Rayford was close enough behind Nicolae that he heard him ask a woman general, “What is our equestrian strength?”

She checked via radio and reported, “Excellency, of more than a million soldiers, a little more than a tenth are on horseback.”

“Call for as many steeds as we need to get the first wave to the Western Wall, and order Reverend Fortunato and me appropriate mounts.”

Within minutes several thousand horses crowded the streets, and Unity Army soldiers were mounting up. A tall, handsome stallion, almost identical to the one Carpathia had ridden out of the city toward Bozrah, was delivered for his use. Cameras clicked and TV crews crowded around as he swung aboard, raising his sword. He twirled the blade above his head, rousing the
troops, who responded with a crescendoing *whoop*, like a football team about to break from the locker room.

Fortunato struggled up onto a smaller black horse and settled himself.

"Follow me to the Western Wall," Carpathia shouted, "and make way for the battering ram and missile launchers! Upon my command, open fire!"

Knowing the Old City by now, Rayford sprinted for side streets, heading toward the Western Wall.

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Mac was already at the southern corner of the Old City, a few steps north of Dung Gate. Abdullah contacted him by radio and said he had found a perch near Antonia's Fortress and believed he was safe and undetectable, with a good view of the approaching invaders.

"I am high enough to see the surrounding army forces too, Mac," he said. "They have the entire Old City encircled, several thousand deep. I can see why they are so confident of victory, having cut off all escape routes 360 degrees."

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Rayford set up a hundred yards short of the Western Wall and far enough south that he had some underbrush for cover. He thought he saw Mac but couldn't be sure. Almost everyone inside the Old City but the press was part of the attacking force, but the occasional civilian stood atop anything available, cheering and shouting encouragement as Carpathia came into view, valiant and proud on his huge horse, sword pointing to the sky, microphone wrapped around his ear and in front of his mouth so the entire army could hear his commands.

"For the glory of your risen master and lord of the earth!" he shouted, urging his ride to a full gallop, clacking over the cobblestone ground. Fortunato's horse mince-stepped slowly after, which seemed plenty fast enough for Leon.

The band lagged behind the mounted and rolling and marching troops, loudly clanging out a rousing melody. As Carpathia drew within range of the wall, he peeled off to the south with Fortunato trailing him.

"Horsemen, make way for the armaments!" Carpathia bellowed. "Attack! Break through the wall! Take the Temple Mount! Destroy the rebels!"

But when the horsemen whipped their mounts, they did not make way. Rather, the horses bolted as if blind—nickering, whinnying, braying, rearing, bucking, kicking, spinning into each other, running headlong into the wall, throwing riders.

"Make way!" Carpathia screamed. "Make way!"

The riders not thrown leaped from their horses and tried to control them with the reins, but even as they struggled, their own flesh dissolved, their eyes melted, and their tongues disintegrated. As Rayford watched, the soldiers stood briefly as skeletons in now-baggy uniforms, then dropped in heaps of bones as the blinded horses continued to fume and rant and rave.
Seconds later the same plague afflicted the horses, their flesh and eyes and tongues melting away, leaving grotesque skeletons standing, before they too rattled to the pavement.

"Reinforcements!" Carpathia called out. "Charge! Charge! Fire! Fire! Attack!"

But every horse and rider that advanced suffered the same fate. First blindness and madness on the part of the horses, then the bodies of the soldiers melting and dissolving. Then the falling and piling of the bones.

Rayford stood, mouth agape, noticing that neither Carpathia's nor Fortunato's horses had been affected yet. Leon slid off his mount and flopped to the ground, rolling to a kneeling position and burying his face in his hands.

"Get up, Leon! Get up! We are not defeated! We have a million more soldiers and we shall prevail!"

But Leon stayed where he was, whimpering and wailing.

Plainly disgusted, Nicolae urged his horse back to the middle of the wall and looked past the bones of his decimated troops for reinforcements. He lifted his sword and cursed God, but suddenly his attention was drawn directly above.

Rayford followed his gaze to see the temple of God opened in heaven, and the ark of the covenant plain as day. Lightning flashed and thunder roared, and the earth began to shift.

Carpathia's horse reared and high-stepped, and Nicolae fought to control him. Fortunato's horse scampered away without him.

The earth groaned and buckled, and the city of Jerusalem was fractured into three as the great fissures swallowed up Carpathia loyalists and soldiers. Buildings and walls were left intact, except Abdullah reported seeing the cemented-over East Gate—closed off for centuries—blasted open by the movement of the earth.

Rayford slapped his palm over his earpiece and plugged his other ear to hear reports coming in from all over the world. The earthquake was global. Islands disappeared. Mountains were leveled. The entire face of the planet had been made level, save for the city of Jerusalem itself.

And suddenly the Lord Jesus Himself appeared in the clouds again, and the whole world saw Him. He spoke with a loud voice, saying, "Speak comfort to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned; for she has received from the Lord's hand double for all her sins.

"Every valley has been exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; the crooked places have been made straight and the rough places smooth. The glory of the Lord has been revealed, and all flesh have seen it together; for I have spoken.

"Behold, the day of the Lord has come, and your spoil has been divided in your midst. For I gathered all the nations to battle against Jerusalem, but the remnant of the people was not cut off from the city. I went forth and fought against those nations, as in the day of battle.
“And the plague with which I struck all the people who fought against Jerusalem was this: their flesh dissolved while they stood on their feet, their eyes dissolved in their sockets, and their tongues dissolved in their mouths. I sent a great panic over them. Such also was the plague on the horses.

“Behold, I made Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples, when they laid siege against Judah and Jerusalem. And I made Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away were surely cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth were gathered against it.

“I struck every horse with confusion, and its rider with madness; I opened My eyes on the house of Judah and struck every horse of the peoples with blindness.

“I defended the inhabitants of Jerusalem; the one who was feeble among them today is like David, and the house of David shall be like God, like the Angel of the Lord before them. I destroyed all the nations that came against Jerusalem.

“Therefore the curse has devoured the earth, and those who dwell in it are desolate. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left.

“In the midst of the land among the people, it was like the shaking of an olive tree, like the gleanings of grapes when the vintage is done.

“The children of Israel called on My name, and I answered them. I said, ‘This is My people’; and each one said, ‘The Lord is my God.’”

Though the Lord did not speak audibly to the remnant, Chaim felt as if he and they were being drawn inexorably around the Old City to the east side. As the million-plus slowly made their way past the dead and the dying, a fraction of Antichrist’s forces remained alive. They struggled and staggered toward shelter, also apparently drawn to the east.

The Lord sat triumphant on the back of His white horse in the clouds, His army behind Him, gazing upon the one-sided victory over the forces that had come against Jerusalem.

Mac found Rayford and they went looking for Abdullah. They knew he was all right, because they had radio contact. He too was headed east of the city.

“You should have seen Nicolae and Leon,” Rayford said.

“I saw them briefly,” Mac said, “when Leon fell off his horse.”

“Nicolae galloped off a little while ago, heading back the way he had come. Leon was running after him, pleading to let him ride along, but Carpathia ignored him.”

“Figures.”

The earth still shifted and moved from aftershocks, and Rayford tried to imagine what it must look like from outer space. No more islands. No more mountains.
Virtually flat with gently rolling hills. The whole of Israel, except for Jerusalem, was level.

They found Abdullah, who at first looked past them, then smiled and shook his head. “I was looking for two white men, Mac.”

Hannah Palemoon caught up with Chaim, who was surrounded by people with questions. She waited until he recognized her, then said, “How long until we are reunited with loved ones who went on to heaven before us?”

“Very soon, I hope,” Chaim said. “There are many I wish to see too, but first I want to see Jesus face-to-face.”

“What’s next?”

“Oh, I think you know. The Lord Himself will set foot on earth again, for only the second time since His ascension. As you know, He came in the clouds for the Rapture, and this time He briefly walked on the ground when He soiled His robe in blood at Bozrah.”

“Is the enemy completely gone?” Hannah said.

“Soon,” Chaim said. “Very soon.”

Illinois, flat as it already was, was hardly affected by the earthquake, though Enoch was certain no one doubted what had happened. The long, low rumbling of the earth continued, and he heard Carpathia loyalists screaming for their lives.

After his people had returned to their homes, Enoch had begun moving his furniture upstairs, looking forward to a life where he could look out the window without caring who might see in. Just before the earthquake one of the few Global Community Peacekeeper patrol cars he’d seen in recent weeks raced down the street. As it came around the curve in front of his place it veered off the road and hit a fire hydrant.

Neighbors ran to the car, collapsing in disbelief when all they found were skeletons and clothes in the front seat. The declared enemies of God were being decimated around the world.

Enoch tried calling his parishioners, reaching many and missing several who called while he was on the phone. No one was hurt, though some of their homes were damaged. Several were badly shaken, telling of seeing government employees disintegrating before their eyes. And all wanted to talk about their new church, where it might be and how soon they might move into it. Many also mentioned their pilgrimage to the Middle East.

“I don’t know when it’s gonna be,” one woman told Enoch, “but I’ll be along whenever.”

Enoch reminded each that sometime after the earthquake, Jesus would set foot on the Mount of Olives, east of Jerusalem, and the whole world would see Him.

“Keep looking up.”

“You still in a teachin’ mood, Smitty?” Mac said.

“That depends on whether I have studied whatever you are curious about.”
"The Mount of Olives, of course."

"Oh yes, I have studied it thoroughly. You can see it from here, naturally. It is only half a mile from the Eastern Wall of the Old City. It is really more of a hill than a mountain, as you can tell. One of Jesus' most famous sermons was preached there. When He made His triumphal entry, He came from the Mount of Olives. And He returned there every night of the last week before the Crucifixion, often praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. The Ascension took place there later too."

"So it makes sense that's where He wants to come now."

"It certainly does to me," Abdullah said.

George Sebastian had never seen anything like it. He told Priscilla he would catch up with her and the kids and the rest of the Tribulation Force traveling with the remnant. He lagged, and rather than following the remnant around the devastated city, he decided to cut directly through it on his way to the Mount of Olives.

As a career military man, Sebastian had seen the spoils of war before, of course, on many fields of battle around the world. He could not recall, however, a quaint, beautiful city so devastated. Most peculiar, it was nearly impossible to determine who had won.

Sebastian had been kept up to speed on the conflict from the beginning and knew from Buck and then Mac how the city had been completely overrun by the Global Community Unity Army. Half the residents had been killed or captured. Many were still imprisoned and had been tortured and starved.

But now as he ambled through the narrow streets, George saw some surviving Unity soldiers leisurely dividing the spoils, while others regrouped for an assault on rebels who would try to escape from the Temple Mount. He also noticed piles of clothes and bones where the Lord had decomposed the bodies of His enemies.

So this was not over. Jerusalem, the jewel City of God, had been violated to the point of ruin. It was a wonder God Himself had not leveled it along with the mountains and islands of the world.

Sebastian scanned the entire area as he walked, heading north to Herod's Gate, where he knew Buck had been killed. He climbed the wall and looked out over the rest of Jerusalem. Perhaps a hundred thousand of Carpathia's troops remained. The rebels still held the Temple Mount, guarding the newly opened East Gate rather than choosing to try to escape through it.

He could see the vast remnant slowly making its way past the South Wall, heading toward the Mount of Olives, and knew he had better catch up or risk leaving his wife with the responsibility of two youngsters by herself. Of course, others would help, but that didn't justify his abandoning her.

Just before Sebastian made his way back down from the wall, he saw a flurry of activity outside the New Gate in the northwest corner of the Old City. It appeared the press had surrounded Nicolae and Leon and what was
left of the potentate’s cabinet of advisers and generals. Sebastian shook his head. He knew what was coming, and Carpathia had to as well. Why wasn’t he running for his life?

Some men never know when they’re beaten, never know when to fold and walk away. Nicolae Carpathia, proving—as if that were necessary—that he was indeed Antichrist, was the epitome of that kind of a man. In a classic case of cosmic denial, his pride still persuaded him he could not lose in the end.

There he stood, pointing, cajoling, scheming, barking orders, talking to the press. Sebastian fired up his radio, and sure enough, his highness was still trying to sell the citizenry on their eventual triumph. “This city shall become my throne,” Carpathia said. “The temple will be flattened and the way made for my palace, the most magnificent structure ever erected. We have captured half the enemy here, and we will dispose of the other half in due time.

“The final stage of our conquest is nearly ready to be executed, and we will soon be rid of this nuisance from above.”

Rayford, Mac, and Abdullah had also been listening as they watched the crawl of people, mostly the remnant, moving toward the Mount of Olives. Of course, the children of God knew what was supposed to come, and so they kept their distance. No one had any idea of the Lord’s timing, but there He remained, hovering over them with His horsemen. And soon He began again to speak words of comfort to His own.

“As you have received Me as your Lord, so walk in Me, rooted and built up in Me and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding with thanksgiving. You are complete in Me, the head of all principality and power.

“My Father has said unto Me, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever; a scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions.

‘You laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Your hands. Others will perish, but You remain; and they will all grow old like a garment; like a cloak You will fold them up, and they will be changed. But You are the same, and Your years will not fail.’

“And I, the One about whom these things were said by God Himself, assure you, My children, that I will never leave you nor forsake you. So you may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’ I, your Lord Jesus Christ, am the same yesterday, today, and forever. Therefore, holy brothers and sisters, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider Me the Apostle and High Priest of your confession.

“I was faithful to God who appointed Me, as Moses also was faithful. For I was counted worthy of more
glory than Moses, in the same way that God, who built the house, has more honor than the house. For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God.

"God has set Me as a High Priest fitting for you—holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and higher than the heavens. I do not need daily, as human high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for My own sins and then for the people's, for this I did once for all when I offered up Myself."

Despite all Jesus' magnanimous comments about Himself, Rayford was struck by how lowly, humble, and compassionate He sounded. He was merely speaking the truth, reminding His children what they enjoyed in Him. The truth of the Word of God, coming from the Living Word, again drove Rayford to his knees, along with his friends and the entire Jewish remnant.

As Rayford knelt, his face in his hands on the ground, Jesus continued to speak directly to his heart.

"God willed to make known the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, Rayford, the hope of glory. I am the hope of Israel, the horn of salvation in the house of God's servant David. Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM."

Jesus fell silent. From the west Rayford heard the Global Community Unity Army marching band. Their weak rendition of "Hail Carpathia." sounded discordant from a distance, and of course it paled in comparison to the murmured prayers of the million on their knees before the Lord in the sky.

The ground rumbled as what was left of the GC's armaments were rolled into position. It was pathetic and laughable to Rayford that Carpathia had not learned anything from the past several hours. There would be no competing with this force from heaven. No damage would be done to Jesus or to His people with weapons of war.

And yet here Carpathia came, horse at full stride, leathers squeaking in the saddle, sword aloft, the pitiable False Prophet bouncing awkwardly along behind him, holding the reins of his horse for all he was worth. The remnant stood as one, not wanting to miss a thing. Rayford looked fully into the face of his Lord and was again reminded of the biblical description of the man on the white horse with eyes like fire.

The conviction that shone in the eyes of Jesus was of one who had finally had enough. His enemy was right where He wanted him, lured fully into the trap that had been set before the foundation of the world. The fulfillment of age-old prophecies was about to take place, despite the fact that the enemy himself had read them, knew them, and had seen every last one of them come to fruition exactly as it had been laid out.

In all his sick, imitative glory came galloping the quintessence of pride and ego, indwelt by Satan himself. Carpathia swung his sword round and round above his head while Fortunato used one hand to attempt some sort of a weird gesture of worship and the other to keep control of his horse and himself in the saddle.

The band, which led the way, played louder and
louder and, on cue, split right and left to allow the mounted soldiers, then the foot soldiers, then the munitions and armament platoons in rolling vehicles to slowly come into position.

With the remnant just a few hundred yards to the east, the besieged city of Jerusalem a half mile to the west, and the heavenly hosts hovering directly above, Jesus nudged His magnificent white charger and descended to the top of the Mount of Olives.

As He dismounted, Carpathia shrieked out his final command, “Attack!” The hundred thousand troops followed orders, horsemen at full gallop firing, foot soldiers running and firing, rolling stock rolling and firing.

And Jesus said, in that voice like a trumpet and the sound of rushing waters, “I AM WHO I AM.”

At that instant the Mount of Olives split in two from east to west, the place Jesus stood moving to the north and the place where the Unity Army stood moving to the south, leaving a large valley.

All the firing and the running and the galloping and the rolling stopped. The soldiers screamed and fell, their bodies bursting open from head to toe at every word that proceeded out of the mouth of the Lord as He spoke to the captives within Jerusalem. “You shall flee through My mountain valley, for the mountain valley reaches to Azal. Yes, you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. The Lord your God has come, and all the saints with Me.”

With shouts and singing, it was as if Jerusalem burst forth; the captives, who had been imprisoned in Jerusalem, came running toward the great rift between the two sides of the Mount of Olives. And as the earth continued to rumble and shift, Rayford watched in awe as the whole city of Jerusalem rose above the ground some three hundred feet and now stood as an exalted jewel above all the surrounding land that had been flattened by the global earthquake.

Mac struggled to his feet and grabbed Rayford. “You see ‘em?” he said, pointing. “See Nicolae and Leon lighting out for safety? And look at that big glob of bobbing light bouncin’ along ahead of ‘em! ‘Member what I told you about Lucifer showing up at Solomon’s Stables? That’s got to be him, and he’s deserted ol’ Nick again!”

Mac and Abdullah and Rayford stood, arms around each other’s shoulders, taking in the spectacular scene. Rebels from the Temple Mount and the captives fled through the new valley, chased by the last feeble vestiges of the Unity Army. But when Jesus spoke, the pursuers died at His words.

“Living waters shall flow from Jerusalem,” He said, “half of them toward the eastern sea and half of them toward the western sea; in both summer and winter it shall occur. And I the Lord shall be King over all the earth. Today the Lord is one and His name one.

“All the land has been turned into a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem. Jerusalem has been raised up and inhabited in her place from Benjamin’s
Gate to the place of the First Gate and the Corner Gate, and from the Tower of Hananeel to the king’s wine-presses. You, the people, shall dwell in it; and no longer shall there be utter destruction, but Jerusalem shall be safely inhabited.”

With that, Jesus mounted His horse and began His final triumphal entry toward Jerusalem. During His first visit to earth He had ridden into the city on a lowly donkey, welcomed by some but rejected by most. Now He rode high on the majestic white steed, and with every word that came from His mouth, the rest of the enemies of God—except for Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet—were utterly destroyed where they stood.

“This is the day of vengeance, that all things which were written have been fulfilled. The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be brought low; the Lord alone will be exalted today.”

Loud voices from heaven said, “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!

“We give You thanks, O Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was and who is to come, because You have taken Your great power and reigned. The nations were angry, and Your wrath has come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that You should reward Your servants the prophets and the saints, and those who fear Your name, small and great, and should destroy those who destroy the earth.”

The remnant trailed Jesus, raising their hands, singing 

*bosanna*, and praising Him. They fell silent when He spoke again.

“It is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest. I have taken vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey My gospel. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power. I have come to be glorified in My saints and to be admired among all those who believe.”
Kneeling in his front yard in suburban Chicago, Enoch wept at the glorious triumphant words of Christ. He also wept because of his deep longing to be in Jerusalem. He had studied these passages for years and knew what was happening. He couldn't wait to get there, to reunite with his friends from the Tribulation Force, and to hear every detail of the great day of God the Almighty.

More than anything, however, he wanted to see Jesus.

With every moment it became more and more difficult for Rayford to take in the magnitude of the supernatural events. Sensory overload was a gross understatement. He never once had to pinch himself to determine whether
this was a dream. It was all so real, so massive, that even what he might have considered smaller miracles took their place alongside the global and local earthquakes in importance. Like the fact that he still felt no fatigue, despite no rest—let alone sleep—in he didn’t know how long.

But when he and Mac and Abdullah parked the Hummer outside the Old City and followed the vast procession in the newly burst-open East Gate, a new phenomenon awaited him. It was one thing to follow his Lord, the King of kings, on His ultimate triumphal entry into the City of David, but to see what he saw there compared with what he expected to find . . .

Jerusalem, particularly the Old City, should have been filled with the gore of the dead. Hundreds of thousands had been slain here, the majority in most grotesque ways. There should have been stench, blood, and flesh, not to mention the skeletal remains of Unity Army soldiers and horses.

But the earthquake that had rent in two the Mount of Olives and elevated the Eternal City some three hundred feet had accomplished a macabre cleanup operation as well. Jesus led the happy throng in and around the inside borders of the Old City, stretching the parade of singing, dancing, chanting, embracing, praising, worshiping, celebrating people for several miles. Strangely, the walls had been leveled, all of them. No more battle scars, no more jagged edges from bombs and battering rams, no more uneven heights. Where the walls had stood were gently rolling mounds of fine, crushed stone.

Even the Wailing Wall had disappeared, and Rayford had the full-hearted feeling that Jesus had replaced it with Himself. Sure enough, as the head of the procession came within sight of the Western Wall, Jesus began to speak. And while in the saddle He was only slightly higher than the people in line and was facing away from them, Rayford knew all could hear Him as clearly as he himself could, about a third of the way back in the throng.

"There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, I, the Man Christ Jesus. I gave Myself a ransom for all."

Where was the residue of war? Rayford could only guess. It was as if the city had been shaken and tilted this way and that. And while the buildings and landmarks remained, the rubble of the walls had apparently scrubbed the streets and pushed the gruesome evidence—all of it—into crevasses now covered over for the rest of eternity. The City of God was pristine anew, and the people seemed astonished by it.

When the Lord had ridden His horse far enough into the city to allow all those following to also enter in, He circled so that the entire host was in a great circle, thousands deep. Behind everyone, almost as an afterthought, were the hosts of heaven, also still on horseback.

The remnant ignored them, as if temporarily unaware of them. Rayford saw them clearly and knew that everyone else could too. In the back of his mind was the prospect—soon, he hoped—of reunions with loved ones. But having Jesus in their midst made everyone think
only of Him. Everything else, pleasant or not, faded
to insignificance.

When everyone had finally stopped walking and shuf-
fling and maneuvering into place, Jesus dismounted and
stretched out His arms. “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,” He
cried, “the one who kills the prophets and stones those
who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your
children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her
wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house was
left to you desolate; for I said to you, you shall see Me
no more till you said, ‘Blessed is He who comes in the
name of the Lord!’”

Jesus looked to the remnant, and Rayford knew intui-
tively that each one had the same feeling he did, that He
was looking directly into their eyes alone. Rayford could
not contain himself. He took a huge breath and shouted
for all he was worth, “Blessed is He who comes in the
name of the Lord!” And every soul there had shouted
the same thing, bringing the most beatific smile to the
face of Jesus.

Ming Toy Woo, standing hand in hand with her new
husband, Ree, drank this all in with a lump in her throat,
her heart full to bursting. She heard every word in her
native tongue and had to remind herself that Jesus was
doing this for each person in his or her own language.
Though she and Ree were at least a hundred deep in the
crowd, and everyone was standing, she had a clear and
perfect view of Jesus without having to stand on tiptoe
or lean between bodies.

Suddenly standing behind Jesus were five heavenly
beings, three of whom she recognized: Christopher, the
angel with the everlasting gospel; Caleb; and Nahum.
These were the three angels of mercy who had delivered
her from certain death when she was working under-
cover for the Global Community. They were also the
ones who told her she would not die before the Glorious
Appearing of Christ.

The other two angels were quickly identified when
Jesus handed the reins of His horse to one, saying sim-
ply, “Gabriel.” The other set a stone bench in place,
and as Jesus sat He said, “Thank you, Michael.”

Then the Son of God, Maker of heaven and earth,
Savior of mankind, looked directly into Ming’s eyes
and said in Chinese, “Come to Me, My child.”

Ming stared as if struck with paralysis. Finally able
to move, she touched her chest and asked, “Me?”

Jesus seemed to look into her soul, concentrating only
on her. “Yes, dear one. Come to Me, Ming.”

She wanted to run, to push others aside, to leap into
His arms. But it was all she could do to put one foot in
front of the other. She let go of Ree’s hand and slowly
began to move, realizing that the entire band, many more
than a million now, was moving toward Jesus as one.

It had been plain as day and no mistake. Jesus had
looked right at Rayford, deep in the crowd, and singled
him out. He had called him by name and told him, “Come to Me, My child.”

Rayford tore his eyes away and looked to his right and his left. Both Abdullah and Mac looked shocked, also staring at Jesus and questioning, by gesture or word—Abdullah in Arabic—whether He was talking to them.

But He was not, Rayford knew. He is talking to me. Rayford pointed at himself with both hands and raised his brows. And Jesus nodded. He began to move toward his Savior. How could this be? How could Jesus give individual audiences before a crowd this size? How much time could He give each person? This could take months! And how was it possible that Rayford was selected first?

As he moved stiff-legged toward Jesus, Rayford’s mind reeled. What were the odds? How could he quantify the privilege of locking eyes with the eternal God of the universe? He began to hurry, and Jesus said, “Come unto Me, Rayford, and I will give you rest.”

Though his eyes were on Jesus and his body moved forward, Rayford suddenly became aware of everything. He was coming out of a crowd of well over a million. Five angels stood sentry behind the Master. Rayford’s friends and family would see him. What had he done to deserve this privilege? Rest—yes, for the first time he felt that need. The fatigue of the last several hours washed over him and he felt as if he could sleep if only given the opportunity.

But as he came within steps of Jesus and saw His welcoming smile, he was struck that the Lord seemed as thrilled to see him as he was to see the Lord. And he was overcome with the shame of his sin. Unworthy. So unworthy. He slowed almost to a stop, fearing he would collapse in disgrace and humiliation.

“No, no,” Jesus said, still smiling, and now leaning forward and reaching for him with scarred hands. When Rayford saw that, he nearly dissolved. He forced himself to keep moving, though he had lost control of his own coordination and feared he would stumble and fall into Jesus’ lap.

He dropped to his knees at Jesus’ feet, sobbing, reminded of every sin and shortcoming of his entire life. Loving hands gathered him in, and he was drawn to Jesus’ bosom. “Rayford, Rayford, how I have looked forward to and longed for this day.”

Rayford could not speak.

“I knew your name before the foundation of the world. I have prepared a place for you, and if it were not so, I would have told you.”

“But, Lord, I—I—”

Jesus took Rayford by the shoulders and gently pushed him back and cupped his face in His hands. He stared into his eyes from inches away, and Rayford could barely hold His piercing gaze. “I was there when you were born. I was there when you thought your mother had abandoned you. I was there when you concluded that I made no sense.”

“I am so sorry. I—”

“I was there when you almost married the wrong woman. I was there when your children were born. I was there when your wife chose Me and you did not.”
“I—"

“I was there when you nearly broke your vows. When you nearly died, before you knew Me. I was there when you were left behind. And I was waiting when finally you came to Me.”

“Oh, Lord, thank You. I’m so—”

“I have loved you with an everlasting love. I am the lover of your soul. You were meant to be with Me for eternity, and now you shall be.”

Rayford had so many questions, so many things he wanted to say. But he could not. Looking into Jesus’ face transported him to his childhood and he felt as if he could stay kneeling there, childlike, letting his Savior love and comfort him forever.

Jesus put one hand on Rayford’s shoulder and the other atop his head. “I pray to My Father, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that I may dwell in your heart through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know My love which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

“Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that you ask or think, according to the power that works in you, to Him be glory in the church to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.”

As Rayford seemed to walk on air back to his place among the throng, something deep within him understood that as personal as that had been, Jesus was bestowing the same love and attention on everyone present. He suddenly became aware that Mac and Abdullah were also returning to the crowd, tears streaming, body language evidencing that they had also been with the Master. The three stood again with arms around each other’s shoulders, unashamedly worshiping.

As Rayford looked around, he could see from every face that each person had personally encountered Jesus.

The Savior had come to Enoch in his sleep, and yet the encounter was so real and deep that the young man didn’t question it for a second. When it was over he found himself on his knees on the floor, feeling as if Jesus had been right there in the room. He had been reminded of significant events in his life, of his journey first away from and then toward true faith. Enoch was able to see anew the hand of God throughout his entire life, and to know that Jesus had known him by name before the foundation of the world. . . .

His phone was chirping, and as Enoch took the first call it began to signal that more and more calls were coming in. An hour later he had heard from almost everyone in his congregation. “I still want to go over there,” was a common theme, “but if Jesus is going to come here like that, maybe I don’t need to.”
Jesus stood and stretched His arms wide, and Rayford was struck that the experience of watching and hearing Him was more personal than ever, despite the numbers of those all doing the same.

"I beseech you," He said, "to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

"Never again put your trust in men, in whom there is no help. Man's spirit departs, he returns to the earth; in that very day his plans perish. Happy are you who have the God of Jacob for your help, whose hope is in the Lord your God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps truth forever, who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The Lord gives freedom to the prisoners.

"The Lord opens the eyes of the blind; the Lord raises those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the strangers; He relieves the fatherless and widow; but the way of the wicked He turns upside down.

"The Lord shall reign forever—your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the Lord!"

And Rayford did. They all did.

For the first time since His appearing, Rayford saw Jesus speaking and yet did not hear Him. He was conferring with the angelic beings behind Him, and naturally, this attracted the attention of the entire gathering with as much curiosity as when they could hear Him.

The one He had called Gabriel stepped forward. "Remnant of Israel!" he began, with a voice clear as crystal and able to be heard by all. "And Tribulation saints! In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality.

"But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.

"The word which God sent to the children of Israel, preaching peace through Jesus Christ—He is Lord of all—that word you know, which was proclaimed throughout all Judea, and began from Galilee after the baptism which John preached: how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.

"And we are witnesses of all things which He did both in the land of the Jews and in Jerusalem, whom they killed by hanging on a tree.

"Him God raised up on the third day, and showed Him openly, not to all the people, but to witnesses chosen before by God, even to those who ate and drank with Him after He arose from the dead.

"And He commanded some to preach to the people, and to testify that it is He who was ordained by God to be Judge of the living and the dead.

"To Him all the prophets witness that, through His name, whoever believes in Him will receive remission of sins. Amen."
The gathered repeated the amen in unison. And Jesus once again addressed them:

“In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name.

“Thank You that Your kingdom has come. Your will has been done on earth as it is in heaven.

“Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.”

After praying with Him in unison, they opened their eyes and Rayford noticed that only four angels now stood behind Jesus. Michael was gone.

And Jesus said, “I am not alone, because the Father is with Me. In Me you have peace. In the world you had tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”

Jesus lifted up His eyes to heaven, and said: “Father, You glorified Me that I also may glorify You, as You have given Me authority over all flesh, that I should give eternal life to as many as You gave Me.

“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Me whom You have sent.

“I glorified You on the earth. I finished the work which You have given Me to do.

“And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

“I do not pray for the world but for those whom You have given Me, for they are Yours. And all Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine, and I am glorified in them. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.

“I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

“O righteous Father! The world has not known You, but I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me. And I have declared to them Your name, and will declare it, that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them.”

Again Gabriel stepped forward. “The Lord is faithful, who will establish you and guard you from the evil one.”

With the mention of the evil one, Mac saw commotion in the crowd far behind Jesus and the angelic beings. People were moving aside and murmuring, making way for the archangel Michael. With him were Nicolae Carpathia, in his now disheveled leathers, sans sword; a worn and exhausted looking Leon Fortunato in one of his lesser, simpler robes and no head adornment; and the three ghastly robotic Carpathia look-alikes Mac and the others had seen over the hidden camera when Carpathia and Fortunato had introduced them to the ten kings of the world. These were Ashtaroth, Baal, and Cankerworm, the three froglike demonic creatures who had been sent
out to deceive the nations, persuading them to gather together in Megiddo to fight the Son of God.

They were hideous, chalky white beings that had taken on human form and wore identical black suits. They looked defeated, bent, as if crippled by their own evil. They stuck together but separated themselves from Carpathia and Fortunato, and Nicolae and Leon seemed not to want to have anything to do with each other either.

Michael led the five in front of Jesus, and Mac was struck by His countenance. He detected righteous anger, of course, but also what appeared to be disappointment, even sadness. There was no gloating.

The pathetic trio locked arms and knelt before Jesus, whispering in annoyingly screechy tones. Carpathia turned his back on Jesus and faced the remnant, hands on his hips, defiant and bored. Leon wrung his hands and occasionally fringed his gaudy gold 216 necklace. He half faced Jesus, looking guilty and full of dread, pecking at Carpathia every now and then as if for direction.

Gabriel stepped between Jesus and the three and bent at the waist to get in their faces, and in a loud voice said, “As a fulfillment of age-old scriptural prophecy, you kneel this day before Jesus the Christ, the Son of the living God, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

“And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled

Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

“Yes!” the beings squealed, hissing. “Yes! We know! We know!” And they bowed lower, prostrating their deformed bodies.

Gabriel continued: “Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth—like you—and that every tongue, even yours, should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

“Jesus Christ is Lord!” they rasped, and Gabriel stepped back behind Jesus. “Jesus Christ is Lord! It is true! True! We acknowledge it! We acknowledge Him!”

Jesus leaned forward and rested His elbows on His knees. The three kept their faces to the ground, not looking at Him. “As I live,” says the Lord God, ‘I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.”

“We repent! We will turn! We will turn! We worship You, O Jesus, Son of God. You are Lord!”

“But for you it is too late,” Jesus said, and Mac was hit anew by the sorrow in His tone. “You were once angelic beings, in heaven with God. Yet you were cast down because of your own prideful decisions. Rather than resist the evil one, you chose to serve him.”

“We were wrong! Wrong! We acknowledge You as Lord!”

“Like My Father, with whom I am one, I have no
pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that is justice, and that is your sentence.”

And as the three shrieked, their reptilian bodies burst from their clothes and exploded, leaving a mess of blood and scales and skin that soon burst into flames and was carried away by the wind.

Leon flopped to the ground with such force that his palms smacked loudly and his forehead bounced with a crack. He ripped off his necklace and tossed it away. As Jesus sat staring intently at him, Leon rose and tore off his robe, casting it aside and kicking off his shoes. Then he lay face-first on the ground, clad only in plain pants and shirt and socks, his great belly pressing the pavement.

“Oh, my Lord and my God!” he wailed, sobs gushing from him. “I have been so blind, so wrong, so wicked!”

“Do you know who I am?” Jesus said. “Who I truly am?”

“Yes! Yes! I have always known, Lord! Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God!”

Jesus stood. “You would blaspheme by quoting my servant Simon, whom I blessed, for flesh and blood had not revealed it unto him, but My Father who is in heaven?”

“No, Lord! Your Father revealed it to me too!”

“I tell you the truth, woe to you for not making that discovery while there was yet time. Rather, you rejected Me and My Father’s plan for the world. You pitted your will against Mine and became the False Prophet, committing the greatest sin known under heaven: rejecting Me as the only Way to God the Father and spending seven years deceiving the world.”

“Jesus is Lord! Jesus is Lord! Don’t kill me! I beg you! Please!”

“Death is too good for you. How many souls are separated from Me forever because of you and the words that came from your mouth?”

“I’m sorry! Forgive me! I renounce all the works of Satan and Antichrist! I pledge my allegiance to You!”

“You are sentenced to eternity in the lake of fire.”

“Oh, God, no!”

Gabriel said, “Silence!”

Leon rolled and then crawled several feet away, where he lay in a fetal heap, sobbing.

Jesus sat again and Nicolae Carpathia, still facing the assembled crowd, shrugged and thrust his hands deep into his pockets. His eyebrows were raised, a smirk planted, and Mac had to wonder how this would play out. Even Carpathia was to bow and confess that Jesus was Lord, but he exuded no fear and certainly no humility.

Michael advanced to one side of him, Gabriel the other. Michael grabbed an elbow and spun him around as Gabriel shouted, “Kneel before your Lord!”

Carpathia wrenched away from Michael and again stood arms akimbo. Jesus said, “Lucifer, leave this man!”

And with that, Carpathia seemed to shrink. He looked again the way Mac had seen him below the Temple Mount in Solomon’s Stables. His leathers were now too roomy for him and hung on him like limp robes. His
hands and fingers became bony. His neck seemed to swim inside a collar now much too large.

Nicolae's hair was sparse and nearly colorless, and dark veins appeared on his exposed skin. He was pale and pasty, as if his skin could be easily rubbed away. Again Mac had the feeling that this was what the body of Carpathia would have looked like, had it been moldering in the grave since his assassination three and a half years before.

Nicolae shivered and quivered despite the heat, and he slowly, clearly painfully, reached up and spread his cape around both shoulders, covering himself and seeming to hide within it as if it were a cocoon.

"Kneel!" Gabriel shouted, and he and Michael moved back behind Jesus.

Nicolae nodded weakly and deliberately lowered himself, like an old man, to one knee. It was as if the pavement was too hard for him and his other knee quickly came down, his hands splaying to the sides to keep himself from pitching to his face. There he knelt, on all fours, weak and pathetic and frail, leather cape hanging limply off bony shoulders.

Mac had to contrast the righteousness of Christ with his own humanity. Had he been in Jesus' place now, he would have been unable to resist rejoicing in the triumph. Mac would have said, "Not such a big man now, are you? Where's the sword? Where's the army? Where's the cabinet, the sub-potentates? Now you're only the supreme impotentate, aren't you?"

But this was not about winning. This was about justice.

Jesus said, "You became a willing tool of the devil himself."

Nicolae did not protest, did not beg. He merely lowered his head even more and nodded.

"You were a rebel against the things of God and His kingdom. You caused more suffering than anyone in the history of the world. God bestowed upon you gifts of intelligence, beauty, wisdom, and personality, and you had the opportunity to make the most of these in the face of the most pivotal events in the annals of creation.

"Yet you used every gift for personal gain. You led millions to worship you and your father, Satan. You were the cunning destroyer of My followers and accomplished more to damn the souls of men and women than anyone else in your time.

"Ultimately your plans and your regime have failed. And now, who do you say that I am?"

The pause was interminable, the silence deadly. Finally, in a humble, weak voice, Nicolae croaked, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God, who died for the sins of the world and rose again the third day as the Scriptures predicted."

Jesus reached and gestured as He spoke, and Mac had the impression He wished that Nicolae would look at Him. But he did not. "And what does that say about you and what you made of your life?"

Carpathia sank even lower than Mac thought possible. "I confess," he whispered, "that my life was a waste. Worthless. A mistake. I rebelled against the God of the universe, whom I now know loved me."
Jesus shook His head and Mac saw a great sadness in His face. “You are responsible for the fate of billions. You and your False Prophet, with whom you shed the blood of the innocents—My followers, the prophets, and My servants who believed in Me—shall be cast alive into the lake of fire.”

The archangels Michael and Gabriel stepped forward, Michael to pull the False Prophet from the ground and Antichrist to a standing position. He stood before Jesus as if awaiting instructions while the wasted Nicolae Carpathia was hunched and elderly looking, hanging his head. Leon Fortunato looked a mess, hair askew, face flushed and tear-stained, hands clasped tightly in front of him.

Gabriel pronounced to the crowd, “And I saw the Beast, the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him who sat on the horse and against His army.

“Then the Beast was captured, and with him the False Prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image.

“These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone.”

Gabriel moved out of the way, and on the spot where he had stood, a hole three feet in diameter opened in the ground and a putrid, sulfuric odor burst forth, making Mac and everyone in the city hold their noses. This was followed by a whistling blue flame that erupted from the hole and rose twenty feet, which Mac could only compare to a monstrous acetylene torch. This added the smell of ether to the mix, and Mac found the front lines of the crowd backing away.

Even as far as he was from the action, Mac felt the tremendous heat emitted by the raging pillar of fire. Jesus and the five angelic beings were apparently immune to the smell and the heat, but both Carpathia and Fortunato tried to back off. Michael held tight to each, still looking to Jesus.

The Lord nodded sadly, and without hesitation, Michael briskly walked the two to the edge of the hole. Fortunato caterwauled like a baby and fought to escape, but with one mighty arm Michael pushed him into the hole. His keening intensified and then faded as he fell. Carpathia did not struggle. He merely covered his face with his forearms as he was dropped in, and then his bawling echoed throughout Jerusalem until he had fallen far enough away. The hole closed as quickly as it had opened, and the Beast and the False Prophet were no more.