

CHRONICLES OF THE FINAL DAY



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By Andre Dellerba

PREFACE

Our Heavenly Father is preparing His church for the end time that is rapidly approaching. As we compiled this book, it was essential for us to capture: the key events, their precise sequence, and the intentions of the ten kings and the Beast during this seven-year world tribulation period. Therefore, the key building blocks of this story is based on the Bible. And more specifically, the Book of Revelation (chapters 6-19), Ezekiel 38-39, Daniel 7-12, Zechariah 4 & 12, Matthew 24, and 1 Thessalonians 4.

I am convinced that the Holy Spirit has led me in write this narrative to equip my brothers and sisters, with a clear understanding, of what is about to come. Essentially helping them identify and remember the key events described in the Bible in a story format, so that they are not caught off guard when these events begin to unfold.

Instead of fear, find hope and peace by fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, and not wavering in keeping His commandments. Let us remember Revelation 14:12 which says, "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." For in Him we live and move and have our being.

I pray that this book be a blessing to you in Yeshua's name.

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CHAPTER 1: THE TEN KINGS RULE

Phoenix a striking figure in his late twenties, well-built, with an unshaven face that contrasted sharply with the lines shaved on both sides of his head awoke to the persistent beeping of his alarm.

With a practiced flick, he silenced it and blinked against the encroaching light. His apartment, sleek and modern, hummed softly with the sounds of automation. The lights brightened slightly as the window shades retracted into the ceiling, flooding the room with soft, natural light.

“Good morning, Phoenix,” the female AI voice chimed warmly. “It’s Monday, 7th of September 2037. The weather is mild, and don’t forget you have a meeting at 8 with your superiors at the Central Correctional Facility. This is followed by a 10-hour shift. Would you like coffee?”

“Yes, please,” Phoenix replied, his voice still rough from sleep.

As he stepped out of his apartment, he was greeted by the sprawling metropolis of Babylon, the futuristic city that had once been New York City. The streets buzzed with life; an eclectic mix of people seamlessly integrated with advanced technology. VR headsets and glasses adorned many faces, creating a surreal blend of reality and technology. Digital transactions were conducted with a mere touch, showcasing the seamless integration of tech in every aspect of daily life, all using the one-world “UN” currency.

Robots, their metallic forms glinting in the sunlight, served coffee and hot dogs with precise efficiency. Buildings were adorned with bright advertisements, their screens flashing vibrant messages. Churches had been repurposed into fast-food joints, and schoolchildren, in their uniforms, were on a field trip while teenagers posed for photos to share on social media.

Navigating the city with practiced ease, Phoenix's white uniform stood out starkly against the urban tapestry around him. He exchanged smiles and nods with passing civilians, his demeanor reflecting the city's energetic pulse.

The New York Stock Exchange towered over the surrounding buildings, which included scientific labs and Correctional Centers. Large screens flickered with a cascade of news updates.

A red flash cut across the news screens, grabbing Phoenix's attention. A stylish news reporter appeared, her presence commanding as she spoke. "Good morning, Babylon!" she announced brightly. "Another beautiful day in our vibrant city. Unemployment remains low, thanks to the savvy financial deals brokered by our Ten Kings. Though the rebel terrorist threat persists, our Militia has made significant arrests."

As the report played, a homeless man approached a line of patrons at a sidewalk hot dog vendor. His clothes were ragged, and his face bore the marks of hardship. He pleaded for money, desperation edging his voice. "Just a UN or two, please? It's been days since I've eaten, man."

The patrons turned away or shook their heads, ignoring him.

Phoenix subtly took a digital note out of his wallet and about to slide it to him, when the homeless man grabs a woman's arm, his eyes wild. "Open your eyes, sinners! The prophecy approaches—the end of days is near! A seven-year apocalypse! Jesus will return, and you'll all pay the price! Blood and fire!"

Phoenix steps in quickly, slips the note back into his pocket, and places his hand on the man's shoulder, pulling him away from the woman. "Alright, that's enough. Are you okay, miss?"

The woman, visibly relieved, nodded in silence. Phoenix whistled sharply, summoning two of his Militia soldiers who had just rounded the corner.

The soldiers took the homeless man by the arms, escorting him away.

The news reporter's voice continued in the background, "Let's eliminate misinformation and dissent together! Once all the Christians and Jews are found and educated, we can live in total peace and harmony."

The regal UN logo, adorned with a "10K" symbol in the center, flashed across the screens. As the logo illuminated the street, Phoenix and the citizens around him turned in unison, raising their right fists in salute. "Hail the Kings!" they chanted; their voices unified in loyalty.

"Hail the Kings!" Phoenix responded, his salute crisp and unwavering.

CHAPTER 2: RIGHTEOUS PERSECUTED

Inside the Central Correctional Facility, the stark white walls loomed overhead, casting an unyielding glow over the bustling activity. Staff in immaculate white uniforms moved mechanically, while armed guards kept a watchful eye, herding a line of captured rebels with a mix of disdain and duty.

General Hogan Bates, in his late fifties, a large man, scar across his right cheek, strolled casually down the corridor toward the front doors, where, at the front of the line of rebels, some guards had brought in a family they'd found camping in the woods somewhere around the facility. He was chewing gum so hard his jaw hurt and he had no idea why he was still chewing it. Looking around, there was no garbage pail anywhere along the corridor, and because he can, he presses his gum into one of the women rebel's hair. He continues walking with his tablet close to his chest, eyeing the rebels as he passes and completely apathetic toward them.

"Alright, let's get this over with." He growled when he reached the end of the family. All eyes were on him. They wanted to know what he was going to do with the family. The family consisted of a father, mother, child, and grandmother. They stood huddled together, their faces marked with fear.

"Ah, a mother and child," Hogan said, looking at each, speaking with a cold, satisfied tone. "Perfect candidates for our little operation." He curled his upper lip. These days it seemed all these rebels were starting to look alike. He held them all in contempt, just for being there.

"Please..." the mother said in a wobbly voice. "Let us stay together. Please, I beg of you."

Hogan froze where he was gazing at her in disbelief. That she had the audacity to even speak to him blew his mind. He wouldn't let his thoughts display on his face, though. He maintained the same stone expression before she baffled him with her arrogance.

“You! You!” He pointed with his digital pen to two of the guards and tapped it in the direction of the mother and child. The guards came trotting over obediently. “You.” He tapped one of them on the chest with the pen. The guard didn’t look away from his eyes. Hogan appreciated it when he got the respect he deserved and gave the guard a one-sided grin as a reward for his good behavior. “Take this woman to C section.”

Hogan moved to the other guard. “And you. Take the child to B... no.” He held up his hand when the guard went to move. He turned slowly. The guards had taken hold of the woman and the little girl by their arms, ready to lead them away.

Hogan wanted to prolong the agony for a little bit longer. He loved to drink it in and absorb the pain they emanated from their very souls. After all, other rebel prisoners who were standing in other lines, were watching. He had a point to make. “Please...” The woman was begging again. Hogan thought it was delicious. He wanted more. More begging. Now that someone had actually had the nerve to do it, he realized how much he liked it. It made his power seem even stronger, it made energy course through his body.

“Please don’t take her from me. Please...”

Hogan took the few steps between himself and the woman, moving so close they were almost touching nose to nose.

“When you become as enlightened as I am, woman, you know that responding to the pleas of the one begging by affirming that need and granting that wish only leads to more begging and more pleading, in the hopes that mercy and grace will prevail. It is a sad day for you today. Accept it and you will feel more peace.”

Hogan stepped away, turning abruptly to the second guard. “The woman goes to B. The child goes to E. Keep them as far apart from each other as you can.”

“No! No! Please! Please!” The mother’s wailings traveled through the corridor. Hogan closed his eyes and listened, relishing in the woman’s pain.

While Hogan had been dealing with the woman and child, other guards had been restraining the father and grandmother, both of whom were quite animated, struggling against the hands that held them back, covered their mouths and made their screams silent. It was amusing to watch the old woman in the wheelchair fighting against the guards who were on their feet and forty years younger at the least.

“You can’t do this!” the father yelled. “You can’t split us all apart like this! We are a family!” He continued to resist, but his efforts were futile against the superior force of the guards. Hogan raised a hand, stopping the guards with a curt gesture.

“We’re not savages,” he said, his tone almost mocking. “Keep these together.” He glanced at the father, a smirk playing at the corner of his mouth. “You—strong and healthy. You’ll make a fine addition to our seed program. Your future children will be honored to serve the Kings.”

The father was led away, his desperate pleas echoing down the corridor.

“I thought you were sending her with me! Mom! Mom! I love you, Mom!”

“I was just kidding about that!” Hogan called out after him. “Sorry!”

They might all look the same but Hogan had to give it to them. Some were much more vocal than others. That represented a fearless nature that they could really use on their side. Hogan’s attention shifted to the elderly grandmother, who sat with vacant eyes in her wheelchair.

“And the Undesirable,” Hogan mumbled. “Society’s dead weight. Looks like those vaccines didn’t quite do their job.” He glanced upwards at the glass ceiling, tapping his pen thoughtfully. “The Pit’s crowded, but I suppose they can fit one more.” A guard moved to take the grandmother’s wheelchair, but Hogan waved him off dismissively. “Leave the chair. No need to waste good scrap metal.”

The grandmother was roughly pulled from her wheelchair, her protests blending with the general clamor of the facility. Hogan took a seat in the abandoned chair, making notes

with detached amusement. He glanced up and watched as the two male guards who held the elderly woman ducked and dodged her flying arms and fists. They were small but powerful, Hogan thought, chuckling.

“Oh come now, boys. Surely you can restrain one little old woman. This is pathetic.”

In what Hogan could only classify as unnecessary roughness, one of the guards lifted the old woman off her feet and brought her down on her back with great force. “That’s enough!” he yelled in her face.

Trembling, the old woman looked up, saying in a breathless voice. “Lord, open their eyes. Let them see. Let him see, and let him reap what he sowed!”

“If your God cared so much, my dear,” Hogan retorted with a smug grin, “He wouldn’t have let you live so long. Maybe you’re the one who needs to open your eyes.”

With a final, condescending lift of his chin, Hogan gestured with his pen that they should take the woman away. He watched as the guards lifted her up from the ground and took her away screaming. Hogan didn’t care for the sound. It reminded him of his own grandmother when she’d become an Undesirable. It was their fate so they should just accept it.

Through a large glass window, he noticed a group of Militia guards marching by, led by his son, Phoenix. He could practically hear the steady thump of their boots through the glass. He hurried down the corridor to the double metal doors that led outside. He pressed the long bar to open one of them and stepped out into the bright sunlight.

Shielding his eyes from the sun, he called out to the marching men. “Boys!”

Phoenix and his men all stopped at the same time, turned and offered a sharp, precise salute. Hogan was especially proud of Phoenix. His son was brave and confident, everything he’d been at his son’s age. He was determined that Phoenix carry on the family legacy and he looked on the fast track for doing just that.

Hogan puffed out his chest. He was proud but he didn't let it overshadow protocol and professionalism. Phoenix turned to his men and told them to be at ease. Then he turned back to Hogan, remaining stiff until his father was directly in front of him. He could only relax then, though not completely.

"Where's the hunt today?" Hogan asked looking at Phoenix. He was taken aback when one of the guards answered instead, "Heading to a suspected terrorist penthouse downtown, sir. We've got a nest of vermin to clear out."

"Careful, this one's got a thing for heights," Hogan warned, giving Phoenix a decisive glare.

Phoenix winced slightly. "General, I thought you were headed for Jerusalem?"

"Bogged down for a few more days," Hogan responded, shrugging. "Even I have to answer to someone. But that'll change." Hogan looked down at his left knee with a small amount of hatred. It was because of that he was taken off the active duty he'd been on.

"How's the knee?" Phoenix asked, genuine concern evident in his voice. Hogan was glad to hear it.

"Turns out, vermin skulls are tougher than they look," Hogan said, clearing his throat. A few chuckles cut through the tension.

"We'd better get going, sir. General," Phoenix said.

"Give 'em hell for your mother, Major," Hogan exclaimed, stepping over and slapping Phoenix on the shoulder with a hearty thud. "I know she'd be very proud of you. And don't forget dinner at Angelo's tomorrow, in Jerusalem!"

Phoenix's team moves off, while shaking Hogan's hand, "I'll be there, in fact, I'll be there this evening, they found rebel's hub near Jerusalem, going to check it out.

Hogan's gaze returned to his tablet, and notices an appointment reminder. Phoenix heads out.

CHAPTER 3: TEMPLE'S FINISHING TOUCHES

Hogan approached a door marked "Josh Angelos – Chief Architect." The door featured a retina scanner that buzzed softly as it scanned Hogan's eyes, granting him access.

"Welcome, General Bates," a female AI voice intoned as the door slid open. Inside, Josh Angelos's office was a chaotic mix of papers, temple schematics, and hologram monitors. Josh, in his late fifties with a prominent nose and thinning hair, was engrossed in a virtual blueprint at the far end of the room. He looked up in surprise as Hogan entered, hastily adjusting his glasses.

"Hogan! I... I mean... General!" Josh stammered. "Yes, of course!"

Hogan, his demeanor commanding, replied, "Perfect time for a homecoming, don't you think? It's been far too long since I've set foot on that sacred ground." He moved to the desk next to the area where Josh was working and took a seat in the comfortable office chair. He sat forward, staring at the man as he tapped on the pad in his hands.

Josh, still grappling with Hogan's sudden presence, nodded vigorously. His heart beat hard in his chest. It took a moment to get over being frazzled and in the meantime, he stared at the pad as if it was the only thing he would ever see again.

"Yes, General! We're just finalizing the designs for the exterior of the New Temple. Everything will be ready in time for the opening ceremony."

Hogan picked up a Star of David ornament from Josh's desk, twirling it between his fingers with a raised eyebrow before setting it down dismissively. His attention shifted to the virtual blueprint projected next to the desk where Josh was working with a large electronic pad in his hands.

"Much better than that eyesore, the Dome of the Rock. Glad they got rid of it," Hogan remarked. "Zoom in right there. Yeah. Let me read that..." He was silent a moment or two while he took in what he was reading. "And this is all per the Kings' instructions, right?"

Josh's hands twitched nervously as he pointed at details on the hologram with a laser pen, saying, "These follow the parameters laid out in the Book of Ezekiel, just as the Kings directed. I've double-checked everything. As you can see here, we've been able to perfect this area and this area where we were having trouble because of the ground underneath the foundation. We've..."

Hogan held up one hand. "I don't need all the details. Is everything going to be ready this week?"

"Yes, General." Josh turned off his laser pointer and slid it in the breast pocket of his white lab coat.

"Good," Hogan murmured, covering his chin with one hand and resting that elbow on the other fist, which rested on the desk. He scanned the hologram, sighing. It looked perfect and satisfactory to him. "A real masterpiece of unity. Showing the world that while we honor the past, we're all about building a brighter future. Zoom out, let me see more of it." As Josh zoomed out on the blueprint, he noticed a peculiar detail off to the side. "What's this?"

Hogan got up and went over to the hologram, moving around the desk. He leaned to one side as if that would help him see it better. He tilted his head for even more effect. Was that really what he thought it was?

He pointed at it and turned blazing eyes to Josh, who was at least six inches shorter and much weaker than Hogan. He watched the man cowering as he replied, hesitatingly, "A clinic—well, a 'vaccination clinic.' It's modeled after the one we have here at the Central Correctional Facility."

Hogan's brow furrowed. That's what he'd thought it was. He turned narrowed eyes to Josh. "What's going on? Who ordered this? We're supposed to eradicate these people, not help them."

Josh quickly added, "It incorporates tracers—nanotech tracers, in every vaccine."

Hogan's expression softened slightly as he considered this. With a tap on Josh's chest with one thick index finger, he said, "Track the vermin to their nests. Smart."

Hogan really felt like he'd seen enough. He returned to the desk and with a swift move, unlatched the window and pushed it open. For no other reason than he wanted some fresh air. It was too stuffy in the room full of books and paper.

With a mighty swoosh, a burst of wind came in the room, causing a sudden tornado of papers and light pamphlets or short stories flying through the air and then drifting down to the floor like a million tiny parachutes.

Hogan reclined in Josh's chair as if nothing had happened, propping up his sore knee while Josh scrambled to gather his scattered papers. Hogan gazed out the window, lost in thought.

After a few glances back to see if Josh was done tidying up, he said, "Well, I'd better get back to it. We still on for tomorrow —dinner in Jerusalem? Flights pending?"

Josh, looking both relieved and anxious, nodded. "Yes, and thank you for putting in a good word—Abigail was accepted at the hospital in Jerusalem."

Hogan's face twisted with a hint of smug satisfaction. "Of course. Glad to help. Let me know if you need me again." With a final hearty pat on the back, Hogan exited the office, leaving Josh behind.

CHAPTER 4: RENDEZVOUS JERUSALEM

As the golden hues of the setting sun bathed the desert mountains of east of Jerusalem.

Matt, in his early twenties with extremely small round glasses that framed bright green eyes and messy light brown hair, crouched beside Manfred, who, despite his silly French mustache, and being Italian, had an undeniable British tan. Their hearts raced with a mix of awe and trepidation as they spied on a remarkable sight below.

A large group of men, draped in flowing white linen tunics, had gathered in a sunlit clearing, their faces glowing with a peaceful radiance. They huddled together, pouring over ancient sacred scrolls, their voices rising and falling like a gentle melody.

“Look at them,” Matt whispered, eyes wide with wonder. “They’re reading the Scriptures. We should go join them!”

Manfred’s expression turned grave, a frown creasing his brow. “No, Matt. You can’t just approach them. They are the holy Israelites—set apart for a specific purpose. Just in case you ask, I don’t know. I heard it from Sofia.”

“But they look... so serene,” Matt replied, his voice tinged with longing. “What harm could it do to simply stand with them? Maybe they could offer us guidance.”

“Guidance?” Manfred shook his head vehemently. “They’ve been fasting for days. They’re probably delirious with hunger right now.”

A silence enveloped them as they observed the group, but the desert's tranquility soon gave way to a sense of urgency.

“Come on,” Manfred finally said, glancing toward the horizon where the sun dipped lower. “We need to get back to the warehouse.”

Amidst the clutter of maps, charts, and high-tech military equipment, they worked with frenzied urgency. Manfred moved around a desk, stuffing maps and charts marked with a red cross watermark into backpacks.

“Where are you headed?” Manfred asked, glancing at Matt, who was helping to pack, a mixture of curiosity and amusement in his eyes.

Matt pointed upwards, a determined spark in his gaze. Manfred chuckled softly, adjusting his backpack with a gesture of resigned familiarity. “I give you that; you’re consistent,” he remarked with a wry smile.

“I wish you could see what I see,” Matt replied earnestly.

“I deal in only what I see,” Manfred countered.

“Nonsense. It’s a shame your prejudice and pride keep you blind to the Biblical events unfolding before your eyes. Take care, brother,” Matt said, extending a hand in farewell.

With a chuckle, Manfred clasped his hand. With a final nod, he departed, bags in tow, while Matt turned back to the chaos of the warehouse, feeling the weight of the world pressing down but resolute in his belief that they were part of something much greater.

Moments after they had both escaped, the soldiers moved in with cold precision, sifting through the debris-strewn floor. They tossed aside banned books, crumpled blueprints, and discarded hard drives with careless disregard. Major Phoenix Bates, despite the early hour, had a sharpness to his gaze that cut through the confusion.

He kneeled by a pile of discarded papers detailing homemade pipe bomb recipes—a sobering reminder of the threats that lurked in the shadows of this world. With a frown of concentration, he gathered the papers and tucked them under his arm. “Secure anything valuable for the Investigative Squad,” Phoenix instructed. “Disarm and pack up the weapons. And make sure they know this city isn’t theirs to claim!”

The soldiers sprang into action, and once they'd carried out his orders they torched the building, leaving behind a rising plume of smoke. The warehouse erupted into a blazing inferno, dark smoke curling upwards into the sky.

Later, in the Militia quarters' locker room buzzing with the chatter of off-duty soldiers, polished lockers lined the walls like vigilant sentinels, reflecting the harsh fluorescent lights overhead.

Phoenix, his face etched with the weariness of a long day, emerged from the showers wrapped in a towel. He made his way to his locker, where Sergeant Ahmad Shiekh in his twenties, heavily tattooed, no-nonsense kind of guy, standing in his way with a cheeky grin.

"Here's the teacher's pet!" Ahmad called out, his tone a playful mix of mockery and camaraderie. "Had to work overtime just to make us look bad, huh?"

Phoenix, a smirk tugging at his lips despite his exhaustion, responded, "Actually, I was covering for your lazy ass, Shiekh. The General said your arrest numbers were embarrassing." The locker room erupted into hoots and hollers at the exchange.

Ahmad's grin widened as he shrugged off the jibes. "We're hitting Newton's for happy hour. You joining us for once?"

Phoenix shook his head, swiftly changing into a button-down shirt and dabbing a splash of cologne on his neck. "Got plans."

Ahmad raised an eyebrow, his grin turning mischievous. "What's her name, lover boy?"

"None of your business," Phoenix shot back.

"Hey, fellas, Bates here is ditching us for some new lady friend!" Ahmad announced, drawing a chorus of playful boos and catcalls from the men. Phoenix chuckled, shaking his head as he closed his locker and prepared to leave.

CHAPTER 5: COMPASSION OR MERCY

The night at Jerusalem Hospital was quiet, punctuated only by the soft patter of Abigail's footsteps along the linoleum floors of the psychiatric hospital. Abigail, a petite and attractive young woman in her mid-twenties with brunette hair, moved through the corridors calmly. Her crisp white lab coat fluttered slightly with each step, while the pastel-colored scarf tied around her neck provided a splash of color against the sterile backdrop. It was 2 A.M. It had been a long shift.

In the staff room, Abigail hung her lab coat neatly on a hook and approached the mirror. She adjusted her hair and examined the dark circles under her eyes. With a weary sigh, she walked out of the room.

Abigail exited the building and quickly spotted Phoenix waiting for her, a single flower in hand. A smile broke across her face as she hurried toward him. Phoenix's arms opened to embrace her. They shared a warm hug and made their way to a nearby park bench. As they settled down, Phoenix lay his head in Abigail's lap, looking up at her.

Abigail gazed down at him, her fingers gently running through his hair. She played with the flower in her other hand. "What a day," she began softly. "So many people just... broken, clinging to religion like it's all they have left."

Phoenix looked up at her. "Can't imagine," he replied with a hint of sarcasm. He reached up, taking her hand in his, his touch warm and reassuring. He brought it to his lips and kissed it gently. Looks at his watch. Maybe he understood how she felt. Or maybe she was just fooling him with her beauty and charm. Either way, his heart thumped for her each and every day. "It's officially early morning. Are you nervous about the dinner tonight?"

Abigail softened. "A little. I already know my mom's going to be a wreck. She's so worried about Matt. We never know what is going to come out of his mouth. And we also know your dad."

Phoenix's brows furrowed slightly. "Have you heard from Matt since he left?"

Abigail shook her head, her gaze distant. "No. He's always been a bit... lost, you know? He used to say he didn't fit in anywhere. Maybe being home will help."

Phoenix gave her hand a comforting squeeze. "You're a good sister." A smile touched Abigail's lips. "What about you? Ready for your dad?"

Phoenix chuckled, though his eyes betrayed his apprehension. "Weeks feel like months with that guy. He'll probably spend the whole time grilling me about when I'm getting promoted to Lt. Colonel." His mood shifted, growing somber. "He'd lose it if I ever told him that I was seeing you, a Jewish girl. Sorry, an ex-Jewish girl. I wish he wasn't so hard-headed, so stuck in his ways. But my mom, I wish she had met you, she would've loved you and these ridiculous scarves."

Abigail playfully punched him on the shoulder. "Did you pick this from the bushes out front?" she asked, her tone teasing as she touched his nose with the flower.

Phoenix froze for a moment, caught off guard. He crossed his eyes to look at the flower and followed its movement before sliding his eyes to meet hers. His heart thumped hard.

"No?" he said, the word trailing off uncertainly. Her lips twitched. Before she could react further, he leaned in and captured them in a kiss. She laughed softly, her breath against his lips giving him chills.

"I want to show you something," she whispered.

#

Abigail and Phoenix made their way along an abandoned street, the walls marred by graffiti. The few shops that lined the street were boarded up, with other windows shattered. A few stray pieces of trash fluttered across the empty road, driven by a soft wind. Phoenix was on high alert, his gaze darting from shadow to shadow.

“It’s just a little further,” Abigail said as she gently pulled Phoenix along, her arm linked through his. “I know it looks bad here, but we’re almost there.”

Phoenix’s eyes remained cautious as he glanced around. “I’m not sure this is a good idea,” he murmured in a low voice. “This place is... well, it’s pretty rough.” He surveyed the abandoned street, his discomfort growing with each step. “Do you know how many arrests I’ve made on this street? I hope you don’t come here alone.”

They approached an old, rusted dumpster hidden in the recesses of an alleyway. Abigail crouched beside it. Phoenix flicked on his flashlight, the beam cutting through the darkness beneath the dumpster. The light revealed the outline of something small and trembling. Abigail’s voice was filled with compassion. “Can you hear him? He’s so scared.”

Phoenix, kneeling beside her, squinted into the dimness. “It’s a dog!” he exclaimed. He shifted the flashlight so the beam was on her face. She squinted and put one hand up. He quickly moved the light away, feeling exasperated. “You brought me out here for a dog?! What were you doing out here in the first place?”

“What were you expecting?” she asked, her voice equally annoyed.

“I don’t know but it wasn’t this.” Phoenix shook his head, directing the light back toward the ground so it wouldn’t be in her eyes or the dog’s.

Abigail’s hands were already at work, trying to shift the heavy dumpster. She paused, glancing up at Phoenix. “I couldn’t just leave him here. Help me get him out of there. I think he’s trapped, mostly too scared to move.”

Phoenix hesitated, and after a moment, he let out a reluctant sigh. “Alright.” With a coordinated effort, they maneuvered the heavy dumpster away from the wall. The space underneath gradually became visible, and Abigail quickly grabbed a couple of old towels from her work bag. She held out her arms and slowly got closer to the animal.

“Come on, little guy,” she whispered softly. “We’re here to help.”

A tiny, shivering ball of fur emerged from the shadows, its eyes wide with fear. It took a few steps, then a few more while she cooed at it. When it stopped and lowered its head, its tail pressed firmly between its legs, Phoenix could tell it wasn't coming any closer.

"Just go to it," he said softly so he wouldn't scare it off. "It's not gonna move anymore."

Abigail glanced back at him with a look he couldn't quite decipher. Was she amused? Why would she be amused?

Abigail did what he said, stepping forward with her knees just a few inches at a time until she could reach out and wrap the puppy carefully in the towels.

Phoenix kept the flashlight away from their eyes, keeping the area lit just enough to see. He was grateful for his powerful flashlight. The overhead lights on the street did nothing for the dumpster in the alleyway. If logic reigned, that's where the lights would be because that's where possible crimes would be committed. In the alley.

Shrugging off his thoughts, he observed in a soft tone, "He's so tiny... shakin' like a leaf. Cold and afraid," Phoenix felt his earlier reluctance fading into concern.

Abigail nodded, her gaze fixed on the small puppy. She stood up, holding it against her chest. "Yeah, he's just scared and alone. We need to get him out of here and find him a home." Phoenix took the bundle from Abigail's arms, cradling the puppy, handing over his flashlight.

The tiny creature licked his face, its tail wagging weakly. As Phoenix looked down at the puppy, his tough exterior seemed to melt away. One side of his lips lifted and he tilted his head. "You're kinda cute, Casper," he said.

"Oh, that's his name, is it?" asked Abigail with a smile.

Phoenix shrugged, keeping his eyes on the puppy. "I think he kinda looks like a Casper. He doesn't to you?"

Abigail's smile was warm and inviting. He wanted to kiss her again but restrained himself. He had a puppy to take care of now. The thought made him feel young again, very young, like a little boy. He'd wanted a dog when he was ten. He remembered that's what he'd asked his parents to get him. Nothing else. Just a dog.

But his dad didn't want one. He said training a boy to become a man would be hard enough without the added distraction of an animal.

Phoenix was surprised he'd never thought of that memory before. He felt a small twist in his chest. He couldn't remember ever being angry at his father as an adult. But that was anger he felt and he didn't like it. Without thinking, he squeezed the puppy gently, hugging it like he would have when he was ten. Was it logical to have a pet when he was always in danger? Maybe it was time to throw caution to the wind. Maybe this dog would help him be a better soldier and fight along with him. He could train him?

Abigail didn't try to take the puppy back. When she continued down the street, he followed her holding the wrapped puppy in his arms. It was quiet. All Phoenix could hear was the breeze blowing trash down the street. He wondered where everyone was. Hiding? The puppy didn't make a sound. He looked down and it appeared to have fallen asleep. His heart warmed over for the animal.

They turned a corner and Abigail stopped abruptly, grabbing his arm with the hand not holding the flashlight. She directed it on a homeless man sitting on the sidewalk. His weary face was partially obscured by a comically oversized beanie, and he was surrounded by a few possessions and a tattered blanket. His eyes lit up in the light and he held up a hand to cover it. She lowered the beam.

"I'm sorry," she said sharply. "I didn't expect to see you there."

"It's no problem," the man's voice was gravelly when he replied. "You wouldn't happen to have any food, would ya? I ain't eaten in a long time."

With a kind smile, Abigail knelt next to him. “As a matter of fact, I do. I have a lunch in here I prepared and a bottle of water. I brought two and you can have both.”

She pulled her work bag around her body to set it on the ground. Phoenix looked on as she rummaged through the duffel bag and brought out a small grocery bag that was tied shut. She handed it to him and brought out a bottle of water next.

Phoenix smirked when Abigail pulled the sides of the bag up and pretended to look deeper for the other bottle. “Where is it?” she said, her voice muffled because her whole face was inside the bag. The older man chuckled. Abigail looked up at him, grinning wide knowing that Phoenix was watching.

“I’m just messing with you. I wish this bag was that deep. I’d just go ahead and live in it.”

Phoenix was impressed with the friendly way Abigail treated the man on the street. He took the second water bottle and lifted it in a salute to her.

“Thank you for all this, Miss,” he said. His eyes skirted up to Phoenix and he nodded.

Phoenix nodded back.

“Can I bless you with something?” the street man asked sincerely.

Abigail nodded. “Of course. We appreciate receiving blessings as much as giving them.”

The man extends his hand, “I don’t have much, but what I have I give you.” He touches her hand with a trembling gesture as he begins to pray. “Heavenly Father, touch her with your presence, in Jesus’ name, Amen.” He opens his eyes and smiles at her.

The words of the prayer had an immediate and unsettling effect on Phoenix. His face tightened as did his arms on the puppy. He looked down, regretting that he’d let his heart soften.

“Come on. We have to go.” He left the words sounding stale in the air, pulling Abigail and leading her away from the man. He glanced back over his shoulder to see the man was staring at them.

Abigail looked shocked and dismayed. “What... what are you doing, Phoenix?”

Phoenix had to harden his heart and look away from her face. He retrieved his military phone from its pocket in his jacket, shifting the puppy to one arm. It woke up but went back to sleep without prompting. Pressing the buttons, he put out the call.

They’d only made it halfway up the block when a squad car sped past them, coming to a screeching halt behind them. Abigail spun around. Phoenix didn’t need to. He knew the men would remove the homeless man with unnecessary force. That’s what they were trained to do.

Abigail screamed and started back toward the Militia men. Phoenix couldn’t let her get involved and he knew it. Reluctantly, he grabbed her arm, preventing her from getting closer to the scene. He glanced up and saw two men beating on the homeless man with batons. They were ruthless and the possible rebel wasn’t fighting back. He was holding his arms over his head and receiving most of the blows to them.

“Stop! Please, stop!” Abigail shouted, her voice cracking with desperation as she struggled to get away from Phoenix’s strong grip. His face was a mask of sorrow as he tried to pull her away from the violence.

“Abi, Abigail, it’s the law. Plus, this could’ve been a social test for us.” His voice was laced with sadness. “That man could have been a plant, placed there. You know how these things work.”

Abigail struggled against him, her face contorted with anguish. “But this is still wrong! They’re hurting him!”

Phoenix's grip remained firm as he turned her away. "We can't interfere. Abi. Come on. It's too dangerous. Let's get out of here before they see the dog. At least we saved him."

The militia continued their ruthless assault on the helpless old man as the young couple left him and his bag of food crushed. Abigail wobbled away with her face in her hands, tears sliding between her fingers. Phoenix walked with as much dignity as he could muster, blocking out the sounds behind him.

"You didn't have to call on him..." Abigail mumbled through her tears.

"You know I did," Phoenix replied.

It was not lost on Abigail that Phoenix had not disagreed with her.

CHAPTER 6: FAMILY DIVIDED

Josh's home in Jerusalem bore the marks of pride and accomplishment while still maintaining a modest atmosphere. The living room was decorated with a UN logo on the wall, the 10K symbol prominently displayed in the center. Rachel, Josh's wife, was busy adjusting a "WELCOME HOME" banner, her nerves evident as she fussed over its placement. Her dyed black hair was pulled tightly into a bun, and her anxiety manifested in her fidgeting hands.

"It's crooked," she insisted, holding one end of the banner up and pulling away to look at Josh on the other side. He had already attached the plastic hook and was climbing down from the chair he'd been on. He stood back.

Josh tried to placate her. "It's fine. Are your contacts in?"

Rachel scowled at him, scanning the banner again. "I'm telling you, it's crooked!" she responded sharply.

Josh sighed, shaking his head. "Pull it up on that side just a bit. A little more. There now it's good. Matt's been out in the desert for two years. Do you really think he'll notice?"

Rachel darted back to him, her eyes flashing with annoyance. Josh loved his wife but he knew she was a perfectionist. Everything had to be just right. "It's the first time the family's been together in ages. I want it to be perfect. And where's Abigail? She should have been here by now."

Josh shrugged. He wasn't surprised by that at all. "Probably with that new boyfriend. She said his family is also in town for the Temple unveiling."

Rachel's frustration was evident. Josh knew how she felt about the new boyfriend, too. His wife was nothing but an open book. She was like that with everyone. If she had an opinion on something, she was going to let everyone know. Her brave attitude

“Ah, the boyfriend we’ve heard about but never met,” she said, scoffing as she climbed down from the step ladder and joined Josh on the other side of the table to look at it from the doorway. He looked at her to see if she would approve of its straightness or not. She didn’t seem to register any emotions and instead turned her narrowed eyes to him. “And why is Hogan coming again? This is supposed to be a family gathering.”

Josh raised his eyebrows, turning his gaze to survey the room. Rachel had clearly been waiting for this day. “Hogan kind of invited himself. I couldn’t refuse, especially after he helped get Abi that job. Besides, he is my boss.”

Rachel finally seemed satisfied with the banner’s position and turned her attention to the table. “I think it all looks good now, Josh.”

Josh nodded, glad they weren’t going to fuss over the banner anymore. If he was honest, he thought one side of it was drooping a little. He wasn’t going to tell her that and he didn’t think Matt would notice or care.

A knock at the door alerted them. Josh and Rachel exchanged a glance, both heading for the front door together. He stayed back while she grabbed the knob and pulled it open.

“Surprise! Welcome home!” they exclaimed, Rachel throwing her arms in the air. Josh felt a vacuum effect when he saw it was Hogan.

The older man gave them an amused look. He held up a crate of “Gold Star Export” beer with a grin. “Sorry, it’s just me. Don’t look so disappointed. I brought good stuff.”

Josh took the beer, forcing a smile. “Wonderful to see you, General. Welcome to our home.”

Hogan stepped inside, surveying the room with an air of familiarity. “It’s just Hogan tonight, please. We’re practically family, right?” Josh nodded, though Rachel’s nerves were evident as she watched Hogan’s inspection with wary eyes.

“Make yourself comfortable,” Josh offered, taking the beer to the table under the banner and setting it in an open space. It was really a good brand. He turned to look at his boss, who strode in with his usual confident air. He took everything in and dropped into one of the recliners.

Hogan inhaled deeply, savoring the air. “The place looks exactly the same. It’s been far too long. We’ve missed Jerusalem. Feels good to be back.”

Another knock at the door interrupted the moment.

“That must be him!” Rachel said, hurrying to answer. Josh watched as she didn’t bother to get everyone else ready. She yanked open the door and yelled, “Surprise!”

Abigail walked in, absorbed in her phone, looking up at Rachel with a confused glance.

“Thanks, Rach. I forgot my key.” Abigail seemed to study Rachel’s perturbed face for a moment before grinning. “It’s okay, Rachel. You are always the prepared one. But maybe look through the window before you yell it out, right?”

Rachel shook her head, looking back at Josh, who came in the foyer behind her.

“Did you hear, how our daughter speaks to me?”

“Where have you been?” Josh asked. “Weren’t you supposed to be back an hour ago?”

“It’s that new boyfriend of hers,” Rachel said, clearly annoyed. “He’s taking all her time away from the family.”

Abigail groaned, rolling her eyes. “Just out for some air.” She stepped into the living room and looked at the banner and table. “Nice,” she said offhandedly. She settled her eyes on Hogan when he spoke.

“Boyfriend? Wasn’t she in diapers just yesterday?”

Abigail blushed. “Hi, General Bates. I haven’t been in diapers for over two decades.”

The General laughed.

“You should have brought your new man, Abi. So he can meet the family. When are you going to let us meet him?” Rachel came in the room behind her, immediately going to the table and adjusting a few things.

Josh was still at the door, his back to it. He turned to close it and was confronted by a tall, wide young man, who was smiling and holding out a bottle of wine.

“Am I late?” Phoenix asked in a friendly voice.

“Not at all, son,” Hogan said with a warm smile. “The party doesn’t start until you get here.”

Phoenix followed Josh into the house, turning his head and making admiring sounds with his mouth. He presented the wine to Rachel on a grandiose way. “Mrs. Angelos, I brought this for you. And thank you both for inviting me.”

He halted when he looked at Abigail, who was back to looking at her phone, though she’d taken a seat. She looked very relaxed, one leg over the arm rest of the chair she was in.

Josh held his hand out to sweep it from one side of the room to another. “Go ahead and take a seat anywhere, Phoenix.”

At the mention of his name, Phoenix noticed Abigail’s eyes flit up to his face. He was glad his name got her attention. He was even more glad to see the smile that came to her face.

“Hey, Abi,” he said, lifting one hand and waving.

“Phoenix,” Abigail greeted him. “How’s Casper?”

Phoenix strolled over and sat down in a chair near hers. She scanned him and he sensed she was uncomfortable with him. He knew why. She hadn’t forgiven him for

turning in the homeless man. But he still wanted to kiss her every time he saw her but held himself back. It would take time and maybe some effort on his part but he would get a chance to kiss her again. He could feel it in his bones.

“I found the perfect home for him.” He wouldn’t tell her he’d decided to keep the pup and train him to be a soldier, too. She probably wouldn’t like that idea.

“I’m glad to hear that,” Abigail responded in a flat tone.

Phoenix noticed the others in the room were staring at them with curious expressions. A shuffling sound made them all look through the open door into the foyer.

What they saw made all of them surge to their feet, even Abigail, who tossed her phone on the chair behind her as she followed the others to the foyer.

Josh grabbed Matt, who had stumbled in. He was unshaven and disheveled. Something had happened to him.

“Matt! Are you okay?” Josh asked, grabbing the young man by the shoulders and holding him up. Matt dropped his dirty backpack to the floor, allowing Josh to comfort him. Rachel went to them and put her arms around her son.

“I’m home,” Matt murmured, closing his eyes, allowing his parents to comfort him. “I’m home.”

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The dining room was filled with the sounds of clinking glasses and murmured conversation as the families finished off the main course. Matt sat quietly at the end, lost in thought.

“I guess no one wants dessert now,” Rachel joked. All the men, except Matt, held their hands up as if they were in a classroom. She laughed, pushing away from the table.

“I’ll help clear the plates,” Abigail offered, standing up and gathering hers and the two next to her up.

“Let me give you a hand!” Phoenix jumped up, bumping the table, forcing Abigail to grab a glass before it tipped over. She looked up at his blushing face and laughed softly.

“Thank you,” she said. Phoenix got the distinct impression she might be edging toward forgiving him. They headed to the kitchen together.

Hogan finished off his beer and settled the bottle down on the table, turning to Rachel as she also gathered the empty plates.

“Rachel, wonderful meal! It’s been a while since I’ve had home-cooked food. It’s nice to have both families together like this. Just like old times. Sarah would’ve loved it.”

Josh nodded in acknowledgment. Rachel reached down with her free hand and squeezed Hogan’s, her eyes and voice sympathetic. “You must miss her.”

Hogan’s normally stiff stance softened. “I do. Phoenix and I both do. But she would have been proud of what we’re doing, the advancements we’ve made under the Kings. And in her honor, I won’t rest until every fundamental Christian and Jew is captured, reeducated, and brought to peace.” He cleared his throat and changed the subject.

“So, Josh, the Temple—everything on track? No hiccups?”

Josh shook his head, though his chest instantly tightened when he was asked the question. There was a reason his family was so tense when Hogan was around. The military man was not the type to tolerate anyone with views different from his own. Josh walked a fine line but knew his son would not. He hoped Matt wouldn’t bring attention to himself.

“Everything is on track, General.”

“Not General tonight, just Hogan.”

Josh nodded and tried to look at ease but if his boss didn't want to be called boss, he shouldn't be bringing up work. They were celebrating Matt's return. He didn't want to talk about business right then.

Hogan didn't care what Josh wanted, though, and that was obvious. The man was aware of Matt's ideology but didn't hesitate to put it in the young man's face whenever he could.

Hogan's gaze turned to Matt. "Having such a renowned temple built on the plans of your Jewish forefathers is a big deal. You must be proud of what your father has accomplished."

Matt didn't respond, though he did look Hogan in the eyes unwaveringly. Josh was proud of his son and scared for him at the same time.

Matt showed no signs of amusement when he let out a sharp laugh.

Hogan raised his eyebrows. "Something funny, Matt?"

Matt hesitated. He glanced at his father. Josh shook his head. Matt returned his eyes to Hogan. "Is it really something to celebrate? Ironic don't you think—a Temple without God?"

Hogan's gaze hardened. "What kind of camp did you go to again?" His tone was edged with menace. Rachel's face turned pale as she got up to get the coffee pitcher. She'd noticed Hogan's coffee cup was nearing empty. She hurried to pour it, trying not to let her hands tremble as she did so.

"He went to a wellness retreat," she said in a wobbly voice. She cleared her throat and looked at her husband, who was stoic. Josh's jaw was clearly clenched tight. She felt a measure of anxiety.

Hogan scoffed. "Come on, I wasn't born yesterday. He's been out in the desert with those sandal-wearing hippies."

Rachel returned to the kitchen, setting the pitcher on the counter and taking a deep breath. She returned to the dining room where her husband looked visibly distressed. Abigail was right behind her with a tray of desserts.

Phoenix was right behind her with a fresh pot of iced sweet tea.

Both Abigail and Phoenix set their things down, looking around at the tense faces.

“What’s going on in here?” Phoenix asked. “Did we take too long with the desserts? Just so you know, Abigail held me hostage in the kitchen, trying Mrs. Angelos’ famous brownies.”

Abigail let out a soft laugh, smiling weakly, “And one clearly wasn’t enough. You had to sample four?” She glanced at him.

Phoenix chuckled, taking another brownie off the plate, holding up five fingers as he popped it into his mouth. The tension was broken by their behavior, though Hogan was unable to let it go completely. Rachel was just glad he let it go at all. Josh felt the same, considering he knew exactly what his boss was like at work and it was for that reason he never invited the man.

Hogan, true to fashion, raised his glass for a toast. “I’d like to make a toast to the Kings, who’ve brought us all together again to celebrate their cause. Hail the Kings.”

Hogan raised his fist toward the UN logo on the wall. Everyone but Matt followed suit.

As the toast concluded, Hogan’s gaze lingered on Matt. “Matt, aren’t you going to honor our Kings, who brought us peace through science and unity?”

Matt looked up at him, his eyes narrow. He held his voice steady as he responded, not wanting to disrespect his parents. “True science? Peace? You asked about the camp I went to. It was a camp for peace, for those who can think for themselves without being forced to conform. There’s only one true King, and you don’t know Him.”

Phoenix interrupted when his father sat forward in his chair. In his experience, when Hogan did that, it meant he was ready for a long, harsh debate. This wasn't the time or the place for that. "Well, that's quite a statement, Matt. Let's focus on celebrating your return and less on politics."

Hogan's eyes narrowed at his son. He knew why Phoenix had spoken up. He wasn't too keen on having this heavy discussion in the home of his employee either. And he had told them he was there on an unofficial basis.

He sat back, taking another sip of wine. He didn't fail to notice the relief on Josh and Phoenix's faces. "He's your son, Josh," he said, his tone firm but tinged with the hint of an old friend's exasperation. "I'm your friend. I'll overlook this outburst for now, but you need to think seriously about sending him to the correction facilities before it's too late."

Matt, his face flushed with anger, shot back defiantly. "You mean the concentration camps."

Before anyone could react, Rachel slapped Matt's cheek. The room fell into stunned silence, the sting of the slap hanging in the air.

Phoenix stood up abruptly, another brownie half-eaten on his plate. "Thank you for your hospitality," Phoenix said, his voice tight. He glanced at Josh and Rachel. As he headed for the door, Abigail went behind him. She reached down to Matt as she passed him, grabbing his hand and pulling him behind her. He went willingly.

Rachel, her face pale and trembling, turned to Hogan. "I'm so sorry. He didn't mean it."

Phoenix gave Abigail a look of regret and sympathy at the door. He tapped her on the chin with his fist. "It's going to be all right."

She just stared at him without any expression. Phoenix headed for the car, she and Matt sat on the porch swing side by side.

Hogan, standing and clearly agitated, shook his head as he grabbed his coat. "If he were just some kid spouting Rebel propaganda like that... well, let's just say he'd be getting very acquainted with those camps he knows so little about." Rachel moved into Josh's arms as Hogan stormed out of the house.

"Don't be late tomorrow," he shot over his shoulder as he stomped to his EV Truck, ignoring Matt and Abigail on the porch swing.

Josh was stunned by the turn of events. He was angry with his wife for slapping Matt when he'd just returned home. He was upset with Matt for speaking up when he knew his job would be in jeopardy, not to mention the safety of the entire family.

He buried his face in his hands, leaning forward in his chair. The silence in the house was deafening, weighing down on him as if he carried the world on his shoulders.

Rachel took a nervous sip of wine, glancing at her husband and turning her eyes to the front window where she could see her two children on the porch swing. They were talking. She wondered what the topic was. Did Matt hate her now? She shouldn't have slapped him. Regret filled her. She took another, longer sip of wine. The once festive atmosphere was now dark, unhappy and strained.

CHAPTER 7: FEAST OF TRUMPETS

The afternoon sun blazed fiercely over Jerusalem, casting an unrelenting light on the bustling street as the Bates and Angelos families made their way through the crowd. They were dressed in their finest attire, with the notable exception of Matt, who evidently didn't feel the need to dress up for this occasion. Still he was clean and casual and looked confident.

Hogan walked alongside Phoenix, casting frequent, disapproving glances back at Matt, who was several paces behind them and not paying them any attention at all. He looked happy and talked to the vendors as they passed by.

"Why is he here?" Hogan's voice was low and tinged with irritation.

Phoenix, maintaining a calm demeanor, replied, "They've brainwashed him in the desert. This is his chance to see things for himself. Let him witness the Kings—truth has a way of winning people over." His gaze flicked toward Abigail, who was walking on her own, looking at the wares people were selling on the sidewalk.

As they wove through the crowded streets, militia patrols acknowledge Phoenix with respectful nods, leading the families through the sea of spectators and vendors. Hogan tapped Phoenix on the shoulder and pointed to a preacher standing on a stack of crates nearby.

"Tell the boys to sweep the street. Looks like some are still slipping through," Hogan instructed.

"On it," Phoenix replied, signaling to his men.

The preacher's voice, amplified by a makeshift speaker, cut through the noise of the crowd. "My brothers, my sisters, surrender to God! The time is at hand—the prophecy will be fulfilled. Yeshua is coming back! Be ready! Seven years of torment about to come! These are the ten kings spoken of by the Prophet Daniel and the Apostle John.

They will lure you with their lies. You are their lambs for the slaughter! He who has ears to hear, hear.”

Hogan’s hand twitched toward his gun as shouts of “Treason!” erupted from the crowd.

Phoenix calmed him down. “Just watch.”

A squad of militia moved in to drag the preacher away.

Arriving at the Temple, the militia stood in vigilant formation, checking papers and saluting Hogan, Phoenix, and Josh with clenched fists. The three men returned the gesture. “Any trouble and you...” Hogan began, turning to Phoenix.

“I know. Zero tolerance,” Phoenix responded curtly. He knew his job. He didn’t need to be reminded of it every time an opportunity presented itself.

“Good. It’s really a shame that your mother couldn’t have been here to see this day. Especially considering... well, she would have loved to have seen this.”

A red ribbon adorned the entryway and a sea of spectators filled the raised seating in front of the Temple. The Ten Kings were seated above, waiting for the ceremony to commence. Hogan and Josh stepped onto the stage, and the crowd erupted in cheers. Josh, though clearly overwhelmed, tried to maintain a composed demeanor, while Hogan basked in the adulation, leaning into the microphone. “Hail the Kings!”

The crowd responded with fervent chants, their fisted salutes punctuating the air. “Hail the Kings! Hail the Kings! Hail the Kings!”

Hogan adjusted his uniform, smoothing it down as he prepared to address the crowd. “Brothers and sisters, I am General Hogan Bates. Our team has worked tirelessly to build this magnificent Temple in honor of our Holy Kings and the worldwide unity they’ve brought us. As outlined by Ezekiel and led by this Jewish man, Joshua Angelos.”

Josh shot Hogan a sidelong glance, his eyes narrow.

The general continued, "... Sorry, ex-Jewish man, Joshua Angelos. To make it official, we needed a person of Jewish heritage to fulfill the design requirements." The crowd applauded. "This Temple stands as a symbol of a united world and will serve as the new headquarters for our Ten Kings!"

The crowd erupted once more in chants, pumping their fists in the air. "Hail the Kings!" Photographers and press captured the scene from a distance, and drones buzzed overhead. Josh scanned the crowd, spotting Rachel and Abigail among the clapping and cheering faces. Matt, however, remained silent, his gaze distant and critical. It was to be expected.

As the ceremony continued, Matt lifted his water bottle to his mouth. As he took a sip, he murmured out of the corner of his mouth so only his sister would hear. "A sacred place, originally meant to honor Yahwah, is now used by those trying to erase Him... ironic."

His mother overheard and shushed him sharply. "Matt, enough! I don't want to hear any more of this treason. Especially not now."

Abigail subtly took her brother's hand and squeezed it just once. Matt's eyes darted around. "Each of them is more corrupt and wicked than the next."

Abigail, her anxiety evident, squeezed his hand again, hissing, "You're going to get us locked up!"

Matt gave her a skeptical look. "Phoenix won't let anything happen to you. You know that."

Abigail looked puzzled. "What are you talking about?"

"You know what I'm talking about. I have eyes."

Abigail's scowl deepened.

Matt sighed, drinking some more water. "Not to worry. No doubt I'm getting the boot after today anyway."

Abigail squeezed his hand a third time before lifting it to clap along with the crowd at whatever Hogan had been saying. She hadn't been listening. Matt's prediction weighed heavy on her heart but she tried to ignore it.

The crowd performed the fist salute once more, their voices chanting in unison. "Hail the Ten Kings! Hail the Ten Kings! Hail the Ten Kings!" The Kings, seated in their elevated positions, acknowledged the cheers. Tietan, a solid towering 7 foot man, in his thirties, jet black hair slicked back, took the stage with a commanding presence. His charisma was undeniable as he addressed the crowd.

"Thank you, General," Tietan began, turning to face the audience. "I am Tietan, your Admiral, known as the man of war. Or the Beast of War by some." Tietan smiled as he paused for the cheers. "Many of you know I come from Istanbul. But why am I here, in Jerusalem? Because this city has always been my second home. My parents, you see, hailed from the Jewish tribe of Dan." He paused deliberately, a knowing smile on his face. "Notice that I said, 'my parents,' not myself. For I am the offspring of someone far greater." The crowd applauded with excitement.

"It is my honor to serve as the Military Secretary for our Ten Kings. Throughout history, so many senseless battles have been waged in the name of religion. How fitting, then, that the very faith born here thousands of years ago meets its end today." The applause grew louder.

"It has been under two thousand years since the last Temple trumpet sounded. Today marks the Feast of Trumpets, and once more, a trumpet will sound. But this time, it heralds not division, but true peace for us all."

Tietan savored the moment, his smile widening. "This Temple, my friends, stands as a symbol of our unity, our true strength. No more religion. No more conflict. From this day forward, everything and everyone under the reign of the Ten Kings."

The crowd erupted in thunderous applause as Tietan pointed up toward the Ten Kings seated above. A map of the world projected onto the sky showed ten distinct regions. As each King stood, their respective region illuminated, bathing the sky in light.

After the last King stood, a loud shofar trumpet sounded. Suddenly, the sky darkened rapidly. The sun was cloaked in a sackcloth of coal-black, while the moon glowed blood red, casting an eerie shadow over the Temple and its ecstatic spectators.

CHAPTER 8: THE RAPTURE

As the crowd stood in awestruck silence before the Temple, the earth beneath them suddenly convulsed with a violent quake. The stands swayed precariously, and panic erupted like wildfire among the spectators. The ground trembled violently, sending waves of terror rippling through the crowd.

Above them, the sky burst open with flashes of lightning, revealing a shadowy figure obscured by storm clouds. The mere presence of the figure was both electrifying and terrifying.

On stage, Tietan's expression shifted from curiosity to a slow, knowing smile. Hogan sprang into action, rallying the militia men stationed by the Temple entrance. "Fire at will! Now! Don't let it get closer!" he commanded. The militia responded, unleashing a barrage of lasers into the sky, but their efforts were futile. The guards, faces taut with urgency, scrambled to usher the Ten Kings off their platform and into the safety of armored vehicles.

In a crackle of thunder, two brilliant lights descended into the Temple courtyard behind Tietan. A few people scattered in the crowd began to glow. Those whose bodies were not glowing were too terrified to notice.

Abigail's eyes widened with panic as she looked down at herself. She had no glow about her body but Matt did. She tugged at Matt's arm frantically. "Matt, Mom, come on! We need to get out of here!"

Matt looked down at himself. He noticed neither Abigail nor his mom were glowing. He tried to calm her down with a reassuring smile. He placed one hand on Abigail's shoulder and the other on her head, looking up at the sky and mouthing silent words.

In a split second, those who were illuminated were lifted skyward in a flash of blinding light, surrounded by crackling lightning.

Abigail and Rachel stood rooted to the spot as Matt and the others were whisked upwards. Phoenix, navigating through the chaos with purpose, grabbed Rachel and Abigail. "This way! Now!" he shouted over the uproar, shielding them from the surrounding mayhem.

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Inside the twilight of the caves, people flooded in and were packed together like sardines. A woman in her thirties, with wide, frightened eyes, held her child close to her chest, her heart racing with each echoing footstep and whisper. "Quiet! This whole damn thing could collapse on us!" Nearby, a shorter man found himself shoved against the cold, unyielding stone walls, gasping for breath as he struggled to maintain his footing. "Better to be crushed than to face Him who sits on the throne!" A tall male, visibly trembling, raised his voice in near-hysteria, his words reverberating off the rocky surfaces. "Flee the Wrath of the Lamb, for the great day of His vengeance has arrived!"

Phoenix barked orders as he pushed through the crowd. "Out of our way—now!" he commanded. He pulled Rachel and Abigail behind him, maneuvering through the throng of panicked people. Abigail, dazed and disoriented, was pushed around by the surging crowd and couldn't hold onto his hand. Despite Phoenix's best efforts to protect her, she collapsed amidst the chaos.

"Abigail? Abigail!" Phoenix called out, his voice laced with concern as he frantically searched for her.

CHAPTER 9: THE 7-YEAR COUNTDOWN

9 SEPTEMBER 2037 – NEW MOON. THE 7-YEAR WORLD TRIBULATION BEGINS.

Outside the Temple, night had fallen. The courtyard was a battlefield of chaos. Militia guards trying to enter the Temple were met with a catastrophic blast of fire. Some were disintegrated on the spot, while others were engulfed in flames coming from inside the Temple courtyard. The ground was strewn with burned corpses, and cameramen and news reporters scrambled desperately for safety.

In the midst of the pandemonium, Abigail appeared, moving with an unsettling calmness amidst the chaos. Her demeanor was almost trance-like. All eyes turned to her as she approached the Temple entrance.

“These are the Two Prophets, Moses and Elijah, sent to declare God’s judgment and bear witness of Yeshua, the King of Kings,” Abigail proclaimed with solemnity.

Suddenly, flames erupted from the Temple’s entrance again, engulfing the militia at the Temple entrance. Two men in long white robes stepped out from the Temple—Elijah, in his sixties with a wild mane of hair, and Moses, a hundred and twenty years old, with a barrel-chested build and a flowing grey beard. Flames spewed from their mouths. Despite their age, they appeared remarkably fit and agile as if they were in their forties.

From behind them, the same men Matt had seen earlier in white robes emerged from the Temple. They walked eastward towards the desert, hands raised in praise, each forehead marked with the name “YHVH,” which seemed to glow.

A voice from the crowd declared, “These are the 144,000 of the tribes of Israel. 12,000 of each tribe. They have been sealed by God!”

Abigail continued, raising both arms high in the air and eyes rolled back, “Listen to them, for they bring the good news of Yeshua to the world. Let those with ears hear, hear!” She then falls to the ground unconscious.

“Over the next three and a half years,” Elijah’s voice was calm yet foreboding, “seven trumpets will unleash the judgments of Yahwah. A third of the earth’s vegetation will be destroyed. This is the first of the seven trumpets.”

As Moses and Elijah re-entered the Temple, the 144,000 disappeared from view.

“Abigail! Abigail!” Phoenix’s voice echoed through the chaos.

#

Bet Shemesh was the temporary location of the UN HQ. The grand hall with its towered ceilings adorned with elaborate banners that draped gracefully down the walls evoked a sense of bygone grandeur. At the center of this opulent space was a round table with ten thrones spaced evenly around it, filling the center of the room.

The ten kings sat on their respective regal thrones. In the middle of the table, a hologram projected the evening’s dramatic Temple events into the air.

Tietan and Hogan made their entrance. Hogan, ever the disciplined soldier, stood with military precision, his posture immaculate. Tietan, in contrast, moved through the room with an air of ownership, as if he were the true leader.

Among the Ten Kings, three figures radiated an unmistakable aura of authority. Dimitry, a formidable Russian man with a striking resemblance to Stalin, was seated behind an engraved placard that read "NORTH ASIA." His intense demeanor was accentuated as he slammed his fist onto the armrest of his chair.

“Tietan!” Dimitry’s voice was deep, tinged with a thick Russian accent. “Your self-aggrandizement today did not go unnoticed. Know your place.” The other Kings nodded in agreement.

Mazoku, a figure reminiscent of Mao Zedong, sat behind a placard that read "EAST ASIA." His presence was equally imposing, his gaze sharp as he spoke with a heavy Chinese accent.

“Our plan is unfolding as expected,” Mazoku declared. “We’ve provoked Him and His son. It’s only a matter of time before He arrives to fight His own battle. But those two strangers at the Temple—they must be eradicated before they start converting the people.”

Tietan remained calm, his demeanor unruffled by the harsh words. “My men and I will take care of it,” he assured, his voice steady. “There’s no need to worry.”

Mazoku’s eyes narrowed, his voice sharpening. “Have you forgotten your place once more, Tietan? You will do exactly as we command—nothing more. You will tell the people of Jerusalem that during the Temple ceremony, we executed the Christian extermination program from space.”

Tietan’s eyes gleamed with a challenging spark. “You mean using lasers to vaporize the last of the vermin?” A murmur of agreement rippled through the Kings as they nodded in consensus. “But why lie?” Tietan pressed. “What are we trying to hide? Tell them the truth!” A tense silence fell over the room.

Muhammad, a stern figure who resembled Ayatollah Khomeini, sat behind the "SOUTHWEST ASIA & NORTH AFRICA" placard. His gaze was piercing as he leaned forward.

“The truth? And what truth would that be, Tietan?” Muhammad declared.

Tietan continued, “Enough with the games and the atheist rhetoric. Let’s be honest with the people. The choice is clear. Yeshua left the rest to be destroyed. Those two henchmen at the Temple have already started His work by killing all those who try to enter. Thereby stripping the remaining rebels of any hope of going to heaven.” He pressed on with fervent intensity.

“To what end?” Muhammad replied.

Tietan continues, “Then we unite as one people to fight back. Didn’t Yahwah, the God of Israel, say in the forbidden Book of Genesis, ‘The people are one, and they have all one

language; and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do? What those at Babel failed to accomplish, we will finish! Let's unite against Him."

Dimitry's gaze was unyielding as he addressed Tietan. "You will say exactly as Mazoku instructed. Understood?"

Tietan cast his eyes downward, offering a half-hearted nod. "What about the two henchmen at the Temple?" Dimitry inquired, his tone brooking no argument.

Hogan stepped forward. "We have missiles ready. Just give the word."

Mazoku snapped, "General, you were responsible for security today! How did those vermin slip through the crowd? If not for Tietan's vouching for you, you'd be finished! No more mistakes!"

"General, you have our full support to eliminate those two henchmen at the Temple and their followers. By any means necessary. But—" Dimitry paused. "Under no circumstances are you to damage the Temple. It is our symbol of unity and peace. We must keep it intact to provoke Yeshua to return."

Hogan gave a curt nod, acknowledging the directive. With a final glance, he left the room without looking back.

CHAPTER 10: THE HUNT

Josh's house, once a sanctuary of calm, was now a whirlwind of military activity. The night thrummed with the relentless clamor of soldiers and the rumble of armored vehicles. The front door swung open and shut like a revolving door, soldiers trooping in and out with heavy boxes and equipment, each new arrival adding to the mounting sense of dread.

Abigail's normally tidy room was completely disheveled. Phoenix stood amidst the disarray, his gaze roaming over the space now stripped of its personal touches. Hogan's sudden entrance shattered the quiet.

"There you are! I've been looking all over for you."

Phoenix turned. "What was that thing in the sky? What is going on? I can't reach any Angelos family member."

"They're all traitors, Phoenix," Hogan declared, his voice hardening. "The entire Angelos family. I should've seen it coming when their son started spouting that dangerous Rebel talk. They've gone underground. I had my men here within ten minutes of the chaos at the Temple, and they were already gone with the Temple and the underground tunnel plans."

"No," Phoenix's voice was firm, his eyes on his father hardened. "Abigail is not a traitor! The Rebels must have pressured her. You know they have the power to do that. I'll talk to her. We can work this out."

Hogan's lips curled. He looked doubtful. "Remember, son, women can be a greater weakness than you think. The Christian and Jewish vermin may have powerful weapons, it's nothing we can't crush. But a woman—she impacts the heart, which is more difficult to crush without collateral damage." He checked his watch. "Let's move—we don't want to be late for the briefing. There's a lot to get done."

The briefing room at the Militia Headquarters was buzzing. A crowd of Militia officers, including Phoenix, was gathered and attentive to the presentation of maps and diagrams shared by Hogan.

“We’re splitting the city into zones,” Hogan’s voice held an authoritative edge. “With round-the-clock patrols. Each of you will receive a list of assignments and a roster of Rebel suspects for your sector. The Kings have escalated Jerusalem’s security status—lethal force is authorized if necessary.”

Ahmad, sitting a row ahead of Phoenix, twisted in his seat and flashed a grin at him, his fist pounding into his hand.

#

In the dim, dusty dark basement, Rachel and Abigail huddled together in the corner, their hearts pounding in time with the distant footsteps and muffled voices that echoed overhead. The air was thick with tension, each sound sending a shiver down their spines as they strained to listen. Suddenly, the voices ceased, and a heavy hatch creaked open above them, the noise reverberating like a distant thunderclap.

“It’s just us,” came a voice, low and reassuring.

The two young women breathed a collective sigh of relief as Manfred descended the stairs, his weary face illuminated by the faint light filtering in from the hatch. It was clear that he hadn’t slept in days; dark circles framed his eyes, and his hair hung disheveled around his face. Josh was right behind him and gave his wife and daughter a look of relief. He hugged them both.

“They searched everywhere,” he said, a flicker of a smile breaking through his fatigue.

Manfred turned to Abigail, his expression shifting to one of concern. “What happened at the Temple?”

“I honestly don’t know,” Abigail replied. “All I remember was Matt putting a spell on me before he was taken away by the Ten Kings. Then I woke up in your car. Did you find Matt yet? Do you know where they’ve taken him?”

Manfred shook his head. He pulled out his phone, methodically dismantling it with deft fingers.

“We’ll find him,” he promised. “But first, we need to bring down their communication network. It’s the only way to stop them from tracking our people.”

Josh, who had been quietly listening, suddenly remembered something. He reached into his pocket and produced a small high tech memory stick, turning it over in his hands like a precious artifact.

“I managed to smuggle out half of the Temple plans,” he said, his voice filled with urgency. “The rest are still at my house. Hogan will be after them—trying to find a way into the Temple to stop those two, whoever they are.”

Manfred nodded, his mind racing with possibilities. “Yeah, we need to buy them some time. The more the focus is on them, the less it’ll be on us. But we’ve got to move to somewhere safer.”

#

When it was dark outside, he managed to smuggle them out through one of the large windows at the back of the house. He got them into his SUV and covered them with blankets, telling anyone who asked that he was taking supplies to the guards around the perimeter of the property.

They’d uncovered themselves as soon as they got a few miles away from the area and now the vehicle rumbled down a rugged gravel road, the landscape scarred by devastation. Burning trees and charred farmland flashed past in a disorienting blur.

Suddenly, another meteor streaked through the sky and crashed onto the road ahead, exploding in a fiery blast. Manfred reacted instinctively, swerving violently to avoid the fiery obstacle, but the truck skidded uncontrollably and crashed into a tree with bone-jarring force. Smoke billowed from the wreckage as the truck came to a halt.

“Is everyone okay?” Manfred’s voice was edged with concern as he looked around the wrecked vehicle. His hands were still on the wheel and the memory of seeing what was about to happen flashed through his mind repeatedly.

“Let’s move. We’ve got to go on foot,” Manfred urged, grabbing the radio from the dashboard. “The Militia will be here any minute.”

Josh held on to Manfred as he got out. “What happened? What was that thing that hit the ground? A meteor? Some kind of missile?”

Abigail replied, “The first of the Seven Trumpets.” Her announcement was met with stunned looks.

Manfred rushing, “Come on. Let’s go!”

Shaken, they all fled into the dense forest.

#

At Josh's house, the living room bore the marks of recent upheaval. Furniture was overturned, and personal belongings lay strewn across the floor. Sofia, a short Hispanic cleaner with a colorful vacuum, was accompanied by a large Corporal and three other Militia members, who sat in the corner absorbed in a card game. One of the Militia members glanced up and asked with a hint of curiosity, “What’s with the room service?”

Sofia, clearly uncomfortable, replied awkwardly, “No hablo inglés.”

The Corporal, noting the UN Approval seal on the orders, nodded in confirmation.

“Wow, Spanish are here too. General wants this place spotless.”

Sofia began her task, vacuuming the debris amid the mess. She was nervous but did her best to hide it. She knew that at any moment, if she annoyed someone, they could do anything they wanted to her.

#

The desert sun beat down mercilessly as a truck trundled across the arid landscape. It came to a halt at a rugged outcrop of mountain rock. Sofia emerged from the vehicle, her colorful vacuum in tow. She approached a Rebel Guard, draped in a sand-colored cloak with his hood pulled low. His voice was gruff. "Password?"

Sofia confidently replied, "Yeshua is King." The Rebel Guard, satisfied with the answer, stepped aside, revealing a hidden door in the rock face. Sofia passed through the concealed entrance.

Colorful tents dotted the landscape; families moved about their daily routines, campfires crackled, and merchants bustled. Sofia made her way toward a large tent. She ducked inside. Manfred, Josh, Rachel, and Abigail were gathered around a table, their faces illuminated by the glow of a large virtual map of Jerusalem.

"Sofia! Thank God you made it out safely!" Manfred exclaimed, rising to greet her. They shook hands and nodded at the familiar faces. She was glad to see smiles on the Angelos family's faces.

Sofia set down her vacuum with a thud. "And not just that—I managed to recover the papers our dear Architect wanted."

With a practiced motion, she unlocked a panel on the vacuum and retrieved a collection of files and papers. She held them out and the reaction from the group was very satisfying.

"Oh, Sofia, you miracle worker!" Josh cried out his eyes on his papers as Manfred took them.

“Thank you, Sofia.” Manfred gave her a side hug. The sight of the documents seemed to momentarily lift the weight of their situation.

CHAPTER 11: THE KINGS' PLAN

At the Militia Headquarters Garrison, Phoenix sat hunched over a desk in a sparse room. His gaze was fixed on an old radio that crackled intermittently with static. His fingers hovered over the speaker button as he said, "This is Major Phoenix Bates, requesting the location of Abigail Angelos. I repeat, requesting the location of Abigail Angelos. Over."

He released the button and listened intently, but the radio responded only with silence. Frustration etched deeper lines into his face as he adjusted the dial, shifting to the next channel. He tried again.

"This is Major Phoenix Bates, requesting the location of Abigail Angelos. I repeat, requesting the location of Abigail Angelos. Over." Still, there was only static. Phoenix glanced out of the small window over the desk. The night sky stretched out before him, and he whispered, "Oh Abi, just give me a sign, please. My father's on the warpath, but I can protect you."

#

Months passed. Day and night, Hogan led brutal raids across Jerusalem, targeting suspected Christian and Jewish households with relentless aggression. Phoenix, always at his side, fulfilled the role of second-in-command. Hogan's methods were harsh and unforgiving; he dragged people into the streets, using violence to subdue anyone who resisted shooting their families and pets without remorse. Phoenix, though loyal, occasionally intervened and stopped some of the killings. All the while, Phoenix continued to search for Abigail.

At the Jerusalem Correctional Center, Hogan walked through the lines of captured Rebels, his tablet clutched tightly as he took meticulous notes. Two Militia members escorted a pregnant woman in her thirties past Hogan. The sight caught the attention of another member who remarked, "Looks like we've got another hell-spawn on the way."

“I’ll take her down to the lab,” someone added.

Hogan’s narrow eyes gleamed with sinister interest. “I’ll take it from here, boys,” he said, waving them away. As he approached the woman, he noticed her terrified expression as she looked around seemed to fade when she settled her eyes on him. It looked like she thought he would help her... be friendly toward her. He wondered if his face really looked that trustworthy.

When he took her by the arm, he did so in a firm but not brutal way. She continued to be cooperative.

Hogan escorted the pregnant woman, an IV drip attached to her arm, down corridors devoid of windows, illuminated only by harsh fluorescent lights. Rows of men, women, and children lay restrained on hospital beds or chairs set up against the wall. They were drugged and docile.

“The Ten Kings aim to create superhumans by reengineering the seed,” Hogan explained to the woman he was escorting. “Making us more powerful than ever before.” He looked her up and down. “And it seems as though you have plenty of spare parts to work with.”

A door opened ahead, seemingly without help and a doctor with blood-stained gloves stood there, waiting for Hogan and the woman. He handed the pregnant woman to the doctor, ignoring her pleading eyes. He wasn’t surprised that she said nothing and gave no resistance. It was always easier when people just accepted their fate.

As Hogan turned to leave, Phoenix arrived, his face etched with urgency. “Forgot the haloperidol,” he said in a tight voice.

Hogan responded while tapping his gun, “Don’t hesitate to use something more sedating. And don’t be late for the meeting.”

Phoenix, his gaze unwavering, stepped forward once his father was out of sight. He held the door to the lab room open, his eyes on the doctor, who had taken hold of the pregnant woman. She had let herself be set down on a folding chair and did nothing to try to escape. “Sorry, Doc, but that one’s mine.”

The doctor hesitated, looking from Phoenix to the woman and back again. It was clear he didn’t understand why the father would hand the woman to him and then the son make claim to her. But he was Phoenix Bates and he always got what he wanted. Reluctantly, he handed the pregnant woman over to Phoenix, who took her by the arm and left.

#

The war room buzzed with tension and activity. Phoenix stood before a large map of the city, surrounded by his officers, watching the big screen showing Tietan speaking in front of news reporters. “You’ve been left to be trampled. This is no God of Love, but a God of Terror! We must fight back. I know His weaknesses. Unity. Unite with me, and I promise you—we will win.”

Phoenix’s finger moved decisively across the map, pointing to various locations marked with red pins. “We need to root out every last one of them. No hiding places. No sanctuary.”

Someone in the crowd interrupted, shouting, “No mercy!”

Officers around the room nodded in agreement.

Phoenix responded quickly, “No, you will show mercy. But we will not retreat. There is no need for constant brutality.”

He didn’t like the looks he was getting but it didn’t matter. He was in charge and they would do what he told them to do.

#

As night descended over Jerusalem, Phoenix and Ahmad surveyed a dark, lonely alleyway. As they approached, a homeless family huddled together in a corner. A young girl, her eyes wide with fear, looked up at him. "Why are you taking everyone away?"

Phoenix stopped and crouched down to her level, meeting her eyes with his. "Have you seen any Christians? Can you guess where they are?"

She shook her head. "We are not supposed to speak to Christians."

Phoenix nodded. The mother watched him warily looming over the girl, both her hands over her daughter's shoulders. The girl tentatively reached out her small hand.

Phoenix looked down at it and hesitated for a moment before gently clasping her fingers. He had a large package under his arm, which he left at the girl's feet. He looked up at her. "This is for you, all right? You and your mom and dad."

The girl blinked at him. He tried to ignore the feeling it gave him to look into the little girl's eyes. She smiled and his heart melted. He stood up, shoving away the sentiment. He stomped away, not looking back to see the delight on the faces of that starving family when they saw the amount of food he'd left for them.

CHAPTER 12: THE BEAST REVEALED

At the UN grand hall of Bet Shemesh, the Kings sat in their imposing thrones around a round table. At the end of the room, Hogan stood at attention, with Phoenix behind him. They all watched the events unfold on the holograms and awaited further instructions.

The first hologram projected images of vegetation devastation. A stark voice announced by Mazoku, “A third of the world’s grass and vegetation... gone. But that’s just the beginning.”

The image shifted to fiery eruptions engulfing the Hawaiian Islands. Lava cascaded in molten waves, consuming everything in its path. There were abandoned ships adrift in the ocean and dead marine life bobbing on the surface of the water.

Mazoku continued, “Hawaii erupts just as those FALSE prophets predicted! Impossible! The Pacific drowns in bloody lava. A third of our oceans poisoned, our ships destroyed! And then...”

Next, the hologram showed a comet hurtling toward Earth, its trajectory unchanged despite desperate missiles and lasers. It struck Lake Superior, spreading a pale green substance into the other Great Lakes.

Muhammad proclaimed, “Then this star called Wormwood struck Lake Superior, poisoning a third of the Earth’s fresh water supply! Spreading death to all who drink of it. And recently...”

The hologram then displayed an explosion in the night sky. The sun, moon, and stars were each marred and missing a third of their surfaces.

Dimitry’s voice strained with frustration. “A third of the sun, moon, and stars refuse to shine. All because of those two.”

The final hologram revealed Moses and Elijah standing at the Temple's entrance. "You defy Yahwah by mocking His Son and persecuting His people. Repent!" Moses declared.

"Blind guides, leading others into eternal darkness," Elijah added.

Moses continued, "Woe, woe, woe, the final three trumpets are about to sound."

Frustration overtook Dimitry as he slams his fist into the desk, cutting the hologram feeds. "Why haven't we obliterated them yet?"

"We've tried every strategy that wouldn't risk destroying the Temple," Hogan solemnly replied, feeling helpless. He felt like a failure, and didn't like that feeling.

Dimitry snapped back, "Have you located the Architect or the Temple's underground tunnels yet? Then why are you still here?"

Hogan nodded, preparing to leave with Phoenix and the two Militia members. At that moment, Tietan strode into the room and gestured for Hogan to halt. Looking back at his father's anxious face, Phoenix went out the door with the Militia.

Mazoku's voice interrupted sharply. "Maybe, King Dimitry, it is the weed of division that needs to be uprooted."

Dimitry gave a curt nod. "General Hogan, arrest that man!" he said, pointing to Tietan. "He's been spreading treasonous lies to the people."

Hogan hesitated, caught between the gravity of his orders and Tietan's commanding presence. Tietan stepped forward, his demeanor both defiant and assured. "We Kings are developing transhuman beings, yet we fight a spiritual war with feeble weapons. I hold the key to true power—the power that will obliterate the Two and all who follow Yeshua. Their flesh will feed the birds, and their blood will be mine!"

Dimitry's face contorted with disgust. "You've overstepped! Who do you think you are?"

Tietan raised his hand and proclaimed, “I am your future King. Born of a power greater than you can imagine—the DRAGON!” The reaction from the Kings was immediate and unified. Shock and outrage marred their faces. Muhammad’s voice rang out with finality. Many of them banged their fists on the thick wooden tables, making a resounding noise.

“TREASON! You’re finished!”

The kings, in unison, put their rings into a panel in the table that had a specific slot for each of them.

A grin spread across Tietan’s face as he motioned for Hogan to follow him. With a swift movement, Tietan and Hogan slipped out of the room. Hogan’s pace faltered as pain shot through his knee. The sound of approaching footsteps echoed ominously as guards made their way toward the chamber.

In the dimly lit corridors of the UN Secret Passageway, Tietan and Hogan moved with precision, their footsteps echoing off the stone walls. The maze-like corridors twisted and turned, but Tietan navigated them with an air of familiarity. The voices of pursuing guards grew louder, and seemingly at the last moment, they ducked into a shadowy alcove. Hogan was not used to hiding from a fight. He was confused but felt the urge to follow Tietan nevertheless.

Tietan, with a tone of smug satisfaction, said to Hogan, “I knew you’d stand by me. They’ve taken you for granted for far too long. You’ll be my second-in-command. I need a leader I can trust.”

“I would be honored.” Hogan replied, almost automatically. He hadn’t forgotten he’d been ordered to arrest this man for treason. But being around him made him feel differently. It made him feel like he had no choice but to follow the man’s guidance. He had an automatic and unrelenting trust that Tietan knew what he was doing.

Spotting a hidden stairwell, they descended with haste. The ancient steps creaked softly beneath their feet. They emerged through a concealed passage into a bustling

courtyard. Outside, Hogan and Tietan blended seamlessly into the crowd, disappearing into the labyrinth of the city, a great relief to them both.

#

“This is Major Phoenix Bates. Looking for Abigail Angelos. Can anyone hear me? Over.”

He had been at it for so long, he was beginning to lose hope. If Abigail was alive and well, she would eventually find a way to communicate with him. They had their own channel and he was determined to keep calling for her until he found her.

Months had passed but Phoenix wasn't giving up “This is Major Bates looking for Abigail Angelos. If anyone knows the whereabouts of Abigail Angelos, please put her in contact with me. Over.”

The radio crackled with static. Phoenix thought about taking a nap right there at the desk. He lowered his forehead to press it against the cold wood of the desk.

Then, through the interference, he was stunned to hear the voice he'd been longing to hear for so long now. “Phoenix, is that you?”

Phoenix's heart slammed in his chest. He sat upright, his mouth and eyes wide open. He pressed the red button and tried not to get too close to the microphone. “Abi! Abi! Yes, it's me! Where, mmh, are you okay?”

He put his hands over his face and let the tears come for just a moment before slapping them away and putting a stop to the waterworks.

Her voice, though faint, came through. “We're okay. We're safe. The Rebels have given us sanctuary. They're good to us.”

“You need to come in. It's the only way I can protect you. Are you sure you're okay?”

Abigail softly replied, “Yes, I am, Phoenix. And... I miss you... so much.”

Phoenix allowed himself a smile. He was flattered that she'd been thinking about him and missed him. "Me too, Abi. Can you tell me what happened to you at the Temple ceremony? Why did you say those things?"

There was a long pause before Abigail's voice returned. "They weren't my words. They were spoken through me. Matt said something over me before he was taken. I've been seeing things... visions, things I never could've imagined. It's either... the sort of thing Matt always talked about, or I'm losing my mind."

Phoenix's heart ached at her distress. "We'll figure this out, Abi. I promise. I'll talk to my father. Where can I pick you up."

"I don't know. I have to go before they know I'm speaking with you. I'll call you again."

"Abi? Abi? Abi?" Phoenix's voice rose with desperation as static crackled in response.

#

At Militia HQ Garrison, Ahmad had leapt up onto a table, drawing the attention of the room with his brash confidence. His arms were raised high as he rallied the men around him. "The Kings are too lenient!" he bellowed over the din. "We should follow the lead of our great General and unite under Tietan!"

The men roared their approval, their voices rising in a thunderous chorus as they all stomped their boots on the ground. Ahmad's eyes flicked toward Phoenix, who sat apart, lost in his own thoughts.

Ahmad's grin widened into a sneer as he addressed Phoenix directly. "What do you say, Phoenix? Intimidated by Tietan's unyielding methods? Or do you still want us to play nice with the Rebels?"

Phoenix's gaze slowly lifted from his drink. "I say, let Tietan and my father stamp out every last piece of evil from this Earth."

The response from the men was even louder this time, a thunderous approval that seemed to echo through the Garrison. Phoenix exchanged a hard, calculating look with Ahmad, his smile strained and insincere. His father's insistence on changing teams had come as a shock to him. What side was he on? What side was his father on? How had one man made another change so drastically with very little effort?

"We need to wait for the General or Tietan's command. They're in Istanbul. Then we must act."

CHAPTER 13: THE BEAST vs. THREE KINGS

In the heart of Istanbul, Tietan's estate radiated an opulence that mirrored the sleek, black cars departing from it. Inside one of these cars, Tietan lounged comfortably in the backseat.

Hogan, gripping the wheel, reported, "The Kings have declared war on us, just as expected. As we speak, Dimitry's forces are crossing the Black Sea from the north, while others are advancing by land."

Tietan's eyes gleamed with anticipation. "Then it's time for Israel to witness my power. Let's head back to Bet Shemesh UN HQ and take it. Prepare Dragon Protocol."

Hogan nodded in agreement.

As Tietan's convoy of black SUVs rolled through the streets of Bet Shemesh, they stopped in front of an old mosque. The stillness was abruptly shattered by a barrage of bullets from the south.

Inside the lead black car, Tietan leaned back with a smug smile, seemingly unfazed by the attack. "Right on time," he mused, his voice dripping with satisfaction. "I knew Muhammad would be the first to attack."

Hogan's eyes narrowed. "Muhammad?"

Tietan's grin widened. "Indeed. They're swift. But do not kill them! Bring them to me." As the exchange continued, Tietan leafed through a Bible and sipped a dark, crimson liquid from a wine glass. From a distance, it would have been mistaken for wine. But someone sitting next to him would have been able to see that it was, in fact, blood.

Hogan and his team sprang into action, engaging Muhammad's forces with a combination of EMPs, sonic devices, and other high-tech weaponry. The clash sent Muhammad's Thawb-dressed soldiers crashing to the ground, many dead.

Hogan dragged Muhammad to Tietan's feet. Muhammad's ring was presented to Tietan, who examined it with a handheld device. Muhammad's voice was laced with disbelief and anger. "How did you do this? I have the strongest forces in the world."

Tietan smiled as he tossed Muhammad's ring back at his feet. "Well, you had one of three," he corrected with chilling calm. "My powers surpass anything of this world. Thank you for your cooperation, King Muhammad. Isn't this better than losing a hand for trying to steal what belongs to me?"

As Hogan received a message on his earpiece, he hurried over to Tietan, whispering urgently. Tietan sighed, a flicker of frustration crossing his face. "Show mercy," he instructed. Just as the words left his mouth, a fresh barrage of firepower erupted around them. Despite the onslaught, there was an invisible shield that held firm, deflecting the explosions with an eerie calm.

#

Outside the city, Tietan's Militia vehicles sped through the desert sands and approached a cloud of dust near the caves. Mazoku issued commands to his men, dressed in red uniforms, to advance.

Tietan's forces once again overpowered the soldiers, and the sonic weapons caused rocks to tumble and crash, trapping Mazoku under a cascade of falling debris.

Moments later, Mazoku, shackled at the wrists, was pushed down to his knees in front of Tietan. Hogan handed Tietan Mazoku's ring, which Tietan scanned and then threw back to Mazoku. "I must rescind the decree against me by the strongest Kings. This will deter the rest. I don't want more people dying."

Mazoku looked around at his dead soldiers, panting heavily. "Is it worth it, Tietan? All of this bloodshed?"

Tietan commanded the nearby soldiers, "Remove those chains. He's a King, not an animal!"

His men hastily removed the shackles. Tietan continued, “Thanks to my mercy and commitment to unity, you have survived this.”

Mazoku, still shaken and rubbing his sore wrists, asked, “I do not understand.”

Tietan responded, “You questioned my Kingship—do you believe my abilities now? We must unite to stand a chance against our common foe and defeat Yahwah, the Elohim of Israel. I am your ally, not your enemy.”

As Tietan’s grin widened, Hogan received an urgent message on his tablet.

“Dimitry is approaching from the Mediterranean Sea and northern Israel,” Tietan tells Hogan. Hogan shocked, how did he know, and nods.

Tietan’s eyes sparkled with dark anticipation. “Ah, that relentless Russian dog still hunts me. The last of the three mighty Kings will soon bow. Let’s not disappoint him, Hogan.”

#

In the courtyard of Tietan’s Bet Shemesh compound, Hogan paced the open space, his phone pressed to his ear. “Everything’s coming together, son,” Hogan said. “By tomorrow, Tietan will meet with the Kings and rise as our new leader. I’ll be back in Jerusalem soon, standing by his side.” He paused and asked, “How are you holding up?”

Inside the dimly lit Garrison room, Phoenix responded, “I’ve spoken with Abigail—I found her on the radio. They’re not really Rebels, Father, just caught in the crossfire. I was thinking, if I can convince her and her parents to surrender, I could offer them protected status.”

Hogan replied with a nod before realizing his son couldn’t see him. Phoenix was glad to hear the sound of approval and maybe even relief in his father’s voice. “Of course, son. If that’s what you wish.”

There was a brief moment of static before Phoenix's voice came through again, urgent.
"I have your word they'll be safe?"

"You have my word," Hogan assured him. "And well done, Phoenix. Keep this up, and you'll be a Lt. Colonel before you know it."

CHAPTER 14: THE BEAST RULES

SEPTEMBER 2039.

At the Bet Shemesh UN HQ, Tietan paced confidently before the Ten Kings, with Hogan standing to the side. “Thank you for your time, Kings. You’ve heard what I had to say,” Tietan said, his voice smooth and authoritative. “The decision is yours.”

Dimitry leaned forward. “I agree, to vanquish Yahwah, Elohim of Israel, once and for all, we must stand united—a single leader guiding us against the Two Deceivers, the 144,000, and their followers. I propose Tietan, who has ruled faithfully alongside us for one hour, become our leader—the King of Kings.”

The Kings nodded in unison. “As decreed, so it shall be,” Mazoku declared. In a synchronized movement, the Kings inserted their rings into a central panel. The panel glowed with an eerie light as they beat their chests.

They stood and raised their fists in a unified salute. “Hail Tietan! Hail Tietan! Hail Tietan!” the Kings chanted, their voices reverberating with fervor.

Tietan modestly raised his hand for them to stop. “I accept,” he said in a calm tone.

Muhammad responded, “How are you going to stop those two who have proven themselves to be a great menace?”

#

In the dimly lit Qumran cave, Tietan reverently knelt before a shadowy figure whose serpentine silhouette flickered on the cave wall. “I know Abaddon, also known as Apollyon, is the only one who can stop the Two Temple dwellers. If the price for releasing him from the pit is leading the locusts against the people for five months, so be it. Release my friend, the prophet.”

Satan’s whispering voice from the shadows, responds, “As you wish, my son.”

#

That night, at the edge of Jerusalem, two Militia soldiers stood guard where the city met the desert. Phoenix arrived, his vehicle stirring up a cloud of dust as he approached. The soldiers saluted him, and he returned the gesture with a nod. "I've got the next shift, Captain," Phoenix declared.

"Sir? We've still got thirty minutes left," the Militia Captain protested.

"That's an order, soldier," Phoenix insisted. "Take your things and go home to your families for the night."

The captain saluted again, and he and his companion headed back to their vehicle, leaving Phoenix to take their position. Phoenix glanced at his watch, his gaze fixed on the barren expanse of the desert in front of him.

A cloud of dust appeared on the horizon, steadily growing larger until it resolved into the shape of a truck. The truck stopped at the edge of the city. Abigail stepped out, her face lighting up as she saw Phoenix. Without hesitation she ran to him. He couldn't resist stepping forward to receive her when she threw herself into his arms. Phoenix buried his face in her hair, overwhelmed with relief, drinking in the scent of lavender he'd missed so much. "I'm so happy to see you," he said, his voice trembling with emotion, his heart thumping hard.

"I'm happy to be here for you to see. I'm so sorry I was mad at you back then," Abigail replied softly, her cheek pressed against his chest. She could hear the rapid heartbeat and smiled.

Phoenix pulled back slightly to look at her. "You're okay? You're unharmed?"

"I'm okay," she assured him, nodding. Their reunion was abruptly interrupted by the sound of a gun being cocked. Phoenix and Abigail turned to see Hogan standing there, flanked by a squad of Militia men. The sight of his father brought a look of horror to Phoenix's face.

“Looks like the Jew finally wandered out of the desert,” Hogan said coldly, his eyes on Abigail.

“Father!” Phoenix exclaimed, stepping protectively in front of Abigail. “You said she would be safe! Don’t betray me, father!”

Hogan’s gaze was unwavering as he instructed his men, waving one hand casually toward Abigail. Her grip on Phoenix tightened as did his on her.

“Take her,” Hogan ordered. “No matter what you have to do. Just get her away from my son.”

The Militia men moved forward but Phoenix stood firm, blocking their path. He pushed Abigail so that she was behind him. His pleading eyes were on his father but he was prepared to defend her. The two guards stopped. It was clear neither wanted to harm Abigail when Phoenix obviously cared about her. They both gave Hogan wavering looks, which seemed to infuriate him. Phoenix had never been so angry in his life.

“You promised she would be protected!” Phoenix said, his voice filled with anguish mixed with rage.

Hogan eyed him for a moment. “I am protecting you from her. I’m disappointed you can’t see the bigger picture. Have you forgotten that your mother died at the hands of a religious fanatic like her?” He waved his hand at the two Militia men, expectantly.

“I won’t let you take her!” Phoenix declared fiercely, resting one hand on the gun at his side.

Hogan stepped closer, speaking quietly with Phoenix. “Many truths have come to light, son. There are things you don’t know, and I won’t let you get caught in the crossfire. I need her father. And you’re the only family I have left. And as long as you stand by me, with me, she’ll be safe and you can visit her anytime. Let’s find a way to bring them all in.”

Phoenix stepped forward toward the Militia men. He gave them infuriated looks but felt a sharp blow just above his right temple and everything went black.

CHAPTER 15: THE LOCUSTS

5 MONTHS LATER – FEBRUARY 2040.

In the dimly lit underground bunker, the soft hum of computers filled the air, punctuated by the anxious tapping of keys. Manfred, sporting a scruffy beard, hunched over his screen, his eyes darting with urgency.

“According to my spies,” he said, glancing toward Josh and Rachel who were sitting near him with anxious eyes on his screen, “there’s a transfer request for Abigail to the Correction Facility. We’ll get more details once we breach their central communication network.”

Josh rolled the office chair he was sitting in to another computer and yanked out a memory stick from the drive, his expression a mask of determination. “I’ve got to break her out of there,” he muttered, banging his fist on the desk. He switched the one he’d taken out for another and settled in front of the keyboard and mouse.

Manfred looked up, concern creasing his brow. “You won’t do Abigail or Rachel any good by getting yourself caught—or worse. She’s only alive because of you. They’re going to use her as bait for you. We need to be smart about this.”

Just then, Odi—a tech-savvy man with bushy, Einstein-like hair and glasses that sat awkwardly on his nose—entered with a tray of coffee, trying to lighten the mood.

“Are they working yet?” he asked, setting the tray down with a hopeful grin.

“We’re still working on it. Patience is needed,” Manfred replied, his voice steady despite the tension in the room.

“It’s been months!” Josh interjected, his frustration bubbling over. He spun in the office chair, a movement that resembled a child having fun, but his face showed he was not.

“So, what’s a few minutes more?” Manfred replied quickly. He was sympathetic to their plight. They were tense and scared, but he was sure Phoenix had her safe and sound. He was 99% sure.

“Those demonic locusts have been messing with our signals for nearly five months!” Manfred mumbled harshly, his eyes darting between the screens as if they might hold the answers, which they did but he had yet to find them.

Rachel sighed deeply; her heart heavy with worry. “An eternity, Manfred. My poor children. Matt was braver than I could ever be, and my Abi—suffering who knows what. I just wanted to protect them. I’m a bad mother.”

Josh put an arm around her shoulders, offering comfort. “She’s strong, Rachel. You know that. You raised her to be a strong woman. We both did.”

Rachel’s mind was racing. Despite her nervous anxiety, she felt cold.

“I just... I can’t help but think of what Matt told me would happen before the end,” she murmured, her voice tinged with longing. “That Yeshua would come, and this is one big test to see who is ready to be with Him for eternity. What if He really is the Messiah—our Messiah? And that Matt did go up to meet Him? We know that the Kings lied about the Christians. What if Yeshua can save Abigail?”

Suddenly, the computer began to beep loudly, cutting through the weight of their conversation. Manfred’s eyes lit up with triumph as he pulled Rachel, who was closest, into an exuberant hug. She reacted with giggles that were more awkward and reluctant than happy.

“I’m a genius!” Manfred declared, his excitement bubbling over.

The room erupted with energy, the tension shifting to a renewed sense of hope.

“We’re in!” Manfred continued, beaming. “Our virus has taken down their central communication network and is still spreading. They’ll be forced to rely on old-fashioned radios now. Now we can seal off the Temple’s underground access and get to Abigail!”

#

In a decrepit house on the outskirts of Jerusalem, vehicles and drones converged. Militia soldiers, moving with precision, entered the rundown building, their eyes scanning for traps. Inside, the Sergeant and Hogan examined a radar monitor, frustration evident on their faces.

“The signal was coming from here, but it disappeared when our comms went down,” the Sergeant reported. “The last transmission was the 144,000’s coordinates in the desert and that Tietan wants the media on-site.”

“We here now, check the perimeter,” Hogan ordered. “I’m heading to the desert. Phoenix, you’re in command. Just stay out of the locusts’ way.”

Phoenix nodded as he looked at the sonic readings. The Sergeant stood nearby, looking over his shoulder.

“People have tried to kill themselves when stung by those locusts, and yet no matter what they try, they cannot die,” the sergeant said. “The radar had them heading towards this area tonight, so we have a little time.”

Hogan nodded at them. “Keep me updated on everything. You understand? Everything.”

“Yes, sir,” the sergeant replied at the same time as Phoenix.

Outside the decrepit house where the rebels had located themselves, Militia soldiers used sonic scanners to probe the ground. They discovered something strange and raised the alarm.

In the underground bunker, Manfred signaled for silence, powering down the last computer. The flickering fluorescent light overhead cast eerie shadows.

Outside, soldiers looked on as two excavators began digging up the ground. They uncovered the ceiling of a concrete bunker.

“I want them alive,” Phoenix commanded, looking down at the concrete slab. “You bring them to me, you understand? No one else.” The soldiers nodded, their faces a blank. It was amazing how well the conditioning worked on most soldiers. They had no opinions of their own and just did what they were told. Absolutely remarkable. Phoenix couldn’t imagine following every order without thinking about it.

Inside the bunker, the Rebels scrambled to gather their essentials and destroy what they couldn’t take with them. They prepared to escape through a tunnel, but just as they were gathered in front of it, not wanting to leave anyone behind, the excavator hit something that caused a ripple effect underground. The earth in that area shifted and suddenly a tremendous cracking sound split through the bunker causing the ceiling of the tunnel to cave in. The debris was so massive, it would be impossible to take that route without taking hours to dig through. For all they knew the entire tunnel had collapsed in on itself.

Outside, the excavators finally broke through the ceiling. A low buzzing sound, like the distant roar of racing chariots, filled the air, cutting through the moment. Suddenly, a swarm of locusts descended upon the Militia, their stings inflicting sharp pain and sending soldiers into violent seizures. They screamed and thrashed and ran from the onslaught.

Phoenix barely escaped. He managed to dive into an SUV and slam the door behind him. A locust crashed against the vehicle’s bulletproof window with a sickening thud. The car’s camera zoomed in on the creature’s grotesque features: a face disturbingly human, framed by a golden wreath, with lion-like teeth, long hair, and a scorpion-like tail. Disoriented but aggressive, the locust struck the window with its tail, the force cracking the glass as venom dripped down its surface.

Phoenix remained unfazed, though disgusted, by the locusts. He grabbed the handheld radio. "Mayday Mayday, this is Major Phoenix Bates speaking. We need help in the fifth sector. Mayday mayday, we have locusts. We have locusts."

The static crackled and a voice burst through. "Transfer of extra resources to section five has been denied."

"What? What about the locust shields" Phoenix barked into the phone.

"All shields are in the field." The voice sounded so robotic.

Phoenix looked around, his own platoon had been stung and there was nothing he could do. And that underground bunker was definitely part of the rebel's faction, but he could do nothing.

"If you can't get me resources, I will!" he yelled into the phone, starting the truck and leaving.

CHAPTER 16: GOOD EVIL, EVIL GOOD

Inside the dimly lit Militia Garrison's holding cell, Abigail huddled in a corner, cocooned in blankets and coats. Her eyes darted nervously, listening to the casual conversations of the Militia members as they went about their duties. Ahmad, among them, would occasionally shoot her a smirk, his gaze unsettlingly persistent.

One of the soldiers peeled off his shirt, leering at her with a crude grin. "Like what you see, sweetheart? It's been a while, hasn't it?"

Abigail turned away, pulling the blanket over her head in a desperate attempt to shield herself. Her heart went into overdrive when she heard the sound of someone unlocking her cell door. She peeked through a fold in the blanket and saw it was Ahmad. She wanted to scream for Phoenix, but she knew he wasn't there and it would do no good. She prepared herself for the onslaught.

Ahmad barged in, ripping the blanket away to reveal her handcuffs. The other man stood leering at them, saying encouraging words to Ahmad about how good Abigail looked and how good she would taste.

Ahmad leaned down, cupping her chin with one hand, his tongue flicking lasciviously across her cheek. Abigail recoiled in disgust. Ahmad's friend came in the cell then, taking her by the shoulders and pushing her to her knees in a begging position.

"Don't, don't," Abigail said in a weak tone, though she was in a prime position to punch him in the groin. Though he would probably kill her if she did that.

Her heart slammed in her chest, and she spun around when the door to the cell area was thrown open. It hit the wall with a loud bang, making Ahmad and the other man freeze where they were.

"Help! Help!" Abigail took the opportunity to scream at the top of her lungs.

“Get away from her!” To her utter relief, it was indeed Phoenix who stormed in, his eyes blazing as he fixed them on Ahmad. “What do you think you’re doing Ahmad!”

“Ah, Storm of Samaria,” Ahmad sneered though he stepped away from Abigail. The second man did as Ahmad did. Abigail hated the look of disappointment he gave her. “You can wait your turn.” Abigail nearly fainted when Ahmad closed the door to her cell with him on the inside. He forced the other man to stand in front of the door.

Phoenix growled, stomping over to the cell and shoving the door, which hit the other man but didn’t cause him to flinch or move away. “Get out of my way. And you get away from her, Ahmad. Now.”

Ahmad chuckled, returning to Abigail. She was still on her knees. He rested a hand on the top of her head. She looked horrified, adding fuel to the fire in Phoenix’s chest.

“Haven’t you heard?” Ahmad asked in a flat tone. “Anyone who’s been with the Rebels either dies or learns some humility. You’ve been protecting her long enough. I know you’re the one trying to transfer her, and it was denied. Guess who denied it?”

In a swift, fierce move, Phoenix shoved the door into the soldier, went in and grabbed him, dislocating his soldier’s arm and sending him crashing to the ground.

Ahmad leapt at Phoenix and quickly got him in a headlock, while the soldier who had fallen got back up, pummeling Phoenix mercilessly. Abigail’s desperate cries for help echoed through the garrison as she clawed at Ahmad to get him away from Phoenix.

“Help! Somebody help!” Ahmad reached back and slapped her so hard she felt her neck pinch when her head snapped to the side. She saw stars sparkling in front of her eyes and fell down, stunned and dizzy.

Phoenix’s own Militia team burst in, piling into the small cell and pulling the attackers off him. Blood streamed down his face as he was pulled to his feet. His face was enraged. Abigail had stopped screaming and watched as he limped toward Ahmad, who was on

the ground, just as bloody and beaten as Phoenix. His men backed away, some of them leaving the cell but sticking around to see what their boss would do.

Phoenix stopped in front of the prone man and began kicking him repeatedly in a surge of fury. When Ahmad had been reduced to nothing more than a groaning figure curled into the fetal position on the floor, Phoenix helped Abigail up and led her down the corridor, holding her in his arms.

“I’m so sorry,” he murmured, his voice heavy with regret. “I’ll get you somewhere safe while I sort out everything.”

They were nearly to the exit, when they heard Ahmad’s voice in the distance:

“Arrest them!”

The Garrison soldiers rushed toward them, but Phoenix’s own hardcore soldiers made a thick wall between them and their enemy.

The Garrison soldiers backed down but continued to follow the group to the double doors that would lead out. Phoenix stopped about fifty feet from the exit and looked back at them. “I haven’t seen any you around here before. Where did you come from?”

One of the soldiers responded, “We’re the third shift, just started today, Major. I’m sorry we did not see who you were at first.”

The other soldiers, realizing what their cohort had discovered, lowered their weapons and stood at attention, all of them apologizing profusely. Phoenix held up one hand to silence them.

“Did that man back there hire any of you?”

“He hired us all, sir,” another soldier answered.

“All right. Now arrest him,” Phoenix ordered, pointing to Ahmad. “For disobeying orders. Put him in the cell where he was holding this woman. He gets no food or water. He is to be court-martialed. Understood?”

Phoenix turned Abigail away from the mess as Ahmad yelled with outrage while being handcuffed and taken back into the cell block, he’d just left.

CHAPTER 17: THE 144,000 AND THE FLOOD

In the blistering heat of the desert, a helicopter thudded down onto a dusty mountain peak, its blades whipping up a frenzy of sand. Hogan and Tapper disembarked. Tapper, a pompous reporter with blond slicked-back hair, and an air of self-importance, held a pair of binoculars in one hand and a two-way radio in the other. He motioned to his large team of reporters to follow the soldiers arriving in various vehicles.

Tapper adjusted his binoculars with exaggerated care, peering through them with an air of superiority. "Why aren't they being stung?" he asked, frustration evident in his voice. "Is it those ugly tattoos on their foreheads?"

Through the binoculars, the 144,000 Israelites moved serenely across the desert, their foreheads glowing faintly. They appeared untouched by the locusts who swarm right past them, without touching them.

Hogan surveyed the area through narrow eyes. "It doesn't matter," he said firmly. "We finally have them right where we want them. Move out!"

Like a flood, the Militia trucks and media convoys closed in on the Israelites, cornering them against the desert mountains. They ran until they were all trapped.

Meanwhile, Tapper's eyes were drawn to his portable Temple news feed. Moses and Elijah stood at the Temple entrance with their hands raised. "You reap what you've sown, fire for fire," they intoned solemnly. "The Fifth Trumpet is over. Now, we release the Sixth of the Seven Trumpets. It will last one year, a month, a day, and an hour." They pointed in the direction of the desert to the east. Elijah commanded, "And earth, we command you to help our brothers!"

Just then, a curtain of fire descended from the sky, narrowly missing Moses and Elijah, who withdrew into the Temple courtyard. A man appeared in the midst of the flames. Abaddon, a towering man even taller than Tietan, dressed in a black Imam Thawb,

emerged untouched by the flames with a no-nonsense facial expression. The feed is cut, the screen blank.

Suddenly, a tremor started to shake the ground where Tapper and Hogan stood. Hogan had experienced earthquakes before, this was the beginning. He looked down at his feet, then at the trembling earth.

“Get to the chopper now!” And over the radio, “Take care of those rebels quick!” He and Tapper ran for the helicopter, which was already started and waiting. He yelled for the pilot to get them in the air. They’d barely made it to the chopper, which struggled to rise against the turbulence in the air and the unsteadiness below.

Hogan looked through the window as they ascended, watching in horror as the ground near the 144,000 Israelites cracked open, swallowing the flood of approaching Militia and reporters. The earth then sealed itself, not touching the Israelites at all.

Remarkably, the 144,000 continued their march, their hands raised in unwavering praise. The locusts had disappeared.

Anger split through him. “What is this outrage!” he yelled slamming one fist into the chopper. “How is this possible! What luck!”

In the distance to the east, the Euphrates River belched thick, black smoke onto the land, accompanied by fiery flashes. Unlike the locusts, which flew, these creatures were smaller but swarmed in much larger numbers and were land-bound. The smoke spread over the land, darkening the horizon.

Hogan’s alarm grew as he observed the dark surface advance. Tapper, concerned, said, “Network down.” He tapped his earpiece and shook his tablet, like that would make a difference.

The pilot nodded, turning slightly in his seat to talk to them. “Yes, nothing coming in or out.”

“Back to Bet Shemesh. We must warn Tietan,” Hogan ordered.

The helicopter veered sharply.

Across the world, chaos and devastation unfolded as the darkness touched down. Streets were littered with dead bodies with holes burned into their skin. The small, firefly-like entities continued their rampage, spewing fire and brimstone from their mouths. Their tails sliced through skin like a hot knife through butter leaving some people who were not killed, severely wounded.

CHAPTER 18: VIRUS ENDS

13 MONTHS LATER - MARCH 2041.

Inside the opulent Bet Shemesh UN interview room, Tapper sat across from Tietan. Papers and charts cluttered the polished mahogany table between them.

“Well, you are a man of war. It’s been thirteen months since the fire and brimstone virus swept the world,” Tapper reported.

Tietan’s eyes briefly flashed red. “How many deaths?” he inquired.

“One in three of the world, dead,” Tapper responded.

“How many able to fight?” Tietan asked.

“Unknown.” He hated bringing nothing to the table, but he hadn’t been allowed anything more than secondhand news. He didn’t go on raids with Hogan. It had become too dangerous for his liking.

“And?” Tietan pressed, his gaze intense.

Tapper knew what Tietan wanted to hear.

“Our top scientists report that the vaccines from Babylon have subdued the firestorm,” Tapper continued. “The communication network that the rebels destroyed has been restored. We’ve had round-the-clock coverage showing how we’ve brought the virus to its knees.”

Tietan’s fervor ignited. “Good,” he said passionately. “We will honor the fallen by defeating the one who unleashed it! Let the people hear it and be heartened!” Tapper nodded.

#

In the dark corridors of the Correction Facility, Phoenix moved with a sense of purpose, holding a package under his arm. Accompanied by a fat, sweaty guard, he passed by cell after cell, each one filled with correction candidates whose eyes betrayed their fear and desperation. Phoenix stopped at an empty cell with Abigail's scarf draped in the corner. He turned to the guard, irritated. "We meet weekly. Where is she?"

The guard responded sheepishly, "It's the female thing, you know." That seemed to calm Phoenix down. He entered and placed the package of food and treats next to her scarf. He gave the guard a knowing nod. Phoenix paused at the door.

"Have you been taking good care of her?" he asked.

The guard nodded.

"Make sure she gets it all. Understand?" Phoenix persisted. The guard nodded again. As Phoenix was about to exit, he took out a chocolate and handed it to him. "Before I forget. Give her this one. Tell her it's special from me. It's her favorite." Phoenix exited.

CHAPTER 19: ECHO OF BETRAYAL

Josh and Rachel, their faces concealed, cautiously hurried through the streets. They carefully avoided Militia patrols and CCTV cameras, their movements deliberate and stealthy. Reaching the entrance of an ancient sewage tunnel near the Temple, Josh and Rachel finally reunited with Manfred. They made their way in after hugs and warm, quiet greetings.

As they navigated through the dark tunnels, their flashlights were the only source of light.

“The Comms and network were down, but now they are back up. You two go in and I’ll stand guard.”

Josh and Rachel switched to night-vision goggles and continued their way through.

Outside, a convoy of vehicles arrived, pulling up to the metal fence outside the correction facility. Tietan, Hogan, and the Militia soldiers, along with Phoenix, all stepped out, armed.

Tietan addressed them. “Gentlemen, tonight, it all ends!”

Abaddon nodded to Tietan from the other side of the grounds. Tietan acknowledged him and turned to Hogan. “Get her. We need the bait. And bring Tapper; he needs to broadcast this.”

Inside Abigail’s cell at the Correction Facility, the same fat guard Phoenix had spoken with the previous night strapped an exhausted Abigail down. The package Phoenix left was ripped open, with the guard munching on the goodies and enjoying the sweets.

“He’s a keeper,” the guard said to Abigail with a mouth full of her food. He then turned to face Jeckle, a thin evil-looking man in a lab coat, preparing his equipment. The guard continued, “We tried all night; she just wouldn’t talk. Maybe you’ll have better luck.” He dropped a handful of Abigail’s sweets on Jeckle’s torture table as he exited.

Jeckle connected the electrical probes to her and pressed button “1.” The lights in the cell flickered ominously, crackling with energy as her body convulsed violently. The straps were the only thing keeping her from levitating off the table. She passed out, the probes still smoking. Jeckle casually picked up a sweet, popped it into his mouth, and threw water on her. Slowly, she began to come around.

Jeckle’s face remained impassive. “Honey, that was only level one. How are you going to manage the next ten? I’m not about to let you ruin my perfect record. Tell me where your father is so I can go home to my wife.” Jeckle pointed to his machine. “And you see this?” He pointed to a red button. “I can make it even worse. This explodes the nanoparticles in your blood stream with Wi-Fi frequency—BAM! It’s pretty cool to see. So—” He adjusted his machine. “Do you have anything to tell me?”

Abigail, still a little groggy, turned her head away.

Jeckle sighed. “Okay, as you requested. But let’s skip four and go directly to level six.” Jeckle was excited but still expressionless. He was about to press “6” when he was interrupted.

There was a deafening crash and the wall behind Jeckle exploded inward, sending fragments of concrete and a whirlwind of dust into the room. The wall crumbled into debris.

Josh and Rachel ran in with masks over their faces, running to Abigail. Tears rolled down Rachel’s cheeks as they cut her free. Josh grabbed her and pulled her to her feet. She was unsteady. Jeckle lay on the floor, disoriented, his ears ringing. Abigail’s voice was barely a whisper.

"Mom... Dad?"

"We’re here, sweetie. You’re safe now. Dad’s got you." Josh swept her up into his arms and they ran from the room, back through the tunnel.

Outside the Correction Facility, Hogan, Phoenix, and his team were making their way down the steps. Hogan's watch beeped urgently, and he reacted immediately.

"Phoenix, with me," he barked.

They headed inside with the Militia.

Hogan and Phoenix stormed into Abigail's cell, interrupting Jeckle's frantic attempts to salvage his machine. Phoenix looked around in horror at the broken torture straps and scattered probes littering the floor—a stark contrast to Abigail's room the night before. Without a word he unsheathed his knife, rushed forward, and pushed the blade into Jeckle's stomach, grabbing him by the shoulder so he could use force to get it in as far as he could before yanking back out. Jeckle gasped in pain, his wide eyes staring at Phoenix, who was snarling at him.

A guard rushed in, holding Abigail's half-eaten chocolate bar.

Phoenix turned his head, his eyes dropping to the chocolate the guard tried to put quickly behind his back. Outraged by the deceptions he was encountering, Phoenix yanked his gun from the holster at his side and fired a shot that hit the arm holding the chocolate, then another into the guard's right kneecap, sending him crashing and screaming in pain to the ground. Phoenix put one more into his skull with a cold stare, finishing him off.

Spinning around, Phoenix got in Hogan's face.

"You lied to me!" he shouted, fury blazing in his eyes. "You betrayed me!"

The Militia men filed in one by one, filling up the space quickly. Hogan ignored Phoenix, gesturing for them to move quickly. He pointed to the hole in the wall, and the Militia men ran through it, guns up and ready.

Hogan went to the machine to see what could be salvaged when Phoenix fired, destroying the machine. Hogan turned, his expression unreadable.

"I am disappointed by your actions, my son," he said coolly. "You've made your decision." He looked at the two guards, hardening his eyes on Phoenix, who pushed out his chest in defiance, balling his hands into fists.

Hogan shook his head. "Arrest Major Bates."

#

Manfred waved urgently from the exit of the tunnel. Josh, Rachel, and Abigail rushed toward him, their breaths coming in quick, panicked bursts.

"All clear. Let's go!" Manfred's voice cut through the chaos.

As they moved, gunfire erupted from deeper in the tunnel. They all looked behind them as the soldiers got closer. Abigail couldn't run any faster. Her legs were already starting to hurt.

"Abby!" Rachel shrieked, throwing herself behind her daughter. Just as a gunshot rang out, Abigail fell down. When Abigail hopped back to her feet and tried to get her mother to stand, she noticed the bullet wound. It was in the right side of her mother's chest. Blood was coloring her white shirt red, and the blood continued to flow.

Rachel screamed when Abigail inadvertently pulled the wrong arm. "Oh, I'm sorry, Mom! Dad!"

Manfred fired back at the attackers, aiming above their heads and causing the tunnel to collapse around them. Josh ran to his wife and slid to her on his knees. His heart shattered as he ripped his shirt off and used it to try to stop the bleeding from her wound. She started to wheeze as she struggled to breathe.

"You'll be all right, my love. You'll be all right. Just gotta stop the flow. That's all! Just gotta stop the bleeding."

Rachel, her breathing shallow and labored, shook her head, gesturing for Josh to stop, patting his hand away weakly. He grabbed her hand and held it hand tightly. Abigail, overwhelmed with grief, clutched her mother's shoulder nearest her and cried, kissing Rachel's forehead. Rachel looked up into her daughter's eyes.

Behind them Manfred paced, his worried eyes on the family and all around them, waiting for danger, prepared for it.

"Matt was right, you know," Rachel whispered. She took in a sharp breath, grimacing from pain. When she settled again, she continued softly, "Yeshua is the only way to eternal life, I want to see you there... I want to see you..." She moved her eyes to Josh, squeezing his hand, "and you. Surrender to Him before it's too late. Do it for me and do it for our family. Trust Him."

With her strength fading, Rachel looked away and upward, her final breath escaping as she whispered, "YESHUA, forgive me."

She exhaled and died, her eyes remaining open.

Josh whimpered, kissing her face repeatedly, his face streaked with tears. "No, no, no, no..." he repeated the word.

Manfred watched Abigail hug her mother's lifeless body, her sobs echoing through the crumbling tunnel. He had let this go on long enough. He was sorry Rachel was gone but she was in a way better place than they were right now and if they wanted to continue fighting and living, they had to get out of the tunnel.

Manfred's voice was soft but urgent. "I'm so sorry, but we have to leave her here. There's nothing we can do."

She stood up. As they walked out, she moved to her father and he took her in his arms, kissing the top of her head weeping silently.

Moments later, a large stone near the Temple entrance shifted, and Manfred, Josh, and Abigail emerged, their faces pale and weary. Abigail still holding onto her father's arms. The desperate cries of Phoenix cut through the air.

"Abi, ABI! Please help me!"

Phoenix's voice was filled with anguish. Abigail's heart pounded as she spun in the direction of the calls. They were coming from a nearby alley.

"Phoenix," she murmured then said his name louder. "Phoenix?"

Josh took his daughter's arm, but she pulled away from him shaking her head. "No, Dad, he needs me. He needs help!"

"Abi, I need you, Abi!" Phoenix's pleas continued, drifting toward her, wrenching her heart strings. Without another moment of hesitation, Abigail ran toward the alley.

"Abi, no!" Josh shouted, going after her but held back by Manfred, who shook his head vehemently.

"She'll be all right if she's going to Phoenix. No matter what. She'll be all right."

Josh had his doubts about that. But what other choice did he have? He knew Manfred was right.

"Abi, Abi," Phoenix's voice called out. Abigail ran down the alley, her eyes scanning for the man.

"Abi, I'm right here... I'm right here..." His voice was getting closer. She was sure he was right around here. He was close. Very close.

Just then, Abigail rounded the corner and found herself face-to-face with the Militia and Hogan. Hogan held an AI voice changer to his mouth, his tone mockingly sweet as he said, "Oh here you are, honey. I have found you, my perfect sacrifice." Phoenix's voice

came from his mouth. He lowered the voice changer, a huge grin on his face. She could see how delighted he was with himself. She scoffed and spat at him.

Abigail struggled fiercely against the grip of the Militia soldier who had snuck behind her and seized her. "Let me go! Let me go!" She tried kicking back with her feet but another soldier came over and both men lifted her up, so she wasn't even on her feet anymore. She tried to squirm, but they were much too strong for her.

CHAPTER 20: TWO PROPHETS KILLED

That night was darker than usual. Tietan, Hogan, Dimitry, and Abaddon gathered outside the towering fence that encircled the Temple. A massive stream of fire erupted from the Temple entrance, pushing the militia back. Abaddon, with a touch of sarcasm, remarked, "Too predictable."

In a dramatic counterpoint, a vertical column of fire shot down from the heavens, orchestrated by Abaddon's hands, melting the fence. Abaddon stepped forward, his laughter ringing out over the tumultuous night.

Hogan and Dimitry shielded themselves from the scorching heat, their skin reddening and blistering under the intense blaze. Tietan, undeterred by the flames, strode confidently through the fire, his confidence unwavering. Abaddon followed closely behind, dragging a figure with him.

Moses and Elijah emerged from the Temple's entrance. The media, gathered in anticipation of the ultimate showdown, turned their cameras toward the prophets. Moses's voice rang out with fervent authority.

"Repent for sacrificing to devils. Repent for leading people astray with your pharma. Repent for rejecting Yeshua!"

Abaddon directed the fire from the heavens toward the prophets. Moses and Elijah countered with their own torrents of fire from their mouths. The fire collided, shaking the Temple's pillars and sending tremors through the ground. The fire subsided, and Tapper focused his camera on Tietan, who made a dramatic reveal. Abigail, battered and handcuffed, was paraded by Tietan in front of the live cameras and released between the prophets and Abaddon.

"My followers!" Tietan proclaimed, gesturing toward the Temple entrance and drawing attention to the altar behind Moses and Elijah. On the wood of the altar lay the flesh of a

ram, with the fat and the inner parts separate. The ram's head, with horns, rested on top. The entire sacrifice engulfed in flames.

"You've all witnessed the cruel, barbaric burnt offering sacrifices made by the Two Deceivers during their time among us," Tietan declared, turning to the Prophets. "Step forward, Deceivers, and take one of your own—a gift, a peace offering."

Moses and Elijah looked down at Abigail, who was staring straight ahead of her. She was pushed from behind and fell to her knees in front of them. The coat she wore fell open, revealing a bomb strapped to her body, the harsh reality of her predicament laid bare.

"It is time," Moses said calmly.

"For the Seventh and final Trumpet. This will release seven bowls of God's wrath. What has been written about us must now come to pass," Elijah added, his voice somber. Moses and Elijah moved in unison towards Abigail.

"Now!" Tietan commanded. Abaddon leapt onto the entrance behind Moses and Elijah. With arms outstretched, torrents of fire descended, striking the prophets and knocking them to the ground. Their bodies smoldered, the heat so intense that reporters dared not approach. Though the prophets remained unburned, they were unmistakably dead. Abaddon approached the fallen, standing on each one's neck cracking it. The Militia erupted into cheers, their voices raised in exultation.

Abigail's eyes filled with tears as she gazed at the lifeless faces of Moses and Elijah. Abaddon dragged the bodies by the hair, and tossed them before Tietan, who stood with arms raised in victory.

"Hail Tietan!" Abaddon declared, as Tapper's camera broadcast the scene live.

"Hail Tietan! Hail Tietan!" chanted the Militia and the gathered crowd, their voices blending into a cacophony of adulation. Tietan addressed the gathering crowd and the cameras.

“The ones who brought the world to its knees for the past one thousand two hundred and sixty days, in other words, three and a half years, are dead. And I’ve saved you. I AM. I am your savior, and I will never leave nor abandon you like the God of Heaven.”

“Tietan is the true Messiah! Our one, true leader!” affirmed Abaddon.

The crowd responded with fervent chants.

“Hail Tietan! Hail Tietan!”

Tietan turned his gaze toward the Temple. “Take three days to purify the Temple, and on the Sabbath, I will take possession of my new home.”

The sounds of animals from the Temple made Tietan clearly irritated.

“And free those helpless animals. No more sacrifices.”

As he left, he pointed toward Moses and Elijah.

“Leave their bodies where they are. Let them rot so that the world sees my glory.”

Televisions around the world broadcasted the lifeless forms of Moses and Elijah. In response, wild celebrations erupted as people danced in the streets, exchanged gifts, and embraced one another.

CHAPTER 21: THE BEAST MORTALLY WOUNDED

Three and a half days later, the Temple loomed majestically against the morning sky. The streets gleamed with pristine clarity, except for the two bodies of the prophets lying starkly visible. Flags bearing Tietan's face fluttered proudly above.

With an air of triumphant grandeur, Tietan made his way up the Temple steps. He approached the bodies of Moses and Elijah with a smirk of disdain, delivering a cruel kick to Moses before standing over him, his foot planted on Moses' neck for a dramatic photo op. The crowd erupted into cheers.

Abaddon bowed deeply as Tietan approached. The two men embraced.

"Hail Tietan! Hail Tietan! Hail Tietan!" chanted the crowd. A few paces behind Tietan, Hogan surveyed with a wary eye. Into his radio, he barked orders, his voice edged with frustration.

"I don't care! Tietan demands ten groups of seven thousand for each parade to honor the Ten Kings! Just make it happen!" His voice was sharp and urgent. He held the radio close so Tietan didn't overhear his troubles. It was his job to make sure everything went smoothly, and he didn't want to bother Tietan with any of it. "Have they found Major Bates yet?" He paused. "That's not possible. Interrogate those who had him. Double Abigail's guards and keep searching."

Across Jerusalem, ten parades of seven thousand marched in disciplined formation, each with a different colored uniform and each parade waving flags proudly displaying Tietan's face in the center of the 10K "UN" flag. The streets were alive with celebration, flowers showering from every direction as people cheered.

Tietan stood on the top step of the Temple entrance. The crowds, fists in the air, chanted,

"Hail Tietan, Hail Tietan, Hail Tietan."

Tietan boldly addressed the people.

“Enlightened ones, my friends! I promise to lead us toward peace, prosperity, and happiness. My people deserve no less. Today marks—”

Suddenly, from the shadows of the Temple entrance, Josh emerged, wild-eyed and disheveled, wielding an ancient Jewish dagger. He lunged at Tietan and landed on the stunned self-proclaimed deity, driving the blade deep into Tietan’s neck. Blood sprayed from the wound as Tietan collapsed. He twitched several times before his body lay lifeless on the ground, his eyes open and were black. The Militia surged forward, tackling Josh with brutal force and dragging him away as he laughed hysterically.

Doctors had immediately surged to the front of the crowd, up to Tietan. They all turned to Abaddon, their faces filled with despair, shaking their heads. Tietan’s wound was too grave—he was pale and lifeless. He was already gone.

Abaddon, unwilling to accept it, pushed the doctors aside. He stood over Tietan and shouted, “Tietan, you have been given the power of the Dragon. Get up! It is time to show them the true Messiah!”

Dark smoke enveloped Tietan as the doctors fled. A mysterious force sealed the wound with searing fire. Miraculously, Tietan stood with a smile, his neck now scarred. He raised his hands in triumph.

“Unite!” He shouted.

The crowd, unable to believe their eyes, erupted into frenzied cheers, bowing and worshiping him.

Tapper shouted to the crowd, “Who can stand against Tietan? He cannot be defeated! All Hail Tietan!”

The crowd continued to bow and worship unrestrained, cameras broadcasting the scene live with Picture-in-Picture of Moses and Elijah’s dead bodies.

A thunderous voice erupted from the heavens, silencing the crowd. "Come up here."

All eyes turned to see Moses and Elijah, standing where their slain bodies had lain, restored to perfection. A split second later, they ascended into the clouds before vanishing.

The crowds stopped worshiping Tietan, their faces filled with confusion. Murmurs lifted up, the chattering began. Tietan's rage filled him as he watched panic began to spread.

Just then a violent earthquake shook the ground, the violent tremors instantly causing a tenth of the city to collapse. Amid the devastation, one of the ten parade groups lay dead beneath the rubble. An eerie silence settled over the scene as the earth rested once more and the onlookers saw that Tietan was gone.

#

Meanwhile, Phoenix secretly looked through a window of a second story building adjacent to the Correction Facility. He saw a battered Josh being dragged toward a half-sunken, crowded holding jail.

Josh was in so much pain, he didn't even notice it anymore. He allowed himself to be tossed into the jail cell with others. He was spun by the guards in such a way that he very, very briefly caught sight of Mount Zion to the south, just as the 144,000 ascended into the clouds before vanishing.

He blinked rapidly, unsure if he'd really seen what he thought he saw. He turned to the people around him. No one was paying him any more attention. He was just another prisoner.

"Did you... did you see that? Did you see it?"

No one responded with an affirmative. Josh struggled to walk, he held onto the cell bars, staring at the sight that was no longer there, his faith renewed and refreshed.

A short woman in her fifties, looking a little crazy, grabbed Josh's arm and pulled him lower.

"Hold on. Just three and a half more years. Yeshua will return!" She was so positive. She smiled and he noticed she had no teeth, her clothes were a little too big and hair that hadn't seen a brush or shampoo for at least a month.

"Mr. Angelos. Mr. Angelos."

He heard his name. He turned to look outside the crowded cell.

"Mr. Angelos."

He twisted around to see a man with a cap and glasses, kneeling, tying his shoes. Josh narrowed his eyes. Why was this guy familiar to him?

Phoenix lifted his head and made eye contact. Josh was momentarily taken aback.

"Don't react," Phoenix snapped.

Josh had a million questions to ask but couldn't decide what he wanted to know first. Phoenix moved closer, retying his shoes.

"I'm sorry, sir. I didn't mean for anything to happen to Rachel and Abigail. You've got to believe me. I love Abi. I trusted the wrong people."

"What do you want from me?"

"Tell her to hold on. I've got a plan to get you both out. Just don't give up," whispered Phoenix, tilting his head in Josh's direction.

Josh frowned. "I don't know where she is now."

"She's in here with you."

Stunned, Josh didn't know what to say.

“Tell her what I said,” Phoenix hissed, standing up and moving away from Josh, leaving Josh searching through the crowded cell.

#

Tietan faced the trembling crowd.

“See how the cowards run in fear?” he declared, his voice dripping with disdain. Fire from Abaddon shot toward the spot where Moses and Elijah had disappeared. Tietan continued, “Stay strong and courageous. Together, we will defeat Yeshua once and for all!”

Tietan strode across the Temple entrance.

“Unlike the story of Babel, where the people were divided by language, we are united. Together, we can achieve anything. But remember—” Tietan’s tone grew menacing. “If you’re not with me, you’re against me. Those who refuse to worship me are dividers and enemies. They will be hunted down and beheaded, like these ones.” He pointed toward the Correction Facility’s outdoor holding cell in the distance where Josh had been placed.

“No more mercy, no exceptions. We must unite before Yeshua’s return at Megiddo!”

Abaddon raised his arms, and lightning streaked across the sky in a dramatic display. He thrust his hands downward with finality. The Temple doors creaked open, revealing a colossal statue rising from the ground amidst swirling dark mist. The statue, though motionless, breathed with a malevolent presence and said,

“The mark is clear, on your right hand or forehead. His image, his name, or his number—666.”

Fireworks erupted in a brilliant display of light conducted by Abaddon’s hands. But this was interrupted by a streak of fire arcing through the sky, followed by a booming, resonant voice that echoed with divine authority. An angel’s voice thundered,

“Fear God and give Him glory, for the hour of His judgment has come. Worship Him who made heaven, the earth, the sea, and the fresh water.”

The sky roared with thunder, punctuating the angel’s declaration, and another streak of fire followed.

“Babylon is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication,” declared the second angel, his voice a thunderous warning.

The heavens crackled with another resounding thunderclap as a third angel’s voice sliced through the air.

“If any man worships the Beast and his image, and receives his mark, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of His indignation,” the third angel proclaimed.

A sonic boom echoed as the angel’s voice continued:

“They will be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and the Lamb. The smoke of their torment rises forever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the Beast and his image and receive his mark.”

A solemn beat followed before the angel’s voice softened with a note of divine promise.

“Here is the patience of the saints: those who keep God’s commandments and the faith of Jesus.”

Abaddon stood at the entrance of the Temple, firing streams of flames toward the angels. He addressed the crowd, saying, “Good, the entire world has heard their feeble threats. Now, worship Tietan, who was dead and is now alive. Give your life to him by taking his mark. Those who refuse will not buy or sell. The choice is yours and the consequence is yours.”

Across the world, Tietan's reign unfolded with relentless and disturbing efficiency. Clinics and stores became hubs of desperation, their long queues stretching like serpentine lines of unease, all waiting to receive Tietan's mark. The mark came in three forms only, placed either on their foreheads or right hands, never on the left. Some bore Tietan's face, others simply displayed the name "TIETAN," and some bore the ominous number "666." Only those with the mark were able to purchase and sell food.

On the central social media platform, heavily monitored by the Ten Kings, users flaunted their newly acquired marks with a perverse sense of pride. Pictures of marked individuals were posted with triumph and defiance, their statuses becoming a testament to their submission and conformity. The digital realm buzzed with images of the mark, a sign of loyalty and a way to showcase their alignment with Tietan's rule.

Over the next couple of years, in stark contrast, those who refused the mark faced brutal ostracism. Militia checkpoints sprang up across the cities, beheading anyone who failed or refused to bear the mark. The air thickened with terror and control. Many lashed out at loved ones who had not taken the mark, escorting them and forcing them into the long lines.

A flash of light and those with the mark began to develop painful sores and boils over their faces, necks, and arms. And they blamed the unmarked for their affliction.

Another flash of light and the ocean changed into a deep red like the blood of the dead – dark and clotted. Everything that lived in the ocean died, and people panicked when the dead life washed ashore.

Another flash of light, and the lakes, rivers, and fountains of the land were soon to follow the oceans. The water that people drank became blood, and they spat it out.

Another flash of light, and the sun turned on mankind. Flares from the sun scorched various groups of people. Everyone wished for night. Then, they got it.

Another flash of light, and the sun was enveloped in shadow and the world became totally black. A darkness that could be felt.

CHAPTER 22: SUMMON TO MEGIDDO

In the former Holy of Holies inside the Temple at the far end, the grand chamber was illuminated by the Temple Lampstand, casting eerie shadows that danced across the walls. Tietan sat on a lavish throne, in the previous Holy of Holies. His face a mask of absolute authority. Beside him, Abaddon stood like a silent sentinel, ever watchful and stoic.

The heavy doors of the Temple burst open with a resounding crash as Tapper stumbled in, his face etched with urgency.

“Hail Tietan! Hail—” he began, but he stopped abruptly as Tietan raised his hand.

“The atmospheric conditions caused a world-wide EMP, disabling all electronics and networks?” Tietan mused.

Tapper apprehensively nodded, wincing as he gnawed on his tongue, the sharp pain drawing blood that spilled over his lips. He thrust a tablet towards Abaddon, who received it with practiced ease and then handed it over to Tietan.

Tietan’s gaze remained fixed as he examined the tablet’s screen.

“So, the Euphrates River is dried up,” he remarked flatly. “Well, we have water stored.” He swiped through the device’s contents with a languid air. “Even though the EMP has fried the motors. This makes it a lot easier for the Kings of the East to reach Megiddo on horseback,” he added dismissively.

Tapper, still wincing from his painful uncontrollable gnawing, “But they’ll destroy those cities on the way.”

Tietan shrugged indifferently. “They need to eat and play.” He turned to Abaddon. “I want one billion souls there—far more than those who gathered at Babel. We need a grand display of unified strength when we finally face Him.”

“What about the communication lines?” Tapper pressed. “How will we rally them?”

Tietan’s gaze was chillingly detached. “Dragon protocol. I have no need for human technology now.”

Without warning, Tietan threw his head back, and from his mouth emerged a grotesque, frog-like creature. Abaddon mirrored the gesture, and another similar creature appeared from him. The room seemed to shudder as a large shadowy dragon materialized at Tietan’s left side, accompanied by yet another frog-like creature. The three creatures hovered ominously, their presence unsettling.

Tietan snapped forward. “Summon the Kings of the earth and their armies to Megiddo,” he commanded the frogs. “Use signs and wonders if you must. The time for unity is now.”

With that, the three frog-like entities touched and soared off in different directions, their departure a foreboding signal of the chaos to come.

#

The dry riverbed of the Euphrates was now nothing more than cracked earth. Dust rose in swirling plumes as a massive militia advanced, their numbers swelling both on foot and horseback.

A city, on route to Megiddo, erupts as southern soldiers descended upon it plundering homes, tearing jewelry from the necks and fingers of the civilians, and seizing the young women. The once-peaceful streets were transformed into scenes of violence and despair.

CHAPTER 23: BABYLON REJECTS THE KINGS

The streets of Babylon, in its most resplendent form—buzzed with an almost feverish energy. A few luxurious chariots drawn by prestigious horses, accompanied by the Militia, wove their way through the bustling, candle-lit streets. The occupants waved graciously to the throngs of people lining the streets, their faces alight with adoration.

“Hail Tietan!” the crowd chanted, their fervor unrestrained. They surged forward, eager to catch a glimpse of their revered leader.

The chariots stopped at an outdoor venue that served as the centerpiece of the evening’s grand celebration. The air was charged with anticipation as the crowd gathered around the stage, their faces bathed in the bright lights of the venue.

The Kings exited their chariots. Dimitry was poised to address the gathering. As the murmurs subsided, all eyes turned expectantly towards him.

“Good evening, citizens of Babylon,” Dimitry’s voice rang out. The initial ripple of polite applause followed, but it was tepid compared to the earlier cheers. A few people in the crowd exchanged puzzled glances and whispered among themselves.

“Where’s Tietan?” one onlooker murmured; confusion evident in his voice.

“Is Tietan going to speak?” another asked, her concern clear.

Dimitry pressed on, his eyes surveying the crowd. “Tonight, we come together to celebrate nearly seven years of collective achievements since that sign first appeared in the sky. The prosperity and progress we’ve accomplished together are unparalleled!”

Despite his words and a few scattered claps, restlessness began to simmer within the crowd. Faces turned, scanning the horizon for the familiar figure of Tietan. Discontent spread like wildfire, and a noticeable shift occurred as people began to drift away from the venue. Their earlier excitement had given way to visible disappointment.

Dimitry's speech faltered, drowned out by the sound of shuffling feet and murmured disinterest. The crowd's collective disillusionment transformed their initial fervor into muted apathy.

Inside the chariot, the mood was decidedly less festive. Mazoku, Muhammad, and Dimitry sat in silence, their faces etched with a mix of anger and frustration.

"No respect for their Kings?" Muhammad's voice cut through the silence, thick with irritation.

Mazoku's response was sharp and bitter. "We've guided them through one crisis after another—ungrateful fools!"

Dimitry's eyes flashed with anger, simmering under the surface of his words. "Arrogant Babylon has turned its back on us. Now we'll return the favor." He slammed the door and tapped the roof so the driver would get it moving again.

As their chariot passed a brightly decorated storefront, a jovial store owner waved cheerfully at the passing crowd. His exuberant greeting seemed starkly out of place amidst the mounting tension.

"Evening, folks!" the store owner called out, his voice brimming with enthusiasm. "We've got everything you need for the festival!"

CHAPTER 24: THE GAMBIT

The store owner's once-cheerful demeanor crumbled when he spotted Phoenix approaching. His smile faltered, and he nervously displayed his marked right hand, a desperate gesture of compliance.

"Major Bates. I've heard you've been seeking the rebel leaders."

Noting the scrutinizing gazes around them, Phoenix quickly ushered the store owner inside, one hand on his arm. The owner went along willingly, though he was clearly terrified.

Inside the shop, the store owner fumbled with his register, extending a hand filled with cash towards Phoenix. Phoenix does not take it, but covers the store owner's hand with his own. With a deliberate motion, he lifted his hand to reveal a small Bible.

The store owner recoiled in horror, dropping the Bible to the floor.

"That is not mine," he stammered. "Such an item is forbidden."

Phoenix's eyes were steely, his tone unyielding.

"Very true. One could be arrested for possessing such an item."

"It's not mine," the store owner insisted, his voice trembling.

The store owner's eyes darted nervously.

"Do you know what happens if they find this?" Phoenix asked, dryly, leaning over the counter.

As the argument escalated, the other customers, sensing trouble, quickly exited the store.

Once they were gone, the shop owner moved quickly around the corner and turned the open sign to closed. He peeked out the glass of the door up and down the street. Satisfied, he returned to the counter.

“You know what I want,” Phoenix stated firmly.

The man nodded, the look of surprise still on his face. “I must say, sir, I’m surprised you...”

Phoenix lifted one hand; his index finger raised. He dropped his eyes to the counter. “We won’t talk. Just show me the way.”

“Yes, sir.”

#

Phoenix and the store owner arrived at the imposing Library of Celsius. The grand old building, with its towering columns and sprawling trees. The store owner gestured towards it.

“In there. Odi is the gatekeeper. The recruiter.”

“Thank you, Clyde.”

The shop owner hadn’t introduced himself but didn’t ask how Phoenix knew his name. They shook and the man walked away casually, blending into the crowd and disappearing around a corner.

Phoenix walked in, heading for the research and development section.

Inside the library, ornate shelves were lined with ancient volumes, each a testament to a bygone era. Odi, fulfilling his role as a janitor, was busy with his duties, his long sleeves concealing his hands. He leaned on a mop as Phoenix approached.

“They say the Book of Revelation contains prophecies of future events,” Phoenix began.

Odi did not reply. He went back to mopping, dropping it in a bucket and splashing water on the dry floor near Phoenix's feet.

Phoenix pressed on. "Or current events. Depends on what you're looking for."

Odi finished mopping the small section and pushed the mop and bucket to a small nearby door. Phoenix followed him.

As Odi began to unpack a stack of books, Phoenix's patience wore thin. He lunged at Odi, producing a knife, pushing Odi against a bookshelf that reached to the ceiling. He pushed the knife under Odi's chin against his throat.

"Where's Manfred?" he asked.

Odi's response was calm and somewhat mocking. He looked into Phoenix's eyes. "I'm scared. Don't kill me."

Defiantly, Odi revealed his right hand, unmarred and untouched by the mark. Then he tapped his forehead.

Odi with a smirk, continues, "Now you have even more of a reason to kill me".

After a tense moment, Phoenix eased off, shoving Odi into a secluded cubicle and slowly retracting his knife. With a deliberate motion, Phoenix peeled away his bandage to reveal the ominous "666" etched into his skin.

Odi nodded knowingly, then looked surprised as Phoenix removed the mark with his fingernails.

"That's not how that works. It is embedded in the skin. That's not how it works!" he said, watching in disbelief as Phoenix removed the last traces of it.

"I needed to know if I could trust you," Phoenix explained, his voice steady.

Odi was stunned.

“They’ll kill you for this. Especially you,” he said dryly.

“What I thought was love was the biggest lie,” Phoenix said softly. “And I see the true evidence of love in Yeshua’s people. How do I meet Yeshua?”

Odi’s eyes glistened with tears as he looked up at Phoenix.

“She prayed for you daily since you saved her,” he said in a soft tone. “It appears she has been heard.”

With trembling hands, Odi pulled out his wallet, showing Phoenix a picture of his wife—the same pregnant woman Phoenix had rescued in Jerusalem. Another photo showed Odi, his wife, and a baby.

“This was the last picture before Yeshua took them after the Mark of the Beast was enforced,” Odi said, his voice choked with emotion. “I was angry at first, but then I realized He was merciful to take them when He did. It got much worse.”

Odi carefully returned the photo to his wallet.

“So to answer your question, just speak to Yeshua with an honest heart and you will find Him. He is closer than the air you breathe. In the meantime, I’ll take you to Manfred. He can use your skills and access to make things right. That’s why you came, isn’t it?”

Phoenix nodded.

Odi got to his feet. “Be warned—he won’t see you unless you bring him something of value.”

“I have something of great value he will want,” Phoenix replied with great confidence.

CHAPTER 25: THE SURFACE OF UNITY

In the dimly lit office of the Militia Headquarters in Babylon, Hogan sat hunched over his desk, his brow creased in concentration. The name "TIETAN" was embossed across his forehead. He held a large brochure on the upcoming Babylon Festival. The quiet of the room was broken only by the flipping of pages.

A sudden knock on the door drew Hogan out of his intense focus. Without looking up, he called out for them to enter.

The door creaked open, and Phoenix stepped into the room. His presence was marked by an air of tension, but he carried himself with calm determination.

"Father," he said softly, the word carrying a mixture of reverence and weariness.

Hogan paused, and completely ignored him by continuing to read the brochure.

"Sorry, you must be mistaken. My son died nearly three and a half years ago."

The disdain in his voice was palpable.

Phoenix took a seat across from Hogan's desk, his posture stiff as he waited for his father's full attention. Hogan's eyes remained glued to the brochure, his concentration seemingly unshaken.

Phoenix said coldly, "I wonder how Mom would have reacted to hearing that."

That pushed Hogan's buttons, causing him to grow angrier. He looked up and glared at Phoenix, eye to eye.

"How dare you?" Hogan growled forcefully.

Phoenix could practically see his father bristling. He missed their old relationship. But it was never to be that way again and he'd come to accept that. "I'm sorry, but no one

likes to be hunted. You left me no choice,” Phoenix began, his voice laden with a mixture of sincerity and sarcasm.

“Your mother would want that apology, not me,” Hogan responded, sitting back, throwing the brochure on his desk forcefully. “So, where have you been all this time?”

“Glad you asked,” Phoenix continued. “What is the one thing Tietan wants above all?”

Hogan’s lips curled into a self-satisfied smile.

“Unity. Loyalty. Something you’re missing.”

Phoenix leaned forward, his eyes narrowing.

“The greater of those is unity. And as long as Manfred and his rebels are out there, he is unable to achieve complete unity. So strike Manfred, and the sheep will be scattered.” He let the statement hang in the air, then added, “Are you any closer to catching them?”

He paused, rising from his seat with a sense of purpose. Hogan’s gaze followed him.

Phoenix continued, “What if I told you I’ve spent the last few years learning how to get close to Manfred? I can help end this disunity once and for all. I can bring you the leader of the rebel movement. Dead or alive.”

Hogan responded sarcastically, “I suppose you want me to release Abigail as a reward?”

Phoenix said honestly, “That would be nice. But I need something better. I want my father back and to become Lieutenant Colonel.”

Hogan’s demeanor shifted from hostility to something softer and more contemplative. He stood and walked around the desk, pulling Phoenix into a brief but heartfelt embrace. “I’ve missed you!”

When he pulled back, reveals Phoenix has tears in his eyes. Hogan rests his hands on Phoenix's shoulders with a firm, reassuring grip.

"I knew you'd come back to me, son," Hogan said, his voice tinged with emotion. "Your mother would have cried to see us reunited."

Hogan's gaze fell on Phoenix's bandaged hand, his brow furrowing in concern.

"Your mark... it's infected?"

Phoenix winced as Hogan gently touched the mark on his hand.

Phoenix added, "There's one thing. I can't get close to Manfred without offering something he needs. It's a quid pro quo."

Hogan's expression grew thoughtful.

"I can't give you Josh," he said after a moment's pause. "He's the main attraction for the upcoming Babylon Festival." He made a dismissive gesture with his hand. "The one who tried to behead Tietan gets beheaded. Ironic, isn't it?"

Phoenix's eyes gleamed with determination. "I suppose if we had the dynamic duo—Josh and Manfred—then—"

Hogan's interest was piqued, a small smile tugging at the corners of his mouth. "Then Tietan will be very approving! And you'll get the Lieutenant Colonel status you've always wanted. I can guarantee that." Hogan's eyes flashed at the thought of the glory he would heap upon his son.

Phoenix's mind was already racing with possibilities. He reached for a map he had brought with him. "You catch more ants with honey than with vinegar..." he remarked.

Hogan nodded in agreement, and together they huddled over the map as they began to strategize.

CHAPTER 26: LOYALTY QUESTIONED

The prison's cell block was a shadowy realm, where flickering lights struggled against the encroaching darkness. Distant clanging sounds echoed like ghosts in the night, a harsh reminder of the place's grim purpose. Guards clad in tactical gear patrolled the narrow corridor. Phoenix strode in with a burning conviction that set him apart from the soldiers around him.

He stood in front of the control room's reinforced glass window. The Prison Warden, a stern man with a number "666" marked on his right hand, looked up with a mixture of surprise and trepidation. Phoenix slammed his fist on the counter, the sound reverberating through the air like thunder.

"Release Abigail. Now."

The Warden frowned, shaking his head.

"Major, you don't have the authority to—"

"It's the General's command," Phoenix interrupted.

The tension crackled between them, thick as fog. Warden types away to verify the order. The Warden hesitated another moment, clearly intimidated by Phoenix's commanding presence. With a weary sigh, he relented.

"You do know she's one of those rebel leaders?" he said, a note of warning lacing his voice. "And she needs to be returned or I could be hanged for letting her out. I'll send a detail with you."

"You will be hanged for refusing orders." Phoenix's eyes narrowed, unyielding.

With a series of clinks and clatters, the Warden began the laborious process of unlocking the cell doors. At the end of the block, the heavy door creaked open, revealing Abigail. Her face was pale, and as her wide eyes met Phoenix's, tears of joy

glistened there. Her hair was a mess and she'd lost weight but she looked overall healthy.

"Phoenix!" she cried, her voice breaking with emotion. He went into the cell to meet her.

She rushed toward him, enveloping him in a desperate embrace. Phoenix wrapped his arms around her, the stern facade he wore softening as he buried his face in her shoulder, bringing his lips close to her ear.

"I'm here. I've got you," he whispered, resolve settling in his heart.

Abigail pulled back slightly, her hands resting on his shoulders. Her expression was a mix of joy and disbelief, as if she couldn't quite comprehend the miracle unfolding before her.

"I knew you wouldn't leave me here. I knew you'd come. Dad told me," she said, her voice thick with gratitude.

Phoenix met her gaze, his heart swelling with unspoken promises.

"We're getting out of here, together."

As they began to move toward the exit, Abigail looked up at him, her expression shimmering with love and hope. But Phoenix's thoughts were momentarily drawn to the Militia around them. He took a deep breath,

"We don't have much time," he called to the soldiers. "Move out!"

With his words, the soldiers sprang into action, following their orders with mechanical precision. He turned to Abigail and secretly whispered,

"Buying us time. I'm sending them to the other side of town."

Sometime later, the sun hung low in the sky, casting long, slanting shadows across the cracked pavement of the Babylon Abandoned Warehouse. The same group of Militia

soldiers gathered around a high-tech command van parked nearby, the tension in the air palpable as they prepared for their next move.

Inside the van, Hogan surveyed the screens before him. Surrounded by a group of technicians, he focused intently on the movements displayed on the monitors. A female silhouette glowed as it entered an underground room, and Hogan's eyes gleamed with a mixture of admiration and contempt.

"Love technology," he mused, his voice low and gravelly. "We would never have been able to track them if they didn't have those ..."

The technicians nod, their faces illuminated by the glow of the screens.

#

In the Babylon Underground Bunker. The air hummed with the clacking of keyboards and the glow of flickering screens as his rebels worked feverishly.

"We're on the verge of keeping the communication network down forever." Manfred paced furiously, his thin frame vibrating with tension.

The rickety old elevator creaked and groaned as it descended, finally shuddering to a halt. The doors slid open and Odi and Abigail stepped out, their arrival bringing needed energy to the bleak interior of the bunker.

Manfred's face brightened with a mixture of relief and joy when he saw Abigail. He rushed over and enveloped her in a tight embrace, his frazzled nerves easing momentarily. He pulled back to look at her.

"I can see it now—Yeshua's touch!" Manfred exclaimed, his voice a blend of awe and excitement. "You've crossed over. I can see it in your eyes".

He paused, catching his breath before adding, "So have I."

As the words left his mouth, Phoenix emerged from the elevator behind them. The atmosphere in the room shifted palpably. The rebels and Manfred's eyes widened with surprise and unease as they took in Phoenix's imposing figure. Several who were sitting abruptly stood as if they thought they might have to quickly run away.

Abigail, noticing the growing tension turned to the room, patting the air with both hands.

"It's okay," she said, reassuringly. "Phoenix saved me. He has a plan to get my father out too. He is one of us now. We are all safe."

Manfred's relief was short-lived as panic set in. His eyes darted around wildly, realizing the gravity of their situation.

"It's a trap—they're leading them to us!" he shouted, his voice cracking with fear.

Before anyone could react, the blaring sound of a perimeter alarm filled the room. Manfred spun around, desperately trying to locate the source. Abigail and Odi turned their attention to Phoenix, who raised his hands in a gesture of desperation.

"It's not me, I swear. I risked everything to bring you here," he pleaded urgently.

Without warning, the entrance of the bunker exploded in a thunderous roar. Dust and debris surged into the room, obscuring everything in a thick, choking cloud. Through the smoke, the Militia forces stormed in, their weapons raised and ready for combat.

The rebels, caught entirely off-guard, were thrown into disarray. The once orderly bunker became a battlefield, the air thick with the acrid smell of gunpowder and the cacophony of shouting voices. Dust and smoke billowed into the room as the Militia forces stormed in, weapons raised.

Manfred's face turned a ghastly shade of white as he saw the Militia advancing. He turned to Phoenix, his voice barely audible over the chaos.

"Take him down!" he shouted.

Without hesitation, the rebels surged toward Phoenix. They tackled him to the ground, their numbers overwhelming him. A few began kicking him mercilessly while he struggled against their relentless assault. Despite his best efforts, Phoenix was quickly subdued by the sheer force of their attack.

Abigail's anguished cry cut through the tumult.

"Phoenix!"

Just then, Hogan made his entrance.

"Secure it!" Hogan ordered his men, his voice slicing through the clamor.

Hogan's men pushed through the chaos, quickly subduing the remaining rebels. Handcuffing Manfred, Odi, and Abigail, their disciplined actions contrasted sharply with the earlier confusion, swiftly bringing the situation under control.

As the Militia released the battered Phoenix, Hogan's eyes immediately focused on Phoenix's unmarked hand and pondered. Then he approached Phoenix with a smile and a nod of approval, patting him on the back.

"Well done, son!" Hogan said, his tone a mix of pride and satisfaction. "The hand—a brilliant trick to earn their trust. Sending your team in the opposite direction was a nice touch, just in case they were watching. And of course, you knew we tracked Abigail's nanoparticles."

Odi, his face a mask of realization, mumbled, "The vaccines."

Hogan's smile widened with smug satisfaction. "Of course. Though I'm afraid it's a bit late for you to be having this realization."

Abigail, her face a picture of shock and betrayal, looked at Phoenix with sharp eyes. He could see they were filled with the deep pain of being deceived again. As the Militia started escorting the rebels out, Phoenix stepped toward Hogan with his hands out.

“Dad, it’s too late. I’ve crossed over.”

The ground started to shake uncontrollably, another earthquake. All the rebels being dragged off, Odi whispers as he passes Phoenix, “The seventh and final bowl of God’s wrath is being poured out.”

CHAPTER 27: THE FINAL BOWL

Earthquakes rippled across the world. In China, bridges collapsed into rivers below, sending waves crashing against nearby villages. In Panama, the land sunk abruptly, creating a stark divide between North and South America. Mediterranean islands vanished beneath rising sea waters, and continents ground against each other, merging into a single landmass—Pangea Ultima.

#

Half the mountain had sheared off, filling the valley below. Atop the semi-Mount Megiddo, Tietan lounged on a newly constructed throne.

Abaddon stood nearby, his hands raised as he summoned fire from the sky. Shards of light pierced the dark heavens, illuminating the devastation wrought by the earthquakes. The battlefield cast an eerie glow on the massive military forces gathered there, extending as far as the eye could see.

“Embrace your destiny!” Abaddon’s voice rang out. “Let your fear drive your fury!”

Tietan looking upwards, “Is that the best you can do?” he scoffed. “Coward.”

Thunder rumbled overhead in response, accompanied by great hailstones the size of footballs, falling on everyone except Tietan and Abaddon, who were protected by Abaddon’s fire shield. The hail smashed through buildings and bunkers alike. People scrambled for cover, their cries of desperation drowned out by the deafening impact of hail against stone.

The carnage was relentless. Some ran but could find no cover, losing limbs and life to the unyielding hail. Even in their agony, they took time to curse God with desperate gestures. The hail ceases, and soldiers cautiously emerge from their shattered hideouts.

CHAPTER 28: BABYLON'S DESTRUCTION

Later at the Babylon Festival, a team of workers moved swiftly and purposefully, repairing the damage left by the recent hailstorm. It wasn't as intense as at Megiddo. Babylon's bright festival banners, emblazoned with Tietan's face, waved proudly. The city was illuminated with millions of candles of diverse sizes.

Before the stage, a sea of spectators gathered, their excitement undiminished by the storm's aftermath. Long dining tables, weighed down with lavish food and drink, offered something new instead of the more sinister display normally there. Nearby, a table labeled "BABYLON'S SPECIALITY – BLOOD OF THE 'SAINTS'" stood ominously.

The crimson blood in the glasses was consumed with unsettling casualness, even by children, who raised their drinks in toasts to Tietan's image, saluting and worshiping in their drunkenness. Drums and instruments rose slowly to a crescendo, drawing people to the stage, where five guillotines awaited, with people already in the headstocks.

Hogan limped onto the stage with a non-electric megaphone in his hand. People gathered around the stage, eager for the main event. "For our main event," he announced, his voice ringing through the night, "we present the last of the Rebels: Manfred the leader, Odi the Recruiter, Josh the Chief Temple Architect and the one who tried to kill our Messiah. We also have the Temple herald Abigail, and—" He hesitated, his voice catching slightly. "—her lover, Phoenix, the traitor."

The crowd responded with a unified roar as the executor, a large man dressed in black, walked past, raising the head of each condemned person. The crowd chanted in unison: "CHOP! CHOP! CHOP!"

Hogan raised his hand to silence the uproar, and the crowd fell into expectant silence, eagerly awaiting the spectacle. Hogan continued, "As is the tradition," he turned to those in the headstocks, "Any final departing words of repentance?"

Phoenix struggled to raise his head and keep it up. “There is only One God worthy of worship!” he declared. “No other! Those without Tietan’s mark, there is still time for you!”

The executioner dressed in black, wearing a black covid mask, showing no patience for Phoenix’s defiance, struck him in the face with the butt of his gun. Blood streamed from Phoenix’s nose and mouth, but he remained steadfast. “There is only one way to be free,” he continued, his voice steady despite the pain. “Accept Yeshua as your Lord and Savior and be beheaded for Him! Then you will reign with Him! HAIL YESHUA!”

Abigail joined in. “Hail Yeshua!” Odi, Manfred, and Josh followed suit. “Hail Yeshua!”

Odi, in a trance-like state, opens his mouth but there the voice come from booming from Heaven, as he mouths the words, “Come out of her, my people, that you be not partakers of her sins, and that you receive not of her plagues. Babylon is fallen!”

The crowd’s response was swift and violent. Objects flew through the air, landing on the stage. “Cheap tricks! Away with them! AWAY WITH THEM!” they chanted, their voices rising in a frenzied crescendo.

Hogan stands sadden, tears welling in his as he looks at his struggling son. The crowd’s unrest continued to grow. Phoenix raises his head one more time to make eye contact with his father, mouthing to him. “Thank you for letting me go.” The executioner urged Hogan to give the signal. Phoenix continued, “I love you.” He struggled to keep his head up.

A tear rolled down Hogan’s cheek as he closed his eyes and slowly nods to the executioner. The guillotine blades fell with a decisive swoop, and the crowd erupted into thunderous applause, their cheers echoing through the city.

Meanwhile, in the heart of Babylon, the Ten Kings advanced, their faces hardened, leading their relentless Militia, made up of modernized WWI tanks that do not use any electronics. The tanks rumbled through the streets, their powerful treads crushing

everything in their path. Explosions rocked the air, sending debris and flames spiraling skyward. Screens shattered, buildings crumbled, and smoke and ash billowed into the night sky. The city was ablaze with fire.

Amidst the destruction, Hogan struggled to his feet, a solitary figure among the wreckage of the festival stage. Each step was a painful ordeal, his twisted knee making the journey excruciating. He paused to look back at the vaporized guillotine where Phoenix had been, locking on to Phoenix's burnt shirt. All that is left of him.

From the outskirts of Babylon, Dimitry, Muhammad, and Mazoku observed the destruction. Babylon, once a symbol of power and opulence, now lay in flames and ruins. Dimitry nodded. "Pride comes before destruction." Muhammad's voice was a harsh whisper. "That great city destroyed in a single hour!" Mazoku nodded gravely. "It's for the greater good."

Dimitry's gaze remained fixed on the burning cityscape, his eyes reflecting the flames. "We have conquered all. Our greatest and final conquest lies ahead: defeating God Himself." Muhammad's response was curt. "Now, off to Megiddo, Israel."

CHAPTER 29: ARMAGEDDON

SEPTEMBER 2044, 6000 YEARS SINCE CREATION.

The night atop Mount Megiddo was thick with tension as Tietan stood imposingly before the gathered forces. By his side were the Ten Kings, Abaddon, and Hogan. Tietan's arms were outstretched, his voice carrying over the vast assembly.

"Today, our seven-year journey ends!" he declared. "The God of Destruction has tried to bring us to our knees, but we are unified and refuse to bow! The time is now! The final battle is upon us!" Tietan turned to face the heavens in total arrogant defiance. "Face us, coward, if you dare!" The crowd below erupted into frenzied cheers, their voices merging into a thunderous chant.

"HAIL TIETAN! HAIL TIETAN!" they roared, their fervor echoing through the night. With a dramatic sweep, Tietan turned to face the North. All, poised with their hi-tech mechanical bows and arrows, mirrored his readiness for the coming confrontation. On the horizon, a brilliant light began to manifest, growing steadily brighter as it drew nearer.

At the base of the mountain, the Militia prepared for the impending clash. Weapons were drawn, and war horses snorted impatiently, their restless energy reflecting the brewing storm of battle. As dawn approached, the sky remained dark and heavily overcast.

In the upper atmosphere, the arrival of YESHUA, who's face remains unseen due to his blinding radiance. Adorned with many crowns and draped in a robe stained with blood, His face remained hidden by divine brilliance. Across His garment and thigh were the words: "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

Following Him was a vast multitude, riding on white horses and clad in pure white linen. Among them were familiar figures: Josh, Matt, Rachel, Odi, his wife, Manfred, Abigail,

and Phoenix, alongside Sarah, Phoenix's mother, and a seemingly endless line of followers.

A mighty Angel stood in the sun, silhouetted by his brilliance. His voice, thunderous and commanding, called out, "Come, birds and animals! Gather for the great feast of God. You'll eat the flesh of kings, captains, mighty men, horses, and their riders. All people, both free and slave, small and great."

Across northern Israel, including Mount Megiddo, waves of birds and beasts assembled around the outskirts of the mountain and region, surrounding the Militia forces with a sense of impending doom. Waiting. Fiery boulders were hurled toward Yeshua, but He remained calm. Opening His mouth, a flaming sword emerged, slicing through the air with divine precision. The boulders exploded mid-flight, turning them into clouds of smoke. The sword began cutting down the Militia gathered, causing them unwillingly to drop to their knees. Hogan, his gaze fixed in astonishment, looked up at the sky. His eyes fell upon his son and Sarah, a mix of shock and sorrow etched on his face.

Abaddon's voice bellowed, "FIRE!" The remaining Militia released a volley of fiery arrows toward Yeshua and His followers, but the arrows disintegrated into nothingness before they could reach their targets.

On the mountaintop, Hogan's eyes, filled with smoldering fury, turned toward Tietan. He secretly drew his sword, prepared to strike Tietan. Abaddon's casual wave of his hand caused Hogan to collapse. Abaddon finished him off with a foot to the neck.

Tietan aimed his bow at Yeshua, but as Yeshua drew closer, His radiant presence knocked Tietan's bow from his hand, sending it crashing to the ground.

Now Abaddon collapsed under the weight of Yeshua's divine power, his legs buckling under the pressure, forcing him to kneel. The voice of an Angel echoed, "Every knee shall bow."

From the heavens, Archangel Michael, towering and majestic, descended swiftly and seized Tietan in one powerful hand. Michael's gaze remained unyielding as Tietan struggled defiantly. Michael then turned toward Abaddon.

"Michael. I stood with you," Abaddon declared with arrogance.

"You made your choice," Michael replied, his voice carrying a finality that allowed no argument. With unmatched strength, Michael seized Abaddon and ascended quickly, carried both Abaddon and Tietan away.

As Yeshua approached, His presence was so overwhelming that it caused the blood of the Militia to pour from their eyes, ears, and mouths, turning the ground into a flowing crimson and fallen bodies.

The blood surged, flowing into the Megiddo and Jordan rivers, rising under the horses' bridle, which is about a height of one and a half meters.

The birds and animals that assembled now descended upon the fallen, feasting on the remains.

Yeshua descended upon the Mount of Olives with a blinding brilliance, so intense it illuminated the broken city of Jerusalem. The Mount trembled violently beneath the weight of His arrival. The earth cracked and split, creating a north-to-south chasm between the mount and the city. Additionally, the Mount of Olives split down the middle, east to west, causing part of the mountain to shift north and part to shift south. The split extended from the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean and the Dead Sea began to drain.

Those Militia forces who had specifically come against Jerusalem stand like sentinels, unable to move, their bodies began to melt away like wax in a furnace. First their eyes dissolved within their sockets, and their tongues within their mouths. What had once been a formidable army was reduced to haunting remnants, consumed by the brilliance of Yeshua's light.

The Dead Sea, now empty of water, revealed a horrifying lake of fire. Its flames reached toward the sky, casting a glow over the land. Michael descended with Tietan and Abaddon, casting them alive into the searing inferno.

EPILOGUE

OCTOBER 2044, YESHUA'S 1000 YEAR REIGN.

The first light of the new day spread across the horizon—the earth's Sabbath and the one-thousand-year reign of Christ.

The Prophet Daniel, an elderly figure with a beard steps forward. Behind him stood the resurrected Rebels in white glowing robes.

The vast assembly before him consisted of those who had not gathered against him at Megiddo. It was a mixed crowd—those marked with Tietan's mark and those who had remained unmarked.

Daniel surveyed them with a solemn gaze, a look of peace settling over his features.

“Now the sacrificial lamb, God's Son Yeshua, reigns as the Lion of Judah,” Daniel declared, his voice resonating with authority. “Justice, mercy, and grace be multiplied to you all for the next thousand years. And at the end, Judgment Day.”

He let the weight of his words hang in the air before continuing. “But now, for forty-five days, the Earth must be cleansed.”

Phoenix, now clothed in a radiant white robe, placed a comforting hand on Matt's shoulder. The gesture spoke of gratitude and solidarity. Matt, gazing toward the horizon, reflected the hopeful glow of the new day.

“This is only the beginning.”

CHRONICLES OF THE FINAL DAY

In 2037, Earth hangs on the edge of ruin, caught between destruction and a fragile hope for renewal. The apocalyptic prophecies of Revelation have come to life, throwing the world into chaos, and Major Phoenix Bates is caught in a dangerous struggle between duty and love.

Under the control of a powerful one-world government ruled by ten kings, only a brave few—rebellious Christians and Jews—dare to challenge the regime.

Five seals have been broken, the sixth is about to shatter the sky, and the seventh will bring a seven-year tribulation like no other. Plagues, disasters, and divine wrath loom as humanity faces its darkest hour.

But for Bates, the stakes are even higher. Forced to choose between his deepest beliefs and the love of his life, he stands on the precipice of a decision that could change everything. In a world where there's no turning back, one question remains: Will he risk everything to stand for what's right?