

THE  
THRONE  
OF  
GOD

A Prophetic Novel inspired by the actual  
Discovery of the Ark of the Covenant

## DAY ONE

### Chapter 1

From the north came the ominous report. The largest military force ever assembled is crossing the southern border of Turkey into Syria. This huge concentration of armor, infantry and cavalry units is dominated by Russia and supplemented by former Soviet satellite republics. The gathering forces have held the exclusive attention of the world for several weeks. They had been joined by armored infantry units from Libya, Ethiopia, Iran and Turkey while massing along the border of Turkey and Syria. Their swift deployment surprised and astonished the western intelligence community. Combined, they formed the coalition forces of a Soviet led Islamic Alliance.

Deep inside Israel's latest secret Defense Forces Command Center, underneath Jerusalem, intelligence officers and staff members exchange concerned looks. Though not surprised their faces show concerned acknowledgment that the inevitable show down with the enemy expedition has finally begun. With the initial troop movements to the south across the border, the IDF command center erupts in frenzied activities and communications. Subordinates and liaisons quickly begin reporting to their assigned commands and superiors. The Prime Minister, cabinet members, Knesset members, IDF senior officers, air force and base commanders must all be alerted.

Called a joint exercise by Moscow, deliberation on the true intentions of this force has been the focus of headline news around the world since their staging began. Those in Israeli intelligence know their enemy's intent. After finding a huge cache of weapons in tunnels staged underneath Beirut after invading Lebanon in 1982, Israel has been sure of Soviet invasion plans. The weapons, found in those tunnels, from small arms to armored vehicles to helicopters was so extensive it took Israeli trucks running around the clock four months to haul it all back to Israel. By the amount of weapons found and the completeness of military mapping and battle plans discovered, Intelligence determined they had thwarted an invasion by months.

To the tiny state of Israel, enemies are easily recognized. A coalition of Soviet and Muslim nations Israel a nation of people gathered from dispersal around the world to their ancient home land, had fought many enemies in its struggle for existence. The majority of those wars and most of their battles had all been against the weaponry and tactics, if not the actual forces, of the Soviet Union. Therefore, even though the Kremlin claimed that the missions for these armies are only to contain the belligerent factions of Iraq and Kurdistan, those in the Israeli Defense Force command center knew in their hearts the enemies' ultimate objective.

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Far to the south of Jerusalem, high atop Masada at the southern end of the Dead Sea, two lone figures, silhouetted by the breaking rays of dawn, stand at the edge of the northern cliff overlooking the valley below. This ancient fortress was where the ancestors of the state of Israel had made their final stand against the Roman legions two

thousand years before. The figures are tall and dressed in white attire, much like what the native Bedouins wear. Their robes cover their entire bodies from the top of their heads to just above their feet. With golden-colored sashes at their waists, they appear to be the mirror image of each other. Their clothing has an aura of cleanliness and purity that, in the early morning sunlight, almost sparkles as they survey the valley below. Unlike most natives of the area, the garments of these two show no effects of travel or occupation.

The figures looked toward some strange whitish colored formations, different in color and composition than the surrounding landscape just north of the mountain. One of the figures slowly raises a hand to point to an object that sits on a high place among the formations. It is of the same composition of the formations in the shape of a sphinx. Then his raised hand moves toward another object in the front of the formations that resembles a ziggurat or early pyramid. As they quietly continue to look over the valley below, two Israeli soldiers approach from behind them. One, an officer, speaks softly to an enlisted man as they approach stopping short of the edge of this mountain plateau. They are apparently unaware of the hooded figures only yards in front of them. They begin to look at the valley below seemingly right through the two figures who turn their heads toward the soldiers as if to greet them.

The enlisted man pointed to the formations below, excitedly.

"I'm telling you, sir, that's what I've heard. Those large formations below were once one of the cities of the plains that were destroyed by fire and brimstone. You know, Sodom and Gomorrah."

The officer lifted his field glasses and stared across the valley below to the formations being pointed out by the young enlisted soldier gazing directly through the two figures standing at the edge.

"If they were destroyed then why are they still standing?"

As he turned to face the officer the enlisted man explained.

"They tell me that those formations are like a powdery ash. When you break some of it off you find that it turns into a powder with very little rubbing. Also, they have found that the ash contains little balls of sulfur. These sulfur balls are what's left of the fire and brimstone that rained on the cities. The formations are full of those sulfur balls. They say the very intense heat that would have been produced by such a substance burning would create what is called an ionization effect that leaves a residual ash that is heavier than the original material burned. If they really are the remains of the cities of the plains, then God not only utterly destroyed them, but He left them perfectly preserved."

The officer lowered his glasses to peer at the enlisted man with a look of understanding. "He could do that. We'll have to have a closer look, someday."

"Yes, sir," the enlisted man replied as they looked back toward the formations for one last time.

As the soldiers turned to return to their duties, one of the hooded figures looked grimly toward the other.

"A very perceptive young man."

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Amidst the hurried activity of the Jerusalem command center, Colonel Moshe Riskin leaned back in the chair at his desk contemplating the events unfolding in front of him. As Deputy Chief of Military Intelligence for the Israeli Defense Forces, his most recent effort is culminating with the Soviet Muslim Alliance forces movement into Syria. He has been gathering vital information on these forces since the discovery of the initial deployment of their troops in Turkey. His executive role will now be turned over to the Israeli Defense Forces command staff to implement whatever countermeasures his intelligence reports have initiated. Now his attention will focus on internal matters vital to security. Nevertheless, he is sympathetic toward the Israeli Defense Forces staff. They must design contingency plans against a force that is vastly larger than any they have ever faced before.

"Looks like our sense of timing is still as impeccable as God's provision," Moshe thought to himself as he looked around at the heart of the recently commissioned command center. The command center had just become fully operational two months before the first staging of the Soviet Muslim Alliance forces was detected. Intelligence had already put it to good use and now IDF command would use the center for the ultimate test. It was proving as good an idea as he and his boss, General Mordechai, had originally thought. The previous IDF central command center, in the Negev desert, had served them well and was a reservoir of fond memories. However, they had decided that because Jerusalem now belonged to Israel, it should undoubtedly be the last stronghold for the nation. It was unspoken, but still true, that the Jews would defend Jerusalem to the last citizen, if necessary. Captured Soviet contingency plans, which they had been studying with such great intensity for the past month, indicated that scenario was a distinct possibility. Obtaining those plans had been a gift from God. He had provided for their capture in the Lebanon Invasion in 1982 and they would be the basis for defense analysis throughout any campaign, present or future, which involved Russian influence.

As a young commando officer, Moshe had been in Lebanon to see the elaborate underground tunnel systems Israel had found. The tunnels stored large quantities of small arms, armored personnel carriers and even helicopters. Some of the tunnels had facilities for submarines to enter them which allowed for the disembarkation of Soviet officers and engineers. Plans, captured in the tunnels, proved that the stockpiling of these large caches of equipment was staging for a planned invasion of Israel. At the time it had put a chill down his spine to see just how real the threat was. Now, it seemed like only yesterday. However, the years had taken their toll. His jet black hair was now receding and streaked with gray. His toddler son, who greeted him upon his return from Lebanon, was now a lieutenant himself and it appeared as if he might also pursue a career in the IDF. From the look of things it could be a short career. That thought brought the Colonel back to attention in his seat; that and the excited young officer approaching.

"Sir, have you seen the situation board?"

"Is all of this troop movement confirmed, son? Maybe, it's just a large fog bank."

Moshe knew the answer, but toyed with the excited young officer to see if he could shake his confidence.

"No, sir!" The young officer replied, looking a bit puzzled by the calmness of his commander. "Movements are in green on the board until officially confirmed, then they turn red. They are red now, sir."

Moshe looked at the young officer, sternly.

"The system is so new, maybe it's a malfunction we are seeing."

"Sir, that particular system is mine. I have checked and double checked it, now, for a week. I assure you it is operating perfectly." The young officer now looked dead serious. This system was his and he knew it inside and out. He was willing to bet his honor on it.

Moshe thought he had better look serious himself for the benefit of this young Jewish officer. "Son, I believe you. Please have an operator get General Mordechai on the phone for me."

General Yosef Mordechai was Chief of the General Staff and Moshe's immediate superior. It was his duty to inform and brief the General on the latest developments. Moshe knew the General had been up late at meetings. While he waited, Moshe looked around the room. Everything here was state of the art. The new situation board the young officer was so proud of, was capable of showing troop concentrations, naval operations, individual air craft and even missile signatures for the entire Middle Eastern region. It is supplied by the latest computerized communications provided by their own new satellite, and linked to American AWACs and spy satellites.

"Sir, it's the General," the young officer said, handing Moshe the phone receiver.

"Good morning General," Moshe began before pausing to announce, "The Russians are coming."

Moshe thought his remark to his old friend sounded amusing even though it was certainly appropriate.

"The deployment has started?" the General asked, still drowsy. Over the phone, Moshe heard the rustling of the general trying to get himself together.

"Sir, will you authorize an initial air strike?" Moshe asked, testing his old friend's attentiveness.

The General was very familiar with Moshe's tactics. "What would you recommend Moshe, conventional or nuclear?"

"Both."

Until now Moshe had been playing the devil's advocate with the General. However, the realization that what he had just said was precisely what should be done brought him to somber seriousness. "Actually, sir, I don't think that would be enough."

The phone was silent as the two old warriors considered the gravity of this perilous situation.

The General spoke first. "I'll be there in 20 minutes. Full war alert."

"Yes, sir," Moshe answered.

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At the United States Embassy, in Tel Aviv diplomats and staff were arriving and hurrying to assignments and meetings with unprecedented speed.

Major Robert Stringer sat at the long table in the U.S. Embassy staff meeting room watching the other staff and personnel busily enter and be seated. He smiled in acknowledgment whenever one of them looked his way. He was not one of the most popular of the military personnel at the embassy. To most of the civilian embassy diplomatic corps the embassy military group to which he is assigned was radically

conservative and militarily biased. Moreover, to the diplomatic corps, an even more radical fact was that Major Stringer was a Christian.

At 46, Major Rob Stringer was still as lean and mean as he was in the Marine Corps where he had started his career. He joined the Marines at age eighteen because of their reputation as the toughest outfit. Low pay and benefits influenced him to return to civilian life and go to college. It was there that he met Sarah. Since she had been a service brat and he missed life in the field, it soon became clear to them that the military was the place for them. This time he chose the Army so that his Marine training would benefit his career. He was soon in officer training and along the way found ways to diversify his expertise. He commanded infantry then transferred to armor as a tank platoon commander, went through airborne training and ended up in intelligence. Having served in most field positions, he turned his attention toward military intelligence and embassies. He wanted something special for them to finish off thirty years. As both he and Sarah were Christians, this particular duty station captured their imagination because it was Israel, the land of the Bible. Sure enough, after intense training, he was able to get the position he held now, as his first Embassy staff assignment. He was assigned to the Embassy Milgroup, or U.S. Embassy Military Assistance Group. The group was composed of all military personnel attached to the Embassy. The senior ranking military man or DOA (Department of Defense Attaché) was an old Special Forces man. Lt. Colonel Mark Evans was from Chicago. At first, Rob thought it odd that a black officer was senior military man at the Israeli Embassy. However, he soon found they shared interest in a Biblical, as well as a military, regard. This aspect, of Colonel Evans, led Rob to believe that their both being in Israel at this particular time had special significance. Their relationship led to Rob's special assignment of liaison to IDF intelligence in Jerusalem. This special task was unique to Israel because the U.S. Embassy was in Tel Aviv, not Jerusalem, the true capital of Israel. Rob's mission was actually a secret that only the Colonel knew. As Mark had put it, "You'll report to me and I'll report to the Ambassador." The senior officer gave Rob great latitude in carrying out his special assignment because they shared something that the Ambassador did not; a belief in the prophetic Word of God. Colonel Evans had invented this job because Rob had developed a friendship with the chief intelligence officer for the IDF. That relationship, and the fact that the IDF senior officer knew Rob's character and his unique Biblical perspective, gave Rob valuable insight in his foreign policy assessments. It served Rob well that he had not been exposed to the politics and corruption that surrounded some other Embassy duty locations. On this, his first assignment, he would have no tainted influence in his thinking. He and Sarah both agreed that it was a good frame of mind when assigned to God's land and His people. They were not surprised to find a God-fearing man in charge of the Military Group at the U.S. Embassy to Israel. It increased their faith and seemed to make this exciting duty assignment complete. The U.S. Ambassador did not have such a pure-hearted perspective of Israel. As the appointee of the President, his main objectives were political.

The Ambassador entered the room and walked toward the podium at the front amidst a few quick greetings, but his countenance revealed the straining political problems the mornings' events brought to U.S. foreign policy. Everyone, not already seated, scrambled for their chairs.

"Good morning, ladies and gentlemen."

The Ambassador quickly surveyed those present before continuing.

"In case anyone here has not heard, the forces of the Soviet Muslim Alliance began their exercise this morning by crossing the Turkish border and moving south into Syria."

From the looks of those present, few had not heard.

"This morning's IDF intelligence assessment and our own reconnaissance reports show there to be at least three times as many enemy troops amassed as we previously estimated to be in Turkey. Now that they are moving, we are able to get a clearer picture of the strength that the Russians and their allies are projecting into the area. And, it may be more. We are trying to get a more precise count. From the way they have stacked their forces in there, it seems they are playing cat and mouse with us." The Ambassador was clearly disturbed at the information that he was relaying. "This is not welcome news."

Rob raised his hand as if he were in school.

"Yes, Major?"

"What is the current manpower estimate of the deployed enemy forces?"

The Ambassador grimaced. He was reluctant to answer the question, knowing the reaction he would get.

"As near as we can tell the troop strength from the combined nations' forces now on the move is...", the Ambassador took a short deep breath, "...two million."

The room hushed as those in the room stared at the Ambassador in disbelief. In the silence, Rob thought how he and Mark had warned them. He took no pleasure in the fact, but just to give a hint of a reminder he raised his eyebrows a bit and spoke toward Colonel Evans.

"Now, that's what I call an exercise."

Amidst sparse chuckles, everyone began looking around and the room started to buzz with individual expressions of dismay. The exception was Colonel Evans who, by shaking his head, showed his displeasure with Rob's excess commentary. Stringer sometimes had a slight problem with sarcasm. Colonel Evans thought it might be time for another of his speeches, to his command, on diplomacy.

"Please," the Ambassador said, giving Rob a look of disapproval and trying to quiet the room again.

"Let's get on with the meeting."

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Young Russian tank platoon commander, Lieutenant Vladimir Kochetkova, wheeled around and shouted into the turret of his tank.

"Stay on the road, Private."

The tank suddenly jerked and turned back onto the dusty road just before going completely off into the barren countryside.

Vlad, the young but able lieutenant, would be glad when the vodka of the night before was worn off of his driver. They had started so early this morning that the revelry of the previous evening was still taking its toll. After the initial adrenaline rush of crossing the border into Syria, the crew started to get lax again as the miles wore on and the sun began rising. Vlad could hardly blame his own crew or any of the other tank

crews for the late night partying. It seemed it was the only way to relieve the tension that the last month of staging had brought on. Being out in the middle of nowhere for the last two weeks had the men going stir crazy. Then two nights ago, they had all been told that they were going on a mission and that the survival of their homeland and families depended upon their success.

"In Syria?" everyone had asked each other.

Apparently the high command knew things that ordinary soldiers did not. So, tensions and intensity were high. Every one was razor sharp because a mission of that importance must surely mean actual combat was possible. Things were quiet early in the evening and the troops were primed for the situation ahead. The stand-down the following morning gave the men the usual let down from continual delays that occurred on every exercise. So, of course, that night there would be plenty of vodka with everyone expecting to have several more days of delay. However, this morning would be different. They would actually go.

Back at their base in Russia, the mobilizing of Vlad's unit had been in the night. Moreover the secretive fashion in which his orders were relayed for this massive exercise had given him a sense that something was going on which was out of the ordinary. He had been able to say his farewells with this in mind. Before departing he had shaken his father's big rough hand an extra second and hugged and kissed his mother. She tried to give him her most valuable possession, a New Testament Bible in Russian. She had stood in line for over an hour to get it. But, he replied that he had no more room and that he really wouldn't have time for it, this trip.

"Besides," he told her. "It is better if you have it, so you can pray for me properly."

She did not press the issue, but he could tell she sensed that this departure was out of the ordinary. She had told him, "Take care of yourself and I will pray for you."

Little Alexander saluted and then hugged his brother's neck as he leaned down to say good-bye. It had been a good farewell. It could be a good last farewell, if need be, he thought. No girl to say good-bye to, however. Oh, there had been a few girls before his enlistment began. But, there had not been enough time since receiving his commission in the army. It was just as well. The comrades could be cruel if you tried to have a steady girl. Nevertheless, he was sure that his time would come. He was an officer now. He even began to consider transferring to a more political assignment; where he could advance. Being in the field was okay, but he did not want to spend the rest of his career fighting the elements and logistics. Of course, being in the field also had its advantages. The rations were actually something to look forward to. Things at home were not so good and he would sneak rations home to his family after any field training he was on. The prospects of a good life in Russia were bleak. Maybe, the next trip he would find a girl. Most of the young girls wanted officers with their privileges and stature.

He had not been able to share the concerns of this mission with his crew. Secrecy was stressed to the point of threats. You take risks talking about those kinds of orders. As far as the men knew they would be back as usual with the usual reunions. Now, as he looked back on it, he felt a little guilty. They were a tight crew even though he didn't fraternize with them in their off duty time. However, they had achieved camaraderie through their prowess with their tank that made them a team. It was through the pride of



knowing that they were good at what they did. They had won their Battalion Commanders' prize, a bottle of vodka, on their last shooting range competition. The other two crews of Vlad's platoon also had high scores that made Vlad consider his, the best tank platoon in the battalion.

Wham!

The pitching of the tank snapped his head out of the day dream of past glory.

"Illya, stay out of the ruts! If you throw a track, you'll walk the rest of the way," Vlad shouted.

He began to wonder just how good they would be in actual combat. It was a thought that quickly sobered him up even if his driver was not. His crew had been very good during training. However, being under fire brought other factors into play. Character and composure were elements that had yet to be proven. This also brought to mind the many questions concerning their mission that made him wonder. Their final destination had not yet been revealed, nor who the enemy would be. If the mission was so vital that family and country depended on it, where were they going? What could be so secret? This information was to be given to the unit commanders along the way.

But, along the way to where?

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General Gregor Olinov Grigoryeva stood rigid in the cupola of his command vehicle with a very slight smile on his lips. His officer's cap is pulled down low to his brow and his tan face drawn tight against the warm wind. As Supreme Soviet Muslim Alliance Commander, he insisted on being among the initial thrust of Russian forces moving into Syria. To command the first Russian armored forces to enter the Middle East was a momentous occasion to him. Beaming with pride, he lifted his field glasses to scan the horizon from his vantage point, slightly behind the lead tank of this enormous column.

"So far, so good," General Grigoryeva said to himself. "We are making very good time."

He knew that time was critical to the strategic plans that culminated after months of design. He and his loyal staff had been working feverishly on the final battle scenario since the initial stages for the formation of an Islamic coalition had begun. His hand picked staff was the best, experts in espionage and intrigue. Most had been part of his Spetznaz (the equivalent to the U.S. Green Berets) command. And now, the formation of the Soviet Muslim Alliance would provide the perfect catalyst for Middle East intervention by the Russians. What the rest of the Russian High Command did not know was that his staff had also worked out the perfect scenario for his own ambitions. The Kremlin had been looking for another opportunity to advance strategically into the Middle East since their initial operation had been discovered and plundered in the 1982 Lebanon debacle. The loss, of the huge cache of weapons and contingency plans in their secret tunnel systems to the Israelis, had been a major economic setback and political embarrassment. It had been a major black eye in the European press. However, in the U.S. it had scarcely been mentioned, except in the religious media. The American press could always be counted on to keep the public blissfully ignorant. The General smiled to

himself thinking how the United States would explain their current reluctance to confront his forces.

Now that he and a small group of other top military officers had put the army back on its feet and now on the move, he would soon show the politicians. The army would save the republic of Russia and the former Soviet Union from the destructive democratic forces that had almost wrecked it. He would assure the superior Russian people their proper place in history.

He named his own battle plan Operation Mohammed to the Mountain for the incentive it would provide Russia's Moslem allies to facilitate an attack on Israel. The plan was still secret and on a "need to know basis" even among his higher echelon force commanders. The fewer that knew the ultimate target, the fewer the chances of upsetting the strategy of deception. Their combat forces would move into positions in Syria and Lebanon while the navy positioned itself with hidden amphibious forces as support. These positions would appear on the surface to be aimed at Iraq. However, at just the right moment before an anticipated defensive posture would normally be taken, their forces would attack headlong into Israel. Within days the Motherland could control the Mid-East and Northern Africa with all of its food, oil and treasures. Their Moslem allies with their forces would be easily conquered at his leisure whenever their usefulness was over. His aim was to fulfill the destiny that had driven him all his life, to command the largest army ever assembled into battle and to lead Russia to world domination. And, for his own ambitious plans he needed to be in the forefront of the operation. He was detached from any fixed headquarters and, in the field, and for all purposes was fully self-contained to operate as he saw fit. All he had to do was stay on schedule and survive in order for him to take his place in history as the greatest general of all time. All the sacrifice, the training and even the political parading he had to withstand was now paying off. No more cowing to those idiot politicians. After this he could write his own ticket. It was the right place at the right moment of time, in history, for him to take his place in immortality. He imagined the feeling a conquering Caesar must have had as he triumphantly entered Rome.

He was a god, and the feeling was exhilarating.

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## Chapter 2

Sarah Stringer, sitting at her desk, looked up at the clock on the wall of the immigration office where she worked. It was already eleven and it seemed as if she had just started on the mountain of paperwork stacked in front of her. This was the part of the job that she least enjoyed. The documentation of every immigrant to Israel had to be precise for the many background checks and computerized lineage tracing. Proving Jewish descent is sometimes as difficult as getting into the country, although she knew of no cases where anyone had been turned away.

Sarah knows that she is fortunate to have this job, not being of Jewish descent herself. She received the job only because of the friendship that she and Rob had developed with a particular Israeli officer. Colonel Moshe Riskin had become a good friend and had recommended her. He had suggested he might know of something for her after an evening of dinner and intense discussion on Israel at their home. Moshe had become a frequent guest over the last months. His association with Rob as liaison to the Embassy brought him to their home often and they had quickly become more than counterparts. He was always so courteous and straight forward that it was natural to develop a fondness for him. She had brought up the fact that she wished there was some way she could help out in this moment of history. Moshe had sensed her sincerity and said he might be able to help her. He knew she loved the country and the people and when he learned that she knew some of the Russian language from college, he said he might have an idea of how she could help. He hadn't mentioned it again, but after three days she got a call from the immigration ministry supervisor. She was told that based on Moshe's recommendation she could report to work at the center the following morning. She wouldn't let him down and she really enjoyed working with these precious people. To see the joy on the faces of young and old in expectation of the new life ahead of them, in the land of their ancestry, was very rewarding. It brought her fulfillment and made her feel a part of this wonderful regathering of this ancient people, God's chosen nation. It seemed to her to be the destiny she needed since she had not yet been able to have children of her own. The children of the immigrants were always so wide eyed and in wonder of all that they were experiencing. They seemed to thrive on their new surroundings, even though they had few possessions. They were the future of Israel and she always seemed to be giving away the small earnings of her job to the parents of the children. The appreciation these new citizens showed, made the price well worth it.

Sarah thought to herself how fortunate, and just a bit coincidental, that they had acquired a friend like Moshe. Just as she reached for another file behind her, she heard a familiar voice.

"Hello, cutie." Recognizing the voice, she turned to see that friendly face. It was Moshe. He liked to call her that. She thought it was his attempt at American colloquialism though, with his accent, it was rather brusque. However, she appreciated the sentiment and it pleased her.

Moshe had liked the Stringers right off. He found their love for Israel intriguing and their sincerity refreshing. He also enjoyed teasing and with Sarah he found his match. Rob was more serious and Moshe imagined that Sarah was the reason he was always so sharp. Moshe enjoyed acting as their guide around Jerusalem and the

surrounding countryside whenever they had time to be tourists. Moshe knew where all the traditional Christian sights were to see, even though he made it clear Messiah had not yet arrived. However, Moshe did appreciate their belief that Israel was God's chosen people. They discussed prophetic events that had happened in Israel and their effect on other nations of the world. The events that happened on a daily basis in Israel were proof of fulfillment of prophecy, just as the return of the Jews to their ancient homeland had been. They agreed that soon God would show His hand and His might. As surely as He had shown the handwriting on the wall to the monarch of the Babylon, the handwriting of the prophecies were there for all to see. Only, now the handwriting was over the entire world. They remembered the old days. Moshe could remember his nation's growing pains and the divine intervention it took. The Stringers could remember a strong moralistic America as a world power and missionary. The younger generations had no idea.

"I thought I better stop by and see if you were earning your pay," he teased.

"I'm earning it now," she said pointing to the piles of files stacked on her desk.

"Now I understand. You bring in the Gentiles to do the dirty work."

Moshe grinned.

"I was afraid you might leave," he said, referring to the U.S. evacuation of non-essential Embassy personnel. Rob had told him it had been announced at Monday's briefing.

"Rob thought I should. Of course, he finally saw things my way," she said, smiling a charming little smile. They both laughed.

"You remind me of my Talia," Moshe said referring to his deceased wife. "She could make me see things her way and make me think it was my idea." Moshe paused wishing he had time to reminisce about her when he noticed the clock.

"They were your ideas," Sarah replied. "She just had to let you know what they were."

Moshe laughed. "Well, that reminds me. I'm on my way to see if I can be as successful making your husband see things my way. Would you like to join us? I could use the moral support."

"I pick my own battles," Sarah replied and then continued. "Besides, I better stay and see if I can catch up a little before this war starts."

They thoughtfully looked at each other for a moment, each realizing the significance of what she had just said.

Changing the subject she asked. "How about coming to dinner tomorrow night? I thought you might like enjoy home cooked meal before the start of Rosh Hashanah."

"That would be very nice," Moshe replied, before flirting. "But, what about Rob?"

"Oh well, we may as well let him come since he will be doing the buying," Sarah replied.

Moshe laughed as he turned and looked toward the door.

Then, Sarah said. "You know if I were in this same situation in any other country in the world, I would be scared to death. But here, I'm not."

"That is because you know the God of Israel," Moshe said.

Sarah added smiling, "And His Son."

"You are stubborn enough to be a Jewish wife," Moshe said, with a fake scowl, remembering their many discussions on the subject. However, now was not the time. He smiled again, as he started for the door. "I will tell your husband that you are too busy for us."

"I'm sure, he'll have his hands full with just you," she joked. "But, thanks anyway."

He smiled and waved, as he nodded in acknowledgment before going out the door.

Sarah watched through the window as Moshe crossed in front of the building and then out of sight.

"Before I'm through with him, he'll see things my way, too," she thought.

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The long column of Russian tanks slowly rolled to a stop along the road that appeared to go on forever. Slowly, every other tank would roll off the road to one side, then the next tank to the opposite side. This staggered the column of tanks, to clear the road and help disperse in case of enemy aircraft. Almost as soon as Vlad's tank had come to a complete stop, the driver hatch flipped open and the big hulk of a young man popped out onto his seat, pulling his feet out behind him.

"I don't see why we are so intent on staying on this road. It's giving me a headache," the young tanker complained.

"Perhaps you would prefer cleaning the desert out of the filters more often, Private," Vlad said referring to the more loose desert sand off the road.

Private Illya Galyeva looked up at Lieutenant Vlad Kochetkova with a smile and a little smirk. "No sir, General."

Vlad smiled within. He knew Illya was a rogue and a slacker. Nevertheless, when time came for combat, one look reminded Vlad that he wanted Illya driving. The man could turn a tank by his own sheer strength. He looked down at Illya with a little envy. His shirt was long gone and his muscles bulged with every movement. At 6'2" he was an awesome specimen, blond and blue eyed. He was always accompanied by some pretty Russian girl every time Vlad ran into him off their base. He never saw him lift weights, but was sure he must have lifted heavy weights at sometime. Vlad, on the other hand, lived in the gym. He had to work hard to stay fit and he had acquired some pretty good muscle definition, but looking at Illya, with his work attitude, made Vlad shake his head in disgust.

"How's the head?" Vlad asked as he climbed out of the turret. "Need a little Vodka pick-me-up?"

Illya smiled. "You know I can't drink anymore, General."

"Why would that be?" Vlad would bite.

"Vodka mixes with my Chechen blood and makes me want to kill all you officer types."

"I would have been dead a long time ago, from the look of your pack."

"What do you mean?" Illya smiled trying to act innocent and remembering the four bottles he had hanging out of it when he came on board the tank.

"Oh, those, Uh, those are for Molotov cocktails, sir. I'm expecting trouble."

"Yeah, I can see where that would be better than automatic cannon." Vlad answered.

"Well, the way Rupert there shoots, I thought I better be ready." Illya grinned at Corporal Rubinov Shekodanova, their gunner and radio operator, as he climbed down off the tank's turret. Illya had been a corporal once himself and down deep he was envious of Rubinov's rank and his intelligence. It made him feel better to rib Rupert; as he called him. How he came up with the name "Rupert," no one knew. But, it fit. Corporal Shekodanova was slightly built compared to them and he wore wire framed glasses. He would most often be reading some book while rolling along, but when it came time to shoot, whatever he said, went. He owned that gun. He knew it inside and out. Vlad had learned that quickly enough at the practice range. They were a good pair to have. At least Illya knew enough to keep the insubordination down when anyone outside of their crew was close enough to hear. He also knew enough to keep Vlad from getting mad. The only time Illya had challenged him physically was by taking a swing at him during one of their early encounters. Vlad had seen it coming and luckily Illya was dim from one of his usual hangovers. Instinctively, Vlad ducked the punch, grabbed his shirt and threw him over his hip. Illya hit the ground hard and was so surprised that he listened when Vlad got on top of him. Vlad had told him, "If you ever do that again, you will rot in prison." That had been enough for Illya, so far. He, at least, respected the fact that Vlad was an officer and could make his life hell if he so chose.

Illya turned his attention to Rupert. "What are you reading, now, Corporal?" He smirked with the emphasis on corporal.

"How to fuel a tank," Rupert said, softly, as he pulled the partially opened ration pack out of Illya's hand.

"What are you doing?" Illya asked, looking at him puzzled.

"In case you are ever dead." Rupert said, looking back and motioning toward the fuel truck just pulling up to their tank,

"Oh, no. There better be some food left when I get back," Illya said, scowling, as he got up to fuel the tank. He knew it was his job, unless someone else volunteered. Rank did have its privileges and the corporal seemed to always keep the upper hand on Illya. Rubinov smiled at Vlad. Vlad, with a grin, acknowledged brain beating brawn again.

Vlad turned and walked toward his number two tank commander Sergeant Lavsky Khorkina. He joined him watching his crew while they cleaned debris off their tank. Sergeant Khorkina was the most senior non-commissioned officer in the battalion and Vlad felt fortunate to have him in his platoon. His experience would be valuable in any combat situation. Vlad knew from his record that he had been in theaters, although Sergeant Khorkina was always reluctant to discuss his experiences. It had been another reason to keep Illya with himself. Illya was Chechen and he and Sergeant Khorkina appeared to have an air of animosity toward one another. The only time Illya was ever quiet was when Lavsky was around.

"What do you think we are really doing out here?" Vlad asked, trying to make small talk.

"Don't you know?" Lavsky replied quietly, so no one else could hear.

"Well, I know that this is the first military exercise for the Soviet Muslim Alliance, so my guess is, we are here to get Baghdad in line."

"Forget Baghdad." The Sergeant looked around to see if anyone was within hearing distance. "We're going to Jerusalem."

"Jerusalem?" the young lieutenant asked surprised. He quickly recognized he had said it too loud. In a now hushed voice he asked again.

"Jerusalem?"

"That's what I believe. Do you actually think that we have come this far, this fast, just to be policemen?"

Lavsky paused to look around. "Consider it, sir. If we plant a flag in Jerusalem, we own the Mid-east. Look around. When was the last time you saw this much equipment in one place? Never. Has there been 5 minutes today that you haven't seen jets or hinds?" (Hind is the name of a class of attack helicopters.)

"Do you have any idea how long this column is? Everyone is here and we are just a small part. I, even, saw nuclear shell containers back at the railhead."

Vlad looked surprised. "Maybe it's just precautionary."

"For Iraq?" Lavsky replied, softly. "Listen, I saw Grigoryeva drive by while we were still in Turkey. Let me tell you, he's going somewhere, all right, but it isn't Baghdad. I've never seen that much security accompany anyone before."

It still sounded incredible to Vlad. However, he knew that the Sergeant always had a keen sense of knowing what was up. The propaganda, of the Soviet Union trying to be good world citizens, was hard for Vlad to overcome. He had always believed the government explanation of situations. Why shouldn't he? They were pursuing peace and the good of the world. Isn't that what they had been taught?

"They didn't go to Afghanistan with a tenth of this strength and this is just what we can see." Lavsky turned his head to look up the column then back. "It's getting time to go, sir."

Vlad nodded to the Sergeant and headed back toward his tank.

"Let's go," Vlad shouted to his crew as he climbed onto his tank. His mind was now racing. A dozen questions came to him, and went, before he got his lower half in the cupola. Suddenly the tank lurched forward almost throwing him out of the hatch. It quickly snapped him out of his thoughts.

"I'll tell you when to move this tank, Private," Vlad shouted to Illya below.

"Will that be on the first, let's go, sir, or the second?" Illya said, very matter of fact, without looking around.

The sarcastic remark almost made Vlad smile. It brought his mind back from the idea that Lavsky had planted which was now interfering with the job at hand.

Corporal Rubinov tapped Vlad's leg.

"I can crack him with the cannon, sir." Vlad and Rupert both looked down at the back of Illya's head and grinned at the thought.

"That won't be necessary, Corporal, maybe later." That satisfied Rupe who turned back to his reading.

Vlad looked ahead as they pulled out into their place in the convoy. He strained as if to see some objective ahead before looking back at Illya, then Rupert.

What a crew, he thought, imagining the Corporal's suggestion.

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Rob Stringer pulled the jeep up to a stop along the edge of the small street. As he disembarked to walk the block or so to the little outdoor cafe, he could already make out the slightly balding head with the salt and pepper colored hair of Colonel Moshe Riskin. Moshe had become a good friend to him and Sarah. Though their relationship had a diplomatic beginning, they each had realized the importance of getting to know the other in a personal way. They met at an Embassy function and from the start began a special relationship without really knowing why, other than they liked each other. Rob felt more comfortable with Moshe than with most of the Israeli officials he knew. The majority of Israeli intelligence and regular army officers seemed to view the U.S. personnel suspiciously. Rob was always glad to see Moshe at any of the Embassy functions. Rob felt some remorse about how they began their friendship. He had invited Moshe to dinner and used the relaxed atmosphere of his home to gather information on a particular subject at that time. The Likud party had just voted their leader into the Prime Minister's office at a delicate point in Mid-East peace negotiations. The United States, as well as the whole world, wanted to know as much about this new Israeli leader as possible. Moshe was very close to the new Prime Minister and Rob's assignment was to find out what he could. Rob felt Moshe caught on to his intent early on, but played along giving Rob information he felt the Americans should know and understand about his friend, the new Prime Minister. Rob gathered this vital information and at the same time came to appreciate the kindred spirit of Colonel Moshe Riskin, his senior counterpart in Israel. They got along so well that they talked long into the evening. Before Moshe left, Rob felt he had found a genuine friend, as well as a reliable source of information. The thing he appreciated most about Moshe was that he told him the truth, not just what the Israelis would have the U.S. to know, but the truth. Moshe might not tell all the truth he knew. But what Rob learned from him, he could count on. Rob thought it was good that they had come to this relationship. Because now as developments were shaping up, this was the time of testing.

Moshe looked at his watch. Two minutes till noon, he thought to himself. He sat up in his chair and turned to look up the street, expectantly. Sure as he knew Rob would be there; he spotted him. He was about a half block away walking briskly toward him. He first noticed the crew cut. It made Rob look younger than he actually was. However, his manner and confident stride gave away his age and maturity. Moshe had deduced Rob's position and his mission the first time they met.

The intense expression on Rob's face, as he walked toward him, told Moshe that Rob had been briefed on the upgraded situation and the possible hostile movements IDF had been tracking that morning. Rob was a loyal American, but he knew the gravity of Jewish and Islamic relations. And, although he was there as attaché to report back to the U.S. Embassy, Moshe valued his presence. He knew Rob had been in Israel living and operating out of Jerusalem as a clandestine U.S. Embassy representative. This was because the U.S. still had not recognized Jerusalem as the capitol of Israel. Moshe surmised that Rob's mission was to report, as directly as possible, information gathered about the activities of the Israeli intelligence service and the IDF without compromising his relationship with those organizations. To Moshe, this was a mission of diplomacy to the highest degree. Rob was the clandestine link between the U.S. and Israel in all matters of security for both countries. What Moshe had learned was that he could



accurately relay information through Major Stringer while also getting the sympathetic view the Israelis so desperately needed to present to their number one ally in the world.

Through their ever growing friendship and continuous meetings, both political and social, Moshe could always feel this man reading his gestures, tone and demeanor. Whenever they conversed it was pure. They were two representatives of their respective nations looking for the truth, peering into each others souls for any sign of insincerity or ulterior motive. This officer truly represented the best in U.S. intelligence and, in Moshe's eyes, the finest integrity he had found outside his own country. He had only one flaw as far as Moshe could tell; he professed Christianity. This was just one small flaw and was the result of his American Gentile upbringing. Moshe felt sure that the continued reality of the Middle East conflict, whether warm or hot would cure him of that. Both believed they were sons of Abraham and no matter, from what angle, both believed in the God of Israel. Moshe believed from experience, Rob from faith. The only thing that mattered now was that he was here and to Moshe that meant that the United States of America was here. One ally at least, Moshe thought, as Rob walked up.

As Rob walked up to the little cafe table where Moshe was seated, he strained for a smile.

"How is my fine friend doing today?" Moshe asked, reaching to shake Rob's hand and hopeful of a stronger stance by the United States.

Rob had wished for a little small talk. He grimaced as he pulled his chair around closer to Moshe. It pained him to have to relay the news that he had, and the look that Moshe had on his face wasn't going to make it any easier.

"Moshe you know how I feel and how I believe," Rob stated. He knew that this statement would tell Moshe what he had guessed and he watched Moshe's eyes for signs of resentment. There were none.

Rob paused as the waiter came to the table. Before he could ask, Moshe spoke to the waiter.

"Coffee, please."

They never ate there. It was merely a convenient meeting place away from official ears.

As the waiter went off to retrieve the order, Rob continued.

"The position of the U.S. at this time is, that to do more than stay on our present alert status could be seen as provocation that could do more harm than good."

Rob gave Moshe a look of apology before continuing.

"They're not convinced that Israel is threatened by this build up. But, we'll still continue to supply first hand intelligence to you with AWACs and satellite and I've been instructed to inform you, off the record, that we'll continue to supply you with ammunition and supplies. Apparently, the Jewish and Christian communities still have some muscle."

Rob was glad that at least he had some good news and he didn't mind reminding Moshe of the Christian source. He studied Moshe, watching for his reaction to the news as the waiter returned to pour Rob a coffee and refill Moshe's cup. They both smiled and nodded, waiting until the waiter was out of hearing distance before continuing.

Then Moshe spoke. "My friend, I can see you feel frustrated concerning your government's response to this situation. But let me tell you something, the State of Israel was brought together from around the world and the prophets declare that we will never

be taken out again. Do not let these things trouble you. God ordained long ago the present situation and the outcome. Messiah is coming soon and He will rule with a Rob of iron."

Rob knew from his study of the Bible that his friend was right. The thing that Moshe and his countrymen did not understand was that Israel had rejected their true Messiah the first time that He came and that His second coming would be preceded by a time of great trouble for his friend and his people. Rob pondered whether this was the time to convey these thoughts.

But, before Rob had a chance to speak again, Moshe leaned over and whispered. "Besides, we have the Ark of the Covenant."

This news caught Rob completely off guard and he almost spit out his coffee. Moshe enjoyed Rob's reaction. He smiled, and leaned back, watching Rob contemplate his last statement.

"Colonel," Rob said quietly, looking around one way and then the other for curious ears. "I think, I just heard you say, you have the Ark of the Covenant."

Moshe paused enjoying the revelation to one who would understand the significance. Then he spoke.

"Mister American Intelligence, I just passed to you the top secret of the nation of Israel, maybe the world." Moshe looked at Rob with one eyebrow raised.

"You can't be serious," Rob replied, thinking he was joking, but just as quickly realizing that he was not.

"That is too fantastic," Rob exclaimed before becoming curious and leaning back toward Moshe.

"Why would you trust me with that kind of information?"

Moshe replied. "I believe you are one who can appreciate it. Besides, who would believe you?"

Rob thought to himself how true that was. Then he leaned back and took a deep sigh, his mind reeling over this new information.

"Whoa, the Ark of the Covenant. That boggles my mind. You know, I saw the movie, years ago." Rob stated, excitedly.

"What movie?" Moshe asked with a puzzled look.

"Why, Raiders of the Lost Ark. You know, Harrison Ford, uh, Indiana Jones. It was a big hit."

Moshe look interested. "Tell me about the movie, what was it about?" He was curious that an American movie had been made about such a subject.

"Well, it was typical adventure story about a treasure hunter, a professor, who is sent by the American government to find the Ark before the Nazis, who were also looking for it. It was supposed to have been before World War II. The professor finds it, then the Nazis take it away from him, and of course there is a girl. But when the Nazis open the ark, it destroys them with the wrath of God. He and the girl knew to close their eyes and not profane the Ark, so they lived through it."

"When was this film made?" Moshe asked.

"Oh, it came out in the early eighties. It must have been about 1981 or 1982, if I remember correctly. It was one of my favorites, a Steven Spielberg movie," he added, as if Moshe should know who that was.

Moshe looked toward Rob, thinking. Then he rubbed his chin in thought and inquired.

"Spielberg, huh? What exactly happened when the Nazis opened the Ark in this movie?"

"Well, let's see, they, uh, just started disintegrating, melting you might say, while they stood on their feet."

Moshe looked intently at Rob for a moment, then with a slight smile said. "Maybe he knew about the plague of the Lord. It is described by the prophet Zechariah. Would you like to know something else that is interesting? The Ark was found in 1982."

Rob looked at him. "How do you know all this?"

"I had a good friend who used to be with the Ministry of Antiquities. He shared this information with me many years ago. This is very rare. If there is one thing that group does not trust it's the government, especially the IDF. It is even a closely guarded secret within the ministry; yet, there are Rabbis who know of it and have even told of it. They tell of it being found and that it is under the Temple Mount, sealed up and not disturbed. No one seemed to take them too seriously, so the best thing to do was stay silent. It somehow has been kept out of the Israeli press. The only ones really interested were some obscure American religious ministries. These people would come and ask our officials about the Ark and would be satisfied when the reports were denied. Imagine the arrogance of thinking that just by their asking, we would acknowledge our top secret to them and then to the world. Apparently, no one was very interested after the Ministry of Antiquities denied the reports."

"You mean it's been there all along?" Rob asked in amazement. "I thought I heard something, a long time ago, about the Ark being in Ethiopia, and that it, possibly, was brought back with the airlift of the Ethiopian Jews."

Moshe smiled. "Well, no one here would confirm or deny that story, or any other story about it, as long as it was kept secret."

"So, where was it found?" Rob asked.

Moshe had always been somewhat troubled by this part of the story. Yet, he had come this far. He might as well continue.

"You see, it was not actually found under the temple mount, a fact that the Rabbis left out. And, it was found by an American."

"An archaeologist?" Rob asked.

"Yes, by our standards, anyway." Moshe replied.

"How?" Rob quickly asked with a look of great interest.

"This American was well known by the Department of Antiquities and had previously made some other incredible archeological finds that had great scriptural significance. One day while walking around some property in the city, he points to a trash dumping site and says that it is the grotto of Jeremiah and that the Ark of the Covenant is in there. His reputation demanded further investigation and he was allowed to excavate. I think about four years later, he reported that he had found it, and other articles from the ancient Temple."

Moshe felt slightly uneasy about leaving out the part, about what the American claimed was the real significance of the trash dumping site, from his story. He thought to himself that it was only speculation by the American, anyhow.

"And you've had it ever since? Where is it, now?" Rob asked.

Moshe, glad that Rob changed the direction of the story, continued.

"As far as I know it was secretly moved. Possibly to a tunnel underneath the temple mount. Only the Rabbis know where and by all accounts it is guarded by the Levitical priests for greater security."

"Were the tablets of the law still in it?" Rob asked.

"It was not opened. The priests feared the plague of the Lord." Moshe went on. "But one story tells of an interesting thing that happened as the Ark was being moved. One of the Kohathite priests, carrying an end of one of the staves of it, slipped. One of the other priests reached out to hold it up and keep it from falling. The other priests all expected him to die instantly because, even though the Kohathite priests are to bear and minister to the Ark, they are forbidden to touch it and the other most holy things of the tabernacle. The scriptures tell of another instance where that happened and the priest was struck dead."

"Yes, I know about that story, Moshe," Rob said smiling. "King David was bringing the Ark to Jerusalem." He then thoughtfully added, "We must be in the age of grace."

"God is full of grace and mercy. Israel is proof," Moshe acknowledged.

Rob leaned back letting all that he had heard sink in and register. This was the most fantastic story he had ever heard and from the most unlikely source. They both set back contemplating all that it could mean. As critical as the situation now in the Middle East is to the eyes of the world, Rob found that he was becoming more and more at ease about it. Though many could die in the days ahead, he knew in his heart that God was in complete control.

"One more thing," Rob added, wondering who had been blessed enough to make this great discovery.

"What was the Americans name? Do you remember?"

"Well, he was well known to certain officials," Moshe replied.

"I believe his name was Ron Wyatt."

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General Grigoryeva smiled to himself while gazing at the columns of tanks and vehicles that comprise the largest land force ever assembled. The size of this army, along with the available air and naval forces supporting this operation, projected a seemingly invincible armada. Nothing in earth's history can match it. This is the crowning achievement of long range Russian military planning. It is the end result of perestroika.

Perestroika, a strategy used so effectively that even he had to wonder in amazement. He remembers well the speech by Gorbachev to the Soviet parliament before the iron curtain came down. It was about perestroika and how that it was a two edged sword. One edge would soften their enemies by giving them false security through a pseudo peace. That would cause the west to help them arm by transferring the intelligence and the resources for the communists to become stronger, while dropping their own guard. The other edge would allow the State to determine internal enemies for future reference. How brilliant the morally unshackled mind of the anarchist. Gorbachev warned the parliament not to be concerned by the events that would take place in the coming days, months and years. He stated that these times would be necessary for the

advancement of Russian aims and the strengthening of their nation. Oh, what a time to live and witness just how well it had worked. The iron curtain came down and stopped a unilateral U.S. national defense initiative, "Star Wars," dead in its tracks. Free enterprise brought billions into the country through outside business interests. The Soviet Union broke up into the various republics. This allowed for more outside aid to all the individual states than could have been received in a national form. The nation became less of an outsider to world policy and more of a participant in world police actions. The country endured a time of religious freedom where all participants were identified. All of the entrepreneurs and criminal elements, associated with Mafia type activities and brought on by free enterprise, were identified. Then the door deliberately shut and the true Russia emerged again and immediately cleansed itself of all internal enemies and outside ties. The world was still too busy patting themselves on the back for their "New World Order" to realize what had happened. The alliance with the Arab nations caught them even further off guard. Using the Islamic ties of the new Soviet satellite states to form this new Islamic Alliance would provide the ultimate catalyst for Russia to engage the Middle East situation. Moreover, all along, the Russian military has been building. They continually upgrade weapon systems while making deals with the NATO powers to give up the replaced obsolete weapons for disarmament treaties. The complete dismantling of U.S. defense research after the Star Wars victory was what really had amazed him. The people of the United States had to be the biggest fools on earth. As was their history, they won the cold war at tremendous cost and then they gave the spoils of the war to the enemy. The leaders of United States of America are the greatest saber rattlers in the world, but they lack the resolve to ever finish the job. The culmination of all these elements bring together the perfect moment for conquest.

And now comes the conqueror; General Gregor Olinov Grigoryeva.

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## Chapter 3

Vlad pulled his tanker's helmet off his head to let the dry air flow through his hair. There was no humidity to make things sticky, but the sun beat down unmercifully. The tank felt like one big frying pan. All the hatches were open and still it was almost unbearable. Running at convoy speed was not good for circulation. He wished that they were able to travel at a higher speed. That, of course, would not do for the support vehicles that could get left behind. He would hate to be out in this open country without the ZSUs (An anti-aircraft 23mm gun vehicle). A hot tank like this would make a great target for a heat seeking missile. He was glad the only aircraft they had seen had been friendly.

All of a sudden, the tank pitched right, then back, and then slowly right again. They would have gone off the road except that Vlad yelled through the headphones at Illya. The tank then grabbed left and back into line again.

"Uh, track brake check, sir," Illya said into the mouthpiece of his microphone to his commander. "And they seem to be working fine."

Vlad smiled. He knew Illya was falling asleep at the wheel. Who wouldn't, driving at this monotonous speed in this heat? Nevertheless, he wasn't about to miss an opportunity to dig him about it.

"Felt more like driver malfunction from here," Vlad quipped.

"Not possible, sir." Illya shot back, now awake, again. "This driver is too professional, highly motivated and is probably Spetznaz material."

"Illya?" Vlad shouted below.

Illya popped his head up through the drivers hatch and turned it to see Vlad. "Yes, sir?"

Vlad smiled. "Just checking, I thought maybe we had a new replacement."

Illya grinned back, He rarely got the best of Vlad or fooled him, but at least he could try. Other officers, he had experienced, were too full of themselves to have any fun with. He appreciated Vlad's wit and sense of humor and knew that it was a result of Vlad's self-confidence. For a commander, he could have done much worse. He remembered his last commanding officer. Everyone in his outfit had hated him. He was always trying to impress his superiors with his disciplinary actions. Someone in their outfit was always on report or in the brig, including Illya. Illya remembered thinking of him as just a puny little nuisance until the day he jumped him while on parade. Right in front of everyone, the officer had called him the most sloppy, stupid oaf he had ever seen. Sloppy oaf would have been acceptable, but stupid? He stared at the little young lieutenant, as the officer tried his best to look tough, standing there with his neck bowed and his veins showing. Illya remembered how easy he thought it would have been to reach out and twist his head off like a chicken, but he knew better than that. So when the little officer finished berating him and demanded to know why Illya was so sloppy and stupid, and with everyone holding their breath to see what would happen, Illya did the first thing that came to mind. Without moving a muscle, except his lips, he shot a steady stream of saliva between his teeth into the officer's face that ran down the front of his shirt. Finally Illya ran out of water pressure and the young lieutenant looked at Illya as if he had just shot him. His eyes bugged out and his face turned bright red. Then without

saying a word, he stormed off toward the company offices. Illya had still not moved a muscle. When the officer got a few yards away the rest of his outfit, after seeing what had just happened and straining to hold back, fell out laughing. The whole company was howling. Those in the back of the ranks, who couldn't see what had happened, started trying to get the story from those who had seen it. Except, those who had, couldn't stop laughing long enough to tell them. To Illya, it was his moment of glory. He knew there would be hell to pay, but it would be worth it. Looking back though he wondered, now, if it had been worth it. The Battalion Commanding Officer had grilled him a good 20 minutes and Illya had admitted the incident while standing at attention. Luckily, he held back from smiling. He was sure it had saved his hide. As it turned out, his punishment was that, he lost his rank, a month's pay, and spent the next month in punitive custody. When he got out of confinement he was transferred, which brought him to Vlad's platoon. Vlad, knowing about the incident, could have assigned him to another tank. Instead, Illya's new commanding officer put him in his own tank, moving his previous driver to another. Illya wasn't sure if that was for his benefit or so that his new commander could keep his eye on him.

The incident of his taking a swing at Vlad was still a blur in his mind; a blur brought on by too much Vodka. All he knew was that Vlad hadn't sent him back to confinement, and that was enough for him. He would be loyal to this officer no matter the circumstances and he knew that he would never run out on Lieutenant Vlad. He only wished he knew where they were going and what the persons there would look like. He bowed his back trying to relax it long enough for his neck to pop.

"Are we there yet?" he shouted up to Vlad like a kid.

"Are we where?" Vlad shot back.

"I don't know, you're the officer. I thought officers always knew what they were doing."

"Look who I have driving me out into the middle of the desert and tell me that," Vlad replied, amused at his ability to always get the best of Illya. With that he pulled himself up onto the edge of the hatch to sit on the side of the cupola. That is hot, he thought to himself. Just as he was starting to get a little more comfortable something caught his attention out of the corner of his eye. Up on a sandy hilltop, about two hundred yards away, he saw two figures, standing, looking at them. They were in the native Bedouin dress with hoods pulled up over their heads. He strained to see them, then pulled his field glasses up to get a better look. As if he was alone, he said to himself, "I'll bet they are hot in those robes." Though he could not put his finger on it, there was something strange about them.

About that time Rupert stuck his head up. Vlad had a different tone to his voice, when talking to himself, and it had snapped Rubinov out of his concentrations on the book he was reading.

"What is it, sir."

By this time the tank was almost even with the figures on the hill and Vlad responded. "Looks like a couple of Bedouins over on that hill."

Vlad thought to himself, as he spoke, that they looked tall for Syrians, especially desert dwellers.

"Where?" the corporal inquired.

"Straight out," Vlad said pointing, still peering at them through the binoculars. They hadn't moved a muscle that he could see and he now knew what was so strange about them. There was a clean brightness about them, almost as if they glowed.

"Locals, sir?" Rupe asked as he scanned the horizon, looking.

"I don't know, I can't see how anyone could live out in these parts." Glancing toward Rupert, Vlad noticed that the corporal was still looking around as if he hadn't seen them.

"Are you telling me that you can't see those two standing up on that..." His voice trailed off as he looked up to see that they were no longer there. He was pointing and Rupe was looking, but now there was nothing there.

Illya called up to them. "What is it?"

"The lieutenant thought he saw someone," Rupe answered.

Vlad didn't answer. He was too busy scanning the area where he had seen them. He half expected to see a helicopter rising in the distance. Maybe they were Iraqi reconnaissance, he thought. If they were, why would they expose themselves like that. The scenario gave him an eerie feeling that wouldn't soon go away. He continued to look for them until his tank was out of sight of the hilltop.

Even Illya couldn't break his concentration. "Were there any girls, sir?"

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Moshe and his driver headed south, out of Jerusalem, toward the Negev desert. He would stay the night at IDF command center, Negev. He needed to pick up and move the last of his personal office belongings to the new command center in Jerusalem. He also wanted to visit with some of the staff personnel continuing to operate the former command center. It was still operational and, now, would be indefinitely.

As they drove through the hills, he tried to pick out positions of advantage in the terrain. His mind, now in the military mode, considered areas that looked favorable for dug-in positions that would provide cover against air attack or for ambush. Though the present threat seemed to be to the north, he had read the Prophets and knew that Cush and Put were among the enemies that would come against Israel. Cush and Put were biblically identified as Ethiopia and Libya, respectively. It was not too hard to figure out that the forces of Libya would be involved. In contrast were the Ethiopians. This was hard to imagine even if they had long since become a Communist controlled country. He liked the Ethiopian Jews he had met since their being airlifted to Israel. They and the previously immigrated Ethiopian Jews were hard workers and they made good soldiers. He tried to picture the imminent battles that would come at Israel from all sides. The Libyans and Ethiopian armies didn't worry him as far as being able to destroy them. The problem would be trying to handle assault on all fronts no matter how inept the opposition may be. The IDF could only be stretched so thin. This would be a different kind of war for Israel. In the past they could always rely on intelligence to catch the enemy red handed so that the Israeli Air Force would be able to strike first and decisively. With proof in hand, they could destroy the enemy's tactical air forces in advance and win the battle before it could get started. They had been mildly surprised in October of 1973. At the time, the IDF had been riding a false sense of security, in their assessment of the Arabs capabilities, and had learned the hard way. A new threat, anti-



tank wire guided missiles, had been supplied to the enemy forces. They were somewhat difficult to operate. However, in large numbers, even the most unskilled troops could make good use of them. Their infantry, so armed, became a new threat to Israel's armored forces. Israel had been accustomed to having huge armor quality superiority. The Russian wire-guided Sagger missile gave a small group of operators serious anti-armor capability. The Sagger was difficult to operate, but gave the Arabs a powerful new weapon. The Sagger missile looked somewhat like an enormous dart flying across the battlefield with its rocket roaring behind. Occasionally, you would hear the tell tale sound of the side boosters that steered the rocket. It was a scary sight and it was very visible. One hoped, as an armored vehicle commander, that you could spot it first. This would give you time to disrupt its operators by shooting them first. The anti-armor missile had seriously changed armored tactics for Israel and again made infantry very valuable. There are always many threats, even to armor on the modern battlefield, but these two or three man hunter-killer missile teams are especially dangerous. They can hide easily and are very mobile.

Moshe speculated that if only Israeli intelligence could prove what the Islamic Alliance was up to, we could probably make a good go of it. Tactical nuclear strikes could be a consideration if used far enough away from Israeli soil. This ploy, of using military exercises against Iraqi and Khurdish aggressors to facilitate an unimpeded army build up is brilliant, he thought. Not only would any offensive act by the IDF be grounds for Alliance forces to retaliate, but, Israel certainly had to be on the lookout for any situation that might give the Alliance an excuse to attack. We are in a "hold our breath" situation and that is the worst possible scenario in defense.

As they neared Hebron, his thoughts turned to another problem. How would the Israeli Arab citizens and the Palestinian population react to an invasion from their Islamic brothers? They would surely be sympathetic if not directly involved. He had brought this to the attention of General Mordechai. Both felt the Palestinians would act as an active resistance force with possible preemptive sabotage or terrorist acts. They would be a considerable force to deal with internally, although they were still just pawns to the real powers and would probably be used as shields for the main fighting Islamic forces. Using civilian populace for terrorist shielding was not a new tactic for the radical Moslems. Whatever Palestinian populace was left would, most likely, be disposed of as quickly as the Jews. Still, they had to be considered as enemy in every scenario. Another problem is the fact that Palestinian insurgents have a habit of using their women and children as protection which makes any counter military action extremely difficult.

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It was just before dusk when Rob arrived at the apartment. He had been driving around the city for a couple of hours, silently contemplating what he had heard from Moshe. Whether a result of his mood or reality, there seemed to be an eerie hue and quiet over the city that he had not seen before. Sarah greeted him with a kiss just as she had so many evenings, but there was some concern in her face that immediately made him think of Sarah's parents.

"Rachel?" he asked, her mother's name.

"Yes, I just got off the phone to her and..."

"And?" Rob started to say more, but then thought that maybe he should just listen.

"And, she wasn't very happy with you for not sending her daughter home, out of danger."

"Did you tell her I tried?" Rob asked.

"She is upset because we aren't leaving. She wants us to come back to the States."

"You can still go," Rob said.

Sarah gave him a look that told him there would be no more discussion on the matter.

"Sarah, are you familiar with the Ark of the Covenant?" Rob asked, changing the subject, quickly.

Sarah replied, surprised by the quick subject change. "Well, sure. It was the box that they put the Ten Commandments in, wasn't it?"

"Yeah, it was the object that sat in the Holy of Holies in the Temple or the Tabernacle," Rob said.

"What about it?" Sarah asked.

"Well, the Ark was really a two piece item. One part being the Ark, or the box, that contained the tablets of stone with the Ten Commandments. The other part was the Mercy Seat which sat on top of it."

"I remember the movie we saw it in," Sarah said. "What was the name of that movie?"

"Raiders of the Lost Ark," Rob said.

"Right, the Ark destroyed the bad guys after they opened it," Sarah said.

"The Nazis," Rob said.

"Whatever," Sarah replied. "Why do you ask?"

Rob paused for a moment and looked at her intently. Israel has the actual Ark of the Covenant. He stared at her to see her reaction.

She looked puzzled. "What does that mean?"

Her question as an answer sort of deflated Rob. He had hoped she might show more enthusiasm.

"Sarah! The Ark of the Covenant, the proof the Bible is true; Moses, the ten commandments, creation, Jesus Christ, everything."

"You've seen it?" she quizzed.

"Not yet, but I intend to," answered Rob.

"Make sure you don't look inside of it," Sarah warned.

"I wouldn't do that," Rob replied before continuing. "I just heard about it today. Apparently there are Rabbis who have said they have had the Ark for some time, even though it has been a big secret here. And, get this, it was found by an American named Wyatt. I tried to get some more information on him this afternoon, but without any luck, I'm afraid."

All of a sudden Sarah looked like a light bulb went off in her head.

"You know, that reminds me of something," she said quickly getting up and heading off down the hallway of their apartment.

"Sarah," he exclaimed. "Don't you see the importance of this? This is huge."

Sarah didn't answer. He got up and went down the hall looking for her. When he found her, in their bedroom, she was bent over a pile of boxes rifling through each in

turn. Finally, she pulled out a little paperback book, and holding it up, said. "I found it. Whoops, I was supposed to return this."

"What is it?" Rob could see on the cover an older looking man with a wide brimmed hat standing in front of some long boat looking formation.

She handed him the book and said, "A friend from Sunday School loaned this to me a couple of years ago. Do you remember when we were at Langley? My friend, Suzy, gave it to me. It's about Noah's Ark and I read some of it in bits and pieces. I remember that there were other things this man had found. The Red Sea crossing site and, I think, the Ark of the Covenant are in there."

"This is so strange that you have this book. How come I've never seen it?" Rob asked, taking the book and looking at it. "Ron Wyatt! Yeah, that's the guy that Moshe told me about." He sat down looking it over carefully and started examining it page by page.

"I guess Suzy must think I'm awful for not returning it," Sarah said. "I remember how excited she was about it. He had been at their church, a couple of weeks, before we got there. I remember reading a little about Noah's Ark and skimming through it a little before getting too busy. I never really got a chance to read it all the way through."

Rob acknowledged her with a grunt. He was too busy absorbing the words of this new found treasure.

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"Ain't you the comfy one," sneered the stocky young cowboy as he walked up to the lounging executive type behind the newspaper. The cowboy, dressed the part with boots and an oversized belt buckle, glanced around the airport terminal waiting area and in one smooth swoop dropped his large backpack and a hard-shell case in the seat beside and plopped down to rest.

"Ain't, ain't a word, Mason," the man replied without looking up from reading.

The cowboy looked toward the paper the man was reading as if trying to see through it.

"Kind a like work or help?"

The man in the suit let the paper fall slowly until he could just peer over the top. Then he asked the cowboy, "What do you mean?"

"Well, Mr. James. You know, words that ain't in your vocabulary."

The man in the suit smiled slightly as he raised the newspaper back up to cover his face again.

"I just stand in front of the cameras, I don't lug them around." After a short pause the man continued. "And listen, call me Ty."

The cowboy rolled his eyes while shaking his head. He looked around the terminal area before glancing at the headline on the outside of the front page his partner was reading. The main headline read, "World's Largest Peacekeeping Force Ever."

"So, what do you think of this, Ty?" the cowboy asked while pointing at the headline.

"You do know why we're going to cover this don't you?" Tyler James asked, closing the paper and, looking inquisitively at the cowboy.

“Well, my preacher says it looks an awful lot like an army that’s mentioned in prophecy.” Mason replied.

“It is.” Tyler stated, looking for his cameraman’s reaction.

“It’s what? Mason asked, sincerely, for further definition.

“It’s Gog and Magog,” the reporter answered, before continuing, “from the North.”

Mason looked a bit puzzled before asking. “Is it Armageddon?”

“No. Haven’t you ever read about Gog and Magog in Ezekiel?”

“Naw, I guess I’ve pretty much stayed in the New Testament.” Mason replied.

“You gotta remember, I wasn’t saved until that steer gored me.” Mason let the end of the sentence trail off as he began to look around the terminal. He knew now he was going to have to tell the whole story.

“When was that?” Tyler asked, never having heard the story from Mason.

“Well, it’s coming up on three years.” Mason grimaced as he thought about it.

“I heard the horn went all the way through you.” Ty stated, waiting for the answer anxiously.

Mason looked around some more as if he didn’t hear.

“Come on cowboy. If we are going to be on assignment together, we might as well get to know one another.” Tyler quipped.

That thought was not particularly appealing to Mason. His only previous contact with Tyler James left him with the impression of a brash hotshot, even though he was old enough to be his father. The word around the station was that Tyler still kept one foot in the secular world and longed for a major secular network job. However, he was right about the assignment and he was, by reputation, arguably the best investigative Christian reporter. Mason looked at Tyler to see a genuinely inquisitive look and decided to share his experience one more time.

“Well, not quite. But, the doctor said one inch in any direction would a kilt me.” Mason lifted his shirt up to show the long, broad scar just below his lower ribs.

Ty laughed, surprised at the extent of the cowboy’s scar and said, “Man, that was one mean bull.”

“Ya know, I wasn’t scared, at all, until we were on the way to the hospital. The rodeo chaplain started praying in the ambulance and suddenly I realized that I had never considered dying.” Mason looked at his reporter partner and confessed. “See, I never went to church before. I got scared and confused, I remember starting to tremble. I knew that chaplain was a cowboy and he seemed to know what he was doing. I grabbed his shirt in the middle of a prayer and pulled him to me. I said, who are you talking to? He said, the Son of God. Being somewhat of a smart aleck, I said, How come you’re stopping short? Man, he gave me a look and said, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, gave up His life so that you would never have to. Boy, was that some good news. I told him, in that case, to keep on talking and he led me to the Lord. Let me tell you, that was some roller coaster ambulance ride because as soon as I prayed the sinner’s prayer, I wasn’t scared anymore.”

“Good story,” Tyler laughed, appreciating the purity of it. “So, how did you get to be a cameraman?”

“Well, that was just to be with my girlfriend at college,” Mason replied. “She wanted to be a reporter, so, I took journalism. It didn’t really matter, I was on a rodeo scholarship. But, I found out, I really liked the photojournalism.”

“What happened to the girlfriend?” Tyler asked.

Mason smiled. “Oh, she’s at home with my boy.”

“So, she’s not a reporter?” Tyler asked.

“No, and I’m not a bull rider.” Mason stated, satisfied of the trade off.

Tyler nodded in understanding. He raised the paper as if to start reading again. Then, thought for a moment before asking. “Why did you volunteer for this assignment?”

Suddenly, over the terminal intercom came the announcement, “Now boarding flight 281 for New York.”

Mason grabbed the hard shell case and backpack and started toward the forming line for boarding. As he did, Tyler tossed the paper he had been reading down on the chair, he had been sitting in, and followed the stocky cowboy. As he caught up to Mason, he asked again. “Why did you volunteer for this?”

Mason thought for a moment before answering, “Why, to work with you, Mr. James. Uh, I mean Ty.”

Tyler James looked at the cowboy trying to figure out if he was pulling his leg. He knew it was a possibility that a shy staff cameraman might secretly wish to work with the best Christian reporter at ACN. After a moment of no countenance change on the cowboy’s face, he decided that had to be the case. With his ego now bolstered by that answer, he smoothly slid around in front of Mason to hand his boarding pass to the cute flight attendant and give her a wink. He picked up the pace as he started up the ramp toward the plane.

Mason watched his new partner high stepping and shook his head. He hadn’t lied. He had been asked by the head of the network to volunteer for this assignment. He was asked for the specific purpose, as the boss put it, to keep a close rein on Tyler and to keep him out of trouble. The chief said he wanted the best reporter he had on this important assignment, but he also warned that Tyler did not always act, as he put it, “puritanical.” Seeing Tyler flirt with the flight attendant at the door of the plane as he came up behind, Mason now wondered what he had gotten himself into.

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When Sarah looked up it was late and Rob was still completely absorbed in the book. She knew to leave him alone when he got into something that deep. It would be useless to try and talk to him, anyway. She switched on the TV to hear the latest reports on the now familiar headline story about the status of the vast land armada and the Israeli government’s latest response. The Kremlin was, of course, denying any evil intentions and the Western powers and Oriental nations were rattling the swords of their concern. She thought to herself that Rob had been right. Now that the cold war was over, they had been living in the most dangerous time in history. This situation would never have happened with the iron curtain stand off. Everyone would have known the evil empire was up to no good. On the TV a well-known liberal U.S. senator was being broadcast. He praised the alliance initiative and supported the move that would surely bring peace

and security to the region. He even suggested that the Congress should consider appropriating assistance for the Soviet Muslim Alliance.

"Wake up!" she said to the television. She could only wonder at how liberalism had taken over the United States. It was really only another name for socialism. Liberal politicians promised more social programs and controls to a media-addicted populace becoming ever more reliant on those programs. In turn, the people had to continue supporting the liberals to keep the fixes coming. It was like drug addiction. The cure for everything was always more appropriations. Bit by bit, it took away the freedom and dignity of the people so that they would have to put all their trust and fortunes in the hands of the government. The American and Russian governments were not so different anymore. They both controlled the masses through the peoples' reliance on the government.

"Sarah!" she heard Rob yell to her.

"Yes, honey," she replied, looking toward the door, as Rob walked through it holding the book open at a certain page.

"Do you know what it says here?" Rob looked at her while she shook her head no. "This Ron Wyatt found the Ark directly below the spot he believes to be the actual crucifixion site of Jesus. It says that during the excavation for the Ark, he was digging down the face of an escarpment and found cutouts in the side of the hill where the Romans would put up their notices or news in stone for the people to see. This was always done in an area where the most people would walk by. The Romans were notorious for using this type of area for their crucifixions. They wanted everyone to know the punishment for rebellion against their authority. Mr. Wyatt believes that he found the actual cross holes at that site. Three of them, still there, cut out of rock because the Romans would reuse them. What's amazing is, that running down the face of this very escarpment and just to the left of the middle cross hole is a fault line crack." Rob looked up at Sarah and quieted his tone. "The Bible says that at the time of the crucifixion there was a great earthquake and that the rocks were split. Mr. Wyatt believes that at the time the centurion pierced Christ's side and the blood and water came out, that God provided a passageway for His blood to spill down onto the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant." Rob, even more reverently now, continued. "Put there six hundred years before by Jeremiah, to be at the right place at the right time for His own sacrifice."

Sarah and Rob sat staring at each other for a time, not really seeing each other, but thinking on the wonderful and amazing God whom they both believed in.

Sarah spoke first. "That put chills down my spine."

"I know," Rob replied. "It made the hair on the back of my neck stand up when I read it and again, just now, when I told you. It all makes sense! Jesus said He came to fulfill the law. Do you understand the full significance?"

"Well, I always assumed that Jesus blood had just spilled on the ground, I guess, I really hadn't thought much about that."

"Who had?" Rob answered. "We've also always assumed that the crucifixion took place on the top of the hill. More romantic, I guess. But, if you think about it; it makes sense."

They both pondered this information, in silence, before Rob spoke again.

"The real significance is this. In the old sacrificial system of the Jews, the priest would take the blood of the goat and the bullock and would go behind the temple veil.

He only did this once a year, on the Day of Atonement, and sprinkle the blood on the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant. This would atone for the sins of all the people."

"I thought it was a lamb they used," Sarah interrupted.

"Well each family would sacrifice a lamb," Rob continued. "But the atonement made for all the people was actually two goats, one would be turned away into the wilderness; that is where we got the term scapegoat. The other would be sacrificed for the sins of the people as a whole. This was carried out by the high priest for all the people. The blood of the animals on the Mercy Seat covered the tablets of stone, which had the Ten Commandments on them, so that the Law that was holy could be covered in the eyes of a holy God."

Having said all that with one breath, Rob gasped. "Don't you see how everything comes together? God could not offer any less of His own sacrifice. And when Jesus' blood spilled onto the Mercy Seat, the law was covered once and for all."

"No one will believe it." Sarah stated.

Rob was surprised. "Why not?"

"Well, for one thing, only Christians and Jews know what it is," Sarah replied. "It's only proof for those who believe already."

Rob thought that she might be right. If the Ark was presented to the world, it would be called a hoax or just an antique of Jewish history that was based on superstitions. It would sit in a museum for those who believed and would have no outside impact or significance. It was the blood that was significant.

Then as if Sarah could read Rob's mind, she stated. "There is only one way the Ark can be presented to the world for a witness."

"What way?" Rob asked.

Sarah smiled at him. "God's way."

Rob pondered, silently, what all this could mean.

"It is a blessing to know these things," Sarah said. "Suzy knew and now so do we. Maybe that's why you are here."

Surprised, Rob asked. "What do you mean?"

"I don't know," Sarah said, shrugging. "But you will be the only one involved in all this with a Christian perspective."

A thought came to Rob that made him wonder. "You know. I just had a thought. Maybe God is getting ready to present his proof."

"What makes you say that?" Sarah asked.

"Well, if the Russians turn south as Israeli Intelligence expects them to, there will be no stopping them. Conventional weapons aren't enough and they are already so close to Israeli soil that nuclear weapons can't be used. Their force is so big that you couldn't destroy them fast enough without making this whole region a wasteland. Besides, the Israelis would never use nukes on their own soil."

"So, what are they going to do?" Sarah asked, looking intently into Rob's eyes.

"Well, there is a rabbinical faction that supposedly holds the Ark. And I believe that Moshe is suggesting that it may be brought forth to go before the Israeli army. Just think, the Ark of the Covenant carried before the armies of Israel, just like it was nearly three thousand years ago," Rob replied.

"But, would the Ark do them any good now that it has been fulfilled?" Sarah asked.

Rob looked at her and said. "I don't know, I hadn't thought of that." Rob looked a bit dejected. "Gee, I don't know what to make of all this except that it's great to get some insight into the lengths God went through to provide salvation for man.

"The Jews don't believe that," Sarah said.

Rob thought about that for a moment, then replied. "No, they don't. But they would believe it is the Ark of the Covenant, if it were brought out. Since they rejected Jesus as the suffering Messiah and Lamb of God, there is no reason why they wouldn't believe God for deliverance. It makes you wonder what would happen if God delivered the nation from its enemies and the Ark of the Covenant was in the forefront."

"It sure wouldn't hurt their efforts to rebuild the Temple," Sarah replied.

"No it wouldn't," Rob replied, surprised by his wife's perception. "And..." he continued, thinking out loud. "If I remember my prophecy studies, correctly, I think that the Jews return to the sacrificial system during the tribulation. The problem is that the rabbinical faction won't give up the Ark. They feel like they should continue to hide it and protect it, especially from any invading army. It's the orthodox Jews, and they won't admit its existence. They sure won't relinquish control of it or tell where it is."

Rob and Sarah sat silently thinking, for a moment, before Rob spoke again.

"Moshe says prophets possibly refer to the Ark being set before the city. The scriptures, I've read, don't sound as if Israel is ever taken out of their land again. I wonder if this really could be the prophecy of Ezekiel. It's about an army from the North called Gog and Magog. I remember that they come against Israel and are defeated in the mountains of Jerusalem, by the Lord. I believe that this may be the beginning of that battle. All the same, starting tomorrow, I want you to pack enough gear to stay at the shelters if it comes to that."

"If we have the faith that God will not let anything happen to Israel, then why would I need to go to the shelters?" Sarah asked.

"Well, there may still be air strikes before the main force arrives, and that could be very dangerous," Rob replied. "I don't remember any scripture that says there wouldn't be any casualties in Israel."

"I'm not worried," Sarah assured Rob.

Rob paused thoughtfully and leaned over to Sarah. "You know, this is kind of exciting."

Sarah nodded affirmatively as Rob kissed her.

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## DAY TWO

### Chapter 4

Straining to see, through the pre-dawn darkness, Vlad looked ahead trying to determine if they had reached any semblance of civilization. The column had set out very early this morning because schedules had to be met and timetables kept. The smell of diesel fuel didn't make him feel any better. He had always hated that smell, especially when opposite the smell of gasoline. Gasoline smelled much better, but was certainly more volatile. He couldn't get over how still the air was. No breeze, and it was already starting to warm up even though the sun had not yet appeared over the horizon. It was going to be another hot day. Why did they have to be in the desert? The thought of the previous day's revelation from Sergeant Khorkina still lingered in his mind. Jerusalem! Could that really be the objective of all this? He wanted to believe that they were really just here for an Alliance exercise and that there was only the possibility of some minor armored actions. Just the thought of fighting Israel put a chill down his spine for several reasons. The Israeli army was one reason, for one, and this ancient city, of the Bible, for another. He didn't know that much about the Bible, just what his mother had taught him. That was mainly about Jesus, the one who was supposed to be the Son of God. This Jesus was himself a Jew and His own people tortured and killed him in Jerusalem. It seemed that no good ever came out of that city. From what he had read, it was always the object of contention between Arabs, Christians and Jews. Why this one city was so important to so many people, he could never figure out. Religion, Vlad supposed, was behind all the trouble. Religious fanatics were always the worst kind of fanatic. It seemed to Vlad that there was enough trouble in life, just obtaining the necessities, to worry about too many high ideals. Yet, he still remembered the feeling of hope he had as he listened to his mother read from that little book she valued so highly. She had acquired it from some traveling American evangelists, who were preaching on a corner one day, in their city. He remembered his mother's excitement as she recounted how she received it. When the evangelists asked for anyone to raise their hand if they believed in Jesus, she had raised her hand as high as she could. She told Vlad how wonderful it had made her feel and that she really did believe in the Son of God. It became a real source of trouble at home. She would want the family to go to church services on Sundays, but Vlad's father always went to his second job on Sunday mornings. He would cut firewood and clear land. He insisted that Vlad help and learn about survival in the real world. He didn't believe in praying to some God for help that never came. Since the family relied more and more on any work that they could get, Vlad always went with his father. As it turned out it was a good thing. If he had been identified with the Christians, he would not have been able to get his commission in the army. It was the unspoken, forbidden rule, in the army, to abstain from "the opiate of the people," as Lenin had put it. It had been a lucky day for him when the churches were closed down. Of course the state church was allowed to stay open. His mother had almost wrangled one service out of his father. He was a stubborn man, but he too was human and he did love Vlad's mother. Vlad always felt good about that. Too many of his friends' parents did not love each other and his friends would try to find ways to stay away from home as much as they could. One

problem was alcohol. Vlad was grateful that his father did not drink to excess. Many men did and their families paid for it. Seeing some of his friends' fathers in that condition convinced Vlad, early on, not to drink except for social occasions. Maybe God had been looking out for him. Vlad shook his head at that thought. God? What am I thinking?

About that time Rupert stuck his head out of his hatch.

"Are you awake, yet?" Vlad asked, smiling at Rupert just to rub it in.

"Just be glad I'm not driving this tank. It would be headed north, right now," he snarled back, not observing the protocol of rank this morning.

Vlad observed that Rupert was usually in a disagreeable mood. To some, his attitude would be too much to handle, but to Vlad, it had its comedic value. One thing about Rupert was, he would pull no punches. You always knew where you stood with him and he would tell you what he really thought, not what he thought you wanted to hear.

Vlad was curious and Rupert was a well-read man. "What do you know about Jerusalem, Corporal?"

Rupert turned his head slowly toward Vlad, still scowling, as if he had just asked him something disgusting. Luckily, he didn't say so, but Vlad was already becoming sorry he asked.

"Arabs, Jews and Christians live there and love it. Mohammed, Jehovah and Jesus Christ, need I say more?"

Vlad knew Rupert was not being complimentary. Rupert hated all those categories and had stated so many times. Vlad thought this the perfect set up.

"We might be bivouacking there for a few days during this exercise," Vlad announced with as straight of a face as he could.

"We will be out of ammunition by the time we reach the city limits," Rupert shot back, just as matter of fact.

Vlad laughed inside, barely containing himself while considering such a contrary personality. The thought occurred to Vlad that Rupert's attitude must be what made him such a good gunner, the ability to pull the trigger.

"I take it that you don't believe in any god?" Vlad asked.

"Yes sir, I do. I am god." Rupert looked at Vlad without batting an eye. "I am lord of this gun and all that stands before it."

"What about behind it?" Vlad replied.

Rupert looked ahead as he countered. "If I die, there is nothing, so I must be God. It's like the old question. Do trees falling in the woods make a sound, if no one is there to hear it?" He looked at Vlad, waiting for an answer, sure of his analogy.

"Well, will the woods exist if you are dead?" Vlad came back.

"I won't know that, now, will I, sir?" Rupert replied, now not so sure of his response.

"I will," Vlad said.

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Rob woke early before dawn. The excitement of his new found information, about the Ark, beckoned to him. He glanced over at Sarah still sound asleep. Not bad for a girl in a foreign country on the brink of war, he thought. I'll call and wake her later. He showered and shaved and poured himself a glass of orange juice from the small refrigerator they had purchased in Tel Aviv. He thought it over and decided to wear his khaki uniform. His dress uniform would look more official but might also bring undo attention at an inopportune moment. He considered wearing his sweats since he always ran every morning, but with the current situation, that might cause him to be detained. Normally, he liked to wear his tourist attire to snoop around, but, now that type of dress would stand out like a sore thumb. Most all of the tourists were gone. He looked in the mirror and decided he might just look bland enough without the cap, ribbons, or jump wings. Grabbing his billfold and keys, and with one last look at Sarah, he opened the door to the apartment. The city was motionless and silent as he started for the jeep. As he drove through the streets toward the old Arab quarter, he noticed how unusually quiet it was, even at this time of the morning. Before dawn there was normally a lot of activity going on in the city. No one wants to work the day before the end of the world, he thought to himself. His smile faded slightly as he thought of the current situation. To the people of Jerusalem, and the country, this new threat was another national crisis. They had seen war before and almost everyone he met had been touched somehow either by terrorism, bombardment or actual combat. Israel had always been surrounded by enemies who wanted nothing more than to drive them into the Mediterranean Sea and to eradicate the Jewish people. His admiration for these people continued to grow. Holding fast to the land that their ancestors had held, they had fought all their neighbors at one time or another, but still they are here. If not for his knowledge of the Bible, he would not have believed it possible for these people to return to their land and, after 2000 years, to speak their ancient language. How anyone cannot believe that God had miraculously brought these people here, and kept them here, is beyond comprehension.

Watching for a good place to park, Rob pulled the jeep over as he neared the section of town that would be his first point of investigation. He didn't want to get so close that the jeep would attract attention. He could walk the rest of the way. Climbing out and straightening himself, he grabbed a few of his sleuthing tools that might come in handy. With a quick look to see who was around, and not seeing anyone, he headed toward the old city. It was still very quiet and tranquil. On the north side of the old city was a small hill that is called Jeremiah's grotto. That would be a good place to start. It was also known as Golgotha and his new information made that the first place to start his quest.

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Moshe looked the Negev Command Center compound over one more time before hopping into the jeep that would take him back to Jerusalem. He had gained some interesting insights from Negev command staff members about troop activities they had been monitoring in Libya, Ethiopia and Egypt. Also, some touching moments had been shared with those of his colleagues who realized that he was moving the last of his belongings out of that command center. He had worked closely with the Negev

personnel for a long time and even though he was just making the transition to the new command center, given the present situation, there were some impromptu farewells. Everyone knew what the current circumstance in the north presented to Israel, even if the rest of the world did not. Moshe thought of these things as his driver drove the jeep up the dirt road that led away from the secret base.

The early morning desert heat made his shirt wet and then dried it out; both at the same time. The warm wind blew his thinning hair out of place before he could get his beret out of the shoulder stay and onto his head. The trip would be much longer in a jeep than in a plane. However, he wanted time to think, and the land always brought out the keen senses he needed for a battle. A couple of high clouds lingered, silhouetted by the dawning light in the distance. What a beautiful land, he thought.

As the jeep raced, toward Hebron, occasionally a car loaded down with people and belongings would pass them going the other way. And then another. The closer they got to the city, the more the cars numbered coming toward them. By the time they got to the outermost checkpoint, south out of the city, there was a steady stream of the loaded cars leaving. Moshe thought this was curious and had his driver pull up by the guards operating the checkpoint. When the jeep came to a halt, Moshe jumped out in one swift move. The checkpoint ranking guard, a sergeant, started his salute before Moshe hit the ground. Moshe stood up and stretched a bit before turning his attention toward the line of cars in the other lane. He turned his head, looking up and down the line of cars stopped at the checkpoint.

"What's going on here?" he asked, returning the salute.

"Very busy this morning, sir, seems everyone is going on holiday." The young guard reported, looking down the line of vehicles.

"They seem a little anxious," Moshe said to himself before asking the guard his next question.

"How many are Arabs?" Moshe asked and, with the sergeant at his side, started slowly walking toward the line. A checkpoint guard motioned the first car to go and the line all moved in unison to the next position.

"Well, sir, they have all been Arabs so far this morning," the Sergeant replied.

Moshe stopped abruptly and turned to the guard. "What no Hebrews?"

"No sir. A couple earlier this morning, but since then all Arab."

Moshe looked at the young sergeant, actually noticing his features for the first time. He was a handsome kid, a soldier still, but just a kid really. Moshe thought he must be about the same age as his own son, Aaron.

Turning his thoughts back to the outpost, Moshe contemplated the quarantine that had been imposed on the Arabs citizens. The situation had now developed to the point that he considered it too liberal. Arab citizens could move about if leaving the country due to vacation or employment. However, it had not been his decision, until now.

"Maybe they know something we don't, son." He could see the young soldier smile as it clicked in his sharp mind.

"Stop that car!" Moshe yelled to the other guards who were just getting ready to let another car go on their way. He strode over to the two guards who were working the outbound lane of the checkpoint.

"Corporal, I want you to turn around all Arab vehicles."

"Sir?" The second ranking guard needed it repeated.

Moshe looked him in the eyes. "Turn back all Arab vehicles, Corporal. Is that clear?"

"Yes sir!" the Corporal snapped to. He turned to the other guard who looked just as puzzled as he had. "You heard the officer, let's get this car turned around."

Moshe turned back to the young sergeant and said, "Give them a hand will you, son?"

"Yes, sir," the young soldier beamed, as he turned to go help the other guards.

Moshe took one more look at the line of cars, that now were being ordered to return to the city from where they had come, and walked toward his jeep.

"Get General Mordechai on the radio for me," he said to his driver. The driver hurriedly rang up the command center and, after a couple of minutes, handed the receiver to Moshe.

"General, this is Riskin. Listen, Yosef, I'm at the checkpoint south of Hebron. Sir, the Arabs are abandoning ship."

"What are you talking about?" came back the voice over the radio speaker.

"Sir, there's a caravan of Arab cars, mostly officials, filled with their families and belongings, heading out of Hebron. It looks like they're moving."

"Good," came the reply. "It's a good time to get them out of our hair for awhile."

Moshe looked at his driver and slightly rolled his eyes before continuing.

"Sir, the point is, why? What do they know that we don't?"

Silence on the other end, then, "Oh, I see what you mean."

"Yes sir, the Russians are coming. I have taken the liberty of turning all of them back. I think we should restrict all Arab movement, not just limited quarantine."

Over the receiver the General asked, "What are you going to do, Moshe, hold the Arabs hostage?"

"Why no, sir, these are just military exercises remember?"

A slight chuckle came over the radio. "Where will you be?"

"I'll be at command, in Jerusalem, if you need me, sir."

"Good, Moshe. I'll see you there and I'll issue the restrict order. Anything else?"

"Yes sir, in light of this, I think we should accelerate border mining operations to full scale."

"I agree." After a pause, the General added. "It really is coming isn't it, Moshe."

"Yes sir, it's always been coming," Moshe replied, pausing for a silent moment.

"Out!"

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As Rob neared the hillside of Golgotha, the sun started to rise over the treetops. As he carefully made his way around the small hill, he thought he heard a voice. Slowing a bit as he rounded a corner of the hillside, two tall figures in the native dress of the Bedouin were standing and silently looking at a portion of the hillside. This part of the hillside appeared to be cut out like it had been described in the book Sarah found. He slowed his walk, even more, as he approached them. He had not expected to see anyone around this area, so early. "These guys are a couple of unusually large locals," he thought to himself, as he got closer. The hoods of their dress were over their heads and he could not see their faces. They looked rather imposing, each about six feet tall and he

judged he should approach cautiously. In light of the current situation, they could be dangerous. Their heads appeared bowed, he noticed, as he got closer. Then, as if in unison, they both lifted their heads and turned toward him. Rob stopped immediately, poised to counter any aggression. They were not like anything he had imagined they would be. Instead of looking like the rough Arabic shepherders their dress imitated, they were both young clean shaven very handsome looking men. Their skin appeared so soft that, he thought to himself, these guys look like they never have had to shave before. They both smiled at him; more a smile of acknowledgment than joy. Then both turned in unison and, with one following the other, started slowly walking away around a large outcropping of rock that protruded from the side of the hill.

"Hey, where are you guys from?" he asked hoping to stop them for a conversation. He wanted to know who they were, where they were from and, as anyone in security, their purpose in being there.

"We have just arrived," one said as they got closer to going out of sight. Rob was just about to ask from where, when the other spoke.

"The object that you seek is not here." Just as the last word was spoken, they rounded the corner going out of sight. The statement stopped Rob in his tracks, his mind racing with questions. What object? How did they know what he was doing? Who are these guys? Had he just heard what he thought he heard? When he came to himself again, he sprinted for the corner to catch up to them. Rounding the corner, he saw they were nowhere to be found. It was if they had vanished.

"What the..." Rob caught himself saying. Walking out into the opening, then onto the street, he saw all the usual local residents of the morning. But, the two strange shepherds were nowhere to be found.

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Sarah awoke that morning from the sound of the alarm that Rob had purchased for them. She hated that alarm, but had to admit it did get them up. Being military people, they each had the same responsibility of arising early in the mornings. However, since coming to Israel, she noticed that getting up was much easier than before. The excitement of being in the Holy Land probably had something to do with it. She found that she loved the mornings in Jerusalem. It was almost supernatural, like something in the air. It was hard to explain, but there was a certain something there that she had never experienced anywhere else.

Sarah was used to Rob being gone when she woke up. He normally ran every morning. When she noticed that his personal items were gone, she smiled. She wondered what he might be up to. After getting dressed and eating half of a grapefruit, she sat down to watch the morning news on the television. Before now, she had not watched much television since coming to Israel. However, with the Soviet Muslim Alliance developments, it was important to hear the latest news reports.

Today's news would not be much different than the last few weeks except for the fact that the forces of the Soviet Muslim Alliance had almost completed their staging into Syria. According to Israeli leaders this had quickly become a major threat to all the countries of the region with an army in Syria that almost covered the land. No one had envisioned the immense size of the forces being used in the exercise by the Alliance. It

was already the largest force, in the field, ever assembled many times over. Iran and Iraq were still accusing each other of proliferation. The Khurdish factions were escalating fighting with each other and the outside major power blocs of the world were each still trying to establish some sort of diplomacy with all the aggressive factions.

After hearing the headline news, Sarah turned off the television set and went back to sit at the dining room table. It was hard to imagine such a force outside the country's borders when the city appeared so peaceful. She remembered something that made her pick up her purse and pull out a piece of paper and pen. She needed to write a note to herself to be sure and arrange to have tomorrow morning off from work. She planned to go to Tel Aviv with Rob, the next morning, and didn't want to forget to tell her boss. Under the circumstances she had no doubts that it would be all right. Nevertheless, she always wanted to act responsibly and prudent since she was sort of an emissary of the United States. She put the note in her change purse so as not to forget it and then started for the door. As she went out the door, and locked it behind her, she felt a strange sensation, as if someone was watching her. Her mood changed quickly to one of concern. She looked around as she headed toward the car. When she finally got to the car and put the key in the door to unlock it, her eyes found the reasons for her concern. Up on a rise, on the other side of the street just inside some trees, she saw two brightly dressed hooded figures looking down at her. She could feel the hair on the back of her neck stand up as she looked at them. Their attire was so white that she wondered if her eyes had focused properly. She didn't want to look too long and quickly got into the safety of her car and locked the door. As she started the car, she glanced back toward the two figures. They were gone. She looked around through the windows of the car, but no sign. Still wondering about what she had seen, she drove toward the safety of work.

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## Chapter 5

Still lying in the seat at the empty airport terminal, the folded newspaper brandished the headline "World's Largest Peacekeeping Force Ever." What the article accompanying the headline didn't say was that the Soviet Muslim Alliance had been in existence for only a few months. It had been proposed by the Republic of Russia representing most of the former Soviet Union republics. The Kremlin naturally assumed the major leadership role even though Moslems made up a smaller percentage of the Russian Republic's population than any of the other nations involved. After many rapid high-level Moslem and Eastern Bloc summit meetings its formation was announced to the world. As had been the case with the European Economic Community back in the eighties, the Alliance issued press releases including subjects such as open borders for trade, travel and a common currency. However, what came together very quickly was a military alliance with a central command set up in Tobolsk. A type of "lend lease" agreement came shortly after with Russia transferring huge amounts of "defensive" military hardware from the former Soviet republics to their new Islamic national allies. Tanks, armored personnel carriers, helicopters and jet fighters were some of the main military hardware items, along with their support equipment. The majority of this equipment proceeded to hidden stockpiles in Syria previously built with huge Russian tunneling machines.

Iraq was one of the first Arab nations to support the Alliance. However, after the Alliance became a reality, Iraq seemed to fall out of favor. Soon after, non-compliance of UN sanctions and inspections by the Iraqis precipitated an Alliance announcement that Iraq had been ousted from Alliance membership. Then, reports of mysterious troop movements around the border of Iran along with the ever continuing Khurdish problems, facilitated the announcement of a joint military exercise into the area. The Kremlin used these events to justify moving into Turkey, then Syria and Iran, to stabilize the region and "bring about an atmosphere of peace with security." The joint military exercise, that conveniently was dubbed Red Desert Storm by the U.S. press, had been used to congregate the largest land force ever assembled. After the announcement of their intended military excursion, combined forces of Russia, their satellite republics and some Balkan allies, along with Iran, Syria, Ethiopia, Libya and Turkey began mobilizing and staging immediately. Most of the staging of the main forces, the Soviet republics, Turkish and Iranian army groups, was along the Turkish border. Syrian forces were uncharacteristically quiet while mobilizing and staging additional forces along their eastern border with Iraq. Ethiopian and Libyan forces mobilized in their own countries. Everyone in the region went on full alert. The Iraqis begged for U.N. and U.S. assistance and intervention, but their United Nation protests fell on deaf ears. U.S. and EEC appeals, and then warnings, were not enough to deter the new Soviet Muslim Alliance from, "taking a leadership role in world peace and security." That phrasing sounded strangely familiar in the American press. The Kremlin assured that a show of strength from the new Soviet Muslim Alliance would be all that would be needed to bring about a peaceful resolution to their recently acquired internal regional problems. To the dismay and disregard of the world press, Israel began decrying the buildup as a precursor to an attack on their nation. Editorials in the Jerusalem Post began calling this force and it's



commander "Gog of Magog." The orthodox Jewish leadership, especially the Kabbalists, had been setting dates for this prophetic battle, foretold by the prophet Ezekiel, for some time. Christians and Jews around the world began pointing to the Bible and the prophecy of Ezekiel. However, it was like voices crying in the wilderness. Israel argued that by the time the true intentions of this huge land armada became clear to the world, it be too late. Israel realized that in the event of an attack the reasons reported by the world press, most likely, would all point to Israel. Israel was familiar with their status with the world media. Those reasons were plentiful. The lands of Israel most valued by their belligerent neighbors were the most militarily strategic. The Palestinian problem and the continuing settlement of areas considered occupied territories were still old problems. The many Israeli Defense Forces' retaliatory strikes and invasions into terrorist strongholds, for attacks upon the Jewish nation, could also be blamed. It would not matter that proof exposing the terrorists' Arab benefactors was presented. Never mind that they allowed these terrorists to operate from their territories and even provided them financial and military assistance.

Another key piece to the puzzle had been the new Islamic government installed in Turkey a few years back. The Kremlin had been quick to bring them into the fold. Position was the key. To be able to operate out of Turkey gave the Soviets instant access to the hub of the Middle East and also to many of the objects of their national desire. Turkey gave them the position and the Soviet Muslim Alliance gave them the political vehicle. It had only taken this force a month to assemble and now to be on the move was an amazing feat unless the plans had been in the works for some time.

Of course, everyone in IDF intelligence knew that they had. The Israeli invasion into Lebanon in 1982 had proved it and had preempted a Soviet strike by mere months. Israeli forces had captured numerous huge weapon caches, all of which were taken to Israel by the truckloads. This had not only cost the Soviets billions of rubles in weapons and wasted effort, but had rubbed egg in their face in front of their Arab allies. It had taken these long years to undo the political damage.

Perhaps the final key to the puzzle had, coincidentally, also happened in elections in 1996. In the United States, for the first time in its history, integrity was no longer the most important issue, nor would it ever be again. Indeed, 1996 was a turning point for the United States and Israel; each going in their opposite directions. The consequences were that the world had become a more dangerous place in which to live.

Rob walked briskly down to the street to look up and down for the two hooded men with whom he had just spoken. Those guys can really move, he thought to himself. He was not surprised from the looks of them. They looked as if they were in terrific shape. He wondered how they could possibly know what he was doing there. "Mossad," he thought to himself knowing about the Israeli secret service. Maybe Moshe had assigned them to him. He wouldn't put it past his old friend to have someone watching over him in this section of the city. As he pondered his encounter with the hooded strangers, he was approached by a vendor who appeared to be an older man. He was holding several of the best selling tourist items in his hands.

"American?" the old man asked.

"Judah," Rob answered, knowing the game and wondering if the old man spoke English. He quickly got his answer.

"That's not an IDF uniform," the old man said smiling as if he had cornered his prey. "How about something for your lady friend?"

Rob looked toward the bus station that was near by, wondering why the old man had strayed so far from the tourist run. Then he remembered that the tourists had become sparse since the Soviet Muslim Alliance forces had started massing. The U.S. State Department had declared a "travel at your own risk" warning to potential American tourists. Only those who had great faith or those who had not been able to depart had remained.

"A wife, perhaps?" the old man inquired bringing Rob out of his thoughts.

"A wife?" Rob's thoughts turned to Sarah, still asleep when he had left her that morning. He should call her.

Then he answered. "Yes, a wife."

As Rob was looking through the regular trinkets and souvenirs that he had seen a hundred times before, he noticed a bracelet that he liked. It reminded him of the bracelets that the boys used to give the girls back in junior high school and he thought Sarah might like it.

"How much?" he asked holding up the bracelet.

He got the standard sales pitch. "Very rare, the only one like it in the Middle East. It is native to Judea, and was found there only by chance."

"Five dollars," Rob offered, hoping to stop the sales pitch before the bracelet became the eighth wonder of the world."

"Oh no, sir. But, for good American friend, twenty American dollars," the old man bargained.

Rob was trying to figure his counter offer when, out of the corner of his eye, something caught his attention. Two hooded figures were going into a tunnel across the street at the wall of the old city. They looked like the two strangers that he had spoken with earlier. Got to catch up to them, he thought to himself. He held up ten dollars in front of the old man and announced. "Now or never."

The old man seeing that his only customer was in a hurry took what he could get. He took the ten and handed over the bracelet as Rob started across the street. "Zedekiah's Cave, huh," Rob thought as he pocketed the bracelet and crossed the street. He jogged up to the entrance of the cave and looking around to make sure no one was watching, quickly went inside. Once inside, he realized that there was no way out except through the main entrance. I've got them now, he thought to himself. The cave was an interesting place. He had never been in it before, but his objective was to find the two strangers he had seen go in, or who he thought had come in. Now he wasn't so sure. He looked around a little more and just when he decided that they were not there, a slight movement caught his eye. It came from behind some boards on a wall. He walked over to investigate, all the while, looking around to make sure no one was watching. When he got to the place where the boards were leaning up against the wall, he saw that there was a void behind the boards. A tunnel, he thought to himself. Without disturbing the boards, he pulled out his little pocket flashlight to see inside. The light immediately shone on material like the hooded figures were wearing. Then the robe-like material disappeared, out of sight, down the tunnel.

"How did they get in there?" he quietly asked himself, as he saw that the boards appeared to be nailed down. He looked the boards over carefully before deciding he

could pull one of the end boards loose enough to get through. He looked around again to make sure the coast was clear, doused his flashlight, and took a good pull. The board came out so easy that he almost fell down with it in his hand. With his pocket flashlight in his teeth, he quickly slid into the darkness pulling the board back up into position behind him. Now what, he thought, turning toward the dark unknown he had just entered. He tried to take a few steps before turning the flashlight on in case anyone had become wise to his entering the sealed up tunnel. After a couple of steps his hand went into a spider's web. Enough of this, he thought as he turned on the small flashlight, he wasn't going into the unknown without some light. The little flashlight lit up the place well enough and he could see that the tunnel looked like it had been recently used. There were light bulbs strung up one side of the tunnel at the top and the floor appeared to be trodden down. He had to duck his head a bit as he entered a lower ceiling part of the tunnel. The rocks stuck out in no particular pattern except that they seemed to be stacked up purposely to form the walls. Hurrying along, he followed the tunnel passageway, trying not to bump his head or into the sides. He had gone quite a distance when the tunnel ceiling suddenly rose to what he estimated to be about sixty feet. The sides of the tunnel also became somewhat smoother and upon examination he found that he was actually between two walls extending to the ceiling. Then he noticed a slight movement again down toward the end of the tunnel. This is getting eerie, he thought to himself, as he started toward the movement once again. He began to wonder why he would follow two strangers into this tunnel. Furthermore, why was he in such a hurry to catch them? They looked as if they could handle him easily if they had wanted to. Nevertheless, something about them made him know that he had nothing to fear from them. Now if only he could just catch up to them, maybe he could find out what they were doing here, and how they knew what he was looking for.

Rob finally came to a gate. He looked it over and found that it appeared bolted shut. Wouldn't you know it, he thought. He looked it over to see if there would be any way to get it open. To his surprise, as he put his hand on it, it opened easily. He swung the gate open and quickly went through it. He thought to himself that he better leave it open for a quick getaway, if need be. After going through the gate, he noticed that the passageway was reinforced and would have been well lit if the string of light bulbs were turned on. A short distance further, the passageway made a turn to the left. "Must be getting close to the temple mount," he thought, as he came to an ancient doorway in the wall. He determined it to be a part of the old Temple. He went down into the opening and saw what appeared to be a large room with high arches in the walls. It contained something that looked like an altar in the floor at the front of the room. He shined his light around but only saw one possible opening in the wall with large stones blocking the doorway. Deciding to head back into the tunnel system, he started back in the same direction. He dug out a little compass that he had and opened it. Shining the light on it he saw that the tunnel was leading due south. As he went a little further, he noticed a picture of a menorah on the wall by the next doorway. He examined it before peering into the small room next to it. In the small room he could see what again appeared to be another altar. In front of the altar were large stones with paper slips stuck in the cracks between the stones. He thought that it must be the rabbinical tunnel that he had heard about. From the little he had heard about this area, he remembered that supposedly, it went straight through to the eastern gate. However, it was completely sealed off at this

time. As he was contemplating trying to move a couple of the top stones, he heard the sound of something dropping in the tunnel back in the direction from where he had come. Uh, oh, he thought. I've been seen. He quickly put out the flashlight and put his back up against the wall, listening intently. Carefully looking through the gate into the tunnel darkness, he slowly turned on the flashlight to see what had caused the sound. A shadow seemed to move into the opening that led into the large room that he had previously investigated. He quickly followed the shadow, thinking that he might have caught up to the two strangers. As he turned the corner with all his senses alert his light showed that no one was there. He moved the light all around the room which seemed to penetrate further, into the opening with the stones, than he had noticed earlier. Upon further examination, he found that these stones appeared to have been placed there more recently than the ancient stones of the Temple wall. He slipped his hand in a crack that allowed the light to penetrate and found that he could get a good grip on one of the stones. He pulled. Two of the stones turned at once making a good sized hole. He peered in to see another wall inside that looked to be even more ancient. As he squeezed through the opening, moving the rocks a bit more with his body, suddenly his light went out. He pulled his body on through and began trying to make the flashlight work again. Before he could succeed, he noticed a dim stream of light coming from a small crack in the wall about eight feet up. Just as he was starting to focus his eyes on the dim light, his flashlight came on again. He tightened the top of it to make sure it would stay on and turned his attention toward the crack where the other light had shown through. Putting his flashlight in his back pocket so the light would still show, he climbed up the rocks using the cracks for footholds. When he reached the crack that was emitting the light, he looked in. However, now it was dark inside. Strange, he thought since he was sure he had seen a light coming out of the crack in the stones, and he was also sure that this was the right spot. Maintaining a grip with one hand, he reached around and retrieved the flashlight. As he pointed the light into the small opening, he adjusted his head to see in behind the wall. The light immediately struck an object sitting on the floor of an adjoining room. The object, on the floor, reflected the light back toward him. Adjusting the light so he could see the object better, his heart raced.

"Yes!" he almost said out loud. He immediately knew what he was seeing. It was the Ark. "Wow," he thought, "the actual Ark of the Covenant." A sense of fear and wonder crept over him as he realized that only a limited number of people in world history had ever gazed upon what he was now seeing. It was different from what he had always imagined it would look like. Neither was it like any book or picture had depicted it. He had always envisioned the ark as a box with two little angels on the top. Instead this was an amazing piece of artwork. Two large cherubim stood on the ends with two of their wings extended touching in the back and the other two folded down the side of their bodies in front. The bodies of the angels extended to the floor forming the sides of the Mercy Seat. It looks like a chair, he thought to himself.

"No, it's a throne," he said before he could catch himself. His mind was trying to comprehend all of this when he heard what sounded like voices. They were distant, but he decided they were not voices he wanted to hear up close. He turned off the flashlight. Letting go of his grip, he dropped, trying to land as softly as possible. Quickly, he slipped back through the two stones and, on instinct, put his back to the wall. He risked a quick light from his flashlight to find the door and show him the way, then sped through

the darkness until he reached what felt like the door. Peering out into the dark tunnel, he saw faint lights. The lights, probably from flashlights, were coming from the Rabbinical Tunnel. He heard the voices again and decided it was now or never. Utilizing the faint light from the rabbinical tunnel, he dashed toward the tunnel gate thankful that he had left it open. Hoping no one closed it, he rounded the corner just in front of it.

"Good," he said softly to himself, as his own flashlight revealed that the gate was indeed still open. He ran hard and fast through the gate, when suddenly the tunnel behind him lit up. They must have thrown the switch, he thought, as he neared the last narrow part of the tunnel. He turned off his flashlight as he approached the boarded doorway into Zedekiah's cave. When he came up behind the boarded up tunnel entrance, he could now see, a couple of die hard tourists were inside the cave. He decided he should slip on through. As he did, no one seemed to notice his presence. If they did, they didn't show it. He walked on and, once outside the cave entrance, stopped for a couple of deep breaths.

"Just like Indiana Jones," he said quietly to himself, while looking around to see if anyone was following. He started back toward the car thinking, "I've got to find Moshe."

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General Grigoryeva turned his thoughts to his upcoming foe, Israel.

"They are the only worthy opponent left in the world," he thought, "besides the Orientals."

It was a good thing they, also, were enemies. The combination of the sheer manpower of the Orient and the resolve and strategic brilliance of the Jews united, would be unstoppable. However, sheer manpower could be dealt with. For that reason the General knew that the next 24 hours would be the most critical. If the Israelis found a way to prove the intentions of his gathering forces, then they could justify using their nuclear arsenal against them. That was the reason the true target of the Islamic Alliance was still a secret even to their own forces. He knew that the Israelis would be more than suspicious of their intent, especially after the 1982 invasion of Lebanon. They had to know. He hoped their reliance on foreign aid and world opinion would hold them at bay long enough for the final staging necessary for the attack. With the continued condemnation of their national policies, he wondered why the Jews ever considered listening to a hostile world opinion. The General knew that when it came to national security, no one dictated Israel's responses. He especially wondered about their relationship with America. With a friend like them who needs enemies? The U.S. had been the prime benefactor for the small country since their beginning. Now, however, the U.S. dangled their aid to Israel, like a carrot in front of a horse, only to achieve its own political goals and foreign policy. Israel walked a tightrope of world opinion and national security and yet, they thrived. They had increased in strength and security while the U.S. declined. Since America had forced the Kremlin into the new strategy of Perestroika, through the strength and resolve of an arms race, America had elected to believe in its own propaganda. In its war against Iraq, the U.S. had shown the world the results of its technological superiority. The weaponry was awesome and the troops were magnificent. However, the leadership, in a majestic display of compassion, pulled up short. How soon they forgot the atrocities in Kuwait and the burning countryside left

behind. Almost as soon, they traded their superiority for their economy with their vote. “So much for giving power to the people,” he thought. The irresponsible, elected by the uninformed, had become the new rule. Thank goodness the Russian people had seen the error of their ways. Of course this only came about, as it had in the revolution, from starvation and corruption. Only communist dictatorship could genuinely take care of the people's needs and control their actions for their own good. “Now,” he thought, “the remnants of that failed experiment could be dealt with and the people will have the leadership they deserve.”

The General had seen how other military officers' attempts at gaining power had been thwarted in the past few years. However, they had attempted to gain power through the political process, which was outside their expertise. He would not make the same mistake. This time the grab for power would be accomplished through military means and the politicians would be dealt with along the way.

## Chapter 6

Tyler James walked backed to the empty seat next to the dozing cowboy and plopped down. The jolt woke the cowboy who immediately stiffened in his seat and looked sleepily at the man in the suit and tie.

“What?” the cowboy asked, looking around to see what was happening.

“Thought you needed some company,” Tyler said, straight faced.

Mason rubbed his face and peered at Tyler. He thought he smelled a slight hint of alcohol, which reminded him of their seating arrangements.

“What about your first class pals?”

Tyler smiled a bit. “Hey, can I help it if that cute stewardess found a single first class seat available? You know, I might have offered it to you if she hadn’t been so intent on my company.”

“So, how did it go?” Mason asked, straightening himself out in the seat.

“Ah, she’s married.” Tyler replied. “It didn’t seem to bother her, though.”

“It bothers you?” Mason asked.

Tyler seemed taken back by the question. He looked at Mason, inquisitively.

“What makes you ask that?”

Mason squirmed in his seat knowing he had already said too much. It was an unfair conversation because he had just been awakened. However, it was too late now. But, before he could answer, Tyler questioned him more.

“Listen, I’ve been thinking about your reason for volunteering for this assignment. And, as much as I would like to believe it, I don’t buy it. So, why don’t you tell me the real reason you’re here. You’ve got a wife and kid at home, for crying out loud, and here you are flying into a possible war zone.”

Mason grimaced at the thought of this line of questioning, because he knew it was Tyler’s game and he was good at it. But, he also knew that he was a poor liar. So, they might as well clear the air.

“Barney asked me to volunteer and to help you out all that I can.”

“Barney?” Tyler looked shocked. “Are we talking about Barnabas, the big guy?”

Mason nodded affirmative.

“I’ve never heard anyone call him Barney.” Tyler stated, as he thought about the fact that the founder of the network had asked Mason to partner with him. Then he remembered that he had been the only reporter to volunteer. This was beginning to be intriguing.

“Why would he do that?” Tyler asked. “I thought you usually traveled with the boy.”

Mason knew Tyler was referring to the son of the founder. However, before he could answer, Tyler continued with a look of understanding.

“Oh, I get it. I get the steer wrestler for this job.”

“Something like that,” Mason replied, straightening his neck.

Tyler sat back in the seat and looked straight ahead. He contemplated this new information and determined that the old man must think there could be trouble. Tyler

respected the founder of the network, even though he didn't agree with all that went on there. But, he knew the boss had a keen sense when it came to dealing in foreign countries and he was very honest.

Mason, now fully awake and anxious, looked at his new partner being uncharacteristically quiet and felt inquisitive himself.

"So, what is your story? Why did you volunteer?"

Tyler looked ahead for another moment of silence, then as if coming out of a trance, smiled and looked toward Mason.

"Shoot, I thought everyone knew my story." Tyler said, seeing Mason look puzzled and knew that he didn't. Then, he asked. "Are you familiar with James Evangelistic Ministries?"

"Sure, who isn't?" Mason replied. "That's your kin, Dr. James?"

"That's my dad," Tyler replied.

"Quite a pedigree," Mason stated. Then he gave Tyler a soft backhand to the arm. "Go on."

"Okay," Tyler sighed, now resigned to telling the whole story.

"You see, there were high hopes for me. I was the heir apparent," Tyler explained. "But, I was rebellious and I really tried the world on for size. I won't go into detail but, I finally came to the realization that I had never trusted Christ completely. When I did, He delivered me from some acquired addictions, but more importantly, from doubt and fear. The problem was, or should I say the great thing was, that I understood freedom in Christ. I realized that God knew all our sin, past, present and future before we were ever born, and still chose to provide salvation for us. Well, that doesn't sit too well with a ministry that preaches salvation requiring renewal on a weekly basis with donations required to seal the deal. Don't get me wrong, Dad's a great preacher and a devout Christian man. I thank the Lord daily that I was raised in a Christian home. It was actually my undoing as far as the James Ministry was concerned. You see, I remember going to Sunday School as a kid and everyone reading out of the same King James Bible. But now, have you ever noticed in any Bible study you're in, that what someone else is reading isn't necessarily the same as what you're reading or even have the same meaning?"

Mason nodded, listening intently before Tyler continued.

"That bothers me," Tyler said, making a disdainful face. "Everyone seemed to think that I could overcome that shallow thinking by studying at seminary and getting the proper credentials. But, I read that Jesus didn't pick the learned or the religious leaders to make disciples of. On the contrary, he warned, 'Beware of the scribes.' If you ever want to see what I'm talking about, go to the four Gospels and read the woes to the scribes. Pretty scary, I think. The Bible explains it better than I can."

Mason looked Tyler over, for a moment, with a new respect before speaking.

"Man, that's deep."

"Yeah, some call it off the deep end," Tyler replied plainly, before continuing. "Anyway, I never felt called to the ministry. I think it's more a quest for truth." Tyler smiled, then continued. "What's funny is, I seem to get a chance to share my faith and testimony most every day."

"Have you ever shared that with Barnabas?" Mason asked, thinking of some of the gossip he had heard at the network concerning Tyler.



Tyler grinned and lowered his voice. "To tell you the truth, I really don't mind being the oddball down there. Gives 'em something to talk about."

Mason chuckled slightly, unsure whether to confirm that fact. Then bringing the original subject back, he stated. "You never said why you volunteered for this particular assignment."

Tyler's face lit up.

"Are you kidding? This is the adventure of a lifetime." Tyler slowed and said seriously. "Maybe even our destiny, my friend. We're going to watch prophecy fulfilled. Imagine knowing where and approximately when a Biblical prophecy will be fulfilled, and going to document it." Tyler beamed enthusiastically. "It gives me goose bumps."

"So, you're not worried at all?" Mason asked.

Tyler's face changed expressions to somber as he shook his head no. "Not for us."

Before Tyler could elaborate, the captain's voice came over the intercom.

"Ladies and gentlemen, this is the captain. We are now in visual contact with the coast of Israel. We will be landing in Tel Aviv in approximately 15 minutes. Let me be the first to welcome you to the Holy Land. Shalom!"

Tyler turned toward Mason smiling with the enthusiasm of a kid with a new toy.

"Yeah!"

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Rob arrived back at his apartment building just in time to see Moshe knocking on the door.

As he walked up behind Moshe, Rob hinted. "I have something very important to tell you."

"What is it?"

"Let's go inside, I want Sarah to hear this too."

After both greeted Sarah inside, Rob pulled Sarah away from her cooking to join them. She'd hardly been given a chance to say hello before Rob began to relay his news.

"Moshe, I saw the Ark." Rob announced, hardly containing himself, remembering all that had happened to him that day. Moshe froze, looking stunned. The surprised look on Moshe's face confounded him. He expected surprise that he had been able to find it, but he hadn't considered that the news would have such a profound effect on him. After all, wasn't it he who had first told him the story?

"Moshe, what is it?" Rob asked peering into his friend's eyes for an answer. Then it hit him. "You really didn't know that, did you?"

Moshe, almost embarrassed, answered.

"I must confess to you, that although everything I told you was true to the best of my knowledge, I have tried unsuccessfully for years to actually confirm that fact."

Rob was surprised at Moshe's revelation. He turned to exchange acknowledging looks with Sarah before Moshe continued.

"Obviously you were in Zedekiah's tunnel," he said peering at Rob, looking for conformation.

"You should know. Your men showed me the way," Rob replied.

"My men?" Moshe stated with surprise. "I sent no one."

Rob looked intently at Moshe trying to spot some sign that he was covering up. He saw none. This puzzled him. Then who....?

"Then it is under the temple mount?" Moshe asked bringing Rob out of his thoughts. "How were you able to get in?"

As a reply, Rob began to convey the story of how he had met the two strangers at the hillside and how they knew what he was looking for. Moshe and Sarah sat fixated listening to his story. He continued the account about following the shadowy figures into the tunnel and how his journey culminated in being at the room where he was able to get a look at the Ark. Moshe became more and more moved by the story and before Rob could finish, almost seemed to have tears forming in his eyes.

Sarah spotted it first. "Moshe, what's wrong?"

Moshe looked down for a moment then taking a deep breath said, "It brings back a very emotional time for me."

He paused for a few moments to catch his composure, then he continued. "You see, I too, have been in the tunnel, many years ago. I knew the man that was in charge of security for the archeological digs along the western wall and I knew that they were working in the tunnel that leads to Solomon's Quarry. With his assistance, I explored the tunnel system late one night myself. The archaeologists had just finished the first opening of the tunnel. After hearing that the Ark had been found, I thought that it would be moved there, for safe keeping, as soon as it was possible. I thought if I could get into the tunnels at that time, I might possibly find where they hid it and see it for myself."

Rob interrupted. "Why were you trying to find the Ark, then?"

Moshe looked at him kind of funny.

"I really can't tell you why. Curiosity, perhaps or proof of God's existence. I just don't know. I like to think that it was part of my job to know all that goes on. I was in intelligence back then, also."

Sarah, completely absorbed in the stories, said, "Go on, what happened?" She looked sternly at Rob so he wouldn't interrupt again.

"As I explored around down there, I found rooms, cisterns and even the room that you described with the large archways. I went into it and other rooms off the tunnel looking for the place where the Rabbis might be hiding the Ark. When I came to a tunnel gate leading to what is now known as the Rabbinical Tunnel, I started to go in. At that moment I was gripped by a sudden fear, that I have never known, came over me. It was a feeling the whole tunnel system was about to come down around me. I have never experienced such fear. In combat, I have known fear. But, that was mild compared to the type of feeling I had that night. It was evil or still worse, as I have considered over the years, possibly the evil in me treading on something so holy that it was tearing me up. I just don't know. I don't have anything to compare it with. That is the best that I can explain it. I do know that I got out of there as fast as I could and have never physically looked for the Ark since."

Rob and Sarah looked at each other trying not to let Moshe notice. They had never seen him like this.

Moshe felt their concern, and wanted to assure them that he was okay.

"Scary, huh?" he said to lighten the moment. Yet, there was more to his story and he wasn't sure he should tell them. "Tell me about the Ark," Moshe told Rob to take the

attention off of himself. He decided that he would tell them the rest of his story when he thought the time was right.

Rob continued the story, still hesitant about the effect it was having on his friend. "It was unlike any picture I have ever seen of it. There are two angels at the sides of the Ark with one pair of their wings extending toward each other in the back. The two cherubim extend down each side of the Ark with a staff and a folded wing on each side of the front facing one another. They form a chair." Rob paused and looked at them both before continuing. "The angels form the Mercy Seat," he said letting that thought sink in just a moment. Then he continued. "It's a throne. It was literally God's throne on earth."

Rob looked at them expecting to see them share the same excitement he had from this discovery. He could see, however, that they still did not understand what he was pointing out.

"Let me draw it," he said quickly jumping up to get something to draw on.

Moshe and Sarah were still trying to picture what he was telling them, when Rob sat back down. He started sketching on the back of an envelope.

"You see, the wings in the back form the back of a chair and the angels down the sides are really the legs of the chair. If you lift the whole Mercy Seat off, and set it down by itself, it would stand alone. It is actually a chair. It is the Mercy Seat."

"Or a throne," Sarah exclaimed now realizing what Rob was saying. Then she said. "Wow. That's where the Shekinah Glory of God resided in the Holy of Holies."

Rob smiled and nodded at Sarah's understanding.

Moshe looked at both of them and asked, "I wonder why you have been allowed to see this?" He looked a little distraught at the thought of a gentile seeing the Ark, when he, himself, had not.

"I don't know, Moshe," Rob answered feeling Moshe's concern. "I thought maybe you had sent the two strangers to guide me or protect me."

Moshe smiled again. "Had I known what you were up to, I might have."

"You know, Moshe," Rob began, feeling an opportunity to witness to his friend again. "This brings us back to where the Ark was found. When we talked before, you mentioned a site where the American had begun looking. Was it at Golgotha? You know, north of the old city wall?"

"Please excuse me, but I must get back to command," Moshe said abruptly, standing up.

"Oh, no, stay and eat something," Sarah insisted.

"Thank you, but I'm not really hungry and I must get back to command." Moshe quickly kissed Sarah on the cheek before she could persuade him to stay and shook Rob's hand.

"You, my friend, have been much blessed today," Moshe said starting for the door.

Rob followed him. "There must be a reason," was all he could think to say.

"The reason is the Mercy Seat!" Sarah said boldly.

Moshe and Rob both stopped to turn and look at her following them.

"For the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," Sarah continued, looking at both of them sternly.

"Goodnight, I'll meet you tomorrow at the cafe as usual," Moshe said to Rob.

Moshe appeared visibly shaken, as Rob nodded and Sarah watched silently concerned.

Moshe quickly stepped outside and when he had heard the door close behind him, he looked up at the stars in the sky and sighed. Could it be true? He thought to himself. The Mercy Seat was from where Jehovah had ruled, not where Jesus died. He couldn't bring himself to dwell on such things. The country was facing it's moment of truth and he didn't have time for philosophy.

After taking a deep breath and exhaling, he started toward his car. Then he remembered what he had left out of his own story about searching for the Ark. Oh, well, No sense in alarming them over a strange coincidence, he thought to himself.

Back inside, Rob turned and spoke to Sarah who was turning off the appliances on the dinner that was now ready.

"Boy, that was a quick exit. I guess the subject matter was turning too deep for him."

Sarah walked back over to the couch. "I wish he had eaten." she said sitting down.

"Maybe you were too hard on him," Rob said, grinning at her.

"He's worth it," She replied, grinning back.

"Well, now that he's gone, I can give you something," Rob said pulling the bracelet out of his pocket and handing it to Sarah. "I left this part out of my story."

She took the bracelet and held it up. "An ID bracelet. Does this mean we are going steady?" she asked.

"I think it's about time, don't you?" Rob returned grinning.

Then Sarah quickly turned her attention back to their friend.

"I'm still worried about Moshe. It seemed like something else about your story made him leave suddenly? Do you know what it could be?"

"Well babe, when you are Deputy Chief of Intelligence for your country and the largest hostile force in history is gathering just outside your borders and you now know for sure that the most powerful object ever made by man is a reality, and in your possession, you just might have something else on your mind."

"Aren't you the smart one," Sarah said reaching for Rob. "Did I thank you for the bracelet?"

## DAY THREE

### Chapter 7

Vlad's Battalion Commander sent word before dawn to gather all the platoon commanders to an early morning meeting. Vlad had trouble coming around when the sentry came to wake him. He had been in the middle of a dream that seemed so real. He dreamed that he was home and was sneaking into the house to surprise his parents when he found that his mother was on her knees beside the bed praying. As he was trying to hear what she was saying, she turned to look at him and smile. Just at that moment he was awakened by the sentry. He was having trouble deciding what was reality and what was the dream. Soon, the warm desert air and diesel fumes made obvious to him which one was real. After arising, he wondered if he should wake Illya and Rupert. From what Vlad knew about this operation, he decided there was no real reason, other than speculative, for getting them up this early.

When Vlad arrived at the battalion headquarters tent, the meeting was about to start. The Battalion Commander informed the platoon leaders that their battalion had been chosen from the division to witness the execution of court martial proceedings. They would assemble just prior to dawn at parade for this action. The Battalion Commander did not seem overly appreciative of this dubious honor, but he too had to follow orders. The platoon commanders grumbled at their bad luck that was certain to put them in a foul mood for the rest of the day. At least it was a bit cooler this time of the morning, Vlad thought, as he headed back to his platoon with the news. His first stop was Sergeant Khorkina's tank. The Sergeant did not fuss about the news, but he stated that he would certainly be in a better mood once he got some coffee down him. At the third tank in his platoon, things were not so pleasant.

"What's the chief after, a staff job?" the Sergeant asked grumbling. Then he too went about the business of getting his crew up and around.

Vlad smiled as he headed for his tank. What he had in mind was going to be good and since it was rotten duty he might as well have fun with it. He almost laughed out loud as he plotted what he would do. After collecting himself, when he came up to the bedrolls, he leaned over them and cupping his hands over his mouth he yelled.

"Get up, get up, get up."

Illya sat straight up and, trying to act like he hadn't been asleep, looked around to see what it was he was supposed to be doing. Vlad watched him closely to see when he would figure out what was going on. After a moment of confusion he saw that it was still dark and that he was still wrapped in a blanket. He looked at Vlad. Vlad broke out laughing as he moved over toward Rupert. Rupert never moved.

"Sorry, sir, I guess I was having a nightmare." Illya mumbled as he lay back down.

"Sorry is right guys, early duty this fine morning, time to get up," Vlad said as he poked Rupert.

"It better not be latrine duty," Rupert pronounced as he rolled over to put on his spectacles. "I hate watching Illya do all that digging."

With that, Illya woke up. "Say it isn't so, sir."

"Well it's not liberty, but it's not digging either." Vlad teased. "Battalion parade."  
"Battalion parade?" Rupert shot back showing his disgust at such an odd notion.  
"In the middle of the night? In the desert?"

"Yes sir, comrades, and we are the lucky battalion out of the whole division."

"We don't have to shine our boots, do we, sir?" Illya asked hoping that his joke didn't backfire.

"No one could see them in the dark anyway," Rupe shot back, disgusted that some officer was going to take away some of his precious sack time for a parade, just to make a show.

"And no arms," Vlad said.

"What about security, sir?" Rupe asked.

"Battalion Headquarters platoon will be guarding the perimeter," Vlad answered.

"I just hope it isn't another one of those best looking driver award ceremonies." Illya grinned at Rupert while flexing his bulging biceps. "I just hate it when they make me come forward as an example." Illya said walking off still flexing his muscles and admiring himself.

Rupert watched him walk away then looked at Vlad. "Yeah, best evidence of primate evolution." They both laughed and started off to follow Illya as he walked toward the muster area.

"What is this all about anyway, sir?" Rupe asked. "Isn't it terribly early for a muster?"

"I guess it's never too early in a combat zone," Vlad surmised.

"That's another thing, sir," Rupe said, examining Vlad. "Aren't we a little too relaxed for being so close to combat? I mean even when we have been in other exercises or war games, we have always had officers jumping down our throats the whole time. But, no one has harassed us this whole trip."

"Well, I don't really know myself," Vlad replied. "I've heard Sergeant Khorkina talking about combat duty and he says that the officers become much more friendly in a combat zone. Unpopular officers have a way of turning up missing or dead, if you know what I mean." Vlad looked keenly at Rubinov. "Don't get any ideas, Corporal."

Rupert thought for a moment, then smiling said.

"It is a lovely thought, isn't it."

"Hey, I'm an officer."

"You don't really count, sir. No disrespect, but you're more like one of the guys. I've had officers I would shoot the moment we got to a combat area. They step on everyone else just to make themselves look good. The good officers work to make the team better for everyone."

Vlad looked at Rupe. "Why haven't you tried to be an officer? You have the education."

"Where I come from, you don't try for officer or anything else for that matter."

"Where is that?" Vlad asked.

Rupe picked up the pace wanting to avoid the answer.

"I better go get in line, sir," he said heading off toward Illya.

Vlad watched Rupe go over and tap Illya on the opposite shoulder that he had approached behind him from. Illya fell for it and turned his head the other way. When Illya looked back around and saw that it was Rupert, he playfully punched him on the

arm. Vlad almost wished sometimes that he was an enlisted man again. He felt left out of a lot of the camaraderie the enlisted men enjoyed among themselves. He remembered it well, but realized now that he was an officer and a gentleman, he had to act the part. He smiled and took his place in front of his platoon along with the other platoon commanders. Some of the platoon commanders and the sergeants were conversing while others were trying to look their best. Vlad couldn't figure out the reason for all the fuss. It was still dark and they were out in the desert. He thought about his mother and the vision or dream he had of her and how she was down on her knees praying. He had found her there many times before when he would come home on leave. He knew she had been praying for him since he left, this time. He could feel it. He didn't mind even though he really wasn't sure what his beliefs were. Her prayers couldn't hurt. "Especially now," he thought to himself.

The call to attention snapped him out of his thoughts. The battalion came to attention and they waited for the usual procedures of parade. Before any of the formalities had been observed, an officer called out to a platoon of troops carrying slung paratrooper AK-47s. They marched single file in front of the battalion until they were dead center in front, out about 50 feet. At the command, they snapped right, facing away from the battalion toward the front. It was difficult to see what was going on because of the pre-dawn darkness. Then an officer, the battalion executive officer, Vlad surmised while still not able to see clearly, escorted a soldier out in front of the rifle squad. He positioned him right in front of the squad. He then turned facing the battalion. In the darkness he began reading from a paper he held in his hand.

"According to rules of combat article 54 section 3, unlawful disobedience of an order in a combat zone, the soldier presented today has been found guilty."

Vlad quickly strained to see who the soldier was. He couldn't see him very well, but it looked like he was grinning. What in the world is he smiling about, Vlad thought. That's a death penalty offense. The officer looked at the soldier, who seemed to nod his head in acknowledgment, and then started to quickly walk away.

"Ready! Aim! Shoot!" The officer in charge of the rifle squad announced the commands in smooth quick rhythm before anyone at parade was ready. The smiling soldier had just turned his head back toward the battalion in time to see the squad raise their weapons and shoot him. The impact of the bullets, first, made him stand straight up, then crumple over backwards. Vlad thought he had seen a funny look on the soldier's face, like surprise, just before they shot. However, it was still just too dark, to be sure. The gunfire echoed through the desert until nothing was heard. Not a sound or a movement occurred in the battalion ranks, still at attention. Everyone was imagining what they had just seen. Shock was on every face. Everyone knew the rules and conduct demanded in war. However, no one had ever seen a comrade executed like this before.

As quickly as it had started it was over.

"Battalion, dismissed," came the command from the Executive Officer.

No one moved for what seemed like the longest time. Vlad turned to see the soldiers and even the officers slowly looking around to their comrades as if to make sure that everyone else had witnessed the same thing they had seen. They appeared to be wondering if an execution had actually happened or had their eyes played tricks on them in the darkness.

Vlad saw the rifle squad move hastily toward the dead soldier and pick him up. He quickly decided he had seen enough. Almost sick to his stomach, Vlad started back toward their platoon's area. As he walked, he pondered the soldier's fate. Who was he? What situation would cause a soldier to commit such a crime? Where was he from? What about his family? Many questions came to mind. The question that bothered Vlad the most was, why the big show?

Just then Rubinov and Illya caught up with him.

"What in the hell was that all about, sir?" Rupe demanded.

Vlad noticed that Illya looked sort of shell shocked. As Vlad glanced back toward the direction of the execution, he felt anger coming over him from what they had just witnessed.

"Hell, comrades? It looks like that's where we've come," Vlad said emphatically while they walked. They continued on toward their area, each silent in his own thoughts. Things would never be the same again, Vlad thought to himself.

Never!

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It was the crack of dawn when Rob and Sarah left Jerusalem for Tel Aviv. Rob always enjoyed the trip to the embassy in Tel Aviv. This particular morning, he felt as strong as their prayers had been that morning. He felt God's mighty hand in their lives and in the situation surrounding them. It was around thirty miles to the embassy and he loved every minute of it. What an assignment, he thought to himself. He looked over at Sarah, coming along this trip, to spend some time and money in the modern city of Tel Aviv, while he went to the Embassy for briefings.

"You sure are pretty this morning," he said.

She was looking out the window at the country side. "I'm always prettier in the morning after a romantic evening with an officer," she said with a smile.

Rob looked at her and laughed with surprise. After being married almost twenty years, he still never knew what she would say next. He couldn't get over the fact that he loved her more every day. She would tell him about couples, that they had known during the years, breaking up or getting divorces. It always amazed him because he couldn't imagine life without her.

"Not just any officer, I hope," he replied.

"I'm kind of partial to majors," she said, grinning.

When they arrived at the Embassy in the coastal city of Tel Aviv, he got out of the car and kissed her.

"Be back here at ten-thirty sharp."

"I will," she replied. "I'm a working woman, remember?"

Rob nodded in agreement and watched as she sped off toward the shopping district. His eyes followed her until she was out of sight.

Inside the Embassy everyone was bustling around showing, not only excitement but also, a touch of weariness.

"Good morning, sir," snapped a marine guard, who saluted while walking past.

Rob returned the salute. "Good morning, Lance Corporal."



Rob continued along the corridor until turning in at the office of the Ambassador and walked up to the desk.

"Go on in, they are getting ready to start," the secretary said.

Inside the room, surprisingly, the Ambassador greeted him.

"Good morning Major, glad you are here."

That's a switch, Rob thought to himself. He looked around at all the familiar faces, as he found a seat. An unsmiling Colonel Evans briskly walked in last and nodded at Rob. He appeared very concerned about something.

The Ambassador turned and looked around the room as a marine guard pulled the door shut behind him.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, there has been a new development. The news this morning is that the Iranians are claiming that Iraq carried out some commando raids into Iran last night."

Everyone looked around at each other in dismay.

"That's absurd! Why would they do that?" someone questioned loudly.

"Please, let me finish," the Ambassador said sternly. "Reportedly, Iraqi commandos hit the refinery at Abadan and a pump station near Karind. The Iranians were broadcasting this morning showing the damage and parading around a captured Iraqi commando. He looked pretty bad and still had his commando face paint and beret on. Of course, reading from a signed statement, he admitted everything; that he was part of an elite commando party sent to disrupt Iranian oil capacity in advance of a full scale attack. They showed the signed document of his statement. Baghdad is denying any excursions, however they are admittedly identifying the soldier as one of theirs. He has been listed missing from sentry duty near Basra for a couple of weeks. Iran is publicly calling on the Soviet Union, specifically, to honor their mutual defense agreement, and to declare war on Iraq."

The Ambassador, letting the news sink in around the room, turned to Colonel Evans and asked, "Mark, have I left anything out?"

"No, sir, that's about the size of it. It looks as if they have created their own provocation," the head of the Embassy Military Group replied. Then he nodded his head toward Rob.

You could have heard a pin drop as everyone looked around at each other in silence and amazement.

Rob, looking back at his boss and smiling, spoke first.

"Well now, that's enough to change a status from exercise to assault."

With that the room broke into multiple loud conversations taking place between everyone on what they had just heard.

"People, please, may I have your attention again?" the Ambassador asked, trying to regain control.

"What's our response to this?" someone asked loudly. "Do they think that we are stupid enough to fall for that?" The room quieted down quickly to hear the response.

Rob spoke up. "They don't care what we think."

Before anyone else could comment, the Ambassador interrupted.

"Our state department believes the Russian objectives are political, within the Alliance and worldwide. Number one, they have come here to consolidate dictator leadership over the alliance and to bring into compliance and submission all Islamic

countries still friendly to the West. Iraq will be an example to the rest of the Arab nations of Russia's resolve to control the coalition. Number two, they are here for the plunder. If they can control the Middle Eastern oil flow, they will quickly become prosperous enough economically to feed their people and develop their own national resources. We will call the Kremlin on the issue of the spoils. They need to feed their people to stay in business and the oil revenues from this region can do that for them."

With that, the Ambassador looked around the room for responses. He was convinced of the accuracy of the State Department assessment of the situation and pleased with his presentation of the information. All eyes were on him and in seeming agreement except for Rob, who sat leaning over the table, his hands clasped together, his head down.

"Major, don't you agree with our assessment of the situation?" the Ambassador asked.

Rob looked up and then around the room aware that the focus of attention had shifted to him. For weeks he had been pointing out to them that this force was coming and that it was going to come against Israel. Now, they expected him to admit that he had been wrong and everyone waited to hear him say it.

"Sir, you are right about the spoils being the objective. But, the target is Israel."

Rob's lack of a changed outlook brought deflation, and a few jeers until someone spoke out. "Good grief, sir, do we have to listen to this, again?"

The Ambassador, looking somewhat dejected himself, held up his hand.

"Please, let the Major have his say." Then turning back toward Rob the Ambassador asked. "Major, can you explain how you can come to this conclusion, now?"

Again, Rob surveyed the group. Some looked down, some played with their pencils, others read their own notes. Colonel Evans nodded his head toward the Ambassador for Rob to continue. Standing up to address the Ambassador, Rob began his appraisal of the Russian intentions.

"The Soviet Republics are still third world in social and economical development, but militarily they are world class. The army is their only ace and they are here to play it. This new Islamic coalition is just the catalyst for their aims. Ambassador, let's look at this from the Russian point of view. The people put the communists back in power to solve the shortage of everything in that country. The army forced the issue and we know the communists hold the power even if they don't admit it. The food for the Russian people is not in the oil of Iraq. It is in Israel right now. If they go into Iraq and take over their oil production to finance purchases that will only be the beginning of the process of actually getting it home. They still risk a political boycott and they will not have taken care of this winter. The food they seek is in Israel, not to mention the rich potash, and other minerals, that is in the Dead Sea. And it's ready for the taking."

Pausing for a second, he glanced at Colonel Evans who still looked very concerned. Then he continued.

"This action is a faint to take our eyes away from their intended target and to try to catch the IDF off guard. But, just looking at this from a military point of view, would you leave your flank open to your greatest enemy and the biggest threat to your ambitions? Remember, the Communists are not like us. They have no politically correct agenda. Israel has always been a thorn in their side and is, to them, their true mortal

enemy. They know that eliminating Israel is the key to controlling the entire Middle East. They are not really concerned with Iraq or any other Arab Nation. Because they know that if they can wipe Israel off the map, they'll have the allegiance of every Moslem nation in the world."

Rob looked around the hushed room, before continuing.

"So they are coming. And it's not because of any alliance, or world community, politically correct agenda, but because, at this moment in history, they know that nothing on earth can stop them."

With that the room again broke into loud conversations among the staff as the Ambassador again tried to quiet the room. Rob looked at Mark as he sat back down. Colonel Evans could only look back and nod his head. He had to agree.

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General Grigoryeva smiled, thinking to himself. What a stroke of genius his staff had come up with. The SVR (the successor to the KGB) had nothing on his staff. It made him proud that he had assembled such a group. What had happened that morning was the result of good planning. It would bring his army to a razor's edge, and at the expense of only a few vagabond locals. Each time one of the native Syrians would come along begging from the troops, one of his staff members would bring him along, treating him like a king. They would serve him the best food and drink available, clean him up and even give him a nice clean new Russian uniform. The beggars would look great, just like turkeys stuffed for the table, he thought. Soon, they had enough native paupers to implement the plan. They had taken one out to each division. For one battalion of each division on parade, they would march the local out in front as if he were the guest of honor. To the battalion, the explanation had already been given as to why they had been gathered. It was to witness the execution of a Russian soldier. The charges were all the same, but it really didn't matter. The objective was that the troops present would see that there would be zero tolerance for lapses of discipline or for failure to obey any and all orders. This lesson would be invaluable in the upcoming battle. There would be no time for taking prisoners or for showing mercy in their assault. The time for that would come later, if ever. Just as dawn was coming on, before anyone could see clearly, the Executive Officer would accompany the vagabond to the front of the parade in front of the firing squad, smiling to him all the way. He would position the supposed prisoner, turn and give the firing commands before the poor beggar ever realized what was happening.

The effect was tremendous. The news spread fast throughout each division and throughout the whole army, Russian and Alliance troops alike. The impact on the forces had already started to show. There was a new sense of urgency that usually took a few days of combat to acquire. There would be no room for questioning orders if his plans of conquest were to succeed.

Brilliant, he thought, rather pleased with himself.

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## Chapter 8

The tank wheeled off the road into the muster area, for the first break of the morning. When the heavy vehicle finally came to an abrupt halt, Illya jumped out and fell to the ground trying to catch his breath.

"What's wrong?" Vlad shouted.

When Illya finally caught a few deep breaths he looked around wildly. "I couldn't breathe!"

Vlad and Rupert watched as the big man's face turned from red back to its normal shade of pink as he sat on the ground breathing deeply with his arms around his knees.

"I'll bet he's still sick from that scene we witnessed this morning," Rubinov said, looking at Vlad intent on pushing the issue. Vlad didn't respond to the question in the Corporal's face. He was still a little shaken up himself. They both learned the answer to Illya's illness when he spit out a piece of the cork that he had choked on while trying to pull it out of a bottle with his teeth before they stopped.

"Stay out of that vodka," Vlad ordered.

"I can't say as I blame him after this morning," Rupert said.

"I don't want to hear anymore about this morning, Corporal," Vlad said with a scowl.

They turned away from each other working in silence to retrieve the water can and rations for their break. Vlad looked out across the desert wondering what in the world they were doing in such a place. The heat added to his discomfort and his now totally depressed frame of mind.

As Vlad turned his head to the sky to watch a pair of Mig fighters streak overhead, Sergeant Khorkina walked over to draw some water out of the can they had set up. He took a big drink and looked around.

"Do you know where we're at?" he asked Vlad before lifting the cup to drink.

"We should be just north of Damascus if my readings are correct," Vlad replied, looking over the map of the area.

"Do you realize we should have turned east at that main road back there if we are actually going toward Iraq?" The Sergeant asked looking at Vlad inquisitively.

"Maybe we are going to support through Saudi," Vlad answered.

"We may go through Saudi, but not to Iraq." The Sergeant had a concerned look on his face. It was as if he now realized that he was actually correct about where he had earlier surmised was their true destination.

Vlad thought about what he was saying, but after the events of the morning he was careful about talking of such things.

"What difference does it make, Sergeant? I guess we'll go wherever we are sent," Vlad snapped.

The Sergeant looked off into the desert and then into the sky before quietly asking. "Do you believe in God, sir?"

That question caught Vlad completely by surprise. "No!...well I don't think so, maybe. I don't know. What difference does that make?" Vlad asked. "Do you?"

The Sergeant stared back at him with somewhat of a far away look.

"Haven't you ever wondered how this little backwoods country has fought off all the surrounding Arab nations with their huge arsenals? Then there are their internal enemies, Palestinians and the like, that want nothing more than their total destruction."

"They have all the money," Vlad replied, repeating the old teachings of the communist ideology against the Jews.

Khorkina frowned. "Money doesn't buy the kind of success they have had against those odds. They have been surrounded and attacked by many enemies since they returned to the same land that they occupied 2000 years ago. That alone would be considered a miracle even to an agnostic."

"You seem to know a lot about them. You still haven't answered my question, Sergeant. Do you believe in God?" Vlad was now curious about the Sergeant's questioning.

The Sergeant glanced at Vlad for a moment then looked away toward the road south. "I've seen dying men praying to a god that moments before they swore didn't exist. I just don't know."

Vlad decided not to press him for an answer because of the sensitivity of the issue. It was not the kind of question you would want to answer affirmatively to an officer. Vlad was just about to change the subject himself when the Sergeant spoke again.

"Yes, sir, I guess I do. Can I confide something to you, sir?" Sergeant Khorkina asked.

Vlad nodded affirmative, flattered to have this veteran soldier that he admired wanting to confide anything to him.

The Sergeant looked around to see if anyone was near.

"There is a prophecy in the Hebrew Bible that tells of this very army that we are a part of coming against Israel."

Vlad, curious about this statement, asked. "Does it tell what happens?"

After a moment of thought, the Sergeant looked straight at Vlad. "Five sixths of the army is destroyed."

Vlad, stunned at this new revelation from such an odd source, remained silent until the whistle blew for the battalion to form up. The Sergeant started back toward his tank then turned to look back at Vlad, the recipient of the bombshell he had just lain on him.

"Good luck to you, sir," Khorkina remarked.

Vlad looked over at Illya and Rupe as they were jumping up onto the tank. He turned to look back at the Sergeant one more time. The thought that they might be going up against God was more than Vlad wanted to know about. He climbed up onto the tank and into the cupola. It seemed to Vlad that this day's events were shaping up worse than he could have imagined. Now that they might finally go into combat, he was having to rethink everything. He had heard the stories about the Hebrew God and His wrath. Even though he did not think that he believed in a god, still, the thought of going up against people that were backed by supernatural forces made him more uneasy. The events of the morning had already disturbed him. He always thought that the military was a good instrument of the people. However, wasn't the soldier that was executed also one of those people? He was a comrade and to kill a comrade seemed very wrong. Discipline is necessary in any army, but punishment this severe did not seem justified. Send the

comrade home or put him in jail. To take the life of one of the very people you are fighting for, had to be wrong. Vlad was not sure where they were going or even if they would end up in combat. One thing he was sure of, was that when that time came for action, he did not want to be in any moral dilemma. He always thought the way to enter a conflict should be with a clear mind, a clear motive and a clear conscience. Now it appeared as if he would have none of these, if they indeed went into combat. It was not the place to be with any reservations, he thought. He glanced over at Rupert. Rupe looked as if he didn't have a care in the world. Obey orders and life was fine even though he was always so negative.

"Corporal what brought you to the conclusion that there was no god? You are a well read man," Vlad asked.

Rupe looked at him funny, wondering where this question was coming from. He thought about it for a moment. The Lieutenant was obviously asking for his expertise, and the thought occurred to him that maybe he was an expert on the subject.

"Well sir, it has nothing to do with reading. It's the inequality I've seen. People that have spent their whole lives worshipping, celebrating, fasting, praying, and honoring a god that never answers. They are looked down on, persecuted and given second class citizenship. They are led by leaders who give them strict guidelines that they themselves don't follow. Rules and laws. The leaders use God for their own selfish purposes."

Rupert looked at Vlad. He had not meant to go into such detail. It just sort of spilled out.

Vlad, staring into the desert, didn't say what was on his mind. He didn't have to. Rupert then told him.

"I know what you're thinking sir."

"I didn't say anything," Vlad replied, returning his gaze toward Rupert. He pretended to look like he didn't know what the Corporal was talking about.

"Yes Lieutenant, I'm a Jew, or a half Jew or whatever that makes me." Rupert looked at Vlad as if he had just told him something disgusting. "Now you know."

"That doesn't matter to me Corporal," Vlad replied. "You're the best gunner I've ever seen and a good soldier."

"Well, it would matter to the Army, if they knew," Rupert stated as he turned and disappeared down the gunner's hatch.

Vlad turned his gaze back toward the desert and softly spoke the question weighing heavily on his mind.

"What next?"

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Sarah pulled up in front of the Embassy just as Rob was coming out. He scooted down the steps and over to the car looking around for signs of added security. He intuitively checked the Embassy security each time he was around. This time he was in a hurry, so a quick scan would have to do. He walked around to the driver's side and Sarah scooted over to let him in.

Rob Stringer is a man with a lot on his mind, Sarah decided, after he started the car without speaking and started toward Jerusalem.

"Are you OK?" she asked.

"Sorry, I just can't believe they are buying this newest garbage from Iran."

"You mean the raids from Iraq?"

He looked at her puzzled. He hadn't told her about the Iraqi situation.

"I heard about it in town." Sarah answered before he could ask. "It's all over the news. I know it sounded funny to me that Iraq would want to start trouble with anyone in the Alliance."

Rob exclaimed. "Exactly. I wish you were in charge here."

"What does Colonel Evans think?" Sarah asked.

"He's not buying it, either." Rob replied. "But, he has to support the official policy. He did say he would have a contingency plan ready for the embassy and personnel. He wanted us to return to Tel Aviv until I told him about the Ark."

"What did he say about that?" Sarah asked.

"He thinks there must be some connection, since this has all happened just at this time. And, he gave me the option to stay in Jerusalem." With that, Rob paused to see how long it would take her to ask. It wasn't long.

"Well?"

"I'm staying, but you'll have to go back." Rob stated, waiting for her response.

"Excuse me?" Sarah looked at him with fire in her eyes.

"I mean, we are both staying." Rob said, hardly containing his amusement.

"That's what I thought you said." Sarah announced back at him, smiling.

Rob laughed and said. "I told Mark I was going to tell you that he ordered you back to Tel Aviv. And he said, Oh, no you don't."

"Wise man." Sarah stated, chuckling.

Turning more serious, Rob said. "He did say that if we got cut off, we would be on our own."

"We won't be the only ones, though." Sarah replied.

"What do you mean?" Rob asked.

"I met a reporter and cameraman from ACN, this morning at a restaurant. They arrived yesterday evening and are on their way to Jerusalem to cover the battle with Gog."

"Did you say Gog?" Rob asked excitedly.

"Yes. Gog of Magog." Sarah beamed as she continued. "I had a long conversation with them. Their names are Tyler James and Mason Brock, I think. You might recognize the reporter when you see him. I didn't remember him from television, but he did look familiar. He knows all about Gog and Magog. He said that ACN has been tracking the Alliance since their formation because of the alignment of the nations mentioned in Ezekiel."

"All right." Rob exclaimed. "Finally, a decent intelligence report. Isn't that the Christian network that we get in Jerusalem?"

"Yes, but these guys are from Texas. They both volunteered for this assignment. I offered to give them a ride with us. But they wanted to rent a car in Tel Aviv."

"Too bad. I'd like to meet them." Rob said.

"You will," Sarah said smiling. "They have our address and they want to meet with you. I told them about the Ark."

Rob, surprised, thought a moment. "You know, I'm not sure that was such a good idea. Exactly what did you tell them?"

"I told what we learned from the book and that you had confirmed the existence of the Ark." Sarah explained. "I left out the details of your search and our connection with Moshe. You know, anything to do with your job."

"Good girl." Rob replied.

"But, Rob, I just couldn't not share the significance of the find with these guys. It was wonderful. What a witnessing tool this provides. I could feel the presence of the Holy Spirit as I told them about the Ark and Mercy Seat being under the crucifixion site. When I quoted Matthew 27:51 you should have seen that reporter's face."

Sarah beamed as she relayed the witness experience and Rob knew she had done the right thing. He nodded, smiling, and they quietly pondered these events as they drove toward Jerusalem.

Closer to Jerusalem, Rob spoke first.

"This is an interesting development. These guys are Christian reporters, first and foremost. They will take this information and run, especially if I confirm it. The significance is the location of the find, under the crucifixion site. That is the most important information in the world. But, it is a stumbling block to the Jew. There is the possibility of straining our relationship with Israel over it and that would be very bad timing. The story is too important not to confirm, yet, I'm bound to serve my country's best interest. And, I know that the best thing for America to do is to bless Israel and not be at odds with them. But, proof of Messiah is a blessing to Israel. But,..."

"Rob," Sarah interrupted. "Why don't you let God handle this? You will know what to do when the time comes. Just seek His will. You know, you can't save the world all by yourself."

"I just want to save Israel," he replied.

"I think someone already has that job," Sarah said.

Rob thoughtfully stared down the road as he drove, then he looked over at Sarah again.

"You..., " he emphasized, "are so right. What would I do without you?"

"You would need just a little more faith, that's all. But," she added, "don't try to find out."

"Who else would put up with me?" he asked seriously.

"Oh, you're not so bad." She grinned at him. "Who else would take the time to buy their wife a present in the middle of looking for the Ark of the Covenant?"

Rob felt relieved for the first time in days, relieved to remember that everything was under control. In all the excitement he had forgotten that. He prayed silently, relaxing his grip on the steering wheel.

"Lord forgive me. Not my will, but thine. And thank you for this woman that you gave to me." He was about to continue when Sarah spoke.

"Oh, do you know what else?" she asked, continuing before he could respond. "I think I may know who your two new friends are."

"Who?" His thoughts were now far away from the previous day's events.

"The two strangers you encountered." She replied, trying to get his attention back.

"Oh, yeah." His enthusiasm picked up, again, at the thought of the two young men. "Who?"



"Well, you know the chapters in Ezekiel that you told me about? You know, about Gog and Magog and how they are destroyed?"

"Yes?" Rob answered, in wonder.

"Fire and brimstone." Sarah said, watching for his perception of the answer.

"Fire and brimstone?" Rob looked puzzled.

"Yes, fire and brimstone. The only other place I could remember reading about fire and brimstone was...."

Before she could finish, Rob answered. "Sodom and Gomorrah."

"The angels that God sent to warn Lot before He destroyed the cities," Sarah said. Then she continued. "Maybe these particular strangers have been here before."

Rob looked down the road, amazed at this possibility. They sat silently contemplating the idea. Could he have talked with angels? After a couple of minutes Rob looked toward Sarah.

"I guess you are right about one thing," he said. "Someone else surely is in control."

Sarah smiled and nodded.

When they arrived in Jerusalem, Rob swung the car into the parking space in front of their apartment building. Sarah leaned over for a kiss.

He gave her one and said, "I'll see you later."

She got out of the car, grabbed her bags and headed toward the apartment. After a few steps she turned around and shouted. "You take care of yourself!" Then, as if she had forgotten something, she came back to the car window.

"Listen, Major! No matter what happens, God is in control. I know you're worried about us, but remember that no matter what happens, it will be His will and I'll always love you."

Rob smiled as he watched her turn and walk quickly toward the apartment. She didn't look back as Rob got his brief case out of the car, even though he waved.

Rob looked at this watch. "I still have a few minutes," he thought to himself. He jogged over to the jeep he had been assigned and jumped in. Starting it up, he made a quick turn and headed for the old city. "I have to tell Moshe who may be in town," he thought to himself, thinking of the two strangers and Sarah's evaluation of their identity.

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As Mason drove the rental car along the highway toward Jerusalem, Tyler was still busy reading in the Bible that he had brought. Now and then, Tyler would write something in the notepad that he carried in his coat pocket. The reporter looked so intent on his study that Mason had not interrupted him since they left the rental agency. Suddenly, as if he had found something, he spoke without looking up.

"Listen to this! This from Jeremiah. 'And it shall come to pass, when ye be multiplied and increased in the land, in those days, saith the LORD, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the LORD: neither shall it come to mind: neither shall they remember it; neither shall they visit it; neither shall that be done any more.'" Tyler looked up at Mason while he drove. "That sounds like in the last days, or now for that matter, the ark won't be around. But," Tyler stated, looking down to read more. "If you read the next passage, verse 17, 'At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the

LORD; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it, to the name of the LORD, to Jerusalem: neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart.' That doesn't sound like now. Don't you see? All the nations aren't gathered to the name of the Lord in Jerusalem, yet. And, I don't think everyone has been cured of their evil heart, yet, either. So, this must be talking about in the future after the Lord has returned. Like, when the lion lays down with the lamb. It sounds to me like the ark may be remembered and visited before that time comes. Anyway, it's interesting especially after what we heard."

"Hmm," Mason replied, concentrating on his driving.

Tyler laid the Bible down on the dashboard and looked around.

"Where are we?"

"I just saw a sign for Kefar Shemu'el, I think. We're still thirty miles from Jerusalem," Mason replied.

Tyler sighed, then remembering, asked. "By the way, what made the Major's wife stop and talk to you?"

Mason smiled and leaned back, pushing the steering wheel to extend his arms.

"Guess!"

"Guess? I can't imagine, unless she thought it might be interesting to watch you eat." Tyler said.

"Real funny. Nope, that's not it." Mason replied.

"Okay, come on," Tyler said, before continuing. "I mean, I come back from the restroom and there you are sitting with a nice looking woman. I don't know what was going on and I didn't want to say, Hi! Who are you and why are you sitting here?"

"I introduced you." Mason stated as if he were annoyed.

Tyler looked at the cowboy in wonder. "I remember the conversation, Mason. I would just like to know how it started."

"Boots."

"What, cowboy boots?"

"Yeah," Mason replied. "She said she saw us going into the restaurant and wondered if there was somewhere in Israel to get cowboy boots. She said that when she spotted us, she thought boots would be a great gift to give her husband. When I told her I had brought them with me, she wanted to know what we were doing in Israel at just this time."

"Okay," Tyler said, thoughtfully. "That's where I came in."

"Do you think all that's true?" Mason asked. "You know, about the Ark of the Covenant and all?"

"True?" Tyler asked, raising an eyebrow. "Well, let's just consider that? What in the world would she be doing, sitting there telling us the biggest lie ever conceived? She said her husband had seen the Ark of the Covenant. That's not everyday conversation, boy."

"It was pretty neat, wasn't it?" Mason stated, relaxing a bit.

Tyler shook his head.

"Mason, can you imagine the odds against us running into that particular woman in a city the size of Tel Aviv?" Before the cowboy could answer, Tyler stated; "Beyond astronomical."

Tyler stared at Mason until he turned his head to look at him and then said. “That was no accident, my friend.”

With that, the two men turned to gaze down the highway, silent for several miles. Mason looked in the rear view mirror, then turned to look over the seat to the rear.

“What is that?”

“What?” Tyler replied without looking.

“I dunno. Looks like a storm.”

Mason slowed the car and pulled over a lane toward the side of the road. As he did, he stated, “whatever it is, it’s moving.”

Tyler turned around in his seat to see the huge wall cloud coming up quickly behind them. For once he was speechless.

Mason drove the car off the road and stopped. He got out and, leaving the door open, turned around quickly to watch the massive dark cloud come up behind them.

“I don’t see any funnels,” he shouted over the noise of the wind and the low sounding whine that seemed to be coming from the cloud. It almost seemed jet driven.

Tyler got out and looked in awe at the enormous size of the phenomenon and pointing in both directions, he shouted to Mason without looking toward him.

“There’s no end to it.”

“Yee Haw!” Mason shouted, as the leading edge of the cloud went over them bringing cool winds to cover the land.

As the edge went by and on to the east, the wind diminished gently and the whirring sound they heard became more distant with it. There was no rain. But, the cool breeze remained and felt great. They turned to look at each other over the top of the car.

“Wow!” Tyler shouted, then motioning said, “Get in.”

They got in their seats to watch the edge of the storm continue heading east.

“Never saw a front like that before,” Mason stated, enthusiastically.

Tyler, looking around in all directions, said. “That’s because there has never been a front like that before. Look around! No rain. No other clouds. Just this big one.”

Mason looked around as he was told. “It is strange. You know, I kinda felt something out there, too.”

“I know,” Tyler replied. “Like electricity in the air, only warmer.”

They, knowingly, looked at each other in confirmation of the event they had just witnessed. After a moment Mason slowly started the car moving again.

Tyler continued looking at Mason, then shook his head smiling.

“Cowboy boots, huh? Unbelievable.”

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Rob pulled the jeep into the first open parking space he could find. Hurriedly jumping out, he headed toward the little cafe to find Moshe. He could hardly wait to tell him Sarah's theory about the two strangers. Sarah was right. He had been trying to save the world. Now deciding to relax and quietly watch the salvation of the Lord, he could smile again. He could see the people, see his surroundings, and enjoy the sights and smells of this wonderful city. He was in the middle of one of the most exciting and dramatic scenes that the world would undergo and now he felt the liberty to enjoy it. “Truly the Lord gives life and life more abundant,” he thought. He wondered what it

would be like at the Embassy when these forces turned against Israel. The diplomatic staff were going to be caught with their pants down. However, he knew Colonel Evans would have several air tight contingency plans. At least he had warned them. Thinking about his country's Embassy made him consider the difference in the cultures of the United States and Israel. One lived and dealt with reality, the other in fantasy. The declining moral state of America saddened him and made him realize how important the blessings of God were to a nation. In the midst of the most tense and provocative situation in the world, only by knowing and trusting that God was in control was there peace and life. Rob thought himself extremely fortunate and blessed to know the truth and to be in Israel. The truth had surely set him free.

He was about to turn down the sidewalk to the little cafe when that peace was interrupted.

BOOM!

Rob instinctively ducked from the sound of the explosion that burst forth from the distance.

"That is close," he thought to himself, looking toward the direction of the explosion. Over the tops of the buildings he could see a smoke cloud rapidly ascending.

"Sarah," he said to himself. The explosion had come from the direction of where she worked. He instinctively turned and ran for the jeep.

"Oh, Lord, please let her still be home," he prayed as he started up the jeep and roared off toward their apartment.

Sirens and horns were heard coming from the area of the blast. Traffic jammed up and made it difficult for the ambulances to get through. People from all around went to the scene, most to help, some to see.

When Moshe pulled up to the Stringer's apartment building he could see that Rob's jeep was already there. Judging from the time of the explosion, he knew Rob had been on his way to the cafe when the bomb went off. He sprinted for the open door of the apartment and looked in. Inside Rob was yelling for Sarah, but no one was there. Moshe stepped inside as Rob was coming back down the hall toward the living room. When they saw each other, they both showed the same concerned look on their faces.

"She's not here," Rob said.

"Let's go!" Moshe said, motioning with his head toward the door.

Hustling to the jeep they climbed in and sped down the street toward the immigration office. Neither spoke as they raced through and around traffic until they came in view of the office building. What had been the front of the new office building was now just a smoldering shell of a building. Rob let out an involuntary, "Oh no."

An ambulance passed them, sirens howling, going the other way. They pulled the jeep up as close as they could. Rob jumped out and raced to the building.

"No, sir, you can't go in," a city firefighter said restraining him from entering the wrecked building. Rob looked into the fireman's eyes. They were already tired sorrowful eyes.

"Was Sarah Stringer in there?" Rob asked.

"The American woman?" A hint of hope, now showing in the fireman's eyes, told Rob Sarah was alive.

"She was just taken away in that last ambulance," the fireman said. Rob patted him on the shoulder and turned to meet Moshe coming up behind.

"Come on, she's going to the hospital." They sprinted back to the jeep and spun around, squealing the tires as they went. Then, they carefully weaved the jeep through the crowded street.

"She's going to Sha'are Zedek Hospital," Moshe said without looking at Rob. They both kept their gazes forward. There was nothing to say. Racing through the traffic they finally came within site of the hospital. To the side was the emergency entrance. Moshe pulled up next to the side of the ambulance that still had its door open. Rob leaped out of the jeep and dashed toward the door as Moshe pulled away to park. Rob ran to the front desk, his eyes searching for signs of Sarah in the crowded room. The swarm of people in front of him were all asking for information about loved ones. Rob was trying to get around the side of the crowded desk to try and catch the overloaded nurse's attention, when he spotted something down a long connected hallway. At the end of a row of gurney beds was one with an arm hanging down. On the arm was a bracelet. He tore away from the crowd and raced to the side of the bed. The nurse at the head of the table looked up from Sarah and started to say something. Rob peered into her eyes and the nurse looked back down again.

"We are waiting to get into a operating room," the nurse said, not taking her eyes off of Sarah. Rob looked down at Sarah. There was a slight stream of blood coming from the side of her mouth.

"Sarah." He said softly, touching her face gently with the back of his hand. He moved some strands of her hair away from her cheek.

She winced slightly, then her eyes opened slowly until her gaze fixed on Rob.

"Hi, honey," Rob said, trying hard to smile.

Sarah strained to focus her eyes on him. "Rob?"

"I'm here," he encouraged.

Sarah then said, "I'm glad we are here. This is a good place to die."

Rob's smile dropped and he looked at her sternly. "You're not going anywhere."

She just stared at him and said nothing. The nurse interrupted Rob. "The blast. She can't hear you." He looked at the nurse then back down to Sarah. He looked into Sarah's eyes and mouthed and words, "I Love You."

She smiled through the pain that gripped her body as she tried to relax.

Moshe now appeared behind Rob. "Hi cutie, you just hang on."

She smiled at Moshe for a moment then said, laboring now with the words, "Take care of him." Her eyes slowly began to close.

Rob, now squeezing her hand tightly, said, "Sarah!" He felt her squeeze back as her gaze appeared to wander. Sarah brought her eyes back on Rob and spoke.

"There are angels all around. But you, my husband, shine the brightest." Then her eyes seemed to go distant again. Tears ran down his cheek as Rob leaned down to kiss her softly. As he brought his head back up, her hand went limp. Then her head turned slowly, relaxing, as her spirit departed. The nurse yelled for an orderly, who came immediately. Together, they took the gurney down the hallway picking up another nurse as they burst through the swinging doors at the end of the hallway. Rob didn't move as he stood watching the table going out of sight. He couldn't.

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Vlad helped Corporal Rubinov stow the barrel plunger for the big 125mm canon and thought about Rupert's revelation about being of Jewish origin. That fact didn't matter to Vlad, but with everything else that was now being thrown at him, he thought he might as well know the whole story.

Vlad turned toward Rupert and asked, "How did you get in the army?"

"I lied," the Corporal answered quickly.

Corporal Rubinov looked at Vlad checking for his reaction to his own lack of remorse.

"You see my father was a, quote, born-again Christian and was taken away to the concentration camps when I was eight years old." Rupe looked off in the distance before he continued. "I never saw him again. Later, my mother also converted. So, she was excommunicated from the Jewish community. We were very poor. My mother did all she could, but I had to grow up fast and be tough. I was either always fighting or getting beat up because someone was always calling me a Christian or a Jew. So you see, Sir, it's a little hard for me to believe in a God that would use me as his punching bag. Now, all I want is to be a party member and go to the university someday. I will show them all."

Rupe looked back toward the road. For a long time he had needed to get that off his chest to someone.

"So much built up hatred," Vlad thought to himself. It wasn't so hard to understand Rupe's attitude now. The thought crossed his mind that he should turn Rupe in. Then he remembered his own mother. He could have rightly been in the same situation. Right now, however, he had enough problems. He almost wished he hadn't learned so much about Rupert's past. However, he had asked, and now he had one more thing on his mind to consider. Army life was not supposed to be this difficult.

As they were getting the last of the cleaning supplies put away, an eerie feeling came over Vlad. He stopped for a moment trying to decide what it was. Just as he was turning back to helping Rupe, he heard Illya yell.

"Look!"

Vlad turned his head, toward the west, to see the large dark object in the sky. It was a huge cloud, a storm front, but unlike any that Vlad had ever seen before. Two jets were streaking toward them just ahead of it. The clouds, or actually what looked like just one big cloud, was coming fast and low. The jets streaked overhead and to Vlad it appeared as if they were trying to outrun the storm. That normally wouldn't be a problem. This cloud bank, however, was coming faster than any Vlad had ever seen before. He could literally see it moving toward them. He looked over at Rupe who, after seeing the storm front for a moment, shrugged his shoulders and continued putting away the last of the supplies. Vlad looked around and discovered that most of the other crews had also noticed the cloud and were all watching it move in. When the cloud was almost overhead a cool breeze swept over them making Vlad glad to have the cloud cover. As it went overhead, he could hear a low sounding roar that made him think it was almost as if the cloud was being driven. Moving west, the cloud passed overhead covering them and blocking the sunlight. It gave everything a grayish hue, like just before dawn, that seemed somewhat unnatural for the desert. However, they still had unlimited visibility. Vlad, unfamiliar with the desert, thought it must be some natural phenomenon.

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The kindly old Jewish doctor slowly walked toward Rob, who was now slumped down, sitting on the floor with his back on the wall. Moshe noticed him coming and quietly walked over to join his friend and to stand with him. Rob jumped to his feet when he saw the doctor approaching as if there might be some hope. The doctor, with the kindest manner he could muster, told them what they had feared. Sarah was dead. After pausing, the doctor respectfully added that he found it a miracle that she was still alive when they had found her.

"She must have had some unfinished business," the doctor said, looking at Rob. "The nurse told me you were able to say good-bye."

Rob looked up at the doctor remembering the sweet smile of his beloved wife and nodded. Rob then turned away and, drawing in a deep breath, started out of the hospital. Moshe turned to the doctor and shook his hand.

"Sorry Moshe," the Doctor said. "Was she a friend?"

"Yes, the best," Moshe said, as he watched Rob leaving. Turning back to the doctor, he added. "Thanks Ben, I know you did all you could."

The old doctor nodded and headed back toward the emergency room. Moshe hurried after Rob. When he caught up to him, he was standing in the parking lot looking up toward the sky.

"Rob, are you okay?" Moshe asked. "Do you want to stay with her?"

Rob looked off into the distance and let out a deep sigh before answering quietly. "She's not here."

Moshe didn't push it and they stood in silence for a few minutes.

"You know," Rob stated. "Sarah was right, this is a good place to die. She loved this place, we both did."

"You still do," Moshe said sternly.

Rob looked back up to the sky. "We always prayed for the Peace of Jerusalem, whenever we prayed. And now this."

"Lord, why?" Rob softly asked, looking up into the air.

It was at that very moment when they both noticed a huge cloud bank moving in fast from the West. Neither one of them had ever seen such a cloud system before. Even Rob, who had seen wall clouds and other awesome cloud formations back in Oklahoma, was struck by the enormity of this huge rolling cloud bank. They stood silent as they watched this wondrous sight moving toward them.

Moshe spoke first. "What in the world?"

After a few moments of contemplation Rob replied. "I don't think it's of this world."

Strangely, Rob could feel his spirits lifting with the approach of the dark cloud. They stood watching until it arrived overhead. As the front edge passed over them they heard a distinctive sound, like the sound of a huge jet engine, only not as loud. They searched the cloud for signs familiar to them, but this was one strange cloud. As far as they could tell it was just one massive cloud. It covered the land as far as the eye could see in all directions. It seemed to have a life of it's own and they could feel the change in the air as if there was something electric surrounding them. To Rob, it was the crescendo of his spirits lifting, which had begun as he watched the cloud roll in. It was as if God

was pulling the cover over his deceased wife and assuring him that everything would be all right. To Moshe, it resembled the arrival of the God of his fathers just as He had arrived in their ancient past. Moshe imagined that the arrival of the cloud at Mount Sinai must have appeared somewhat like this to Moses and the people. To both, it was almost a religious experience that brought them a feeling of great calm and peace.

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## Chapter 9

General Grigoryeva stood on top of his command vehicle. He had come to this hill for a good look at his army. He turned his head slowly, from side to side, surveying all the forces that he commanded. He had a magnificent view from this vantage point.

"Look at this!" the General said to his aide. His aide climbed up to take a place at the General's side. They both surveyed the area silently. It was awe inspiring. As far as the eye could see, the land was practically covered with troops, tanks, armored vehicles, support trucks and other military equipment.

"There has never been a sight like this before in the history of man; militarily or otherwise." The General beamed. "The greatest military fighting force the world has ever seen. Ready to go forth and conquer. Razor sharp; mentally and physically."

About that time, a couple of jets streaked high above in the sky. The General looked toward them. "If our air force does their job, this will be a walk in the park."

"The IDF will be waiting, sir," his aide reminded him, before continuing. "They won't be caught off guard even if their air force is completely destroyed."

"As long as they are waiting when we hit them, I will be satisfied. They have a history of not waiting. The IDF," the General pronounced with contempt. "Look around you, do you think that there is any force on earth that can stop this?"

"What about nuclear weapons, sir? We would be sitting ducks, right now." His aide was playing the devil's advocate. It was a valuable job and this officer was doing it well; questioning everything. The General appreciated his candid expertise.

"Too close to home, besides we are declaring war on Iraq, not Israel, remember?" the General replied. The deception campaign had been planned from the beginning and the General realized the genius of it. The Iraqis would cry so loud that all attention would be focused toward them and away from Israeli protests.

"Tonight, just after sunset, Israeli Defense Forces air power will be non-existent, and tomorrow we will be in Jerusalem. We will start their new year off right," the General boasted. "Do you know that for the Jews, Rosh Hashanah starts a time of fasting? They just don't realize how long they will be fasting this time." The General and his aide chuckled in the satisfaction of their own ambitions. "This time tomorrow, I will be demanding the surrender of the capital of the Middle East," the General said.

His aide responded before really thinking about it. "Or we could be dead." Then, after realizing what he said, he sheepishly looked at the General hoping he wasn't offended.

"That too," the General replied. "I'll have one or the other."

He began reviewing his plan over in his mind. He would dictate subordination from the Arab nations to himself when he set up his headquarters in Jerusalem. He would hold their holy sites hostage and control the entire Middle East. From there he could control the world's oil supply. The central command would be moved from Tobolsk to Jerusalem under his control. Any resistance from any of the other force commanders would be immediately dealt with by his own personal elite forces. His plan of conquest was fool proof. Once in Jerusalem there would be no force, friendly or otherwise, that could dislodge him. It was for the good of the motherland, he had convinced himself. He would be the savior of the Soviet Empire.

Just as two more Yak jet fighters roared across the sky, two command vehicles approached and stopped close to the General. More of his staff members came out smiling and looking around at the awesome sight.

"Congratulations General, you have done it," one said.

"Everything is ready," another followed. "Sir, the Iranians declared war on Iraq this afternoon and immediately called upon the Soviet Union to honor their mutual defense agreement. We, in turn, declared war, effective immediately. Of course, America is appealing to the Alliance to use restraint and to exhaust all diplomatic channels before military intervention."

That brought a smile to the General's face and he stated. "The trap is set, and the rabbit doesn't even know it."

This brought a laugh from his staff officers. One of the staff members from the second vehicle resumed the report.

"NATO is calling for restraint. The United Nations has called a special session and has condemned the Iraqi aggression. They are calling for a U.N. led appeasement, instead of military force. The European Economic Community has called for the Alliance to show the world its good intentions by showing restraint from attacking Iraq. China, Japan and the other Asian countries are condemning any aggression toward Iraq as unprovoked. The U.S., England and the other European countries are asking if we have come to take a prize."

The General looked around at his beaming staff members before joking. "All the chickens are asking the fox what he's doing in the hen house." Everyone laughed with the General.

His aide confided to the General. "Sir, some of the Alliance members are backing off somewhat. Saudi, Jordan, Egypt, Sudan..."

"Sudan?" The General exclaimed, before the list could continue. "Those cutthroats? I never would have thought it. I guess they are too busy selling their own mothers. It doesn't matter though, they will be easily taken care of as soon as we've conquered our immediate allies. Who else?"

The officer continued, "Lebanon, and Kuwait of course."

"They don't count," the General replied. "Has anyone had the nerve to rescind the use of their territory?"

"No sir, not that we've heard," an officer answered.

"Then it's too late," the General responded, then announced.

"Comrades, soon the Russian people will rule the middle east." He turned toward them and snapped to attention. He saluted them and announced.

"For Mother Russia."

"For Mother Russia," they all snapped back, returning the salute. While they were still at attention, the General boasted. "Thanks to your brilliant planning and allegiance..."

He was just about to finish his speech, when he noticed that their attention being drawn away. One by one, something in the distance was turning their attentions toward it. "Nothing can stop us now," he said finishing what he was saying as he turned his head to find the distraction.

Off in the distance he could see the object of their gazes. A huge cloud bank coming from the west was rolling in fast and low. It hung low, but the ceiling on it was very high.

"Looks like bad weather, sir," one of the officers stated.

"Bad weather?" The General asked. "In the Syrian desert?"

The General turned to the men. "Comrades, this is an omen, a desert storm." He turned back toward the approaching cloud and they all watched as it approached, a low whirring sound could be heard as it got closer.

Two streaking Russian jets flew high overhead and were heading west. Soon, they disappeared high into the awesome cloud. The General and his staff officers all gasped at the magnitude of the huge wall cloud. The cloud's low pitched whirring was now almost a roar as it finally arrived. As the leading edge of it was passing over them, the General was pleased to see the enormous forces, surrounding him, scurrying about into their vehicles, buttoning up for the weather. The cool breeze, that accompanied the cloud cutting off the sun's glare and the merciless heat, gave the General a great boost. He turned and shouted into the breeze. He was exhilarated. He whirled around and turning to his staff, the General announced.

"Mother Russia has sent us some of our own weather to aid us, in this, our momentous adventure." The General beamed with enthusiasm and all his staff members seemed persuaded by his elation that victory would be theirs.

What the General didn't see or hear were the two explosions to the West.

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Watching Rob, Moshe's thoughts went back to the day he had lost his own wife, Talia. He remembered how the bus she was riding had been hijacked and then blown up by terrorists when their demands were not met. The strange thing about it was, it had been the day after he had gone into the tunnel looking for the Ark. Was it mere coincidence? How could it be? He wished, now, he had warned them. However, what could they have done? How could he have known about the possibility of something happening to Sarah, as it had to Talia. With regret he thought, he should have seen it coming. Yet, how could he? It had to be mere coincidence. These thoughts brought his mind back to Rob. He knew the feelings; that hopeless helpless feeling that would soon turn to self pity if he let it. Moshe knew all too well about the depression, the lack of ambition, and losing even the will to live. Not even Moshe's young son had helped bring him out of the depression he had over her loss. Moshe knew he was lucky to still be wearing the uniform.

"Thank goodness for the army," he thought to himself. How lucky he had been to have a friend like General Mordechai, then a Lt. Colonel. The General had put him in command of an airborne commando team. It had kept him from wallowing in self pity and been an outlet for his anger. Now, Moshe must find a way to do the same for his friend before it started. So, for the sake of his friend and his own country he spoke firmly to Rob.

"My friend, I know this is a time of great sorrow for you. It is for me too. You must know how much I cared for Sarah. This is a hard thing for me to say, but she is a casualty of war, a war that is just beginning. And although it pains me to say it, I must

ask you to put aside your mourning for a time because our country needs you." Moshe almost cringed at saying this, unsure of Rob's reaction.

Rob, almost relieved to have an excuse, turned and looked at Moshe.

"Any grief that I would have right now would be totally selfish. I know where Sarah is, and I know who she's with. I miss her terribly already, but after what I have seen over the past couple of days, I'm not sorry for her. We have talked many times about what awaited us in the next life and that through our faith, our passing over is a time of rejoicing." Rob looked up for a moment at the huge ominous cloud that had covered the land and continued. "It's as if heaven came down to get her."

Rob bowed his head and thanked the Lord for the time that they had enjoyed together and prayed for strength to carry on. Moshe bowed his head in respect for his friend and marveled at the way Rob was handling this tragedy. Could there really be a reason for such great faith? How could these people have such assurance from a Jew who lived and died two thousand years ago. It was a perplexing concept to Moshe. That is, unless this Jesus really was who he claimed to be. But, if he had arisen from the dead, then why did he not fulfill the scriptures and lead the Jews into their rightful place as world leaders instead of leaving the world in the hands of the gentiles? The concept of the sacrificial Lamb of God certainly made sense, but the result remained suspect.

When Rob raised his head, he looked toward the cloud that had brought a cool breeze with it. He smiled as a feeling of comfort came over him, renewing his strength. With renewed vigor, he turned to Moshe and said.

"It's a good day to do battle. Where to?"

Moshe was astonished at the strength of his friend who appeared so collected and serious. He knew that someday they would have to further discuss the origin of this inner strength. But for now, they had greater matters at hand. And, a knowledgeable military man with such a cool head would be a valuable resource in their present situation. He decided that now was the time to start utilizing him to the fullest. He smiled and, putting his hand on Rob's shoulder, said.

"There is a something I think you should see."

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At the newest, hastily assembled Soviet Muslim Alliance command post, all the reports coming in on this new cloud were beginning to make General Grigoryeva very irritable.

"Sir, we now have conformation of two more fighter crashes," one of his staff officers announced. "It seems the Air Force is correct in their evaluation of this weather front. Apparently the cloud bank is so thick that the planes are losing their radar and their communications. However, since none of the aircraft that have entered the system have returned, no one can be sure."

"Sir," a communications officer shouted from across the tent. "Tobolsk, sir."

The General nodded to the officer, confirming his intent to be with him shortly. Judging from the look on the General's face, the officer did not repeat the message. The General turned and looked back at the staff officer who was finishing his report with bad news the General did not want to hear.

"What do you mean they are grounding all aircraft flight operations? What about the helicopters?"

The officer's face lit up with a glimmer of good news, finally.

"Helicopters are operating normally as long as they stay below the cloud ceiling."

"What's the ceiling of the cloud?"

"Just under one thousand feet, sir."

The General looked at the clock on his way to the phone. It was 4:00 p.m. They had only needed a couple of hours more, and now this. "Then," he thought to himself, "It's time to set the wheels in motion." Besides, tactics were never fixed once the battle was under way.

"Comrades, this is it," the General announced turning his mind back to his master plan. He then took the phone receiver, looking around at all his staff members. All eyes turned toward him. The room became so quiet you could hear a pin drop, let alone the conversation that quickly became very loud.

After a minute of listening the General yelled into the phone.

"Not a chance! There will be no delays! Tonight starts Rosh Hashanah and we are going to catch the Israeli Defense Forces at their most vulnerable time." The General listened for a moment, his face red as a beet. Then he yelled again. "You tell him to start planning operations under 1000 feet and get it done quick. If he can't get it done, I'll go over there and put a bullet in his head and find someone who can." With that the General slammed the phone down and everyone suddenly became very busy getting to their assigned tasks. The General turned around with a half smile, calling for everyone's attention.

"Operation Soviet Reunion has just begun. You all know your assignments in this adventure. Be ready and vigilant. Our guests should arrive very soon."

Everyone in the headquarters tent exchanged glances, looking satisfied with events to this point. After letting what they had just heard sink in a bit, they busily went back to their assigned tasks.

"Listen," the General said to his Chief of Staff. "Artillery and rocket attacks go as planned. This cloud cover will have no effect on them. Start planning how to utilize air cover under 1000 feet to the fullest extent. Have a report back to me in 30 minutes on how to implement the plans and to coordinate the air force and ground units. The helicopters will have no problems, and it shouldn't change their mission at all. If we can't fly in it the Israelis can't either. They'll need the air cover more than we will. Move half of the reserve mobile anti-aircraft forward to front line units for the initial Israeli helicopter counterattacks. I want reports back in 30 minutes on unit readiness. This is it. It's time to go."

The General pulled his aide aside and asked quietly. "Has everyone received their special weapons? And does everyone fully understand the plan?"

"Yes, sir," his aide answered back. "Inside and out; target acquisition inside command is numbered from the main entrance, clockwise. Headquarters platoon and the Spetznaz will cover outside security for the command post whether it is fixed or in transit. From this moment on we can handle any attempted hostile takeover."

"Good, I imagine we'll be hearing from our friends very soon."

The General went back over to the large map of the area and studied it intensely. After a few minutes he looked up to see his elite guards, disguised as staff officers, and thought to himself.

The trap is set.

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Moshe climbed into the jeep and checked to make sure Rob got in and was secure. Pulling out onto the street, he swerved to make room for another ambulance making its way toward the hospital. He hoped the sight wouldn't undo the recovery Rob seemed to be making after what just happened. He turned and glanced at Rob to see him looking at the scenery passing by. Turning north onto Sederot Herzl, he followed the highway until he had to make another turn, and go back south on Wolffsohn road. When Moshe turned back toward Qiryat Ben Gurion, Rob didn't look toward the immigration building that was smoldering and still surrounded by emergency vehicles. Instead, he started looking around to determine where they were going. He noticed they were headed for the Knesset. He had been there many times. The Ben Gurion complex contained the Knesset, Interior minister and Prime Minister's offices. They turned just north of the Knesset and drove up to a small building that looked much like a detached garage. Moshe grabbed a remote control off of the tray between the seats and pointed it at the door. The door opened quickly and Moshe drove the jeep inside onto a part of the floor that had squared grooves in it. The door promptly shut behind them. Rob was wondering where in the world they were, when all of a sudden the floor started dropping out from under them. They were on an elevator. The elevator took them past two floors of parking garage before coming to a stop on the third floor. As soon as it stopped, Moshe drove the car off the square and over to his assigned parking space. Then, he turned in his seat and said to Rob.

"You, my friend, are the first non-IDF person to visit this new center. Welcome to Command Center Jerusalem."

Rob, somewhat befuddled, stammered.

"Uh, we didn't know there was a Jerusalem IDF command center."

Moshe looked at Rob seriously. "You still do not know."

"I understand," Rob replied. "I pray it will be here for a long time."

To Moshe that was good enough, he climbed out of the jeep and motioned to Rob.

"Come on." He then started walking toward a door at the end of the parking area.

There was an armed guard at the door. The guard saluted the familiar Colonel Moshe, and Rob walked in behind him.

They walked down a short hall toward the elevators. At the entry door was a desk with an officer seated behind it. The officer stood as they approached and saluted. The duty officer looked at Rob and spoke to Moshe.

"Good afternoon sir, and what is the purpose of this foreign penetration?"

"Friendly expertise," Moshe replied. "I would say this is the situation for it, wouldn't you, Captain?"

"Yes, sir, we can always use another friendly face."

"Major Robert Stringer." Moshe told the officer, who then wrote the name onto an identification badge.

The officer opened the door for them. As they walked through the last entrance door, the officer handed Rob the name tag ID. Moshe stopped in front of the elevator door and Rob walked up beside him. When the door opened, General Mordechai was standing in front of a few high ranking officers. His look of satisfaction to see Moshe turned somewhat serious when he saw Rob with him.

"Hello Moshe," the General said. Then he turned toward Rob. "Good afternoon, Major," he continued, returning Rob's salute.

"Major, would you excuse us for moment?" Moshe asked Rob. Moshe then took the General's arm and led him away for a private conference. They conversed for a few minutes with Moshe doing most of the talking. When they returned, the General took Rob's hand and spoke.

"Major, you have the heart felt condolences of this old officer and of the Nation of Israel." He shook Rob's hand while Rob nodded in acknowledgment. The General looked into Rob's eyes. "I remember Mrs. Stringer well and I can't tell you how sorry I am." After a moment's pause, the General continued. "Excuse me for changing the subject so quickly, but time is of the essence. The Colonel tells me you have seen the Ark."

Rob looked into the General's inquisitive eyes and knew that the General had never seen it.

"Yes, sir, I have."

The General looked at Moshe then back at Rob. He knew that Rob was telling the truth. The General turned back to Moshe, again, and said.

"You know, we have been providing them a Temple guard for so long now that I almost forgot about it myself. The Rabbis are so secretive. When the guards would come back, they told of guarding the entrance to a large room. No one ever mentioned the Ark, but I've had my suspicions." The General then looked back at Rob.

"How were you able to see it and when was this?"

After Rob quickly relayed the story, the General and Moshe had another conference. When they finished, the General thanked Rob and excused himself to urgent business.

Moshe took Rob aside and whispered.

"General Mordechai is going to investigate who actually has the Ark."

"I'm surprised that he doesn't know."

"It's Rabbinical," Moshe replied.

Rob thought he understood but had to ask. "Why would that matter?"

"The priests claim a higher authority than the government," returned Moshe. Then he motioned for them to get on the elevator.

"Let me show you around, we are likely to be here for a while."

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In the uncharacteristic cool of the desert afternoon General Grigoryeva was in the headquarters tent studying maps of the area with his unit commanders. With new orders, the commanders would soon be off getting their units ready for the turn and assault into Israel. The plan was for the Russian led forces to form into predetermined waves as they turned and then charge toward the Israeli border. Shortly thereafter, the artillery

bombardment would commence with the air forces right behind. Before the Israelis could react, the initial waves should be within a few miles of the border. The General thought that, with any luck, they might overrun all outposts and race unimpeded into the heart of the country by midnight. They would pour as many of their troops into the Israeli countryside as soon as possible. Hopefully they would overrun all airports and military posts before the IDF could regroup. By morning his forces could cover the northern half of Israel.

The General walked over to the entrance to the tent. Looking into the sky, he thought to himself. This cloud cover could provide the best possible scenario for the attack. It will keep our forces from having to constantly be on the lookout for air strikes. They had planned for destroying the Israeli Air Force, the first thing. They also considered possible hostile air power from outside sources, although none of his staff thought there would be outside intervention to save Israel. With this cloud cover there would be no ground attack jets unless they are flying very low, where they would be good targets for the surface-to-air missiles and the ZSU's 23mm guns. He considered the planning and execution flawless to this point. Now it is just a matter of tactics that would be dictated by changing circumstances. He thought to himself, "this battle was won a month ago when the western powers did not counter their military build up in the region." And now, was the time for the real battle; his own personal coup attempt with the politicians and old guard. He looked around at his personal staff and the incognito special forces he had in place and wondered if there was anything he had forgotten. He wouldn't have a long wait to find out.

"Sir, they are arriving," his aide announced as he hurriedly came from the front of the command tent.

The General surveyed the command tent once more, and took a deep breath. It would be all or nothing now, he thought to himself.

Outside, two trucks pulled up close to the command tent and several platoons of armed troops quickly jumped out and surrounded the command post tent. Two officers slowly stepped down from the cabs of the trucks and scanned the area. Quiet enough, they must have thought to themselves as they spoke briefly together. Then the officers started toward the main command post entrance accompanied by six armed guards. The rest of troops took up positions around the command tent, completely surrounding it. As the officers walked toward the main entrance of the tent, pairs of the guards broke off, from the six, to cover each of the other entrances to the command tent. When the two officers reached the main entrance they stopped to make sure that the tent was now completely surrounded. With the two guards accompanying them, they then stepped inside. At that moment the other two pairs of guards stepped into the tent covering the other two entrances. They all were armed with sub-machine guns and had them ready. They were expecting trouble.

The General looked up as the officers walked in. Striding up to him, they felt confident with the guards who stood by each entrance looking for any resistance.

"Please, comrades, do not make any hasty moves," the older of the two officers announced to the room full of the General's staff members. As he removed his gloves, he turned to address the General.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I've been authorized to inform you that you are under arrest."



The General stood up tall and slowly scanned the faces of the officers. The senior officer, a captain, looked very sure of himself while the younger officer appeared nervous. He had good reason. Now was the moment of truth.

"Arrest?"

As the General spoke the predetermined signal, his disguised elite guards who were stationed in a variety of advantageous positions inside the tent concealing weapons, all turned and crouched, firing in unison. The muffled sound of the silencers going off confused the guards at the entrances, even more than seeing this deadly ballet all moving at once. Before they could react, they saw the muzzle flashes. It would be the last thing they would ever see. The elites all took head shots that froze the guards from squeezing off their weapons. The action was completely successful, silent and fully contained. As quickly as it had started, it was over and two more of the General's guards had advanced and were holding their silenced pistols to the heads of the arresting officers. The younger officer instinctively reached for his pistol. But, just as quickly, he stopped after feeling the pistol shoved into his neck. His eyes, still on the General, showed his contempt for being caught off guard. The General could see that they both realized they were finished. However, neither showed any real fear. The General liked that. Besides, enough Russian blood had been spilled already.

"Comrades," he announced. "You were given a very nasty job. You were also, not given adequate means to accomplish this task." The General looked at them sternly. "Now, I have another option for you, other than the one pressed to your head. Are you interested?"

In unison, both officers slowly nodded affirmative.

"Good." The General said. He turned and walked toward the table over which he had earlier been pondering. Then, he turned to face his new prisoners.

"Comrades, in the next hour the politicians and military personnel currently running the government of the Russian Republic will be secretly moved to an underground bunker outside of Moscow to rule the country, de facto. This is being arranged in the event of retaliatory nuclear strikes against Moscow, since the attack on Israel will be a surprise attack."

The two officers looked at each other in wonder.

"Israel, sir?" the older officer asked.

The General looked at them and smirked.

"You mean you two were sent here to arrest me and you didn't even know what was going on?"

"No, sir," they both said one after the other.

The General looked at his aide and shook his head. They both had to smile a little.

"Well, it's time for you both to start changing your thinking. The fact is, that these political officials will all be assassinated en route, and the government in de facto will be a front for the new movement of the people led by the army. What has been assembled is the mightiest field army ever and we are going to take Jerusalem. From that point on the Middle East will be controlled by the new Soviet Union and we will be the most powerful and influential nation on earth."

The General walked up to them.

"How would you like to be a part of that?"

The senior officer had no hesitation, or apparent loyalties. "Yes, sir," he answered enthusiastically.

The General turned to the younger officer. "What about you, Lieutenant?"

After a moment of looking around at the hopeless situation he was in, he honestly replied. "I would always be honored to serve my country's best interests."

"Good. Colonel, call off your troops." The General motioned for his aide to take the senior officer and go disarm the troops they brought. They would reassign them into some of the front line units.

The Colonel embarked, to carry out his new instructions with the General's aide and a couple of the elite guards, toward the door. As they approached the entrance, the Colonel turned and expressed his appreciation.

"Thank you, sir." The senior arresting officer then turned to lead the detail out of the entrance, shouting orders for the men to form ranks before disarming.

The General turned his attention to the younger arresting officer. "Come with me," he said, motioning for the Lieutenant to come along. As they walked toward the front of the command tent the General, seeing the bodies on the floor beside the doors, knew that from this moment on, killing would be with him every step of the way. It would be the price he had to pay for power. He would, however, prefer killing Jews and Moslems over his own countrymen.

As they walked past the bodies of his former comrades in arms, the young officer looked down at them. The General knew what he was thinking.

"I noticed you were not quite as enthusiastic in joining our cause as your comrade," the General said. He looked the young officer over, remembering that this one had started to make a move earlier and appeared to be the one with the most fight in him.

"You killed Russian soldiers, sir," the young officer replied, honestly.

"No, comrade, you got them killed!" the General returned sharply. "Never underestimate your opponent. You walked in here unprepared. Always be ready for the unexpected."

About that time the General's aide walked up and spoke. "Sir, it was Anatov."

The senior arresting officer was telling all, including which officer sent them and who now presumed himself to be in command.

"Round them up!" the General responded. "Quickly, it's almost time to go."

The General's aide gathered the detachment to go on his predetermined mission to dispatch the officers that had sent the arresting force. The General watched them leave. When he turned back around, the young arresting officer had his pistol in the General's face. The elite guards, momentarily caught off guard, quickly pulled their silenced pistols and aimed them at the young officer's head.

"Expect the unexpected, General," the young officer quipped.

"You will die," the General answered, holding up his hand to stop his elite guards from shooting.

"And so will you, General." The officer held his grip firm.

"So, now what?" asked the General, stone faced.

The young officer's grimace slowly turned into a smile. He looked boldly at the General and, after a long pause, slowly let the hammer down on his pistol. The General stared back and acted unfazed. Finally, the young officer spoke the answer.

"Since it appears that our nation's fortune is now in your hands, it looks like it is time for you to fulfill your destiny, sir." The young officer then added almost menacingly. "Do not fail!"

The General nodded his head for the elites to put away their weapons. When the young officer saw the elites obey, he slowly holstered his own pistol.

"You are a brave one, comrade," the General said half smiling, admiring the young officer's courage. "This outfit can always use another zealous patriot. If you live long enough, I think you may go far."

Then, the General quickly changed his tone and his attention.

"Let's get this place packed and ready to go. You all have your orders and you know the schedule." The General looked back at the young arresting officer, making eye contact, before exclaiming.

"Destiny awaits us."

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Rob was impressed with the new Jerusalem command center. It was as well equipped as any he had seen. Moshe even gave Rob a desk, next to his own, for his use. After his initial jaunt around, looking everything over, Rob sat down at the desk to relax for a moment and to think. Rob looked at those around the command center and thought about the Jewish feast that was about to begin. Rosh Hashanah was the beginning of the two day festival of the New Year and ten days of fasting which culminated in Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Rob thought about their first festival of Rosh Hashanah. He and Sarah had only been in Israel a few days and it had been a special time for them. He didn't want to think about it too much, not right now, anyway. How would it look, for the first foreign military guest to be allowed into command center Jerusalem, to break down in front of everyone. Looking around, he felt sure if anyone would understand; these people would. Terrorism was a part of their daily lives and almost everyone in the country had been touched directly by it at some time.

When General Mordechai returned it was just about dusk, the start of the new year for Israel. After conferring with the General for a few minutes, Moshe returned to his desk besides Rob.

"Come up with any brilliant ideas?" Moshe asked, as the General watched them.

Rob was just about to answer when a young officer came rushing out of the communication room that was located to the side of the main command room. With an alarmed look on his face, he declared very matter of fact to the General within their hearing range.

"Sir, Metulla is under attack."

The General headed straight for the command board with Moshe and Rob close behind. The General started commanding, the moment he got up to the board.

"Looks like they might bypass the Golan. Has anyone else called in? Let's get the gunships up. We must hit them hard, right now, while there is still some visibility. Instruct the pilots to stay out of those clouds."

Moshe asked the General a question as soon as he finished giving orders. "What's with the clouds, sir?"

"We're not sure," the General replied. "But we had a pair of F-16s flame out and lose all power as soon as they tried to climb through the clouds. Strangely, they were able to gain control, again, when they fell out of the clouds. It's lucky we found out. Otherwise, we would be sending everything we have up into it right now. It's covering all of Israel, parts of Jordan, Syria, Saudi, Lebanon and Egypt. We are unable to fly in it, so we are limiting all our air operations to under 1000 feet."

"What about communications?" Rob asked.

"We've lost satellite and AWACs," the General replied. "We are using land line for defense communication. It's all we have. We couldn't tell anyone."

"Sir, we're receiving reports from all of our Syrian border outposts that they are being hit," another officer said, rushing up. "That is, if they are reporting at all."

"Implement Locusts," the General ordered to the officer.

Moshe turned to face Rob and explain.

"Operation Locusts is the commitment of all of our helicopters in one attack. This hopefully can stop the attack long enough for the ground forces to make a stand or at least attempt a line of defense. The risk of all of our helicopters is great and losses could possibly be higher, but it makes our forces appear larger than they are. It not only will take it's toll on the enemy but should effect the future tactical planning of the other side. It makes them think that we must have other air forces in reserve and that there are larger numbers than they have planned for. The problem is.."

"The problem is if they are all destroyed." Rob interrupted, finishing Moshe's sentence. "Why not cover them with the fighter bombers or, even better, vice versa. At this ceiling, their roles may actually be reversed. The opposition strength is not an unknown. If they are fully committed you better be as well. The jets will burn their fuel up much faster at that altitude and will not serve well in an air superiority role. You can deploy them in the full bomber attack mode. The helicopters can cover and then remain on target while the jets return for fuel."

Moshe and the General mulled the idea over for a moment. Then Moshe smiled and said, "You may come in handy, after all."

"I thought that was the idea," Rob replied.

The communications officer came up quickly and spoke, nervously.

"Sir, we are getting a report from Ortal saying enemy formations can be seen coming at them."

Moshe turned to look at Rob as the General spoke.

"That's ten miles inside our borders."

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With the limited visibility and ceiling provided by the cloud cover in the pre-dusk darkness, the attack had begun. First came a short but very intense bombardment of border outposts. Then, combined Alliance air assaults came in low and struck hard at initial defense positions, rear echelon support units and reinforcements. Ground based air attacks from Syria covered the main assault at Golan, the flanking movement into Lebanon and provided escort for the huge helicopter armada that flew crews to prepositioned armor at points west of Karak, Shamakh and east of Gharandai in Jordan. Ground based air cover from Ethiopia and Libya covered the deployment of the southern

forces. Soviet naval air units out of the Mediterranean covered the landings at El Arish and El Kharruba in Sinai for the attack into Gaza. Naval air units in the Red Sea covered the air assault on Elat. IDF anti-aircraft positions and vehicles along with infantry borne stingers took their toll on the air attacks. However, it was only token losses due to the overwhelming number of enemy aircraft.

The ground assault followed with more artillery and rocket barrages into Golan that was designed to bring the weight of the Israeli Air Forces to bear on the advance of armored probing attacks. A huge armored force consisting mainly of reinforced tank battalions probed all along the Syrian-Israeli border. These reinforced tank battalions had been further reinforced, with additional ZSU anti-aircraft gun tanks and self-propelled SAM surface-to-air missile vehicles, to deal with the inevitable counter air assaults. This was planned for. These heavy anti-aircraft units were designed not only to probe and penetrate gaps or breaches in the defending forces, but also to ambush whatever air assault came against them. With the aid of darkness, the radar guided ZSU guns and SAMs made all Israeli air assaults pay heavily. The vast probing forces pushed hard following the massive bombardments that lasted until they were almost on top of their target areas. The attacking forces did not give the IDF space between the bombardments and assaults that would give them precious time to react. These probing forces also were supported by M-24 Hind gun ships when enemy resistance was encountered. The hastily laid minefields along the eastern Golan took their toll. Although, some of the enemy vehicles were destroyed by mines, more were caught traversing the minefields and destroyed by the Israeli Cobra gun ships and attack aircraft. However, the heavily deployed anti-aircraft weapons did their job. The air assaults suffered sizable losses as wave after wave came in to assault the hampered attacking armored forces. Once clear of the minefield threat, the armored forces continued with their probing attacks until a breakout was achieved at Qeshet. The Alliance armored forces then poured through the ever increasing gap like water breaking through a dike. The forward armor streaked for the Bnot Yaakov Bridge.

Furious fighting took place along the way with Israeli made Merkava tanks sniping the columns from dug-in positions and wire guided missile units hitting the moving forces hard. The wire guided missile units, called TOW, proved to be very effective. They were more difficult to disrupt in the darkness because of their thermal night vision sights. However, the sheer numbers of attacking forces overwhelmed all that were defending. The attacking forces were willing to suffer whatever losses were necessary to gain ground and even though they did suffer large losses, they were small in percentage. Many defensive Israeli positions were engaged just to hamper them long enough for the motorized infantry to come behind and clear them out. It soon became clear that the Israeli Defense Forces were in serious trouble and that an awful evening of war would take the tiny nation into the New Year.

## DAY FOUR

### Chapter 10

By the early morning hours, the border of Israel was a forgotten landmark. For the Alliance High Command the invasion had gone as well as could be expected. After the initial counterattacks which had taken their toll, the Israelis forces were driven back into the countryside in disarray. And, although there was fierce fighting going on all over the country, the sheer number of forces committed to the attack was overwhelming all opposition.

At this rate, General Grigoryeva thought to himself, we should be in Jerusalem tonight. Their forces had attacked all night using the textbook Soviet doctrine of attacking on a broad front until a breach was found, then moving fresh forces into the breach until it was conquered. This type of leap frog tactic kept the pressure on the opposition and kept them in a forever delaying defensive mode, always trying to shore up the front and reinforce troops that were being overrun. The Israelis must have exhausted almost all of their resources by now, the General thought to himself. They couldn't have much more in reserve. According to all reports the morning battles were going well and the reinforcement of the Libyan and Ethiopian landings on the coast would certainly put more pressure on the already thinly stretched IDF forces. The General almost wished that the inferior Libyan and Ethiopian forces were not here. Covering and supporting them required quality troops. At least as far as he had heard, the landings were going as smoothly as could be expected for Libyans and Ethiopians. Those landings were aided by elite Spetznaz units that had infiltrated through Palestinian homes in the eastern Gaza to aid the Palestinians in covering the Libyan and Ethiopian landings. Russian paratroop forces would also cover in Gaza, when the weather allowed for air superiority. Any real resistance to the Libyan and Ethiopian landings would probably have disrupted them beyond repair.

The General implemented a policy of no military prisoners. Also, no enemy troops or civilians were to be treated medically until Alliance forces had secured the country and Jerusalem. The General figured the Alliance medics would be busy enough with their own troops. He would allow a token appearance of compliance with the Geneva Convention when his plans were a reality. it was a necessity due to the General's limited time schedule for the battle and the coup and strict orders had been given to that effect. The victorious Islamic Alliance forces were not going to be popular, anyway.

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Having spent the evening watching the progress of the battle, Rob wondered whether he should try to get back to the Embassy knowing that it must be utter chaos. Although he would like to communicate with Colonel Evans, he couldn't envision how his presence there would help their situation. He and Evans had tried to warn them. Wondering whether they were being evacuated, he imagined that they were bracing for whatever was to happen. With all that had happened to him over the past few days, he knew he could best serve right here. Besides, after losing Sarah, he wasn't really

concerned about his own safety. If only there was something he could do now. He felt somewhat useless at the moment. Since he had been a resident of Israel for several years now, at least he could be out fighting for his current homeland. Just as he thought about the possibility of combat, Moshe came walking up.

"Need a job?" Moshe asked as if he could read Rob's mind.

"Have you got a command?" Rob asked.

That thought surprised Moshe.

"You are too valuable for that, my friend. Besides you are in intelligence, and that doesn't sound too intelligent."

"Maybe not. But at least I'd be doing something," Rob replied.

"I have something," Moshe stated. "Come on, we are going to find a Rabbi."

As they walked toward the parking area, Rob asked Moshe. "The situation doesn't look so good right now, does it?"

"No my friend, it does not. But because of you, we have one small ray of hope. I have a plan. You see I, also am in intelligence. It's my job."

They got into the jeep and departed the command center and started toward the old city. As they drove, Rob quietly asked. "Have you heard anything about the American Embassy?"

"They are still there, if that's what you mean."

"I thought they might evacuate," Rob responded.

"They may, yet. Do you need to go?"

"I've thought about it," Rob said looking at the faint flashes of lights over the horizon. "No. Mark Evans is there. And, retreat is now out of the question."

"Good, because I need you here," announced Moshe, sensing that Rob was talking about his own feelings.

"General Mordechai ran into a brick wall. None of the Rabbis will give us any information about the Ark. They act as if it doesn't exist."

"What about those who have claimed for years that they have seen it under the temple mount?" Rob asked.

"Not talking," Moshe answered. "The General believes that they are more afraid of it's capture than their own country's demise."

Moshe pulled the jeep to the side of the street. The old orthodox district of Jerusalem known as Mea Shearim looked deserted. Moshe left the engine running as he scanned the neighborhood for signs of life.

Rob, looking around, asked. "Is anyone here?"

"Seems awfully quiet," Moshe responded, looking around at the buildings and homes that made up the orthodox district. He got out of the jeep and walked up to the door of one of the small dwellings that looked like it might house someone of importance. Moshe knocked on the door. Rob reached over and turned the engine off and got out to walk up beside Moshe. They stood outside the door waiting, but no one came to the door. Moshe knocked again.

"I don't like this," Rob said, alertly looking around for signs of life.

Moshe suddenly snapped his fingers. "They're at the synagogue. Let's go."

Moshe and Rob went back to the jeep and climbed in.

"It's Sabbath," Moshe exclaimed. "I should have thought of it, but with all that's going on, I guess I forgot."

"Forgot the Sabbath?" Rob asked, slightly smiling.

Moshe grinned, glad to see Rob still had a sense of humor, and asked. "Are you okay?"

Rob stared at Moshe straight faced and replied. "I'm trapped in the middle of the most dangerous encirclement in history with a Jewish intelligence officer who doesn't know it's the Sabbath, and you ask me if I'm okay?"

Moshe shook his head, still grinning, as the jeep engine came to life. He turned the jeep toward the synagogue. Sure, it was a dumb question. Nevertheless, for some reason he expected this man of faith to carry on. And he was.

"I know what you're thinking," Rob said, looking at his friend. "Moshe, if I didn't have the peace and assurance that comes from knowing that Sarah is with Jesus Christ, I would surely be a goner right now. But just the opposite is true. Even in these circumstances, the peace I have controls me. I hope someday, my friend, you will come to know that feeling."

"It sure seems to keep you going," Moshe replied.

Rob suddenly remembered something he had intended to tell Moshe when the tragedy of losing Sarah had torn it from his mind.

"You know, in all this, I forgot to tell you who Sarah said she thought the two strangers were. You know the ones that I thought you sent?"

"Yes, I remember." Moshe said, remembering the two strangers from Rob's adventure.

"She suggested that they were the two angels who visited Lot before destroying Sodom and Gomorrah."

Rob watched Moshe's expression; letting it soak in.

Moshe looked puzzled for a moment before realizing what he was talking about.

"What made her think that?" Moshe asked.

"She recognized that the only other time that something was destroyed by fire and brimstone was at Sodom and Gomorrah." Rob continued. "In the battle spoken about by the prophet Ezekiel, the Bible says that one of the ways that this large force is destroyed is by brimstone and fire from heaven. In the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Bible says that two angels showed up early in the city, and they wanted to walk the streets that night. But, Lot insisted that they come in and stay with them. The next morning they destroyed the city by fire and brimstone from Heaven."

Moshe turned a corner while still listening to Rob. This idea about the angels, although he knew the prophecies of Ezekiel, was new to him. There was a moment of silence as they thought about the early arrival of the strangers and their odd manner.

Finally, Moshe spoke to Rob. "That wife of yours was really something special."

Rob agreed. "She sure is."

Moshe looked at him kind of funny until it dawned on him what he was suggesting. It was the eternal life that Rob and Sarah told about through faith in Jesus. It kept coming back to him. That last thing that she had said to him before the bombing. "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." He smiled as he remembered her concern for him and her persistence.

"You know? I believe she is still after me," Moshe declared.

"You bet, she is," Rob acknowledged.



## Chapter 11

Vlad surmised that the orders issued about taking no prisoners would be easy to follow. These Israeli Defense soldiers would fight ferociously to the death. His tank had already taken a glancing blow in the initial attack while overrunning a single dug-in Merkava platoon. The whole battalion had their hands full with that position. They were pouring through what had appeared to be a weakness in the enemy's lines when they were surprised by the dug-in hull down platoon. His number three tank had taken a direct hit and immediately Vlad knew all were dead. Their T-80 tank had blown up in a fireball before ever firing a shot. The crew never knew what hit them.

In the early dawning light after the initial day's battle, Vlad's battalion was finding less and less resistance. He was glad their battalion had not been in the initial waves to search for weakness in the enemy lines. When the huge first wave of enemy gunships and fighter bombers had arrived, their battalion was behind the front and thus spared the brunt of the attack. The enemy aircraft had inflicted some real damage. The burnt out tanks and vehicles that littered their passageway for miles was evidence that the first armored assault waves had been hard hit. However, the enemy aircraft had taken their own losses. The Shilkas (anti-aircraft 23mm gun tanks or ZSUs) and SAM units (surface-to-air missile vehicles) had put up a withering fire, along with the regular armor units' guns. Many of the enemy's aircraft would never return for a second sortie.

As Vlad scanned the Israeli countryside ahead of them, he searched for any ambush situation that might be ahead. So far, Illya and Rupe had done a good job. The only real opportunity to return fire they had, so far, was spotting and taking out a two-man missile team that had their sights set on one of their comrades. Rupe had hit them with a high explosive round while on the run just in time to disrupt the wire-guided missile. Vlad had spotted the explosion from behind the launcher and had been able to maneuver to a good firing position in time to keep the enemy team from hitting their target. These missile hunter-killer teams were doing a lot of damage to their forces. They were easily hidden and, unless you spotted the missile or the flash of launching, you probably would not know what hit you.

Vlad noticed the terrain ahead. The ridge of a hillside that they were coming up on, was a perfect spot for an ambush. He looked toward the Battalion Commander's tank to see if he had made the same evaluation. However, the Battalion Commander's tank was in a position to only see the front side of the hill ahead of them. The positioning of Vlad's two tanks on the outside would force them to have to go right by the outcropping of rocks and shrubs that was worrying him. The possible position was perfect since it could not be seen by the front or the top of the hillside.

Vlad started to signal when, all of a sudden, Sergeant Khorkina's tank took a hit on the left tread. The armor piercing round knocked the front plate and sprocket off the tank, stopping it and leaving it a sitting duck. The crack of the high velocity gun going off followed to give away the position of the gunfire.

"Right!" Vlad shouted at Illya who had already decided that right was the direction to go. He strained to see what they were up against while Illya quickly turned the tank to the right. The tank leaped down into a little ravine that ran just to the right of their former path.

"What was it?" Illya shouted back at Vlad.

Just then a second blast blew the turret off of Khorkina's tank as Vlad looked for the source of the deadly fire. Now that they were down in the ravine, they hugged the side of it close, slowing down to try to get into position for a look. Two more blasts from the ambush position and several from 125mm cannons went off telling Vlad that part of the battalion was engaging the position. Speeding to the side of the enemy position, Vlad was finally able to make out what they had run into. It was two dug-in Merkava tanks. From the front, the Israeli Merkava was almost impossible to hit in the dug-in, hull down position. The turret of the Merkava is very small and has two large tusks of armor on either side of the gun barrel, giving the view of a very small target. Yet, it can crank out the 105mm or newer 120mm rounds with great accuracy due to their computerized fire control system.

"Sabot!" Vlad shouted to Rupe telling him that they were up against armored targets. This let the gunner know to load the correct ammunition for the task; armor piercing. Vlad was beginning to wonder what the Merkavas were going to do about him. They had surely seen him go over into the ravine and he wondered why they had not shot at the outside tank first. Vlad slowed Illya down gauging that they must just be about even with the side of the position. He looked out of the cupola to see. Suddenly, an object in the air that didn't look like it belonged there caught his attention. Before he realized that what he saw was a missile, the terrain caused the tank to dip slightly. He heard the fins of the missile scrape the top of the back of the tank going from the side he was looking out of toward the other. He instinctively ducked his head into the cupola. As soon as the missile went by, it exploded, rocking the tank. Vlad quickly realized that the dipping of the terrain had saved them and he shouted to Illya to turn the tank toward the enemy position and move in. If that launcher was allowed to reload they would be in trouble and he was not about to give them time.

"Go, Go, Go!" He shouted at Illya. This was Illya's specialty. The tank leaped to the left, up and over the top of the ravine in one big swoop and in the same movement began climbing toward the position fast. Vlad could see the launcher team abandoning their launcher as they saw that they could not reload it in time. The reaction from the enemy tank was more than the missile operators had been ready for. However, they must have communicated it to the Merkavas because the tank that was closest to them began to back out of the dug-in position.

"Rupe!" Vlad yelled.

"I've got him," Rupert shot back.

"Shoot!" Vlad commanded, excitedly. The big gun boomed as he looked ahead to see the Merkava stop dead in its tracks from the impact of the round. It was a masterful shot. Rupe had hit the middle of the tank just under the turret while on the run. Dust flew from the tank as if it had been hit by a giant hammer. Sometimes the steel dart of the sabot round didn't set off an explosion in the tank. But, the kinetic energy, of a one inch diameter by two foot steel dart traveling over a mile a second, penetrated the hull and sometimes even the other side of the tank, killing the crew and sensitive equipment. Vlad knew it was dead.

"Good shot!" Vlad yelled. He shouted for Illya to turn him around the dead tank to get to the other one before it had a chance to react. As they rounded the dead Merkava tank, to the right, they pulled up into perfect position to kill its mate. Vlad was ready to

command the shot when the hatch opened and two hands, held upwards, by one of its crew, emerged. Vlad could see that they were giving up because the gun barrel was pointed down and the commander, still with his arms in the air, was coming out of the tank. It happened so fast that Vlad could not make up his mind what to do. He knew what he was supposed to do; gun down unarmed men who were, at this moment, asking for mercy.

"No prisoners!" Rupert said, reminding Vlad of the latest orders. Even though these enemy soldiers had killed Sergeant Khorkina, he couldn't bring himself to gun down human beings as they were trying to surrender. Hadn't his attack been enough? It had been worthy enough, hadn't it?

"Sir!" Rupert said, ready enough to do the job. It was Vlad's call and he would have to live with his decision. No matter the circumstances, it still would be murder.

As Vlad momentarily paused in his moral dilemma, the rat-a-tat of a machine gun took the decision out of his hands. The four crewmen of the surrendering Merkava, the last one just clearing the hatch, jerked from the impact of the bullets and slowly tumbled in a ballet of death.

"/?#!\*%&!"," Rupert said, knowing that they were in trouble. The Battalion Commander's tank pulled up along side Vlad's, with the coaxial machine gun still smoking from the detestable deed. The Commander just stared at Vlad for a moment, then his tank leaped forward. Vlad softly called to Illya for a right turn to join them.

Vlad was sick at his stomach and he wasn't sure whether it was from what he had just witnessed or because of the trouble he knew he was in. All the training had paid off. He and his crew had performed splendidly as a team and the rest of the battalion survived because of their bold assault. And yet, it was going to be counted against him because they did not cowardly shoot the surrendering crew. It wasn't right and Vlad felt sickened by it. Wasn't it just moments before he had thought that it would not be hard to not take prisoners?

It had just happened so fast.

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In front of the Stringers apartment complex an armored personnel carrier whirred to a stop. Two men climbed out of the back after the rear door hit the ground. Almost before they were completely out, the door started closing. The taller of the men, dressed in slacks and an expensive but somewhat disheveled shirt, jogged around toward the front holding up a piece of paper in his hand and shouted to the vehicle commander standing in the cupola.

"Are you sure this is the place?"

The commander waved as he signaled for the driver to go. The engine of the tracked vehicle was too noisy for him to hear the question. As the personnel carrier started down the road, the taller man shouted once again.

"Hey!" When he realized that they were leaving, he shouted one more time.

"Good luck and God be with you!"

The second man, more husky and wearing cowboy boots, walked up behind the taller man while putting a heavy back pack on.

“Pretty somber group there. Wouldn’t ya say, Ty?” “Can’t say I blame them,” Tyler replied. “I wonder if any of them will come back?”

“I don’t know,” Mason replied, then continued. “Call me chauvinistic, but I still have trouble with women soldiers. Front line women soldiers, anyway.”

“Well, don’t,” Tyler stated, looking in the direction of the apartments. “Everyone fights around here.”

“Are you sure the Embassy gave you the right address?” Mason asked, changing the subject.

“Let’s go see.” Tyler said, turning and walking toward the apartment building.

After checking the numbers of several apartments they came to the one with the right number.

“Hey, the doors open,” Tyler said, motioning toward the slightly ajar front door. “I guess someone’s home.”

He knocked on the door frame and after a few seconds of no response, knocked on the door. The door eased open a few more inches as he inquired firmly.

“Mrs. Stringer? Hello! Is anyone here?” Still, no response. Tyler then opened the door about halfway so he could lean his head inside.

“Major Stringer? Mrs. Stringer? Anybody home?” After no response, Tyler walked into the apartment and looked around the room.

“What are you doing?” Mason whispered into the doorway as loud as he could whisper.

Tyler stuck his head back out of the door, smiling.

“I’m just going to make sure everything is all right.”

Mason wasn’t smiling as he answered.

“Right, Mr. Investigative Reporter. I’m telling you, don’t get us in trouble.”

Tyler shook his head and laughed softly.

“Hey, cowboy. Where do you think we are? You’re in more trouble right in the middle of this war, than you can imagine.”

“I’m talking local trouble.” Mason replied. “Just hurry it up!”

Tyler shook his head again, as he disappeared into the apartment.

Mason looked around nervously, while he mumbled to himself.

“I knew better than come here. This guy is going to get you killed, Mason.”

After a pause to look around, Mason nervously continued talking, only now loud enough for Tyler to hear.

“This afternoon Tyler James, reporter for the American Christian Network was arrested on felony charges for burglarizing a U.S. military complex while on assignment in Israel.”

“This isn’t a military complex,” Tyler said, as he came out of the door and pulled it shut. He was holding a book in his hand.

“It may not be,” Mason responded, motioning toward the book. “But, correct me if I’m wrong, burglars take things that don’t belong to them.”

“Well, you’ve got me there, Tonto.” Tyler held up the book. “Do you know what this is? This is the book Mrs. Stringer was telling us about.”

“I didn’t hear anything about a book,” Mason replied. “She said the Major had seen the Ark.”

“Yes, but, you didn’t listen,” Tyler said. “This is how they got the information on where it is. And so will I. I’ll give it back as soon as we meet up with them. They’ll be happy we closed up the place.”

“You think they left town?” Mason asked, as they walked toward the street.

“If they did; they left everything here,” Tyler answered. “Besides, she didn’t strike me as the type to run. Did she, you?”

“Nope,” Mason agreed. “I think you’d have to kill her.”

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Moshe and Rob got out of the jeep and walked to the door of the synagogue. In front of it the empty street was very quiet. Moshe opened the door and peeked inside. One of the men inside came to the door and he and Moshe spoke for a moment. Then the man went inside and Moshe came back to stand by Rob. Before long, a distinguished looking Orthodox Rabbi stepped outside.

"What can I do for you Colonel?" the Rabbi asked. Before Moshe could answer, the Rabbi seeing Rob, demanded. "Why have you brought this gentile here?"

Moshe cut right to the heart. "He has seen the Ark."

The Rabbi looked at Rob for a moment. "That is not possible."

Rob, sensing the Rabbi's dislike of him, spoke up.

"Is it possible that the Ark has two cherubim standing on either side spreading their wings across the back to form a great chair or throne which sits upon the Ark?"

As the Rabbi's expression changed from contempt to puzzle, Rob continued. "It's known as the Mercy Seat."

"So, it was you," the Rabbi said point blank.

Rob nodded in acknowledgment as Moshe looked at the Rabbi in surprise.

The Rabbi turned to Moshe.

"This gentile violated the Ark and it's resting place and now you bring him here?"

The Rabbi turned quickly to walk back inside with a look of total disgust on his face.

"Yitzak!" Moshe called to him as he had many times before when they were children.

The Rabbi turned around at the sound of his first name.

"Listen," Moshe said. "We have a national crisis here that is bigger than your determination of who is worthy or whether a friend is a Jew or a gentile."

"Trust in the Lord, Moshe, he will protect us," the Rabbi answered.

"Why do you think we are here?" Moshe asked. "This man, whoever he is, was allowed to see the Ark and there is a reason." Moshe eyed the Rabbi suspiciously before continuing. "Tell me Yitzak, how could a gentile approach the Ark while left unguarded?"

The Rabbi, staring at Moshe, started turning a bit red in the face.

"Come on Yitzak, what happened?" Moshe demanded.

The Rabbi turned toward Rob.

"Tell me gentile, how did you get in the tunnel? Did you enter through Zedekiah's cave?"

"Yes," Rob answered.

The Rabbi took a deep breath and looked around to see if any of his followers were around.

"What is it?" Moshe demanded, sensing his old acquaintance knew more about this than he was telling.

The Rabbi hesitated then pointed to Rob. "He cannot be the one."

Moshe stepped directly in front of the Rabbi and looked at him sternly. "But, he is. Now, tell me what you know before I start to consider you my enemy!"

"The guard reported a vision," the Rabbi blurted, sorry that he had revealed this information before he had even finished the sentence.

"What vision?" Moshe was relentless.

Knowing Moshe and his persistence, the Rabbi sighed and continued reluctantly. "The guard admitted that he may have dozed off. But he said that two angels came to him and told him that he should leave. He said when he asked them why, they told him one of the flock of the good shepherd was coming."

"And he left?" Moshe asked.

"He was about to," the Rabbi answered. "Only...."

"Only what?"

"He did not unlock the gate to Zedekiah's tunnel. I was going to the Rabbinical Tunnel to pray for our deliverance when I met the guard coming out. He seemed in somewhat of a daze. When I asked him why he had left his post, he said that one of the flock was coming. When I finally got him to snap out of it, we went back into the tunnel. Strangely, the guard had been turning off the lights as he went. So we went almost as far as the Rabbinical Tunnel before we had to go back to turn the lights on. When they came on, the guard thought he saw someone running out of the other end of the tunnel toward the Zedekiah's cave entrance. Although, he wasn't sure so we followed until we got to the gate of the tunnel and found that it was wide open. After checking the area to find out if anything had been disturbed, we decided to lock the gate and investigate the Ark. We found that the blocks to the entrance room had been moved indicating someone had been there. The sealed entrance to the Ark's resting place had not been disturbed except for one rock, up high, which had been pried open."

"Don't you see Yitzak?" Moshe asked. "It was for this reason that he was allowed to view the Ark."

"What reason?" The Rabbi implored.

"To convince you that the Ark must be brought out for the defense of Jerusalem. It is no longer a secret."

The Rabbi contemplated that fact for a moment.

Before the debate could continue, to the surprise of Rob and the Rabbi, Moshe quoted a scripture.

"As the Prophet Jeremiah wrote, 'Set up the standard toward Zion: retire, stay not: for I will bring evil from the North and a great destruction.'" Moshe eyed the surprised Rabbi and continued. "The evil from the north is here, Yitzak. Let us set the standard before us. There is no other hope. Let us show our faith."

Rob looked at Moshe and then the Rabbi. The Rabbi's look of deliberation turned into a smile at his old friend's knowledge of the scriptures, and the fact that Moshe acknowledged the rabbinical importance in this momentous occasion. He turned to the

door, opened it and spoke with one of his followers for a moment. Then, walking past Moshe up to stand before Rob, the Rabbi quoted his own scripture.

"As the Prophet Ezekiel wrote, 'And I will set my glory among the heathen, and all the heathen shall see my judgment that I have executed, and my hand that I have laid upon them.'"

Moshe burst out laughing as the Rabbi coyly grinned at Rob. Rob, understanding the pointed scripture, nodded acknowledging who the closest heathen was.

Beaming with satisfaction, the Rabbi announced. "I will go with you."

After the Rabbi and Rob shook hands, they all got into the jeep and sped off toward the command center.

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## Chapter 12

Late in the afternoon General Grigoryeva walked into the hastily prepared command tent exuberant about their success. They had already pushed all the remaining forces and refugees into the area in and around Jerusalem. These developments were right on his schedule and his conquest was almost complete.

His aide walked toward him, hardly able to contain himself.

"Sir, the encirclement is almost complete. The southern forces are just now shutting the back door. You have done it."

All in the command tent hushed as they waited for words from their leader. The General looked around the command post, beaming.

"Comrades, this is the day we have worked so long and hard for. Tomorrow morning, after the surrender of Jerusalem, we will be in control of the entire Middle East. Today Israel, tomorrow the world."

The General's staff yelled and applauded, slapping each other on the back and shaking hands. As the short celebration died down, the General continued.

"We have one more matter to take care of; the surrender. Total and complete surrender by all military forces, along with total population control, is to be met by 7 a.m. tomorrow morning or there will be no quarter. Please compose the appropriate document and I want a contingent of staff officers picked to deliver it. I want to let the officials in Jerusalem know that we want the city intact, as they do, and that they will be allowed control over the city's administration. Of course," the General said with a smile, "once we are in, we will deal with them."

Some of the officers let out a little laugh at the General's conspiracy.

"All right, let's get busy," he said.

His staff went about their tasks with renewed vigor after the inspirational speech. It gave the General great satisfaction watching his team, Russia's best officers, that he had personally assembled. He thought about how fate had brought each of them to him at the right time and that now they would all make the most of it.

He walked outside the headquarters tent to survey the vast army surrounding his position. His forces had just accomplished a major victory over a well defended and well-motivated enemy. Even with the huge superiority in numbers over their foe, they had moved faster than even he had imagined. The thought occurred to him that if this famous God of the Hebrews was real, He couldn't have picked a better instrument for the Jews' destruction. This Russian led army was now the greatest battle seasoned fighting force in history. He watched as they went about the tasks of warfare, readying themselves, their troops and their equipment for the final assault. His pride swelled from looking at them. He could feel the power that he now possessed and it was intoxicating.

Overhead, a low rumbling like thunder could be heard coming from the huge cloud that had shadowed the land with its shade and cool breeze.

The General, still beaming with pride, looked up at the cloud and spoke to it in the Russian equivalent.

"Stick around."

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What Vlad feared most happened almost as quickly as he could have imagined. Their tank pulled up to a stop, into the rear reserve position that their battalion was assigned to. It was here they were to stage for the final assault. Before they could disembark from the tank, the Regimental Commander pulled up. He was sitting in the back of a command car along side Vlad's Battalion Commander. They were accompanied by his driver and a guard toting a sub-machine gun.

"I can cut them down right now." Rupert said quietly, leaning over to Vlad.

"No! I'll be all right. You just take care of Illya," Vlad whispered.

"Is that an order, sir?" Rupert asked with a slight smile.

"Yes, Corporal," Vlad replied as he climbed out of the cupola to meet the arresting party. Vlad jumped down from the tank in front of the group and saluted.

The Battalion Commander hesitantly returned his salute and quickly announced.

"Lieutenant Vladimir Kochetkova, you are under arrest for disobedience of an order in a combat zone. You will follow me!"

"What about my crew, sir?" Vlad asked.

The Battalion Commander answered. "You need not worry about your crew, Lieutenant. They are to be given the honor of serving as crew for Regimental Commander Bogachev."

The Regimental Commander smiled and began walking around, inspecting the tank, when he almost smacked head-on into Illya. Illya was coming from behind the tank after his ritual of relieving himself. Illya was still looking down buttoning up his trousers, when they almost collided.

"Who the...Oh, sorry sir." Illya said, as he snapped to attention and quickly raised his hand to salute. The Commander winced, as he returned the salute, thinking he had felt something wet hit him in the face.

"Mount up, Private!" the Commander ordered.

Illya turned to do just that when he noticed Vlad with the Battalion Commander and the guard.

"Hey, what's going on here?" Illya asked, starting toward the arresting party. The guard quickly turned around and pointed his weapon at the big target. Illya, seeing the gun, quickly came to a halt.

"Get on board, Private!" Rupert ordered.

Illya frowned at him, then looked at Vlad.

"Go ahead," Vlad said, motioning toward the tank with his head.

Illya took a deep breath and slowly turned to get onto the tank. As he pulled himself up by the gun barrel, he looked again at Vlad.

Vlad smiled. "It's all right. Good luck, tomorrow."

Illya gave Vlad a slight smile and quick salute, then climbed into his hole.

As the Regimental Commander made his way gingerly into the commander's cupola, the Battalion Commander looked at Rupert sternly and stated.

"Corporal, if the Commander has any trouble out of you two, you will join the Lieutenant."

"Let's go," the Regimental Commander announced, grinning. He then turned to return the Battalion Commander's parting salute.

"Oh, no," Vlad said to himself smiling and rolling his eyes.

Before the Regimental Commander had completely turned in the turret, the tank leaped forward. Vlad fought to keep from laughing as he heard the twang of the Commander's head on the half opened hatch door behind him. He watched Rupert disappear down his hatch with his fist in the air and the tank roar off down the road.

"Those impudent!" the Battalion Commander shouted, watching the same scene. "Aren't they though," Vlad said quietly to himself.

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The Israeli Minister of Defense, accompanied by General Mordechai, walked into the command center war room, his face drawn and looking drained. He walked to the center of the room and scanned the large situation board from one end to the other as if he might spot some solution. Slowly he turned and looked into the eyes of each person, one at a time, searching each face for a hint of optimism. After finding none, he then spoke.

"We have just been delivered an ultimatum for the surrender of Jerusalem and Israel and I'm afraid unless someone has a brilliant idea, we are looking at checkmate." Again, he searched each face. No one spoke.

Someone asked, "How about the United Nations?"

Some snickered, some almost laughed, most just shook their heads at the complete absurdity of the question.

"What about America?" someone else asked. Before anyone could jeer the lack of their presence, a familiar voice spoke loudly for all to hear.

"America has sent us their champion," Moshe said walking in with Rob and the Rabbi.

"What are you talking about?" the Minister asked, walking toward the arriving trio.

Moshe smiled at Rob. Then he said, "Go ahead, Rabbi."

The Rabbi turned to walk toward the front of the room, meeting the minister. He then turned to the address the room.

"Minister, there is something I think the government should know about."

"Yes, Rabbi, what is that?"

The Rabbi looked around the room to make sure all were listening. Then he said, "We have the Ark of the Covenant."

The room fell completely silent. All in the room were Sabra, Israeli born Jews, and they knew the Torah. The significance of this revelation brought looks of surprise and hope.

The Minister, looking somewhat surprised himself, spoke. "General Mordechai suggested that it was possible, but that was completely unconfirmed. I, for one, did not know. What do you suggest that we do?"

The Rabbi looked at the Minister. Then he quoted Jonathan, the son of King Saul, the first king of Israel. "It may be that the Lord will work for us: for there is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few." The Rabbi then continued. "I now believe that we should present the Ark before the city and our enemies and have faith in Jehovah."

The Minister, also familiar with the Biblical story of Jonathan's single handed assault on the Philistines, surprised the Rabbi by quoting Jonathan's armor bearer.

"Do all that is in thy heart, behold I am with you." It wasn't a perfect quotation, but it brought a big smile to the Rabbi and a cheer from all in the room.

The two men strode together and clasped each other's hand firmly which brought more cheers from the room. Everyone there wanted to believe that God would fight for them, even if they had little faith before. The simple fact of the matter was, there was no other hope. How many times in the past had this people, chosen by God, come to this place where there was nowhere else to turn but back to the God whom they had forgotten.

The Minister quietly questioned the Rabbi. "How will you transport it? How long have you had it? Where is it? What does it look like?"

Everyone crowded around the two. Both to hear the questions they all wanted to ask, and hear the answers.

The Rabbi answered the questions quickly and in succession. "We have pure Levitical priests. We have actually had the Ark around twenty years. It is under the Temple Mount. It appears just as the instructions given to Moses for it's construction describe. The Mercy Seat is formed by two large cherubim whose wings overshadow the Ark."

Then the question came. "Where was it found?"

The Rabbi seemed to clench a little bit as if the question offended him somewhat.

"In Jerusalem," he said relieved to have found a true answer so easily. With that he started to walk away saying. "There is much work to be done, the purifying, unblocking the entrance to retrieve it and everything else."

The Minister of Defense walked behind him.

"I must report this to the Prime Minister. I will meet up with you shortly."

Rob looked at Moshe who was beaming with confidence and said quietly. "You know, you were right about that champion from the U.S."

"I was, huh?" Moshe replied, thinking Rob was going to finally take a little credit.

"Yeah, only he came many years ago to make this day possible."

Moshe looked puzzled until he realized whom Rob was talking about. "Oh, you mean, Mr. Wyatt. Yes, I wonder what he's doing now."

Rob answered. "I would imagine he's a praying man."

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## DAY FIVE

### Chapter 13

Across the valley, Rob Stringer could see the person that he immediately recognized as, his wife, Sarah. He could barely see her, yet her features were crystal clear and he could feel the joy that she appeared to be experiencing. It was as if they were standing together and sharing a wonderful moment. And yet, he knew that she must be very far away. He wondered that he was able to see her so well and know the joy that they were experiencing together, though they were so far apart. The air was spring-like and the hillsides were lush with thin short grass that felt like a carpet under his feet. She smiled and waved and he felt as if he could reach out and embrace her from where he was standing. Just then a large hand laid down on his shoulder to hold him back.

"Major," a voice said.

Rob looked back across the valley, but no one was there now.

"Major," the voice repeated.

Rob opened his eyes to look up into the face of a young soldier who had gently shaken his shoulder to awaken him.

"Major, the Colonel said he would be back for you shortly. I am sorry I had to wake you, but he should be back soon."

"Thank you," Rob said groggily as he tried to accustom himself again to the lights and air of the command room. He wanted to return to the dream. It had been so real. Yet he realized, as with all dreams, there was no return. Trying to bring his attention to his present surroundings, he looked around just in time to see Moshe walking toward him. He had a smile that resembled the cat who just ate the canary.

"I'm glad you could get some sleep, my friend. I, on the other hand, have been busy preparing the way for the Ark."

The mention of the Ark brought Rob totally back to reality. He nodded at Moshe, finally realizing what he was talking about.

"Maybe you should have been a priest," Rob said.

"Wrong tribe, besides there aren't enough sanctifying rituals for me to be a priest," Moshe replied.

"You must read the New Testament sometime," Rob responded.

Moshe frowned. "What? Are you still recruiting, with the Ark of the Covenant outside ready to come forth?" Moshe then smiled. "Come on, Christian."

Rob got up to follow Moshe. The thought struck him that Moshe had just called him a name that no one else had ever called him. It was a name that many before him had given all to be called.

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Outside of the Old City's north wall, the headlights of military jeeps, trucks and armored personnel carriers had the street of Sultan Suleiman lit up. The main street in front of the wall was completely blocked off from the streets of Derekh Yeriho to the east and Yafo to the west. Vehicles and soldiers lined the street to keep it clear. Those who

live in the city and the refugees who had been camping wherever they could, were stirring around to see what all the commotion is about. Much of the gathering crowd had been up all night in prayer vigils, all over the city, crying out to God for salvation from the enemy forces. Word had spread quickly about the next morning's deadline for the surrender of Jerusalem. The city was cut off from communication with the outside world and the people felt as if the world community had forgotten them. What they didn't know was that Jews around the world, along with most of the Christian world, had been praying all night for the peace of Jerusalem.

Crowds gathered in the hope that destruction could be avoided and that whatever was going on would bring some sign of hope. Most looked on from where they were. But, an ever increasing amount of them started to gather behind the troops and barricades that were surrounding the street. Everyone was waiting to see what all the disturbance was about. Even though they knew it had to have something to do with the threat of the imminent invasion of the city, no one expected what they would soon witness.

More vehicles came through heading up Salah Ed-din and Derekh Shekhem, two streets that run north toward the outskirts of the city. The bustle of vehicles and IDF troops, running through the streets into position along the hastily set up route, took on the look of a parade that was about to start. A convoy of VIP cars and military vehicles, coming slowly from the west, pulled up the street to stop in front of the Damascus gate. Doors opened and government officials and Rabbis, surrounded by bodyguards, got out and gathered by one of the cars. The Rabbis were wearing their skullcaps and most were carrying prayer books. Then, in unison, they all started walking toward the entrance to Zedekiah's cave.

Once there, they broke off and lined the pathway to the entrance on both sides, with a few of the officials going inside. The crowds that were continuing to grow, followed the officials along the route to see what was happening. A light came on in the cave, and for a few minutes nothing happened. The murmuring of the crowd, along with the noise of the engines of the vehicles and shouting of commands, gave the city streets an almost carnival atmosphere. Then, the officials that had entered the cave, came out and waved to the commanders of the forces surrounding the street. All the engines of the vehicles were turned off, but their lights were left on. Floodlights that had been hastily assembled outside of the cave entrance came on. Then the officials, that had returned from the cave, joined the others lining the pathway to the cave entrance. The officials and Rabbis bowed their heads as one of the Rabbis stepped forward to give praise and honor to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. After he had finished his prayer he turned toward the gathering crowds.

"Hear O' Israel. The Lord, our God, is one God. Turn your hearts and your prayers to the God of your fathers, and pray for the peace of Jerusalem."

The Rabbi then turned and joined the others. A hush fell over the host of people and heads bowed while others went to their knees in prayer. Just as this crowded scene was becoming completely silent, the sound of the blowing of two shofars resounded from inside the entrance to the cave. They were long blasts from the ancient rams' horns and everyone looked up to see from where the sound came.

Suddenly someone shouted. "Look!"

Out of the entrance, walking slowly, came two priests with shofars and following them were four more priests carrying some object by staves on either side.

A woman screamed.

"It's the Ark," someone exclaimed.

Then another yelled, "The Ark!"

The entire crowd gasped in unison. Some shouted, some began weeping. Others, not familiar with the scriptures, turned for explanation. Still others could only stare in awe at the sight of this ancient Holy object that had been hidden for nearly three thousand years. The priests again blew the shofars as they turned slowly onto the street, toward the west, to follow the route that had been prepared for them. After the procession passed them, the officials and rabbis that had lined the pathway turned to follow. It was a procession strangely illuminated by the lights of the vehicles, streetlamps and floodlights. The crowds turned to follow. Word spread quickly. Some ran ahead shouting and telling others what was coming. Everyone vied for a position to see this absolute proof of their ancient heritage. As the procession turned north on Derekh Shekem it passed the Garden Tomb and some noticed how the reflection of the lights from off the Mercy Seat made a light shine on the doorway of the tomb for more than a moment.

Every few minutes the priests would blow the shofars causing people from all over the city to rush forward. Crowds lined the streets the procession would be taking to the city boundaries.

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Leaving the command center, Moshe and Rob turned north onto Wolffsohn Street out of the ministry compound under which it was located. Looking to the East they could see the commotion from the procession of the Ark and the crowds that preceded and followed the procession.

"I would like to have seen the Ark brought out," Moshe said.

"Sorry," Rob acknowledged.

"Oh, no, it's not your fault," Moshe said continuing. "I imagine it would have been hard to see for all the people. And I'm sure it's getting harder all the time."

"You could have climbed up into a sycamore tree like Zachias did." Rob said, looking toward the lights of the procession in the distance.

"Who?" Moshe asked, even though he had heard the story of Zachias.

"Don't tell me you don't know who Zachias was," Rob answered turning to look at Moshe. "He climbed up a tree to see the Lord walk by, because he was a small man and couldn't see over the crowds."

"A small Jewish man? Don't be absurd," Moshe joked.

"Well, he became larger that day because the Lord called him by name and told him that they would go to his house. From the Lord's visit, Zachias and his household was saved."

Moshe frowned, realizing that he had gone along with this conversation too long. He turned the vehicle onto Yirmiy Yahu heading toward the boundaries of the city north of the procession. He thought it was a good time to change the subject.

"It must look like festival time to those in the hills," he said, looking toward the enemy positions in the mountains. "I wonder what they are thinking right now?"

It made Rob think of the feast that had started at sunset the day before. "I wonder if they know it's Rosh Hashanah?"

As Moshe turned the jeep off the road, they came upon some hastily set up barricades. The IDF military police had assembled the barricades to stop the crowds from following the Ark further than city limits.

Moshe returned salutes as he pulled out in front of the barricades and stopped the jeep. He and Rob got out and looked over some of the dug-in defensive positions around the city boundaries where the remaining Israeli Defense Forces had set up. They knew the IDF positions were all around the city, yet, they realized the futility of their defenses. Hearing a growing parade-like noise they looked back into the city where they could see the throng of the procession. It was slowly coming their way.

"This is it, my friend. We can watch from here," Moshe said, walking toward the soldiers guarding the opening in the barricades that would allow the procession to go through. "Excuse me, I will be back soon."

Rob watched him for a moment, then looked toward the hills in the distance. It was eerie knowing that the overwhelmingly destructive forces of the enemy were so close. The noise of the procession was growing behind them. He turned to see the forward priests with the shofars in the distance methodically walking their way. Rob had always thought that if he could have traveled back in time, he would have wanted to see Jesus as he traveled the countryside or, maybe, David as he fought Goliath. However, at this moment, he could think of no other place he would rather be. The procession and the priests gave him a feeling of being back in the days of the Old Testament, watching the Bible unfold before his very eyes.

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After a short restless night's sleep, and awaking before dawn, General Grigoryeva had only been up for a few minutes when the call came in. The latest report from the front was that there was some kind of strange stirring going on in the city. It could only be described to him as some kind of globe looking light, like a huge light bulb being carried. It was coming from the middle of the city moving slowly toward the north. After demanding a better description and hearing that it must be some kind of parade, he became incensed and gathered his staff together for a first hand look. As his convoy gathered to proceed to the front, he was heard on the radio with his front line reporting commander.

"What kind of parade?" he shouted into the microphone. "Have you seen any kind of white flag?"

His staff looked at each other with concern. They did not like to be around the General when anything was going wrong. Those who experienced it sometimes didn't live to talk about it. When he slammed the microphone down and looked around at those officers who had assembled, including his personal guards, they all snapped to attention.

"Have the artillery standing by for my command," he shouted to his artillery chief.

His artillery commander sheepishly asked. "Target, sir?"

"Downtown. If they want to play games I'll level every synagogue and mosque," he said to the artillery commander and anyone else who was close enough to hear. The General and his staff then loaded up and made a convoy toward the front lines. Everyone was hoping that there would be no flaws to the General's plans. As they passed each unit,

vehicle crews and troops were very busy loading up and getting ready for the culmination of the Israeli campaign.

As the General's convey closed in on the front lines, the radio operator handed the General the receiver to the radio.

"Commander, are you telling me that someone is carrying a large light bulb toward you?" The General was almost yelling now. "Get me your executive officer!" After hearing the same description again the General, now becoming calm and serious, turned to hand the receiver to his aide.

"Enough of this, start the artillery barrage."

The General's aide followed his orders. He brought the receiver up to his mouth. "The bombardment is on, you may open fire with your tanks on the city!"

After the aide relayed the command to open fire to the artillery, he tossed the receiver back to the radio operator and turned back to the General.

The General smiled and announced.

"Their parade is over."

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The Levitical priests looked out of place in the backdrop of the modern world. As they began the slow meticulous march outside the city, crowds gathered at the barricades and climbed up onto anything they could find to get a look at what was going on. The road signs, telephone poles, and other modern conveniences were not around the last time the Ark had been carried about the countryside and added a strange touch to the scene. The large procession which had followed the Ark to the outskirts of the city, now stopped to watch as only the priests continued on with their task. The two forward priests again blew the shofars as the Ark followed close behind. The four priests carrying the Ark were on both sides at the end of each of the staves. They were the same staves that had been used to carry this ancient relic three thousand years before. The robes of the priesthood looked like something out of an old Cecil B. DeMille movie.

As the dawning of the new day brought some increased visibility, the cloud cover kept it from becoming very bright. The daylight was much like the light just before the sun rises or just after it sets.

Suddenly, a narrow beam of very bright light like sunlight, pierced the cloud above and shone on the Mercy Seat of the Ark. The hole in the cloud expanded until the whole procession was illuminated in this beautiful heavenly sunlight. Reflected rays of the light shot off of the golden Mercy Seat almost as if the Shekinah glory of God had once again returned. When the light stopped widening, Rob saw something that made him rub his eyes in disbelief. He looked again to see whether it was true. The light had illuminated two hooded figures walking along side the Ark, one on either side. Their heads were bowed, but they walked completely in stride with the procession.

Rob turned to Moshe. "Do you see what I see?"

"Yes, it is as if the glory of God is shining down upon the Ark."

"No Moshe, I mean the two strangers walking on both sides of the Ark."

"I see only the priest's procession," Moshe replied.

Rob paused for a moment realizing that his friend was not being allowed to see these figures.



"Then, they are angels."

"What are you talking about?" Moshe asked.

"Moshe, I see the two strangers I told you about escorting the Ark. I believe they must be angels."

As Moshe looked again at the procession, to see if he could find who Rob was talking about, something caught his eye. In the distance, up in the hills, he saw a muzzle flash. Then, he saw another.

"Take cover!" Moshe commanded. "Incoming!"

Rob and the soldiers within earshot of Moshe dropped to the ground for cover. After a moment or two they realized something strange was happening. In the mountains they could see the muzzle flashes that assuredly were sending shells hurtling toward them, but no shells were hitting. Instead, just to the front of the Ark as it steadily moved north, spent projectiles and katyusha rockets, that moments before were being fired at the city, were falling in front of the Ark. It was as if the procession were pushing a huge indestructible invisible curtain in front of it. The warheads and rockets fell harmless before it, without detonation, as if something were rendering them useless. In the crowds witnessing this, orthodox Jews in their beards and robes began to rock back and forth and to pray. People in modern dress went to their knees in prayer. Others started singing, raising uplifted hands and praising God. What seconds before had been a city in the terror of assured destruction was now a city in loud tumultuous joy. The newscasters and camera crews on hand, looked fixated at the scene in front of them. Even their complete disbelief in what they were witnessing, did not stop them from hurriedly trying to prepare their cameras to broadcast this scene. The crews from the major networks and world news agencies seemed to be having all kinds of problems with their equipment. They found that cameras had to be turned away from the Ark procession to work. Cameramen worked frantically without success to get their cameras to tape the scene unfolding in front of them. Strangely, two network crews had immediately been on the air and broadcasting the scene to the world. One was the crew from the American Christian Network and the other was the crew from Radio Free Europe.

When the procession arrived at a point almost halfway between the barricades and the foot of the hills, the priests stopped. The bombardment was still incoming without success. Yet, the priests maintained their composure. After a short pause the priests who were bearing the Ark turned slowly facing the Mercy Seat toward the mountains. Then, in one motion they gently set the Ark to rest. With that, the priests who had been blowing the shofars turned each to the side, walked parallel to the Ark and then back toward the city. As they passed the forward pair of priests, they turned to follow them for the walk back. Then, followed by the last two, all six priests started walking back toward the city in unison. This brought a huge cheer from the crowds that were watching the priests, until they drew close to the edge of the city.

As the priests got closer to the barricades, Rob saw that the two angels were now both facing the Ark from either side. Their heads were bowed just like the two angels on the ends of the Mercy Seat.

The priests were not as exuberant as the crowds and were visibly shaken by the thwarted bombardment. When they got to the city's edge, the priests quickly disbanded and turned around to see what was happening; looking both tense from the procession and anxious from the ordeal.

The cheering slowly died down as the people vied for position to see what would happen. People climbed on walls, rooftops, tree limbs or anything else to gain an advantageous vantage point. One of the Christian reporters, talking to the camera, made mention of this and compared the scene to one that may have looked much like this two thousand years ago when this same nation witnessed the arrival of the famous Galilean into the city.

As the crowd noise diminished, rockets and spent rounds continued to fall before the Ark in decreasing numbers until there were only one or two a minute. What took their place was the surprise.

Moshe was the first to notice. Pointing, he grabbed Rob by the arm. "Look!"

About halfway between the Ark and the hills containing the enemy, explosions started erupting from the barrage that before was being rendered useless. The explosions began hitting further and further away, from all around the city, until they soon were hitting in the hills surrounding the city. These explosions could be seen in increasing numbers with an occasional fireball indicating something with another fuel source was hit. The increasing explosions, now in the area of the enemy, had coincided with the decreasing number of spent shells and rockets.

"Their artillery is falling short!" Rob exclaimed smiling, then laughing with Moshe. Together they almost jumped for joy. In unison they gleefully exclaimed, "They are falling short!"

For several minutes the explosions seemed to reach a crescendo in the hills surrounding the city, then started to die down. As the explosions decreased in frequency, fires could be seen all around on the hills surrounding the city.

A survey of the scene toward the Ark revealed a huge field of wreckage extending from just outside of the boundaries of the city to just in front of where the Ark now stood. There was roughly a twenty foot path through the wreckage that was clear. It marked the path that the procession had taken. The field of spent ammunition extended for as far as the eye could see, around the city. If all those rounds had hit the city, as intended, what would have been left? That was the question being raised by one of the major network reporters now broadcasting. He was only able to report on the audio signal by microphone. His cameraman had already given up hope of getting their cameras working. Mysteriously, they had been rendered useless when pointed toward the Ark. For some reason, the two Christian network teams were able to broadcast their pictures. This footage would be shared, on their own terms, with the rest of the networks.

When no more explosions could be seen or heard, the heavens slowly began to close off the bright light that, moments before, had so gloriously shone upon the Ark.

Rob looked to see that, just as the beam of light started to diminish, the two angels turned to face the hills that contained the enemies of the Lord. The two angels began to fade from view with the dimming of the beam of light. After facing the hills for a moment the angels, in unison, lifted their heads. Then, as with the light from above, they disappeared.

When the last of the illuminating beam of sunlight faded out, all fell still and silent.

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## Chapter 14

The Commander of the lead Russian armored battalion slowly lifted the hatch to look outside. He had waited until the last of the rockets and shells hit. Having frantically called off the bombardment minutes before, he felt a great relief that his tank had not been hit. As he stood up in the cupola to look around, he could never have imagined minutes before what he now saw. As far as the eye could see, the huge forces that were positioned all around Jerusalem were in disarray. Some of the vehicles were on fire; crew members and soldiers were in a state of confusion, bodies were lying on the ground where they had been thrown. Fortunately, he had been quick to realize that the explosions from their own bombardment were marching backwards, from in front of the strange procession, until they were hitting their own forces. His first thought was that his forces were coming under attack. Only when he recognized that their bombardment was starting to fall short was he able to call in to abort. He realized that if his tank been hit first, no telling how long the bombardment would have lasted.

A quick eye assessment told him that maybe one in ten vehicles had sustained at least some damage. Heads were going to roll, he thought to himself. That thought quickly brought his attention back to the target. He strained through his field glasses to see what he could. Just before the bombardment, the city had been fully visible until the beam of light had broken through. Then, the city seemed to fade until it had been replaced by what could only be described as a mirage that appeared to slowly grow larger and move in their direction. Or maybe, it was a heat wave above the ground that they had seen so many times in the desert. However, this was under cloud cover on a very mild day. It had not made sense, but he quickly became distracted by the tank barrage and the artillery fiasco. After he had frantically radioed to end the bombardment, angry artillery officers stampeded forward to see for themselves that their fire was falling short. It had taken some strange situation to countermand the orders for their long awaited rocket and artillery barrages. That was the reason for which they were there and they were not happy, knowing heads were going to roll.

The forward Battalion Commander leaned back and pondered these events while the artillery officers called back to their units shouting commands over the radios. Was this some kind of new stealth technology? He had been around long enough to know that the Israelis were capable of almost anything. But, if so, then what? What was it hiding? The Commander looked again through his field glasses to see what the object was that they had set out in front of the city. Just as he brought it into view, he heard several command vehicles driving up behind. The tall figure he knew all too well, jumped out of the lead car and hurriedly walked up beside his tank. It was General Grigoryeva.

"What's the story, Captain?"

The Commander quickly grew tense even though he knew he was not at fault.

"Sir, the barrage started falling short, so I called it off." With that, the Commander braced himself for whatever reaction the General would have.

"Looks as if you saved the day, Captain," the General said, shaking his head as he looked around at the destruction. The General turned to shout to his aide standing by his command vehicle.

"Go take over the artillery command and relieve that /?#!\*%&! or shoot him. I don't care which," the General commanded. Then he turned his attention back to the city.

"Have they sent out the surrender yet?"

The Commander came to attention.

"No white flag, sir, but they brought some object out and set it in front of the city."

"What object?" the General asked. Then, climbing up onto the tank, he commanded.

"Let me see!" When he righted himself on the tank he lifted up his own field glasses for a look. After staring through them for a minute, he asked. "Where is the city? And what is that thing?"

"I don't know sir, but from here it looks like a, well, some kind of chair," the Captain replied.

"What?"

"I mean, huh, maybe it's some kind of cloaking device," the Captain stammered, not knowing the correct answer.

The General turned slowly and gave the Commander a look of disgust at such a suggestion. Still glaring at him and without emotion, the General ordered.

"Shoot it."

The Captain, sorry he had suggested such an opinion, turned toward two of his undamaged missile firing armored personnel carriers, called BMPs, and shouted.

"Saggers! To the object in front of the city." He pointed at the object for the two BMP commanders who nodded and disappeared inside their vehicles.

As the General and the Captain watched, the light that had been bathing the object from the break in the clouds slowly disappeared. Suddenly, the roar of the anti-tank missiles igniting followed them off of their launching rails. The two missiles went down range quickly on a low slowly climbing arc as if to just miss skipping off of the floor of the valley below. The missiles started coming together for the kill exactly as their operators were guiding them. When they were just about to hit their target, two flames came out of what appeared to be thin air. The flames shot forward from both sides of the Ark, to completely consume the missiles in mid-air. It was as if the missiles just vanished in the flames. No smoke or trace could be seen. Both the General and the Captain lowered their field glasses and stared in bewilderment. Then they turned toward each other to see if the other had just witnessed what he had seen.

Before the two officers could raise their field glasses for another look, they began to hear a low rumbling sound. It was coming from underneath their position and it was increasing each second. Slowly, the ground began to shake. The vehicle commanders and crews started looking around to see what was causing the shaking of the earth. It grew more and more violent until the ground shook so much that the General fell right off the tank. As he regained his balance enough to stand up, the ground to the side of him suddenly opened up. A huge crack in the earth split open sending him tumbling to the ground again. To the General's horror the tank he had been standing on and a BMP parked behind him fell into it, one from either side. Just behind, further away, another huge crack in the earth opened up swallowing men and machines into the unknown depths of the crevice. The ground shook violently all around as the destruction continued. The General searched for a safe refuge that would not be effected, but there

was nowhere to run. Entire platoons of armor and men were being swallowed up and there was nothing to be done about it. For as far as he could see there was destruction. Some of the vehicles and men were trying to move, not knowing which way to go. Screams and yells for help could be heard as men disappeared into the abyss. Then, as suddenly as it had begun, the rumbling began to subside. The cracks, that had swallowed those unfortunate enough to be positioned over them, just closed up over them. The yelling ceased at the closing of the cracks and the rumbling from the earth came to a stop.

The General got to his feet and started surveying the damage to the forces. He thought how bizarre it was for an earthquake to hit at just that moment. What else could go wrong? The answer would not be long coming. As he looked around, taking inventory on the losses they had sustained, he felt the first rain drop hit him on the head. It started, as any other rain he had experienced; a little at a time. However, this rain kept increasing until it was pounding him and the forces around him. It continued to increase until he had to dive under one of the vehicles beside him. It was practically pouring out of the cloud above.

"This is not natural," he shouted to no one in particular. No one could have heard him, anyway, because the rain was too intense. The rain continued to increase until the roar from it, pouring on the ground the vehicles and everything around, was deafening. The rain came down so hard that it made him think that it might rip right through the armor of the fighting vehicles. In reality, it was tearing out the footing that the vehicles were resting on. The General, wet from the rain and now soggy from the increasing mud flowing under the tank, felt the vehicle start to move. It was sliding. The rain had made the ground under it a big mud slide. He quickly decided he had better get out from under it. Although he could barely move himself in the increasingly slick mud, the gravity of the situation made him get it done. He struggled to get out from under the backside of the tank just as it started to pick up speed on its downward slide. He watched it slam into another tank that was sliding as well. Out in the open, he could not see through the deluge. However, he knew he had to find shelter quick or the rain would tear him apart. Running blindly, the General thought he saw the front of a truck through the thick rain. He turned toward it. Last chance, he thought to himself, as the rain almost beat him to the ground. When he reached the cab door of the truck, he had to reach up through the pounding rain to open the door. As soon as he turned the door handle, a wall of water burst from the open door. As the water poured out, it hit him and drove him to the ground. Awash in the water, he felt the weight of some soft, yet heavy, unknown object on top of him. As he struggled to free himself from the unknown object, he noticed that an arm swung to hit him against his head. It was the driver of the truck. He had drowned. The General pushed him off of him knowing that he was dead. With what strength the General had left, he dove to get under the truck. Finally the rain stopped hitting him. Although it was muddy and wet underneath the truck, at least the unrelenting downpour quit hitting him and allowed him to collect his thoughts.

"What kind of rain is this?" He asked. He had never experienced rain like this. At that moment, he became aware that the rain was beginning to slowly slack off. The crashes and booming, he had been hearing during rainfall, began to diminish. Almost as quickly as it had come, it was gone.

The General sluggishly crawled out from under the truck to survey the scene. He had been lucky. The truck he had been under was lodged on a large rock and had not slid

any further. He began to look around. As far as the eye could see, vehicles were buried halfway up their sides in mud. Some were overturned and others had slid down the slopes and landed on their sides. As he watched the scene, hatches began to open and commanders began sticking their heads out to look around. Everyone seemed to be in a state of shock. The carnage was horrible and the entire area had become a giant mud slide.

There was still a considerable fighting force left and the General wondered the best sequence to get them reassembled. He fixed his gaze on one of the tanks that still appeared in good shape. The commander of the tank was standing in the cupola, his body halfway out as he looked around. He is probably trying to find the rest of his platoon, the General thought. That is what everyone should be doing. The General started toward the tank commander, shouting. Before he could get the commander's attention, something happened that stopped the General dead in his tracks. It was the most fearful thing he had ever seen in his life. As he was about to reach shouting distance, all of a sudden a huge white stone hit and buried half of the turret along with the tank commander deep into the hull of the tank. The impact shook the ground and almost knocked the General off his feet. As the General quickly looked into the sky from where the stone had come, another hit to the side of him shaking the ground again. His first impulse was to run, but he realized there was no safe place to go. Another hit, splitting in half when it hit a large rock. The General then realized that this was hail. More fell until these huge hailstones were hitting all around him. They were tearing up everything. Some hit and buried themselves into vehicles, others bounced off rocks sending ice, mud and shrapnel flying in different directions. The ground shook with each stone that hit. The General wanted to run and hide, but where? He stood still, too afraid to move. As he watched the whole scene unfold, right in front of his eyes, the huge stones hit beside him and in the distance, rolling through the mud in different directions. Some rolled around him. Others barely missed him. He braced himself to be hit several times as he heard the whooshing of the falling stones, but for whatever reason, he had not been touched so far. Then, just as suddenly as the hailstorm had started, it began to let up. The giant hailstones started coming in ever decreasing numbers, until only one was hitting every few seconds. Then they stopped completely. The General looked up into the air to see if there were anymore coming. However, all he could see was the huge dark cloud that was bringing him so much pain. As he looked around the scene before him, the area was devastated. Some of the more thinly armored vehicles were almost flattened. Others suffered partial hits. Amazingly, except for the slung mud many appeared untouched. Some vehicles were on their sides where they had been knocked over. The General's heart pounded as he turned his attention back toward the vehicle he had been approaching when the hail started. He knew there was a commander and crew under the stone that had buried itself into the tank. Fires broke out on some of the vehicles and just when he was about to catch his breath again, one blew up with a roar.

Startled into anger, the General turned and looked up at the cloud above. Although he had rejected the idea that there were any gods, he now had to wonder. If there was a God, this display hadn't gained the General's respect for Him. It brought only hatred. His plans for eternal fame and glory were diminishing.

Without believing in whom he was shouting at, the General shook his fist at the cloud.

"If you really are up there, why don't you come down here and meet me face to face?"

The General's face strained with indignation, increasing with every second. The veins in his neck stood out as he shouted obscenities in utter defiance of the Holy God of Israel.

"There is no God," he yelled in contempt to the cloud above as he shook his fist one more time in the air.

Just then, something very hot hit him in the back of the neck causing him to jump and grab at it with his hand. He turned around to see a fiery small yellowish ball lying on the ground. It smelled bad, like sulfur. He had almost decided to pick it up with something when another hit him in the back. He winced from the pain as these little fire balls of burning sulfur started hitting all around. The General did the only thing he could do, run. As he sluggishly ran through the now cold mud, he continued to be hit until he reached one of the larger resting hailstones and crouched behind it. The little fire balls hit all around him, burning and bouncing in all directions. The heat from them was becoming very intense and the rapidly melting hailstone was not providing enough cover. He knew that if he stayed there he would eventually burn up. Spotting a tank a few yards away, he made a run for it. As he ran for it, he continued to be hit by the burning projectiles. When he finally reached the tank, he unstrapped a water can from off of its side and crawled under the tank. As the heat became excessive, he poured some of the water on himself and pulled his body into the fetal position. All around him everything appeared to be on fire. Just a few moments before everything had been mud. Now everything was becoming dry and parched from the intense heat. He continued to pour water on himself intermittently, thinking that the water would only last so long. All he could do was keep it up as long as he could. As he was nearing the end of the water in the can, he could hear that the sulfur rain was beginning to subside. He poured the last of the water all over himself to relieve the heat, and listened. The fireballs were now only hitting every few seconds; then minutes; then they stopped. The bottom of the tank above him was beginning to radiate heat, so he crawled out from under it. As he did, he suffered burns from the smoldering sulfur balls that were all around. He noticed an outcropping of rocks where most of the burning balls had bounced off of. It only had a few on it, so he made a quick dash to it, scrambling up the small formation until he came to the top of the rocks. As he reached the top, he finally began feeling some relief from the scorching heat. It was still intensely hot all around. He noticed that the fireballs, with nothing to burn, began to crust over and burn themselves out. As the intense heat began to relent, he looked around to see what remained of the force that just minutes before been so formidable. All over the hills surrounding the city fires from the burning hulks of military vehicles glowed.

The General turned his attention toward Jerusalem. The city was now visible and, as far as he could tell, was untouched by the disasters that had inflicted so much damage to the forces surrounding it. All around him, the General could see the remains of the men he had led to their demise. He noticed a new phenomenon. Sticking out of the ground were charred body parts and burning vehicles where the mud had dried so quickly. Dead soldiers were almost entirely buried except for the parts of their bodies they had been able to hold out of the mud. Cooked portions of bodies could be seen all around, protruding out of the now dry earth.

As the General was surveying the horrifying scene, he noticed a movement out of the corner of his eye. About a hundred yards away, someone was climbing out from under a smoking vehicle. A survivor, he thought. Then incredibly, he saw another movement, then another. He found it hard to believe that anyone else could have found a way to survive all the destruction. He knew that he had survived through his own determination and his own stubborn will. It wasn't by some god's will or any other force except his own. The realization that there were other survivors brought a sordid renewed hope that he might yet resume the attack.

A motion behind him broke the General's concentration on his selfish ambitions. He turned to find a ragged, but familiar, figure kicking the sulfur balls out of his way as he walked toward the General. He did so without taking his eyes off the General. It was the younger arresting officer. He had been given a tank platoon to command. The General smiled at the young Lieutenant's good fortune at having survived the hell they both had just experienced.

"I see your luck is still holding," the General said as he nodded toward the young officer in a gesture of goodwill.

The tattered and burned young man, still advancing toward the General, reached down and pulled out the pistol that he had threatened the General with once before. He pointed it at the General as he closed in until the General was looking right down the barrel. The Lieutenant advanced until he was just a few feet away before he answered.

"I see many whose luck has run out."

"But we have survived," the General said, showing his displeasure with the officer's reply. "And we are not defeated until we are dead."

"We are defeated, General. And, do you know what defeated us?"

The General, indignant, gave no reply.

The Lieutenant pointed to the object that still sat silent before the city.

"That, General," he said pausing, "is a throne. It is the Throne of God."

As the General took another look in the Ark's direction, he spoke in disgust at the thought.

"What do you know about God?"

"Just what I've learned today, General." After a pause the young officer continued. "All your plans of glory, was it worth all of this?"

The General turned back to look the Lieutenant straight in the eye.

"I would do it all over again."

Looking into the General's eyes, the young officer could not imagine anyone so egotistical and evil.

"I believe you would," the Lieutenant replied. "I should have done this two days ago." With that, the young officer improved his aim and squeezed the trigger until a loud bang sounded.

The General glared at the young officer in defiance as a small trickle of blood came from a small hole just above his eye. His face appeared frozen until his eyes rolled back and he slumped onto the rocks. His body fell slowly to the ground, until he lay twitching on top of several of the small smoldering balls that were all around. Then the twitching subsided and he was still.



The young officer took one last look at the city and the object that had been their demise and turned to walk, then run, away from the scene of so much destruction. He did not know where he was running. He only knew it was time to run.

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## Chapter 15

The brightly glowing fires, in the mountains surrounding Jerusalem, began to die down. The thousands of eye witnesses to the salvation of the Lord remained hushed and reverent at what they had just witnessed. Not a soul was making a sound in the enormous crowds. There was silence all around the city. What they had witnessed was the hand of God, and in His presence no one dared to utter. The thick smoke, that moments before had been billowing from the carnage surrounding this ancient city, steadily died down until the last of it vanished into the cloud above. Soon there was not a trace of it in the sky. A cool breeze went across the city, from the east to the west, that brought a feeling of exhilaration to everyone it touched. Suddenly, the huge cloud that had been present during the salvation of Israel, started to billow and move. The sound of it, once again, was as the whirring of a low pitched jet engine. It moved slowly at first, then began to gain speed as it moved toward the west from where it came. When the eastern edge of the cloud finally appeared, the sunlight broke through in glorious fashion. The sight of the sunlight breaking through the open sky to the east caused the people around the city to immediately burst into cheering, so that the noise of them surely could be heard throughout the whole land.

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From Vlad's vantage point, he could see and hear the huge cloud beginning to move away as quickly as it had come. A noise in the distance, like a million voices cheering, drew Vlad's attention toward the reemerging sunshine. As the sunshine finally broke through to where Vlad was, the confusion of the last few hours began to clear up in his mind. He could now remember more clearly. Having survived the awful fate of the army around him, he was amazed as he looked over what was left of the vehicle he was being transported in before the catastrophes struck. It was sort of a mobile jail. The vehicle transporting him had avoided the initial earthquake that started the series of disasters. However, after the rumbling quit, the following rains caused the vehicle to slide off the road and get stuck. Remembering the tearing rain, he felt fortunate that they had not drowned. He could now see that the huge hailstone, that had hit the cab of the truck, was almost completely melted. He remembered being thrown out of the back of the truck when it hit. The impact of the hailstone had not only crushed the driver and guard, but had also thrown open the locked door. He must have struck his head when he landed because the next thing he remembered was being struck by small fiery balls that quickly caused him to regain consciousness. The hot brimstone made him immediately seek shelter. Fortunately he found refuge, back inside the truck just behind the crushed cab. The huge hailstone served as a coolant against the extreme heat. He looked down to see the, now encapsulated, little balls that had burned so fiercely. Observing all the wrecked vehicles and destroyed humanity that littered the countryside, Vlad wondered why he had been lucky enough to have survived. It looked as if no one else had.

Movement, coming from the forward positions and the mountains caught Vlad's attention. He could see men running in dazed confusion. They were tattered and charred and in a state of utter terror at whatever they had witnessed. Few looked as if they were

even capable of running. Most, certainly, were not comprehending what had happened just minutes ago. Some fell to the ground and wept bitterly. Others just ran. Not knowing where they were running, they just ran away. Away from the wrath that had befallen their comrades, their army, and their confidence. Vlad watched the hopeless scene as the first of the vagabonds reached his location. He wondered what they possibly could have seen that he had not.

Then he spotted Illya, tattered and burned. He ran right toward Vlad, as if Vlad might be able to hide him or help him in some way. He ran up and fell at his feet. Gasping for air, he began to weep uncontrollably.

"What happened?" Vlad asked, looking down on him.

Illya could not hear him. He wasn't listening.

This time Vlad shouted, "What happened? Where is Rupert?"

Illya could not control the fear that gripped his very soul. Vlad went down to one knee and grabbed Illya by the shirt bringing his limp body up to eye level with him. Looking into his eyes, menacingly, he again asked.

"I said, what happened?"

Illya's eyes finally appeared to focus on Vlad. And, with the most serious look he had ever shown, said, "God's throne is there."

Vlad could not have heard him right. However, before he could ask him to repeat himself, Illya spoke again.

"The God of the Jews destroyed us all." With that statement Illya seemed to come to his senses, and as if Vlad didn't exist, he jumped up and began running again. Vlad could only watch as the shell of his former driver ran away from the mountains and the terror of his experience.

As Vlad watched him run, he pondered the fate of Rupert, then Illya's statement. He remembered what Sergeant Khorkina had told him and wondered, for a moment, if it could be true. Could the Hebrew God have destroyed their army? Vlad realized that if so, He had surely saved his life. He quickly turned his gaze back toward the mountains. Startled at what he was seeing, he blinked his eyes for a moment and then hesitantly looked again toward the astonishing sight. Over the mountains he saw a rainbow. A huge rainbow, that was ever increasing in glowing light and captivating beauty. Struck with awe, he froze.

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Under the huge rainbow left by the departing cloud, unseen by those below it, a joyous celebration broke out among the people in Jerusalem. There was singing, dancing and worshipping the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In spite of the casualties suffered by the small nation, it was a time of thanksgiving and praise. Even some of the Rabbis, who after a time of trying to remind their flocks of the fasting and solemn time of Rosh Hashanah, could not contain their own joy and excitement and joined in the celebration for the grace that God had shown to His people.

Reporters, anxious for explanations, surrounded the Israeli officials, clamoring for interviews. Their many questions were: What really happened? Was this really the Ark of the Covenant from so long ago? What would the nation of Israel do now? The correspondents from the liberal biased networks, who had only come to document the

annihilation of the small Jewish state as they had in 1948, scrambled in front of the cameras for their own explanations. Amazingly, they were able to come up with many. Knowing the unspoken doctrine of their networks, they would never suggest the intervention of a Holy God. So, they came up with speculations of interdiction by extra terrestrials, new Israeli secret weapons and natural phenomenon. As in the humanist classrooms where they had been taught, the theories of modern man overruled the antiquated holiness and righteousness of the Divine Creator. Many around the world would welcome the conjectures of the liberal media, eager to reject the existence of the Hebrew God of the Bible. That existence would prove them responsible for their own actions and invalidate the cleverly devised fables of evolution and humanism that they had worshipped at the altar of for so long. Sitting firmly on the throne in their own lives, the truth, although able to set them free, would be unwelcome news.

The nations of the world now faced the reality that this tiny nation would henceforth deal from a position of power. This would be pointed out by the Prime Minister who arrived to a hastily assembled area for a world press conference. As he walked forward to the make shift podium, microphones were being jammed toward him from the crowd of correspondents. When the cheering finally subsided, the Israeli Prime Minister addressed the world.

"People of Israel, free nations of the world, let us give thanks in a moment of silent praise and thanksgiving for the great deliverance that the merciful God of our fathers has given us this day."

As all bowed their heads, the moment of silent reverence was almost blasphemously short for the believers and unmercifully long for the others. As the Prime Minister finally raised his head, he continued.

"To the friends of Israel, this is a day of great rejoicing for the deliverance we have witnessed. It is also a day of mourning for the lost defenders of Israel. We declare today that they have not died in vain because the Ark of the Covenant, and its blessing, has returned to the land." The huge crowd cheered and applauded long and hard. When the prolonged cheering died down enough, the Prime Minister continued.

"To those who wish us harm, behold. The battle is the Lord's." Again the crowds cheered and hollered. The Prime Minister then held up his hand to quiet the crowds.

"Tomorrow!" he shouted above the decreasing noise. "We rebuild the Temple!" With that the crowd went wild and the Prime Minister, smiling and waving, then laughing, jumped down to join the people in the celebrations of singing and dancing that would last for some time.

Around the world, celebrations were breaking out among believers everywhere. Churches were gathering for services. The Christian television ministries around the world were reporting conversions faster than any other time in their history. Pews were full to overflowing at every Protestant and catholic church around the world.

The simple gospel from a single Christian reporter who knew about, and reported of, the significance and connection of Jesus Christ's blood on the Mercy Seat of the Ark of the Covenant had started a wildfire of repentance and salvation. Leaders of various nations and kingdoms acknowledged that God had indeed shown himself to the world. Around the world, many people, both small and great were believing in and receiving Christ in huge numbers. It was as if this was the last call to mankind. Just as Moses had asked when he came down from Mount Sinai.

"Who is on the Lord's side?"

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From the edge of the crowded celebrations, Rob Stringer looked upon the scene with tempered happiness. The events of the past five days were starting to take their toll on him. He was exhausted. It had been the most exciting five days in his life, and the costliest. Rob looked up into the sky searching for the Lord, that he believed in so much, and asked.

"Why me Lord, the most unworthy of your servants?"

Searching for the face of his Lord, he remembered something Sarah had quoted to him, just days before. It was part of a verse from the book of Esther. "And who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" "We sure came to the kingdom for such a time," he thought to himself. If only she were here, with me, now. Knowing in whose presence she was, made that a selfish thought. He smiled at the thought of her looking down on him and reminding him who had kept him under control. He turned to look back over the landscape toward the Ark. It was gone. He began running toward the site where it had been placed by the priests. Then, out of the corner of his eye, he spotted it again. The processional priests were taking the Ark away without fanfare. No shofars were blowing now. They were trying to avoid attracting any attention. He slowed to a stop as he realized they were taking it to a place of safekeeping. Turning slowly back toward the place where Moshe had parked the jeep, Rob watched the priests going out of sight. Knowing Moshe was trying to locate his son, he considered following the priests to find out where they would hide the Ark this time. He thought about what the Ark had looked like, sitting in front of the city. Suddenly, a thought came to him. A concept, like a bolt of lightning out of nowhere, that stopped him dead in his tracks. He sitteth in the temple. Yes, he thought, immediately recognizing the significance, if not the entire scripture. It all adds up. Paul's revelation in his letter to the Thessalonians. He knew he had to read the words again that stuck in his mind and caused a deep hunger for the Word. He sprinted to the jeep and started it up. As he pulled out onto the road that led back to the apartment, he thanked the Lord for the scripture that now led to his new quest. He found the streets empty once he got away from the crowds. The celebration was now slowly moving back toward the old city. As he sped toward the apartment and his Bible, he tried to remember all of the scripture, but could not. He knew he would have to read it and determine the context. When he arrived at the apartment, he found that he imagined Sarah greeting him, just as she had so many times before. He realized how much he was going to miss her. Yet, he had been so busy since then. "Kept busy," he thought.

When Rob reached the bedroom and found his Bible, he sat on the bed and opened it to Thessalonians. Quickly scanning it, he remembered that the verse was in Second Thessalonians.

"Huh, chapter two. Yes, here it is, verses three and four." As he read, the words seemed to come off the page at him. "Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come, except there come the falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or

that is worshipped, so that he, as God, sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."

Rob looked into space, contemplating the Word as he lowered the Bible to his lap. "Wow," he said audibly. "Now that the Ark and the Mercy Seat have been shown to the world, this can happen. It will be in a rebuilt temple. Everyone will know what he is claiming."

He read on through verse 12 the accounts of future events and thought. "I have to show this to Moshe." Putting his book mark in between the pages he closed and clutched his Bible and started for the Jeep. As he got in, he noticed the sun approaching the horizon.

After the darkness of the last few days, it was a glorious sight.

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A tattered and torn Lieutenant Vladimir Kochetkova walked along the side of the road toward Jordan. As he did, he surveyed the carnage of war that littered the countryside and pondered the disaster that had befallen the Russian army. Just days before the Russian army had seemed invincible. The thought, that he would now be part of a retreating multitude of defeated refugees, had never crossed his mind. He looked behind him to see the tattered remnants of his fellow soldiers stretching as far behind, as in front of, him. They were all walking back to Russia. He wondered if the Israelis would come to round them up. He had a feeling they would not be so fortunate. There was really no reason for them to come. These escapees posed no threat to them now.

Looking behind him to the west, Vlad could see the sun beginning to set over the horizon. He knew he would soon be cold and hungry. Yet, that didn't really matter. He felt relieved, somehow, that all this was over. He wondered if his family had heard the news about their defeat. He wished he could get word to them that he was alive. However, he realized, he really wouldn't be all right until he made it home. Thinking it might be safer to travel cross country, in order to find food and shelter, he left the main road and started to ascend a gently sloping hillside parallel to the road. As he walked toward the top of the hill, he saw a broken down sign that marked the border of Israel. When he finally came to the highest point of the hill, he turned around to watch the procession of beaten men as they slowly made their way away from the setting sun. He gazed upon the countryside of the nation that had been his enemy upon his entrance and his salvation upon departure. He thought of those that had been his comrades and those that he had killed. He considered the fact that only through the way things turned out was he saved from court martial and disgrace, if not execution. The most catastrophic event in history had saved his life. He had passed from death unto life. That thought made Vlad wonder where had he heard those words before. Then, he remembered it was from one of the times his mother had read to his family from the little book that she so prized. With that, he looked into the sky realizing that he had seen the power of the God of that book for the first time.

"God is real," he said out loud. The power and might of the God of the Jews was the only supernatural force he had ever personally witnessed. He determined that a God that had such complete power over the elements and nature must be the creator of those elements and of the earth itself. Ilya said the throne of God had destroyed them. But, he

was wrong. This small throne was just an earthly symbol of the awesome ruler of the universe. As Vlad continued to gaze skyward, he felt a strange peace come over him as he realized that, for whatever purpose, God had spared his life. The realization that there was a Creator, with order and truth to be found, was comforting. He determined that he would search to know this God for himself. And, he knew that he would never be satisfied until he found him.

With his new found mission in life, Vlad surveyed the countryside with renewed vigor. To his surprise on a hill, just a few hundred yards away, he noticed two figures dressed in native attire. They looked much like the two figures he had seen days earlier. However, they looked so clean that he thought to himself, they must be going to town. He wondered why he felt no fear of them. He knew they could be vengeful Israelis or worse; vengeful Arabs. He waved to the two strangers and, even though they did not wave back, he seemed to feel them acknowledging him.

"They probably don't even know what has happened around here," Vlad said to himself as he turned to start his journey toward Jordan. He was about to take the first step when a movement in the direction of the two strangers drew his attention. Vlad turned his head toward the two figures to find that they were still watching him. Only now, they both held up a hand toward him. He waved again and turned his foot slightly to the side instead of straight ahead. As he did, the side of his foot forced a small depression in the dirt and a disk shaped portion of the ground, beside it, moved slightly. Vlad immediately stopped. He knew that deadly shape, he had walked into a minefield. He gently pulled his foot back and slowly bent down to examine it. When he did, he could see the prongs in the middle of the portion of ground that had moved. These were the triggers. Had he stepped forward when he had started to, he undoubtedly would have set it off. Staring at the lethal object, it occurred to him that had he not been distracted by the movement of the strangers waving to him he would be dead. He stood, turning to look for them again. However, they were nowhere in sight. Vlad shook his head in confusion, then he strained to see them once again. No use, he thought to himself. They are gone.

Knowing, where there is one, there are many of the mines, Vlad gingerly backed away trying to retrace his steps, then to retrace the path that he had walked up the slope until he came back to the road. He realized he might as well take the road along with the rest. The best thing that could happen to them now was for the IDF to come and pick them up. He felt he would take his chances with the people of this great God who had just spared his life one more time. But, he needed to find his family and tell them the good news of his deliverance. So, as he wondered about the purpose of his life being spared, he turned to look back at the Israeli countryside one last time.

Lieutenant Vladimir Kochetkova realized he was looking at the crossroads of his life. After a moment, of reflection, he turned around and started walking away.

He would never look back again.

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Major Robert Stringer drove toward the secret entrance building to the command center that he had entered once before. As he did, he wondered how he was going to get in. He still had his identification badge on, but he was without his liaison. Pulling up to

the entrance, he looked around in the jeep for the door opener that Moshe had used earlier to open the door. After finding it, he pushed the button. The door started opening. Inside he could see a car coming out. It pulled up beside him. In the back was General Mordechai.

"My friend," the General beamed. "I want to thank you. You have served your country well. But more importantly you have served Israel as a great friend, as well. I hope that you will stay in Israel as long as you wish."

"Thank you, sir," Rob replied. "I really didn't do that much."

"Moshe told me all about it. Why don't you go in. He's been looking for you," the General said smiling and nodded toward the entrance. "Go on. Security is a little lax at the moment."

"Thanks, again, sir," Rob said.

The General saluted the American Major and waved as he sped off. After returning the salute, Rob pulled the jeep onto the floor elevator and in a short time it started descending. When the elevator arrived at command level, Rob drove off and found Moshe's parking spot. Out of the jeep, with Bible in hand, he hurried inside past the smiling guard.

A small group of excited staff came past him and patted him on the back as they went. A couple more passed him as he entered the room. They must have been the last of the remaining staff since he could only see Moshe walking toward him, smiling.

"So, you steal a jeep and then break into command center," Moshe said. "I'll bet you stole my parking place, too."

Rob nodded, laughing. He, then, remembered to ask.

"Did you find Aaron?"

"Yes. Alive and well," Moshe beamed with pride. "A little shrapnel in one leg. Just enough to be a hero."

"Like his father." Rob said, sharing Moshe's joy.

Moshe then looked excitedly at Rob and said.

"We will begin building the temple, tomorrow! The Ark must be in the Holy place."

To Rob this meant the return to the old sacrificial system and to the law that he believed had already been fulfilled. However, it would be started again and nothing on earth would stop it, for now.

Rob thought of sharing the New Testament scripture, that he had just rediscovered, with his friend while it was fresh on his mind. However, the look of happiness in this victorious soldier's face made him smile and decide to let it go.

"Tomorrow," he thought.

Moshe grabbed his hand and shook it. While he shook Rob's hand, Moshe exclaimed.

"Happy Rosh Hashanah my friend, God is great." With that, Moshe turned and raised his hands to a joyful clasp above his head and with a little jig, started out the door.

Rob watched his celebration dance and, smiling, softly, replied. "My friend, He is greater than we can imagine."

Moshe kept dancing as he disappeared out the door.

In the silence of the now empty room Rob walked toward the desk that Moshe had arranged for him. Gazing around the now empty command room, he wondered what



was happening in the world outside of Israel. Where was Mark Evans and what had happened to his own compatriots at the Embassy? As he walked past the desk of Colonel Moshe Riskin, he laid the Bible down on it. He let it open to the passage that he had been marking with his finger. At his desk, he sat down and surveyed the empty room. After looking around for a moment, he lowered his head and prayed.

"Thank you, Father, for the privilege of witnessing your deliverance. I pray for the continued peace of Jerusalem, even so, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

He raised his head and looked over the desk one more time, his post for the last couple of days. For a moment Rob thought of joining the celebration. Then, remembering Sarah, he thought of how much he already missed her.

"Babe, I sure wish you were here right now," he said out loud as he slowly stood up.

Then, all of a sudden, he heard it. It was the sound, rich and full, of a trumpet; a magnificent trumpet penetrating every molecule of the air and of his being. It was beautiful beyond imagination, unlike anything he had ever heard before. Immediately, his head and eyes shot up skyward in joyous recognition as he disappeared....

**"IN THE TWINKLING OF AN EYE!"**

## EPILOGUE

At the highest rated major American network television studio, a lone figure sits behind the news desk and reports to the largest viewing audience the network has ever had.

"For those of you who may just now be joining us, this is Jeffrey Pennington coming to you live with the latest news on the massive disappearance of thousands, possibly millions, of people around the world. No one yet knows how or why this incredible phenomenon has taken place. Reports from around the world are still coming in and it may be days, perhaps weeks, before we know the full scope of this event."

An off-screen assistant, briskly delivers a paper to the reporter, who then continues with the broadcast.

"As you probably know, from last night's coverage of the Israeli victory over the forces of the Soviet Muslim Alliance, a seemingly chain reaction of events began to occur. Shortly after the miraculous Israeli victory, reports of fire coming down from the sky on Moscow and many great coastal cities and islands around the world started coming in. After this devastating fiery phenomenon subsided, most commentary from around the world indicated a time of world uniting would be forthcoming. With the culmination of the Middle East conflict and the national superpowers in disarray, the United Nations Assembly declared a world emergency. Their announcement of a New World Order seemed to be the culmination of all the dialogue this subject has suggested for many years. Instead, the world now deals with a second catastrophic event in as many days. Most likely, you know someone that has either vanished themselves or is affected by this vast disappearance."

"I've been informed that we have an incredible video of one of the now missing persons. In our efforts to bring you the latest news on the Israeli war, we were taping a broadcast from the studios of the American Christian Network. The tape shows an actual disappearance as it occurred. The reason we were monitoring their broadcast was that they had been successful in taping the procession of the Israelis setting what they claim to be the actual lost Ark of the Covenant, of the Bible, in front of the city of Jerusalem before and during the natural disasters that destroyed the Alliance forces. We were being allowed to monitor their broadcast provided we allowed their commentary during the broadcast. We agreed to this stipulation in order to provide, you the viewer, the most up to the minute coverage."

The broadcaster looked off camera with a look of acknowledgment.

"I understand that the tape is ready to present to you. As we run this tape, remember that the views of the American Christian Network do not, necessarily, reflect the views of this network or its management. Here, now, is that tape."

The taped broadcast begins with a stately elderly gentleman sitting in a large chair on a studio set. He is holding a Bible in his hands and smiles at the camera as he begins speaking.

"For those of you who may, just now, be joining us from around the world. We are coming to you, live, from the American Christian Network studio. In case you have not heard the news, the forces of the Soviet Muslim Alliance were destroyed this morning just outside the city of Jerusalem. This incredible turn of events occurred just after dawn

this morning as Jewish priests brought out and placed in front of the city, what we now believe is the actual Ark of the Covenant. We will show you this event as I narrate. Apparently, only our team of Tyler James and Mason Brock were able to film this event along with a crew from Radio Free Europe. As you can see in the film, the procession is moving toward a position between the city and the Alliance forces. That was early this morning, Jerusalem time. Now, we'll advance to a couple of hours later to show you the damage and what remained of the attacking forces. We will broadcast the tape of this momentous event, in its entirety, in a few minutes. The networks monitoring our broadcast have agreed to stay on with us to bring this news coverage to you. But, first, I would like to take a moment to explain some of these events. Today's incident is unlike any the modern world has ever seen before. As you saw in the film, the Ark of the Covenant as spoken of in the Bible is real. The thing, that caught even those of us in the Christian community by surprise, was the Mercy Seat; it being a separate entity, as we find upon viewing it. As the film revealed, it sat upon the Ark of the Covenant, and therefore was always considered as just part of the Ark. Scriptures reveal that God spoke to man from between the cherubim. It was literally God's throne on earth. However, what this broadcaster learned today, from our reporter on the scene, Tyler James, is the great significance of the Mercy Seat as the altar of the Lord. Let me explain. The Mercy Seat covers the Ark which contains the tablets of stone written by God's own finger. These tablets, with the Ten Commandments, were given to Moses on Mount Sinai. The Ten Commandments were God's laws for the people. The Mercy Seat sits over the law. It represents the Lord's provision of mercy by covering the law with which men are judged."

"In ancient times, each year the High Priest would sprinkle the blood of animals on the Mercy Seat. This blood would atone for the law, contained in the Ark, for one year. This was God's requirement for the sins of the people. In His love for us, a Holy and Just God could require no less of His own sacrifice to redeem mankind. So, He sacrificed the blood of His own son, Jesus Christ. Tyler reported how the Ark and Mercy Seat were found under what we now believe is the actual crucifixion site. With the splitting of the rock as reported in Matthew 27:51, this would have facilitated the sprinkling of Christ's blood upon the Mercy Seat. With that blood, the Throne of God contains all the Mercy any of us will ever need. I believe that it also represents the throne that each of us have in our own hearts and lives. We can either humble ourselves, and turn it over to God for his grace, or we usurp our Creator's authority and sit in it ourselves, rejecting the free gift of salvation bought through the shed blood of His Son, Jesus Christ.

God in His mercy and grace has revealed Himself to the entire world and we have seen this fulfillment of prophecy. The Bible indicates that other prophetic events will soon happen. One is the rapture of the believers. Let me read to you the warning that Jesus gave through His disciples about this event and the awful tribulation to follow from Luke 21:35 and 36.

"For like a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth. Watch ye, therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man."

"Our Lord Jesus Christ is surely returning soon and the question is, are you ready to stand before Him?"

“His appeal is revealed in Revelation 3:20 and 21. ‘Behold, I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.’”

“The Lord, in His mercy, has shown us today that there is a decision to be made. Which throne will you choose? The merciful throne of God, or the throne of self-will and sure destruction? Whether you like it or not, you will, this day, make that decision.”

“The scriptures tell us what we must do to be saved. Romans 10:9 and 13 gives us the instructions. ‘That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’”

“Please make your decision, today, for Jesus. If you do, our prayer partners are standing by waiting for your call. The numbers you can call are on the screen and we have set up all the lines available to us. I see that all the lines are busy right now, but don't let that stop you. We will be here day and night. If you want to talk to someone immediately, call your local Christian church and talk to the pastor. We have had churches calling throughout these events volunteering to stay by the phones to take your calls, guide you and pray with you. If you cannot get through to anyone else, tell a family member or go to your neighbor. Don't let anything stop you from believing and confessing the Lord Jesus Christ. I implore you to do this now, as we broadcast this incredible film in it's entirety.”

Then the screen began replaying the events that fulfilled the prophecy of the Lord given to Israel by the prophet Jeremiah.

“O LORD, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, Surely our fathers have inherited lies, vanity, and things wherein there is no profit. Shall a man make gods unto himself, and they are no gods? Therefore, behold, I will this once cause them to know, I will cause them to know mine hand and my might; and they shall know that my name is The LORD.”

After the long film of the Ark procession and destruction was ending, the view of the camera went back to the host of the ACN broadcast who was sitting in the large chair. Smiling, from the joy of watching the deliverance of Jerusalem once again, he waited for his cue to begin more commentary.

Suddenly, the host turned his head as if startled by something he was hearing off camera. Then, just as suddenly, his image vanished from his chair. Slowly, the view from the camera tilted downward until stopping to show just the floor.

**THE BEGINNING!**

## SCRIPTURAL REFERENCES\*

Origin, Construction and Place of the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat

By instruction from the Lord - Exodus 25:1,8,9

Ark of the Covenant - Exodus 25:10-16

Mercy Seat - Exodus 25:17-22, Exodus 26:34

Mercy Seat as Throne and Altar

Leviticus 16:2, Leviticus 16:13-15, Numbers 7:89,

1 Chronicles 28:11&12, Hebrews 12:24

Sequence of Events

Isaiah 52:8-15, Ezekiel, Chapters 38 & 39, Joel 2:1-27, Jeremiah 4:5-13, Jeremiah 16:14-21, Psalms 18:2-18

Reemergence of the Ark of the Covenant and the Mercy Seat before the Lord's return

Isaiah 11:12, Isaiah 49:22&23, Jeremiah 3:16&17,

Ezekiel 39:21-22, 2 Thessalonians 2:3&4

Pre-Tribulation Rapture

Matthew 24:36-42, Luke 22:34-36, John 5:25-29,

1 Thessalonians 4:16-5:9, 2 Thessalonians 2:7,

Revelation 3:10&11, Revelation 4:1&2

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\*It is important to note that although I believe the Rapture of the Church is alluded to in Joel as the bridegroom and bride, hence the storyline, it is sequenced in such a manner as to make determining its timing impossible. By this reference in scripture it could happen before, during or shortly after the events portrayed.

We must certainly be ready. Whether we see any of the events of this book developing or not, there is no unfulfilled prophetic scripture, that I have found, which precedes the catching away of the believers. On the contrary, my studies have convinced me that Jesus could come in the next breath we take.

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All references, to scripture, or scripture used in this publication, are taken from the King James Version of the Bible.

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