddon would free humanity from divine government itself. Posters appear with the slogans:

EARTH FOR HUMANITY

NO THRONE ABOVE MAN

THE WAR FOR EARTH

And perhaps the most chilling:

WE WILL NOT BOW

Then I saw in a vision that Jonathan Prince had one final private crisis. He knew he was now in too deep to simply become a good man at the last moment, but to his credit, he finally understood what he'd done. He watched Shepherd's armies mobilizing. He watched Shepherd's Chapel recruit people to fight the returning Christ. Then he entered his private quarters, where an old Bible remained. He opened it—accidentally, or perhaps providentially—to Revelation 19. He read about the Rider on the white horse. KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS. Prince closed the Bible, knowing that, for perhaps the first time, there was no theological trick left.

Then I saw Prince confronting Shepherd. Prince asked privately, "David... what if it really is Him?"

Shepherd looked at the passage in Scripture and reacted nonchalantly: "It is."

That answer shocked Prince. "Then you know?"

"Of course I know."

"But you told the people—"

"I told them what they needed to hear."

Prince finally asked: "You expect us to fight Jesus Christ?"

Shepherd answered: "I expect you to decide whose side you're on."

That was the moment Prince realized Shepherd was never deceived in quite the way Prince was. "David... what have we done?" he asked.

Shepherd just casually answered. "Built a kingdom."

"Against God."

"Yes."

Prince was horrified. "How...how could you...?"

"May I remind you of everything you have done to bring us to this point: the Shepherd's Chapel, the miracles, the Seal, the executions, the worship of Shepherd, the deception of millions?" Shepherd said. "There's nowhere for you to go, Jonathan. If I'm fated to go to the Lake of Fire as the Scriptures predicted, you're coming with me to the same fate."

And tragically, Prince believed him. That part was important. Prince's final damnation wasn't because repentance was psychologically inconvenient; it was because he chose despair and loyalty to Shepherd over turning toward the Christ that he knew was coming.

For better or worse, he was locked in with Shepherd to the same fate they were sharing together.

In an underground Sons of Issachar bunker with a pirate broadcast center, some techs decided my last appeal to the general public should be broadcast on national TV. So, sitting before the camera in their makeshift studio, I spoke boldly to the people of the world: "My name is Vincent Geordi. You've probably heard my name used as a curse by David Shepherd often enough. I'm not asking you to join my organization. I'm not asking you to join a political movement. I'm asking you not to march into Israel and fight Jesus Christ.

"For more than six years, we have endured rulership of a false Kingdom of God led by a false king, whose name I'm sure you already know: David Shepherd. He is the Antichrist foretold in Scripture, the one whose coming is after the working of Satan, displayed in all power, signs, and lying wonders, and every form of evil that deceives those that are perishing, who didn't receive a love of the truth that they might be saved. Therefore God has sent on them a strong delusion that they should believe a lie, that they might be judged, who didn't believe the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

"The king of this world wants to fight the King of Kings, whom he once claimed he was building this kingdom for. This King is Jesus Christ, who is coming to set up a thousand-year kingdom of peace for those who truly follow Him and keep His works to the end. Those who oppose Him, unfortunately, will be sent to the Lake of Fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

"So here is my last message: if you've never taken either Seal, there is still time. If you're hiding, come out. If you're afraid, call upon Christ. If you've spent the last seven years laughing at people like me, that's okay. Laugh later. Right now, listen to what the Spirit is saying. He is calling you out of darkness into His marvelous light. He is gathering in the last harvest of wheat before He pours out the wine of His wrath upon that fallen city Babylon. He is knocking on your door, waiting to come in so that He may sup with you, and you with Him."

"That's it!" one of the techies said. "The transmission has been cut off. We are no longer able to broadcast any further signals from this point on."

I started to relax when I received another vision. There I saw Shepherd watching the broadcast. Instead of shutting it down immediately, he watched. Then he ordered Dominion networks to rebroadcast it. Prince asked why. Shepherd said: "Because I want everyone to hear him."

Then I saw Shepherd recording his response in his private studio. "Vincent, you and I finally agree upon something. He is coming." That felt a little startling. Then: "You call Him your King. I call Him my enemy. Soon we'll discover which of us was right."

I watched the response along with the techies in the underground studio. So did Pablo. He said: "He really has lost it."

"No," I said with a pause before adding, "I think this is the first time he's telling the truth."

As the armies continued to converge, the 144,000 independently began receiving the same supernatural instruction: *Return*. Their mission was complete. I realized what this meant. The final harvest had ended. I had no idea exactly how many people responded. Then again, I didn't need to know.

Pablo and I began traveling back toward Petra. Just before departure, someone ran toward me. It was a frightened young person, probably around the age of Pablo's youngest brother. "Mr. Geordi!"

I turned to see who it was.

"Is it too late?"

I looked toward the transport. Then back at the person. "No."

I stayed with the young person and explained the Gospel. The person believed. After I saw the Seal of God appear on their forehead, I smiled and said, "May God bless you and keep you," before departing.

I smiled at the thought that one more person got saved and entered the Kingdom.

Chapter 33

Pablo and I return to Petra and are greeted with a hero's welcome by Valerie, Daniel, Tess, and Martina. Micah also looked approvingly at the two of us as we stepped off the transport.

"Do you realize how long we've been waiting for your return?" Daniel said. "It's now only a few days before the Lord's return."

"Gee, I guess that means time's fun when you're having flies," I quipped.

Tess laughed. "You mean time flies when you're having fun. We watched your video broadcast for the short time it was on the air. I'm glad the Sons of Issachar are doing their part to get people ready for the Lord's return."

"Hey, Vince, remember our promise?" Valerie said. "You said you would treat me to an iced coffee when you return."

I laughed. "I know, but that's going to have to wait a little bit longer. Hope you're not disappointed."

Valerie smiled slightly. "Just a little. Anyway, some people arrived at Petra and claimed to know you. Said they're also part of your family."

Valerie led me to three girls in their early to mid-forties that I recognized. They were Belinda's daughters: Marilyn, Juniper, and Cynthia. All of them had the Seal of God on their foreheads. "Hi, Uncle Vince, glad to finally meet with you after all these years," Cynthia said.

"I'm glad to see you three being together again," I said. "Where's your mother?"

Marilyn looked sad. "She didn't make it. She was taken into custody by the DOG and executed."

"Yeah, we're the only ones who escaped the blade," Juniper said, also mournful. "We just prayed she didn't suffer at the hands of the DOG."

I nodded, understanding the gravity of the situation. "I mourn your loss," I said. "Anyone else from our family who's here with you?"

"Cole with his wife Jill and their daughter Angela are here as well," Cynthia said. "They managed to escape the DOG by the skin of their teeth. And believe it or not, they're also now true believers."

I smiled. "I'd love to meet up with Cole sometime, see how he's doing."

"We told him most of his half-siblings from his father's side of the family are now dead," Marilyn said. "He was glad to hear you're one of the 144,000. In fact, he became saved when he read through your blog articles about Jesus."

"Well, I'm just a humble servant doing my part," I said. "The saving part is all God's doing." Pablo came over to me to ask for some time alone to discuss something. "Excuse me, my friend needs something from me. I'll talk to you later."

When Pablo and I were alone together, he asked, "What was the delay all about? You needed to take a bathroom break or something?"

"It was just one last person who was calling out for salvation," I answered. "I didn't ask for or remember their name, but they were pleading with such sincerity to share Jesus with them; I had to take some time to give them the rundown of the Gospel and how to be saved."

"Oh," Pablo said, understanding. "I'm glad God moved in somebody's heart to bring them to salvation. Just wish it wasn't at the cusp of the 144,000 being called back to Petra."

"Hopefully we will meet with that person again soon, or else we will see them when Jesus returns," I said.

Micah came by. "I have a feeling you have something to share with me, Vincent, about your delay coming back home."

I told him the same thing I told Pablo. Micah understood.

"Then it wasn't too late for that person," he said. "They got in before the door was closed forever."

The 144,000 gathered at Petra over the next few days. This felt unlike our earlier meetings. Nobody was receiving another assignment. There was nowhere else to go. No next campaign. No next city. No next broadcast. Our ministry was complete. Now there was only the return of the Lord to look forward to.

For years, I had wondered whether I would survive long enough to finish what God had called me to do. Now I had. And strangely, that left me asking: *What do you do when God tells you that your job at the end of the world is finished?*

Then, as if knowing what I was thinking, Pablo answered, "Wait for Jesus, apparently."

Our reflection was soon cut short by the televised appearance of David Shepherd. He was no longer directing the war from Washington. He arrived personally in Megiddo with Jonathan Prince, Harry Patterson, Eric Gaskell, and senior Dominion commanders. Shepherd declared that he wanted to be present for the confrontation he demanded.

We could see that the armies gathering throughout the region were staggering in scale. DOG forces. Joel's Army. Armies from all ten Dominion regions. Autonomous weapons. Aircraft. Drones. Missile systems. Everything humanity has left. And Shepherd looked upon it with satisfaction.

Prince had changed after his private confrontation with Shepherd. He now knew that Shepherd knew the returning figure really is Jesus Christ. Shepherd admitted it outright. Prince watched the military buildup almost silently.

Eric noticed. "Something wrong, Jonathan?"

Prince answered: "No." But we could see from his expression that everything was wrong. He kept remembering Revelation 19: KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

Shepherd was surveying the gathering armies. "Your Lordship, as you can see here, preparations for your unequivocal victory are almost complete," a commander reported.

Shepherd asked: "And Jerusalem?"

"The city can be assaulted when you give the order, Excellency," the commander answered confidently.

Prince asked: "And if He comes first?"

Shepherd looked upward. "Then He saves us the trip."

We could see Shepherd was almost eager now. He spent years claiming to represent God. Then he claimed to be God. Now he wanted to defeat God.

Shepherd gave his final military address. "Soldiers of humanity: you have been told that what comes against us is divine. I tell you that divinity gives no one the right to rule you. You have been told that every knee must bow. I say stand. You have been told that every tongue must confess. I say refuse. This earth is our

home. And no throne in heaven will take it from us."

The armies respond: "WE WILL NOT BOW!"

"Remember that this world is ours. The Lord has given us dominion over it. And once we're rid of the God who has given all things on this earth to be in our hands, we will take our rightful place on the throne of the world. And we will enter into the heavens themselves and declare ourselves to be like the Most High...FOR WE ARE THE MOST HIGH!"

We were watching what would be Shepherd's last push to get all humanity on his side against God, his last bit of encouragement to get the world to stand face to face with the God they were aiming to overthrow. But then suddenly I became uneasy. Not afraid exactly. Something was different. The air felt charged. Other members of the 144,000 sensed it too. Conversation stopped. Then I heard something. Not through my ears. A voice. One word: "Finished."

Micah looked at me. "You heard it too?" I nodded.

Then another voice—greater, overwhelming, coming from beyond anything I could describe: "IT IS DONE."

Revelation 16:17.

The Seventh Vial has been poured into the air.

At first, a tremor. Then Petra shook violently. I fell. People screamed. Equipment crashed. Lights flickered. But the ancient rock refuge remained standing.

Then reports began coming in. And I realized: *This wasn't an earthquake in Petra. It was everywhere.* Revelation 16:18 describes: "a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth..." The world was physically coming apart.

Throughout the DOG, chaos reigned. Washington, D.C., the capital of Shepherd's supposedly eternal kingdom, was collapsing. Streets had split open. Government buildings collapsed. Dominion monuments toppled. The DOGs' headquarters was destroyed. The Shepherd's Chapel complex cracked apart. The Image of David, the enormous representation of Shepherd began cracking. Its sword broke in pieces. Its shield bearing the SOD emblem fell. The face split in half. Then the entire statue collapsed. Not because rebels pulled it down. Not because I destroyed it. God did it.

I received another vision then. I saw the worldwide Dominion system collapsing. Not merely Washington. Financial centers. Government capitals. Military command centers. Shepherd's Chapel headquarters. Propaganda networks. The infrastructure that enforced the Seal of David. Everything that made the Dominion function. I remembered Revelation 16:19: "and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath." I finally understood: Babylon wasn't merely one city. It was the civilization Shepherd had built. And its hour has come.

I saw a mighty angel take up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea. He said, "Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all. And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in you; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more in you; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in you; and the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in you; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in you: for your merchants were the great men of the earth; for by your sorceries were all nations deceived. And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth."

Then came something even more devastating to the members of the DOG. The entire economic system connected to the Seal of David collapsed. Servers failed. Banks disappeared. Power grids collapsed. Identification networks went offline. The buying-and-selling system that once made the Seal indispensable simply ceased functioning. People still bore SOD on their bodies. They still had the biochips. But now it couldn't buy bread. It couldn't open doors. It couldn't authorize travel. It couldn't protect anyone. That got me to reflect: *People had surrendered their souls for permission to buy and sell. Now nothing was left to buy or sell.*

At Megiddo, the earthquake hit hard. Shepherd was thrown down. Prince fell. Command tents collapsed. Vehicles overturned. Aircraft attempting to land crashed. Communication systems failed. Soldiers panicked. Shepherd clawed his way upright with his functioning arm.

A commander shouted: "Supreme Potentate! We've lost Washington!"

Another: "Communications with Europe are down!"

Another: "Multiple regional capitals have been destroyed!"

Shepherd looked around. His entire empire was disappearing.

Prince stared at the devastation. He whispered: "Babylon."

Shepherd heard him. "What?"

Prince spoke louder: "Babylon the Great is fallen."

Shepherd grabbed him. "Don't quote that book to me."

Prince answered quietly: "You quoted it when it served you."

This seemed like a good moment for Prince. Not repentance yet. But the truth was becoming impossible for him to suppress.

I watched impossible satellite reports until the satellites themselves began failing. Coastlines changed. Islands vanished beneath water. Mountain ranges collapsed. Maps became obsolete in real time.

Pablo asked: "How bad is it?"

I answered while shaking my head: "There isn't a scale for this."

After the earthquake, silence lasted perhaps thirty seconds. Then something crashed outside Petra. A massive chunk of ice. Another. Then another. The Seventh Vial's hail begins. The stones were enormous. The hail pulverized buildings already damaged by the earthquake. Military equipment at Megiddo was destroyed. Soldiers scattered.

Eric witnessed the hail smashing Joel's Army. The people he recruited were dying around him. He tried commanding the hail to stop. Nothing. He tried praying in Shepherd's name. Nothing. Then, finally, in desperation, he screamed: "David! Do something!"

Shepherd didn't even look at him. That was when Eric finally understood that Shepherd couldn't save anyone. Then out of nowhere, a huge hailstone fell on Eric and crushed him, barely missing Prince and Shepherd. Shepherd briefly looked in that direction and then just turned his face back toward the sky, still unmoved by the scene.

And all through this, people with the Seal of David still blasphemed God. Some soldiers screamed curses toward heaven. Others doubled down on the WE WILL NOT BOW chant. Shepherd heard them. And instead of recognizing the horror of what he had caused, he became energized by their hatred. He screamed: "THAT'S RIGHT!" Then toward heaven: "YOU HEAR THEM?"

A hailstone destroyed a nearby tank. Shepherd didn't move.

"THEY DON'T WANT YOU!"

Another crash.

"THIS WORLD IS MINE!"

Prince watched him. And he finally realized that this wasn't his friend David anymore. Perhaps it never was. The man standing before him wasn't trying to save humanity. He was willing to let every human being die rather than surrender.

Prince whispered: "You don't care about them."

Shepherd turned. "What?"

"The people."

Shepherd said nothing.

Prince added: "You never did."

Shepherd smiled.

That answer was worse than any dialogue. It revealed the truth about the man who once claimed to be a man of God. He was truly the Son of the Devil.

Despite the earthquake and hail, Petra remained protected. I turned and saw frightened children. Families. The people rescued during Operation Children of Light. People brought in through Rapture Enterprises. Converts from the final harvest. And perhaps among them, unexpectedly—the young person I stopped for at the end of the harvest. They made it to Petra.

I recognized them. "You made it!"

The person smiled. "So did you. My name is Enoch, by the way. I was rescued by the Sons of Issachar and raised up in one of their underground bunkers, but I never came to know the true faith of Yeshua ha Mashiach until the day we met."

"Welcome to the family of God, Enoch," I said. "You're just about ready to see the Lord's return."

"Will that be anytime soon?" Enoch asked.

I smiled. "Yes. Very Soon."

Eventually the earthquake subsided. The hail diminished. Communication was nearly gone. The Dominion's global system was shattered. I looked at whatever surviving screens remained. No normal broadcasts. No financial networks. No functioning global government. The Dominion still had armies. Shepherd still had followers. But his kingdom was gone. I thought: *David Shepherd had conquered the world. God dismantled it in an afternoon.*

But God showed me then that it wasn't over yet. In a vision, I saw what was left. Dust. Burning vehicles. Dead soldiers. Hail melting upon devastated ground. Prince nearby. Shepherd had been knocked down yet again. Slowly, painfully, he got back onto his feet. He looked toward heaven. Blood ran down his face. And he started laughing.

Prince stared at him. Shepherd spread his arms.

"IS THAT IT?"

Thunder.

"YOU DESTROYED MY CAPITAL!"

Lightning.

"YOU DESTROYED MY KINGDOM!"

Another tremendous crash.

Shepherd screamed: "BUT I'M STILL HERE!"

Silence.

Then Prince noticed something. He looked upward. His expression changed.

Shepherd noticed. "What?"

Prince didn't answer. Other soldiers began looking upward. One by one. Thousands of faces turned toward the sky. The clouds were changing.

The vision ended, and I, along with the people at Petra, saw it for ourselves.

The sky began to open.

Chapter 34

As the clouds parted, I could see a brilliant light peeking through. An incredibly powerful light that lit up the entire world. A light that made shadows impossible because it was coming from everywhere. Then as I continued to watch, a figure on a horse appeared, clothed in the same light that was coming from heaven.

I knew who it was. Jesus. The Rider of the White Horse. My Lord and Savior.

He was dressed as a king ready for battle. He wore a robe that looked like it was dipped in blood, and he was crowned with an impossible number of crowns resting on his head. His hair and beard were white like wool, white as snow. His eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze refined in the furnace. He had in his right hand an iron scepter with which He would rule the nations. His countenance was like the sun shining in all its strength. On his thigh He had this written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.

As the clouds continued to part, I could see thousands upon thousands of riders upon horses standing behind Jesus. They looked eager and ready to ride with their Lord upon the skies, although I knew from Scripture that Jesus would do most of the fighting. The heavenly army was just there to praise the Lord during the entire battle.

Everyone at Petra looked at this scene and felt an awesome wave of holiness wash over them, emanating from the Rider. We all fell to our knees and cried out, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"

Everywhere in the world, I sensed people seeing the same event happening over their heads. Christians with the Seal of God fell to their knees and humbly bowed, saying the same words as we have said. Those with the Seal of David, however, trembled in terror at the sight, their knees weak as water, and they couldn't help but fall to their knees, realizing that their day of Shepherd's kingdom was over and that the true Kingdom of God had come at last.

The reaction at Megiddo was mixed. Shepherd noticed that everybody around him, his loyal soldiers and subjects, and even Prince himself, were falling to their knees whether they wanted to or not. This infuriated Shepherd, as he expected his DOG forces to resist the urge to bow, but now they were helpless, overcome by the incredible holiness that demanded worship at Jesus' presence alone.

"Stand up, you fools!" he shouted. "This is a trick of the enemy. He wants you to bow down so that you will be rendered impotent and ready to be slaughtered."

"We cannot obey that order," one of the soldiers said. "We all answer to the One who rightly rules over all creation, whether we like it or not."

"You must bow down before the Lord God, your Majesty," another soldier said.

"NEVER!" Shepherd roared. "If He wants me to bow, He'd better come down and make me! This world is mine, and I'm not going to give it back to Him!"

Pablo and I could sense Shepherd's bold resistance even from miles away. So could the rest of the 144,000. We knew that Shepherd's time was coming to an end, and his army couldn't prevent what was going to happen.

Enoch looked at me briefly. "Is that Yeshua that I see in the sky with His heavenly army?" he asked.

"Yes, and He will deal with our enemies with His WOMD," I answered.

"WOMD?" Enoch asked, curious.

"Weapon Of Mouth Destruction," I explained. "The 'sword of His mouth' that will slay His enemies and literally cut them to pieces."

"Weapon Of Mouth Destruction?" Pablo said, sounding weirded out. "You waited for this moment to come up with that?"

I smiled. "I thought that it was appropriate, given what we'll see in the next minutes."

Then, after what seemed like an hour of silence, Jesus spoke. "I AM THE ALPHA AND THE OMEGA, THE BEGINNING AND THE END, THE FIRST AND THE LAST, THE ALMIGHTY!"

Over in the distance at Megiddo, DOG soldiers one by one fell, their bodies cut apart as if being hacked to pieces with a sword. Shepherd watched helplessly as his army was being decimated without even a single shot fired from their side.

"Prince, get me out of here!" he yelled. "We'll regroup at Jerusalem, where we will make our final stand against the King of Kings."

Prince reluctantly obliged. He got up from his knees and got into a Humvee with Shepherd riding in the passenger seat. He had to drive cautiously around carcasses and huge hailstones that were making driving extremely dangerous.

I saw an angel standing in the sun. He cried with a loud voice, saying to all the

birds that flew in the midst of heaven, "Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God; that you may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great."

And in a vision I saw that all the birds of the sky came down upon the piles of dead bodies, gorging themselves full of the flesh that has been prepared for them like a banquet of fresh carnage.

Pablo saw it too. "Ay carumba! Those poor saps are becoming lunch for the birds of the sky, after being slain by the Word of God."

I nodded with some distaste. "That's just the beginning. There's worse that will happen at Jerusalem, which the Sons of Issachar are defending to the last man."

"But how will we get there, everyone at Petra, and even ourselves?" Pablo asked.

"That's not our problem," I answered. "This is entirely God's show, and He will bring us there with whatever method He deems necessary and appropriate."

"People of Petra, bow your knees and pray," Micah said. As everyone bowed to their knees, he continued. "Lord God, show through Your power how You will take us to Jerusalem, where we will see You defend Your beloved city."

We closed our eyes for about a minute, and then the next thing we knew, we were no longer standing in Petra. Rather, we were standing in the heart of Jerusalem with the Sons of Issachar, who were all armed and ready to deal with the invading DOG army should they approach.

Kepha and Jehu greeted us. "Micah, what is going on? Why are you here with the people of Petra?" Kepha asked.

"The Lord has brought us here so that we can see for ourselves how He will deal with the armies that are gathered around the holy city," Micah answered.

"We are armed and ready to deal with the DOGs," Jehu said. "It would be better for you to stay outside the city and let us do our work."

"You do not need your weapons," Micah said. "The Lord has come to defend Jerusalem and its citizens. All you need to do is stand still and watch."

Kepha sighed. "I will take you at your word, Micah." He gave the order to the

rest of the Sons of Issachar to put down their weapons and just watch to see what the Lord would do. They all reluctantly put down their arms and waited with the rest of us for the DOG army to come.

"Let us give praise to the Lord for His deliverance," Micah said. And soon, slowly but surely, everyone among us, both the Petra survivors, the 144,000, and the Sons of Issachar, were singing this one simple phrase over and over: *Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, and His mercy endures forever.* In every language, from every tongue, we could hear this one phrase sung over and over.

Soon we could see Shepherd, Prince, and the DOG army approaching on horseback, ready to ride into the city and destroy the opposition that was facing them. As we watched them enter the city, we noticed the DOG army's horses going crazy and causing trouble for their riders. Even Shepherd and Prince struggled to control their horses as they entered the city. And then suddenly the soldiers screamed as they themselves and their horses were being consumed by a flesh-dissolving disease that afflicted both the horses and their riders. Only Shepherd's and Prince's horses were unaffected. They watched as the curse decimated their forces.

And then we noticed the Lord descending upon the Mount of Olives. The instant He set foot on the mountain, it began to split in two, creating a valley that went from east to west. More of the DOG troops fell as this new valley consumed them in its formation. We also felt Jerusalem rising as the city was elevated while the surrounding mountains were flattened into a rolling plain.

Shepherd and Prince tried to make a run for it on their horses, but Michael the archangel stopped them before they went too far. We would see how the Lord would deal with them a little later.

The Lord entered the city through the Eastern Gate, which had been closed for centuries but was now open to let Him and His followers enter. He got off His horse and addressed the crowd. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills prophets and stones those who are sent to you, how long I have wanted to gather your children together as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, but you wouldn't let Me. See, your house was left to you desolate. For I said to you, you will not see Me again until you have said, 'Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord.'"

"BLESSED IS HE WHO COMES IN THE NAME OF THE LORD!" everyone shouted, which made Jesus smile.

"Now is the time for judgment," the Lord said. "Now the prince of this world will be cast out. The Antichrist and the False Prophet will stand before Me and

give an account of their lives, for they have been weighed in the balances and are found wanting."

We watched as Michael brought Shepherd and Prince before Jesus, with Prince looking defeated and Shepherd looking defiant.

Michael spoke aloud, "As fulfillment of age-old prophecy, you will kneel before Jesus, the Son of the living God, who, being in the form of God, didn't consider clinging to be equal with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found comprised as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death — even the death of the cross. Therefore God has highly exalted Him and gave Him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow — those in heaven, and those on earth, and those under the earth — and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Prince was eager to bow before Jesus. He ripped off his religious robe and miter and fell to his knees. "Oh, my Lord and my God, please forgive me, for I have sinned against You and against Your people," he cried out.

"Jonathan, I have brought you forth for such a time as this, to help make this world a utopia before My return," the Lord said. "But you, along with Shepherd, turned people against Me when you had a taste of power. You gave yourself over to Satan and his empty promises of owning all the kingdoms of the world if you would bow down and worship him. You made your followers hunt down My people like they were beasts, and helped damn millions of souls by forcing the Seal of David upon them and making them swear allegiance to him alone."

"I am sorry for doing that, my Lord," Prince said. "I renounce all the works of Satan and Antichrist, and swear all my allegiance to You!"

"You will be cast alive into the Lake of Fire along with Shepherd," the Lord said, sounding sad.

"Oh, please, no!"

"SILENCE!" Michael shouted. "Now, Antichrist, it's your turn to kneel before your Lord."

Shepherd sneered. "I recognize no authority here to which I will bow."

The Lord said calmly, "Lucifer, release him."

Suddenly, Shepherd writhed in pain as he felt the spirit inhabiting his body leave him, causing his body to turn into a withering corpse instantly.

"KNEEL!" Michael shouted.

"As...you...say," Shepherd muttered, falling to his knees before Jesus.

The Lord looked at Shepherd with sadness. "David, you were a willing tool of your father, Satan. You used every gift you have been given for personal gain. You made people worship you and your father while pretending to be a servant of righteousness. You destroyed My people while condemning millions to set up a false kingdom that pitted your will against Mine. As I have said to Pontius Pilate years ago, 'My Kingdom is not of this world, for had it been of this world, I would have had soldiers fighting for Me so that I would not be delivered to the Jews.' So now I pronounce unto you MENE, MENE, TEKEL, and UPHARSIN. Your kingdom is finished. You have been weighed in the scales and found wanting. And your kingdom will be divided and given unto others who will produce its true fruits. And now, who do you say that I am?"

Shepherd didn't raise his head. He just kept himself low to the ground as he muttered, "You are the Christ...the Son of the living God...who died...and rose again...as the Scriptures predicted."

"And what does that say about you and what you made of your life?" the Lord asked.

A pause. Then he said, "I confess...I confess that my life is worthless, a mistake. I rebelled against the God of the universe...who I now know... loved me."

The Lord nodded. "You also will be cast alive into the Lake of Fire. Michael, it is time."

Michael forced both Shepherd and Prince to stand. "And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army. And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone."

A hole appeared in the ground, with black fire belching out. Prince screamed as he fell into the hole, while Shepherd remained silent, consumed by his own guilt and shame, as he, too, fell into the hole. Then the hole sealed itself up, and that was the end of Shepherd and Prince.

"Oh, man, that was pretty heavy," Pablo said, watching the scene unfold before him. "We just witnessed Shepherd and Prince being cast alive into the Lake of Fire, Vince."

"I know," I said, sounding a bit fearful. "And now I can only wonder what's coming next that we need to watch."

"Be at ease, My children," the Lord said. "Some of you may be uncomfortable with what you have seen, and there's still more to come, but you need not fear. I am here with you, and for those waiting for friends and loved ones to be resurrected, you will see them again, I promise you. Remember, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in Me, though they die, shall live, and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die."

Then while Michael was away, Gabriel spoke. "And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season."

Then I saw Lucifer being brought before Jesus by Michael, who had bound him with a great chain in his hand. Needless to say, Lucifer was angry. "How dare you insist that I come before your Lord and bow down before Him. I don't answer to you."

"No, but you do answer to Me," the Lord said. "Kneel at my feet."

"I will do no such thing!" Lucifer snapped.

The Lord calmly said, "Kneel."

And Lucifer got down on his knees and bowed before the Lord, looking every bit to rebel against Him at the slightest chance.

The Lord told Lucifer that He had fought against him since his creation. That he was an anointed cherub who walked among the stones of fire. That he rebelled against God and His creation, and ended up turning His own creation against Him by seducing Eve into sin, by polluting the bloodline of mankind with Nephilim, by having people build an idolatrous tower unto heaven, by having Pharaoh kill all the male babies in Egypt, by having King Herod the Great order the destruction of babies in Bethlehem during His infancy, by having Judas Iscariot turn against Him and sell Him for thirty pieces of silver. Lucifer listened

helplessly in silence as the Lord laid all the charges against him: his crimes against God and His creation; how God created the earth as a utopia, but because sin entered it, it resulted in death, poverty, sickness, thousands of wars, and the senseless killing of billions.

"You brought this upon yourself, Satan," the Lord finally said. "You said in your heart, 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.' Yet you shall be brought down to Hell, to the sides of the pit."

And soon another hole emerged, and Michael took Lucifer, still bound in his chain, and threw him down into the hole. Michael went in with a key in his hand, then came back out, and the hole was sealed shut. And everyone among us cheered, glad that Satan had finally been dealt with, and that he would deceive the nations no more until the thousand years were finished.

Chapter 35

Now that Satan, Antichrist, and the False Prophet were dealt with, the Lord decided to call each of us forward. Surprisingly, I was called first, as if the Lord wanted to meet me all along among the thousands who were gathered together. I had a sense that everyone in that crowd also felt that the Lord had called them first. So, even though we all came together to meet the Lord face to face, I felt like I was the only one who came forward; everyone just watched me approach with such humility that I felt ashamed of myself and the things I had done.

"Vincent, I have waited for this moment, as I'm sure you have," the Lord said, looking into my eyes and smiling. "You need not be ashamed, for I have purchased you with My blood and set you free from your sins."

"I don't have anything to offer You, my Lord, that's worthy of repaying You for all that You have done," I said, weeping.

"Your heart is all I need, Vincent," the Lord said. "You were ashamed because you were given sexual temptations for strange flesh, and for a time you would have given over to those temptations. Yet I brought you through those temptations by pouring out My Spirit upon you. I also helped you deal with the early years of being a Christian by maturing you to the point where you can overcome the world and all its temptations. You grew in grace each and every day you submitted yourself unto Me, and though there were days when you failed, you asked for forgiveness, and I was willing and just to forgive your sins and cleanse you of all unrighteousness."

"My heart aches because I have been lonely all these years for a soulmate, and I haven't found anyone who was worthy of being one, nor did I find myself worthy of being anyone's soulmate," I said.

"I know what weighs on your heart, Vincent," the Lord said. "You and the 144,000 will be rewarded in the Kingdom that I'm now setting up here on earth with a soulmate, a helper suitable for you and your needs."

Then the Lord touched my head, and I felt an incredible warmth spread through my entire body. I wish I could say it was "better than sex", but since I was celibate, I didn't have any frame of reference for that experience. Only that it reminded me of a scene from an episode of *Star Trek: Voyager* with the two Qs touching fingers with each other.

I smiled, and the Lord smiled back at me. Then I went back and joined Pablo where he was standing. He looked as if he was pleased with what the Lord did with him in that moment. "Hey, dude, you feeling okay?" Pablo asked.

"Better than okay, Pablo," I answered. "It felt like all the pain I have suffered for years was gone in an instant, and I now have an incredible peace in my soul."

"So does this mean it's the end of the DOG for good?" Tess asked as she, Valerie, Martina, Micah, and Daniel gathered around me.

"Not yet, my child," Micah answered. "There's still the judgment of the sheep and the goats that will happen at the new Valley of Jehoshaphat. What remains of the world's population will be brought tomorrow to that valley where the Lord will judge the nations for how they have treated 'the least of His brethren'."

"And then that will be it?" Daniel asked. "We will finally be in the Lord's Kingdom?"

"There will also be the judging of the Old Testament saints as well as the New Testament saints and the 'Tribulation saints'," Micah answered. "These will be for rewards that the Lord will give for each saint, what is appropriate for each one to receive."

"Wow," Martina said. "Sounds like it's going to be a busy time between now and when the Millennial Reign takes place."

"Indeed," Micah said. "Daniel chapter 12:11-12 says this: 'And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days. Blessed is he that waiteth, and cometh to the thousand three hundred and five and thirty days.'"

"So there's going to be additional days to wait before we enter into the Millennial Reign?" Valerie said. "That's another long wait for me to get an iced coffee around here."

I laughed. "I'm still going to treat you to one, Val. Just wait for the day."

"I'll be waiting for that day, I promise you," Valerie said, smiling.

The hours that passed between that time and the "sheep and goats" judgment were uneventful, save that we spent the night together at the Eretz Estate, which was left unto Micah by his parents when they passed away. We enjoyed dinner and fellowship before we went to the sleeping quarters each of us was offered. I felt glad that the Lord provided us with a place to stay after being cooped up in Petra for three and a half years. The night felt so peaceful now that I didn't have

to worry about the DOG watching over me like a hawk ready to swoop down upon its prey.

Early the next morning, we woke up and found ourselves heading for the Valley of Jehoshaphat, ready for what the day had in store for us. As we entered the valley, I noticed that probably one-fourth of the world's population remained after all the judgments and deaths that befell us. This included people with the Seal of God and those with the Seal of David. The latter group looked confused, wondering what they were doing in the valley at that moment, as they probably tried to go about their daily routine and were instantly transported somewhere else.

As my group reached the Valley, we saw Jesus standing on a raised rock platform above the crowd. "Those with the Seal of God, head to your left. Those with the Seal of David, head to your right. Your judgment will come soon."

My group headed to the Lord's right, where we stood among those with the Seal of God. The Seal of David group stood on the Lord's left.

"Now is the time for the judgment of the nations," Jesus said. "For those on My right...come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the eternal Kingdom that has been prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you fed Me. I was thirsty, and you gave Me drink. I was a stranger, and you welcomed Me. I was naked, and you clothed Me. I was sick, and you visited Me. I was in prison, and you came to Me."

"Lord, when did I see You hungry, and fed You?" Valerie asked.

"When did I see You thirsty, and gave You drink?" Daniel asked.

"When did I see You a stranger, and welcomed You?" I asked.

"When did I see You naked, and clothed You?" Pablo asked.

"When did I see You sick or in prison, and visit You?" Tess asked.

"Truly I tell you, whatever you did for the least of My brothers and sisters, you did unto Me," the Lord answered. "For those on My left...depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the Devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you didn't feed Me. I was thirsty, and you gave Me no drink. I was a stranger, and you didn't welcome Me. I was naked, and you didn't clothe Me. I was sick and in prison, and you didn't visit Me."

Those on the Lord's left said together, "Lord, when did we see You hungry, or

thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and didn't minister unto You?"

"Truly I tell you, whatever you didn't do for the least of My brothers and sisters, you didn't do unto Me," the Lord responded. "You will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

"But Lord, Lord, haven't we prophesied in Your name? Haven't we cast out devils in Your name? And haven't we in Your name done many wonderful works?" the people on the left asked in protest.

The Lord looked at them sadly. "I never knew you. Depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness."

And with that, the Lord caused a large opening to form beneath the feet of those on His left, so that they all fell together into the everlasting fire. As soon as the last soul disappeared from that group, the opening sealed itself up.

We looked at the whole thing in shock. It was amazing, yet terrifying, to see the Lord at work, getting rid of the last of His enemies. There was now nobody left on earth but only those who had the Seal of God on their foreheads.

"Be at peace, My children," the Lord said. "As My Father has said, I do not delight in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked should turn from his way and live. But those people chose to make their stand against Me and My Father, and with that choice comes the reaping of consequences. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Me, Jesus Christ your Lord."

The rest of us sat through what seemed like days, watching the Lord honor and reward all the Old Testament saints. Yet none of us seemed to be tired or bored as each saint was given their reward. We sat there patiently, listening to the deeds that those saints had done, and even cheering some of our favorites when they got called. I was particularly interested when I saw King David from Scripture get called up and was greatly honored for his service to the Lord as the king of Israel. Then there were the prophets: Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The Lord praised each of them for speaking truth and doing miracles, and gave them special rewards. After that came the New Testament saints, and we were all surprised by whom the Lord had honored with special rewards for their bold testimonies of faith. And finally there came the Tribulation saints, those who have been martyred during the past seven years for proclaiming Jesus and for accepting death rather than the Seal of

David. I cheered when I saw my sisters Vivian and Belinda get their special rewards from the Lord.

Then at last, when all the saints have been rewarded, the Lord said, "I will declare the decree: the LORD has said unto me, 'You are My Son; this day have I begotten You. Ask of Me, and I shall give You the heathen for Your inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron; You shall dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.' Be wise now therefore, O you kings: be instructed, you judges of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and you perish from the way, when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him. Welcome, one and all, into the Kingdom of God, for this is your reward for enduring seven years of great tribulation."

The rest of the day felt like a mix between a reunion and the end of a graduation ceremony. I met my family members, all wearing robes and crowns, including my brother Charlie and my mother. "Hello, Vincent, it's been a long time waiting to see you again," my mother said, smiling.

I hugged her so tight I was afraid to let go. "I knew that I would see you again, Mom, but I wasn't expecting it to be at the end of the Tribulation. Have you seen Dad in heaven with you?"

"Sadly, no, but I have seen your grandmother and your two aunts and one of your uncles here with me," my mother said. "Would you like to see them?"

"Sure, maybe later, though," I said. "Anyway, I'd like to introduce my friend Pablo Rivera. He was one of the 144,000, along with me, who helped spread the true message of God to the people of earth during the Tribulation."

"So glad to meet you," Pablo said, shaking my mother's hand. "Maybe I should introduce you to my parents. They've been instrumental in bringing me to where I am now as a believer."

"Well, well, if it isn't Vincent Geordi, one of the survivors of the Tribulation," another voice broke in. I turned and saw Walter Hightower of Westville Assembly with his wife, Grace, now looking younger and healthier than I had last seen him.

"Pastor, I'm surprised and happy to see you with the saints," I said.

"Please, Vincent, just call me Walter," he said. "I'm just happy to be here myself. It would have been nice if we all went up in the Rapture before this whole thing started, but as I said, whether it will be with the undertaker or the Upper-Taker, I'm going to be with the Lord forever."

"I'm glad to see that the Lord has worked through you, Vincent," Grace said. "Look at how many people got saved because of your bold witness. You should feel happy for yourself."

I smiled. "That was entirely the Lord's work, Grace. I'm just a mere servant doing my part for the Kingdom."

Valerie came by and saw Pastor Walter with his wife Grace. "Pastor, I'm so glad to see you. I wanted to tell you I'm sorry for not being there by your side when you passed away."

"It was only a temporary sleep, Valerie," Walter said. "Besides, I feel alive and ready to preach another sermon about the Lord's goodness during this time of Tribulation that we all endured."

Valerie smiled. "I'm sure that I would be happy to hear you preach again."

And after we all had reunited with our friends and family members and loved ones who had passed away and were now resurrected, Valerie and I got together again alone. "What say we find ourselves a coffee house where we can get ourselves an iced coffee?" Valerie asked.

"I would love to, but right now I don't have any money on me," I answered.

"Neither do I, sweetie," Valerie said. "But all the same, somewhere out there is an iced coffee waiting for both of us."

"That would be a great way to start the Millennial Reign," I said as we both went off together, hand in hand.

Epilogue

It's now been 100 years since the end of the Tribulation. Things in the Lord's Kingdom have been peaceful, to say the least. The younger folks have been wondering what's going to happen 900 years from now, when Satan is let loose from his prison. I try to tell them what Revelation 20:7-10 says:

And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Some of them believe the words of Scripture. Some mock and say that such things will never happen, that there is no way Satan can deceive us again.

That is why I have been writing this account called *Memoirs Of A Dominion*; to remind the younger generations of the terrible things people have gone through to enter this period of time called the Millennium. We have been deceived before by people who claim to be working for God to bring about the Lord's Kingdom. There's nothing that will stop it from happening again, except for Lucifer being sealed for a time in the bottomless pit. Who knows what the next, final deception will be like?

Just in case you're wondering, I did get cured of my mental illness and have been given a job to work at an IT tech group that handles security systems for banks. There's still a cashless system that uses biochips, but thankfully there hasn't been a seal or mark of any kind that a person has to take, like the Seal of David, during the latter half of the Tribulation. It's a great job that pays well, and I have a new set of friends there. But I still miss the friendship that I had during the Tribulation with the members of the Gilead House and the 144,000. I still keep in touch with them from time to time, though.

I am also married to Valerie, and thankfully, through a miracle that the Lord has worked in her life, she was able to have at least four children with me — Dale, Austin, Terry, and Rose. I cried on the day my first child was born. All my children are autistic, but fortunately none needed anything special to help them deal with the outside world. Valerie and I let our children know they are loved, no matter what the world labels them. Valerie worked mostly from home as a consultant, and she now also has two dogs to take care of now that our children are grown and raising families of their own.

I'm surprised that the Lord gave us believers such longevity to live in this Millennial Reign. I would have been dead by now, but I'm currently 164 years old, and my wife is 160. Although we're starting to show signs of aging, we're still just as healthy as we were when the Tribulation ended and the Millennial Reign began. I treat my wife to the occasional trip to The Holey Ground, the coffee shop franchise that totally replaced Dunkin' and all the others, where we would get large cups of iced coffee in whatever flavor we wanted. I had earned enough money from my job to live comfortably for the next 900 years or as long as the company lasts. I don't know what will happen if we need to find another job, but I trust the Lord will provide for us when the time comes.

My wife is calling me to watch a movie with her in the living room. I think I'm just going to wrap it up here. What happens from here on out, only the Lord knows.