

*The Lost Hadith of
The Quran*

Jack Dunn

**Fact or Fiction
A Novel**

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ISBN - 979-8-89298-511-6



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Library of Congress Control Number: 2024900168

Printed in the United States

Published by

The Flats Press

For the children

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Dante Alighieri

Dante's Inferno - First Circle

“The misery of that sight of souls in Hell
Condemned, and constant in their loss, prevailed
So, greatly in me, that I may not tell
How passed I from them, sense and memory failed
So far.”

Jack Dunn is an international, award-winning author (2008 USA IPPY Silver Medal for best historical fiction). He has written 14 novels and two screenplays. His *style of writing* is a unique blending of historical events set in the present day, and they are fast-paced thriller stories. His first book, *The Diary of General William Goffe* was released in 1982, and *this book created a new genre of historical Fact or Fiction novels*. It was syndicated in *The Advocate* newspapers, and tens of thousands of readers read it. *A Dance through the Maze* was in 1989. *The Vatican Boys* was first published in 1997 and is Jack's second book of *unique style of writing*. *Holyoke, The Belle Skinner Legacy*, published in 2003, and *Dan's Big Idea*, published in 2007. The 2008 novel *Babylon's Tablet of Destiny* won Jack the prestigious national writing award. *Ark Evil* was published in 2010, *The Third Secret of Fatima: Spanish Atlantis* was in 2012, *The Little Book of Copying* was in 2013, *Dagon's Hat* was in 2013, and *Whorlland* was in 2014. *The Brown Code* was published in 2014, followed by *The Durer Mystery* in 2015, and *Devils in the Country* in 2016. *The Da Vinci Fraud: The True Story of Dan Brown and the World's Greatest Literary Crime* by Jack Dunn and Jonathan Coad published in 2021. *The Vatican Boys II; The Garden of Evil Story* was published in 2023. Jack lives in Western Massachusetts.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

There are three major religions that have begun from Abraham – the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims. Basically, they all tell the same stories, with each one focused a great deal on Adam and Eve and Noah and the Ark.

Jack Dunn

January, 2024

INTRODUCTION

The Quran, the central religious text of Islam, was written over a period of approximately 23 years. It is believed to have been verbally revealed by God to the Prophet Muhammad through the angel Gabriel. The process of writing the Quran began in 609 or 610 CE, when Muhammad was forty years old and he started receiving revelations, and it concluded in 632 CE, the year of his death.

During the period of revelation, the Quran was preserved in two manners. Firstly, many of Muhammad's companions, including those who did not know how to write, memorized the Quran. Secondly, those who knew how to write would record the Quran as Muhammad recited the verses to them. After the Prophet Muhammad's death, the compilation of the Quran took place.

The first person to compile the Quran was Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib, the son-in-law and blood brother of the Prophet. He arranged his writings of the Quran in the order of their revelation. However, his compilation was not entirely accepted by the caliph or people of his time.

Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib lived from 600 until 661 CE and was the fourth and last caliph of the Rashidun Caliphate, ruling from 656 to 661. Ali was a cousin of Muhammad. He was raised by him from the age of 5 and accepted the Prophet's claim of divine revelation by age 11, being among the first

Muslims to do so. A senior companion of the Muhammad, he is considered by Shia Muslims to be the first Imam, the rightful religious and political successor to Muhammad.

The issue of progression caused a major rift among Muslims and divided them into two major branches: Shia following an appointed hereditary leadership among Ali's descendants, and Sunni following political dynasties. Ali's assassination in the Grand Mosque of Kufa, Iraq, one of the earliest surviving mosques in the world, by a Kharijite, who emerged during the first Fitna coincided with the rise of the Umayyad Caliphate. The Imam Ali Shrine in the city of Najaf, Iraq was built around Ali's tomb and it is visited yearly by millions of devotees.

Ali played a pivotal role in the early years of Islam while Muhammad was in Mecca and under severe persecution. After Muhammad's relocation to Medina in 622, Ali married his daughter Fatima, in 623 or 624, becoming the Prophet's son-in-law. Fatima has been compared by some scholars to Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Muhammad is reported to have likened Ali's position in Islam to that of Aaron in Judaism. The union of Fatima and Ali holds a special spiritual significance for Muslims for it is seen as the marriage between the greatest saintly figures surrounding Muhammad.

FACT:

Muhammad was a great prophet and the founder of Islam, with billions of believers in the world honoring Allah and the *Quran*.

Jesus Christ was a great prophet and the founder of Christianity, with billions of its believers honoring God and the *Bible*.

Judaism is one of the world's oldest religions, dating back over 4,000 years, and is considered to be the original faith revealed by Abraham, which also includes Islam and Christianity. Millions of Jewish followers honor Yahweh who revealed himself through the ancient prophets, especially Abraham. Jews believe in a number of sacred texts, primarily the *Torah*.

Freemasonry is a global secret society that keeps its practices and initiation rituals hidden from the general public. Its membership is estimated to be approximately ten million strong globally in the twenty-first century, and these numbers are still increasing. Numerous lodges have been accused of violent crimes against non-white people, Jews, Catholics, and Muslims. By 2023, Mason organizations had consolidated their power over the world's technology systems, including telecommunications, social media, banking, and advertising businesses. They also were carrying out earth-altering rituals of purification in order to honor their own Supreme Being.

Mohammed bin Salman Al Saud is the Islamic Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Saudi Arabia where the famous shrines of Muhammad are located in Mecca and Medina. The Crown Prince was considered to be the de facto ruler of Saudi Arabia even before his appointment as prime minister in 2022. The Arabic dynasty House of Saud, the ruling royal family and his family's business, are valued to be between \$500 billion and \$3 trillion. The Crown Prince rules an authoritarian government, and crippling poverty in the country is widespread, comprising about twenty-five percent of the population. It has been reported that the Saudi Arabia *Tiger Squad* mercenaries carry out silencing of political and religious opponents, including Islamic scholars, human rights activists, women's rights members, and journalists.

Then again, *Saudi Vision 2030, for the future*, has started, and by implementing it, the House of Saud royal family has promised to establish progressive social and economic programs to create a thriving and just society for everyone living and worshipping in their country. In accordance with the Prophet Muhammad's guidance, they maintain that, because of, '*our status as the heart of the Arab and Islamic worlds, the principles of Islam will be the driving force to realize our vision*'.

Many observers believe that should Saudi Arabia's ambitious *Saudi Vision 2030* project succeed in achieving its lofty goals, it will act as a beacon of hope for the rest of the world and contribute to the eventual fulfillment of Prophet Muhammad's prophecies.

PROLOGUE

Paris, France
July 11, 2023

The Grand Mosque of Paris, also known as the Paris Mosque, is located in the 5th arrondissement of the city and is one of the largest mosques in France. There are prayer rooms, an outdoor garden, a small library, a gift shop, along with a cafe and restaurant. The mosque plays an important role in promoting the visibility of Islam and Muslims in France, and it is the oldest mosque in metropolitan France.

The history of the Paris mosque is inextricably linked to France's colonization of large parts of the Muslim world over the course of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. An early project for a mosque in Paris was in the Baujon district in 1842. In November 1856, a French decree permitted the Ottoman Embassy in Paris to construct a special enclosure that was reserved for the burial of Muslims. The cemetery covered the tombs of Ottomans who had died in France. This was followed by a revival of efforts by the Moroccan embassy in 1878 and 1885. It was philanthropic in purpose, augmented for political reasons such as the conquest and pacification of Algeria, but also religious in nature since Muslims were considered to be closer to Roman Catholics than to the Jews.

In 1914, an architectural design was proposed for a more prominent building with a dome and clear Islamic characteristics. But the First World War blocked the implementation of the project. The decision to construct the mosque resurfaced in the aftermath of the Battle of Verdun, with the *Société des Habous* charged with constructing it and organizing an annual pilgrimage to Mecca for residents of North Africa. The present Great Mosque was finally built on the site of the former Charity Hospital, and the first stone was laid in 1922. It was inaugurated on July 16, 1926, and was inspired by the Al-Qarawiyyin Mosque in Fez, Morocco, one of the most significant religious sites in the world.

“In Islam, Jesus is Isa, son of Maryam or Mary, and He is believed to be the next-to-last prophet or messenger of the God of Islam. Isa is the Messiah sent to guide the Children of Israel, the Israelites, with a book called the Injil. This book is described by the Quran as one of the four Islamic holy books that was revealed by God. The others are the Zabur, possibly the Psalms, the Tawrat, or Torah, and the Quran. The word Injil is used in the Quran, the hadith, and some early Muslim documents to describe a book and revelations made to Jesus by God. The Quran refers to Jesus as one of the greatest prophets with various titles. Jesus is preceded by Yahya and succeeded by Muhammad, whom Jesus is reported to have prophesied by using the name of Ahmad. The hadith, called by some the backbone of

Islamic civilization, is a record of the words, actions, and approvals of the Islamic prophet Muhammad through chains of narrations. In other words, they are genuine transmitted reports attributed to what Muhammad actually said and did," Aafia Bashir recited her historical descriptions effortlessly.

The elegant, gray-haired seventy-year-old Moroccan woman took a moment to let the audience absorb her comments about a deeply held Islamic belief. As the Muslim Director of the Grand Mosque of Paris, it was her duty to host discussions such as this each time a sizable number of people visited the French landmark. She proceeded slowly over to one of the white prayer hall pillars, giving the guests time to take pictures of the breathtaking interiors of the mosque. As Aafia was about to tell her audience something more, a young man with dark olive skin burst into the room and let out a loud scream. He brandished a revolver, and the visitors quickly scattered in all directions when they saw him holding it.

"Where is it?" the man demanded irately as he seized Aafia, slammed her against the pillar, and wrapped his fingers tightly around her throat.

"Where is what?" Aafia gave him a strong reaction, aware that her time was almost up.

The stranger told her, "The last secret of the Quran is kept by you. The one hidden here in the mosque is the precious *lost hadith*."

“It is not yours,” Aafia exclaimed, calmly, “It never will be yours.”

The sacred mosque’s hallways echoed with the shocking bang of a single gunshot.

Aafia’s lifeless body hit the rough stone floor hard, with a bullet lodged in her head.

The lone assailant disappeared.

CHAPTER 1

London, England July 12, 2023

Catherine Turrell was fifty-nine years old. Her flowing blonde hair was styled differently than the last time she had been in London, and she was still a very attractive woman. Her figure and beauty made other women her age jealous. Her daily jogs and workouts at her French château in Menton kept her body toned and solid.

Although Catherine valued her privacy at her estate, she always looked forward to spending time at her vibrant London apartment on Stratton Street, and this trip was no exception. The English metropolis was always exciting for her, and it felt nice to be free and live here with the city having so much to offer.

“London is by far the largest city in Britain and serves as the economic, transportation, and cultural hub of the democratic nation,” she mused to herself as she climbed up the front steps to her flat.

“Hello Catherine,” a familiar man’s voice from behind, stopped her ascent up to the doorway.

“Well, it’s nice to see the two of you together again,” Catherine said when she turned and saw Stephen Hathaway and Hans Moriel standing below her on the sidewalk.

“We’re on time, right?” Stephen continued.

"Yes, come on in," Catherine answered cheerfully. "We have a lot to talk about."

In an hour after catching up since the last time the three of them were together, Catherine led the discussion.

"We know that the social media companies were all formed to program people's thought processes worldwide. But in the last several years, their founders have developed a whole new blueprint," Catherine said matter-of-factly.

"Politics and social trends are being cleverly manipulated," Stephen guessed from what Catherine was suggesting. "Money is buying incredible influence, everywhere."

"Well, that too," Catherine replied flippantly,

"It's a sociological demolition and as addictive as an opiate drug," Hans said. "They're replacing genuine intellectual, spiritual and creative maturity with deceptive self-worth ideals, and individuals are fabricating false identities for themselves. But when the phony stimulations stop working, the users start to experience a plethora of psychological problems and mood swings. That's why suicide and depression rates are climbing through the roof," Stephen continued.

"The cell phone, media, and app peddlers are making people's minds work unnaturally, on radio frequencies speeds," Hans stated, "By complete design."

"Buy this piece of junk and you'll be happy," Stephen said sarcastically.

“The amount of advertising on these sites is sickening,” Hans added.

“Speaking of that, have you read the news today?” Catherine asked.

Hans speculated. “The Ukraine is now receiving cluster bombs from the US to use in its conflict with Russia. Most nations have banned these abhorrent weapons.”

“I did read a report on the massive numbers of refugees who fled from oppression all over the world on overcrowded, unsafe ships that sank in oceans.” Stephen commented. “They’re all dead.”

“Specifically, I’m referring to our last exploit when we uncovered the real source of all religious history stories and their progressions through the various cultures in the last seventy-five hundred years, with the kings and their priestly caste systems, and the fact that there was a *Garden of Eden* in this world before the *Great Flood*,” Catherine said, presenting them with an article she printed out. “But, I see a development that’s going to change the balance of power all over the world.”

After Quran burnings, UN rights body calls for more action to combat religious hatred. By The Associated Press - July 12, 2023

The U.N.’s top human rights body overwhelmingly approved a measure calling on countries to do more to prevent religious hatred in the wake of Quran burnings in Europe over objections of Western

THE LOST HADITH OF THE QURAN

*countries who fear tougher steps by governments
could tram...*

“How does this pertain to what occurred before the *Great Flood*?” Hans asked.

“The Director of the Paris Mosque was murdered by an assailant two days ago in Paris,” Catherine stated suddenly. “One of the witnesses stated that the attacker made reference to a recently revealed *lost hadith* of the Quran.”

CHAPTER 2

Paris, France **July 13, 2023**

For the last few years, Stephen Hathaway had been touring around the world, periodically. But he always worked closely with Hans and Catherine to plan his weekly itinerary. All together, they had donated the billions of dollars that they had been able to recover from the most recent Vatican Bank scandals to charity groups.

Stephen had finished most of the transactions on their behalf, and he was excited about the people they included in the payments.

Despite being in his early sixties, Stephen was a handsome and lively man. Even now, as he passed through airports, women would stop and glance at him because of his flawless style and flowing gray hair, which gave the impression that he was going to a formal meeting. Although Stephen never took advantage of the possibilities to flirt, he was always courteous when someone did approach him. After all, Stephen thought he was the luckiest guy alive because he and Catherine had been back together for years now.

Stephen looked at his phone for a weather report as he left the Charles de Gaulle airport's main terminal. It was seventy-five degrees, bright, and windy as he exited. Once

outside, Stephen surveyed his surroundings. Given the recent violent protests that had occurred around France, he was exercising caution. Stephen was well aware that the *Place de la Republique*, one of the city's main squares, was the site of protests lately in response to a week of looting and rioting over the police shooting of a teenage Muslim delivery driver.

Having an extensive knowledge of the city, Stephen determined that there were several options he had to get from the airport to the Grand Mosque of Paris. He could use the bus or rail service, or rent a private vehicle. LeCab was a great taxi service in Paris that provided a private driver as an option to riskier individual-owned cars like Uber. So, seeing one, he made the quick decision to go by LeCab to get to his destination.

In one hour Stephen got out of his taxi at 6 Rue Georges Desplas and then proceeded to enter the Paris Mosque through its Great Entrance Door.

When he got inside, Stephen was surprised to see that no one was waiting to welcome him. He became more perplexed as he moved between the rooms of the mosque because it didn't seem like anyone was working or that any tourists were visiting the mosque. Stephen walked in the direction of a Prayer Room after he heard a prayer calling.

"God is great," a loud voice of the Muslim muezzin calling the faithful to prayer echoed throughout the hallways.

When Stephen entered the room, he was surprised to see that the person who had been reciting the summoning was the only one kneeling in the middle of the hall.

"Excuse me," Stephen addressed the caller.

The young boy was startled by Stephen entering the room so silently and jumped up quickly to his feet.

"I'm sorry I frightened you," Stephen told him, *As-salamu alaykum.*"

Hearing Stephen's greeting, the young boy responded, "*Wa-Alaikum Salam*".

"My name is Stephen Hathaway," Stephen told him. "Why is the mosque so empty?"

"I am Waleed," the Muslim boy replied, saying no more.

"I'm not here to make trouble." Stephen told him. "I am a journalist,"

"They're all gone," Waleed told Stephen. "I am the only one left here to pray to Allah."

"Can we talk?" Stephen asked him extending his right hand as a gesture of good will.

In fifteen minutes Waleed was giving Stephen a tour. It was the first time he had been to the mosque but the atmosphere in it reminded Stephen of several ancient churches he had visited.

"I haven't asked you yet, but my curiosity is aroused," Stephen told Waleed.

"You are here because of the murder," Waleed replied nervously.

"Yes," Stephen answered. "Tell me about it."

"An elderly Muslim woman is of no value," Waleed remarked to Stephen. "I know better than to trust the police to chase leads to find her killer."

"What do you suspect?" Stephen asked him in a supple tone.

"Maybe the cell phone is a clue," Waleed responded.

"What cell phone?" Stephen asked.

"The one I found after they took the old woman's body away. A visitor dropped it after the gun was fired and he fled the building," Waleed replied.

"Did you tell the police?" Stephen wanted to know.

"No, they were rough," Waleed replied. "Muslims are hated by the French politicians and police. Many believe they have the right to rule us because they are descendents of France's *Priory of Sion* as portrayed in *The Da Vinci Code*. I have no wish to join the old woman in Jannah."

CHAPTER 3

Paris, France
July 13, 2023

Three hours later, Stephen left Paris on a Eurostar train going back to London. During the two-hour ride, he caught up on headlines, reading some topics that didn't appear in the standard reporting services. Currently, he was sitting in a premier car's comfortable leather chair reading.

Sudan conflict: I saw bodies dumped in Darfur mass graves'.

'If the people who I worked with know I have shown you these photos and videos, I am a dead man, He tells me showing me harrowing pictures of scattered corpses in the city of El Geneina. Sudan has been rocked by fierce battles between the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the army since April 2023, with some of the worst fighting in Darfur, where the RSF originates. They should have been buried according to Muslim rituals. But the RSF discarded them like garbage. Darfur's Arab and Black African communities have been at odds for years - with the worst violence erupting two decades ago when non-Arabs took up arms. The RSF was born out of the notorious Janjaweed Arab militia, which brutally suppressed the rebellion, killing hundreds of thousands of people, described as the first genocide of the 21st Century'.

Stephen found another report that described some of the issues,

'Darfur is an enormous region about the size of France, with an estimated population of about four to five million people. The current conflict has developed serious racial and ethnic overtones and clearly risks shattering historic patterns of coexistence. Overtly, the conflict pits the government of Sudan, against an insurgency composed of the Liberation Army and the Justice and Equality movements'.

An African news article took Stephen completely by surprise.

Sudan's new gold rush in the face of economic crisis

'More than three million people depend on the extraction of the precious metal, the price of which has soared since the start of the war in Ukraine. The gold rush in Sudan is not a new phenomenon. With the independence of South Sudan in 2011, the country found itself stripped of two-thirds of its oil reserves, and President Omar Al-Bashir's regime had made gold mining the cornerstone of its economy. Over the past decade, Sudan has become the third-largest gold producer on the continent. In 2021, billions of dollars of gold were mined there'.

The train's communication system soon informed the passengers that they would arrive in twenty minutes at London's St. Pancras International Railway station

When he heard it, Stephen began to pack up his things. However, just prior to turning off his laptop, he discovered something else,

'Once Hemedti used the RSF to forcefully take over the gold mines in Sudan, it gave him considerable financial power since gold trade constituted forty percent of Sudan's exports in 2017. His gold was sent to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates, where he keeps most of his money. In 2019, the UAE was a key supplier of military equipment to the RSF'.

'In May 2019, Hemedti's first international trip was to Saudi Arabia to meet with Prince Mohammad bin Salman. During the meeting, he stated, "Sudan is standing with the kingdom against all threats and attacks from Iran and Houthis militias." Hemedti has been described by some insiders as being Sudan's version of Mohammad bin Salman: young and power-hungry.

"It's a gold rush," Stephen decided quickly.

'Hemedti has strong ties with the Vladimir Putin regime in Russia. According to insiders, he helped Vladimir Putin exploit Sudan's gold resources to fortify Russian finances to fund his war in Ukraine. Hemedti visited Russia during the Ukraine invasion to sign a partnership deal with the Wagner Group, in exchange for giving them a license to mine gold in Sudan. One of the first tasks of the new government will be to take control of gold exports to ensure all revenues wind up in the right hands'.

Stephen recognized the name Wagner group because it had been inserted into many daily news reports about Russia's, war in the Ukraine, but only lately.

"What a bunch of bull shit," Stephen mused, "Gold, oil, guns, religion and lies. The power paradigm never shifts."

A few minutes later, when Stephen was walking down the aisle towards the exit door of the train a troubling thought came into his mind.

“The fake news is becoming dangerous. The Wagner Group doesn’t even exist. Furthermore, the Ukraine is not their ultimate goal,” Stephen said to himself with certainty.

CHAPTER 4

Paris, France **July 13, 2023**

Out of the twenty arrondissements that make up the heart of Paris, the 19th is among the most violent. An environment of fear is heightened in some communities by a high prevalence of criminal activity, an established drug trafficking network, and very little police presence. The arrondissement is served by the Tram Line T3b. It starts at the city's north, at Porte de la Chapelle, runs eastward around Villette, and then southward to Porte de Vincennes.

The largest park in Paris, the Parc de la Villette is there and is a perfect place for secret meetings, due to its expansiveness. The locality once had the largest meat market in all of France, and was filled with a number of horrifying slaughterhouses. It is now depicted as a completely different location, being a hive of artistic activity. When its La Grande Halle was turned into a park in 1987, the historic market building was preserved and restored. These days, it serves as a location for fairs and other cultural events for the city's residents and visitors.

Jamil got off the tram with a sour feeling in his stomach and made his way through the streets. He was being careful not to draw attention to himself by making any suspicious gestures. Seeing the park entrance directly

ahead, he moved cautiously in that direction right away. He was startled at the sight of two men approaching him from his right, but they quickly turned away as soon as they saw Jamil approaching them.

Being a member of the *Tiger Squad* and an intelligence operative working for Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Jamil was a courageous soldier. He had been trained to react violently and instinctively to any and all threats. He put away the dagger he had pulled out to cut up the men as he watched them leave.

Continuing to remain focused on the road ahead, he was standing near the center of the Parc de la Villette in minutes. Jamil took a moment to survey his surroundings and made an educated guess as to when his companion would arrive, all the while trying to get his bearings. He was dazzled by a burst of light and felt tight pressure in his head and the same disorienting sensations that had only begun a few days ago after he killed the old woman at the Paris Mosque.

"Did you get it?" Aayan asked him, appearing from behind a small building.

"What?" Jimil asked, still being dazed.

"The *lost hadith*," Aayan responded. "Do you have it, or not?"

The blinding light that Jamil had been experiencing returned with force. After shaking his head and once the vivid reflections passed, he tried to figure out what Aayan was asking him.

"I don't think so," Jamil responded. He began to move away as he grew more and more disoriented and clung to his backpack. "I can't remember finding anything."

"We have failed the royal family and the kingdom." Aayan said and then he stabbed Jamil in the chest with his battle knife.

It took him only a few seconds to compose himself. Then Aayan leaned down and listened until Jamil's breathing stopped. That's when he decided to get out of the park as quickly as possible.

For an instant, Aayan considered that he might have to return to Saudi Arabia, to the Al Yamama Palace in Riyadh, admit to failure, and beg for the royals' forgiveness. Then he recalled what had occurred at the Turkish embassy in Istanbul in October 2018. Along with Jamil and a few other *tigers*, he executed and dismembered the journalist Jamal Khashoggi there for opposing and insulting those in the Saudi House of Saud.

"I am God's gift," he yelled out.

Standing up, Aayan made the quick decision that he didn't want to suffer any brutal pain. He then raised his head, gave Allah praise, and began running.

CHAPTER 5

London, England
July 14, 2023

At nine o'clock the following morning, Catherine and Hans were enjoying coffee in the living room of her London flat while talking about what Stephen had told her the night before concerning his activities at the Paris Mosque.

“Muslims believe that Islam is the complete and universal version of a primordial faith that was revealed many times through earlier prophets, such as the first man Adam and then Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, who are other great historical prophets. The earlier revelations are attributed to Judaism and Christianity, which are both regarded in Islam as spiritual processor faiths. Muslims consider the Quran to be the verbatim word of the God Allah and the unaltered, final revelations. Alongside this holy book, Muslims also believe in previous revelations, such as in the Injil, which is the Gospel of Jesus. This is described by the Quran as one of the four Islamic holy books that were revealed by God, the others being the Zabur, the Tawrat, and the Quran itself. They also consider the Islamic Muhammad to be the final prophet through whom religion was finally completed,” Hans declared. “The teachings of Muhammad, called the Sunnah, documented in accounts called

the hadith, provide a valid constitutional model for Muslims.”

“The Isnad, or chain of transmission, is the primary means of confirming the authenticity of a hadith. Historians are reluctant to recognize the status of authenticity conferred by some Muslim scholars because a large number of them can be fakes. Upon comparing and analyzing different hadith, it is evident that a considerable number of them originate from the seventh century. That being said, it is not always easy to tell which hadith are authentic and which ones are not. In the early days of Islam, an appropriate deed or word made by the Prophet Muhammad in an authentic hadith was the best way to advance a cause, a position, or a party.” Catherine elaborated.

“Islam is an Abrahamic one-God religion centered on the Quran founded by Muhammad in the seventh century CE, in the Arabian Peninsula. It spread rapidly by virtue of the early Muslim conquests shortly after his death.” Hans continued. “Followers of Islam are called Muslims. The Abrahamic religions are a group of belief systems centered upon the worship of Abraham, a Hebrew patriarch who is mentioned extensively throughout the scriptures of the Quran and the Hebrew and Christian Bibles. Jewish tradition claims that the Twelve Tribes of Israel are descended from Abraham through his son Isaac and grandson Jacob, whose sons formed the nation of the Israelites in Canaan, or the Land of Israel.”

“Islamic tradition also claims that twelve Arab tribes known as the Ishmaelites are descended from Abraham through his son Ishmael also in the Arabian Peninsula,” Catherine remarked. “In its early stages, the Israelite religion was derived from the Canaanite religions of the Bronze Age and the Iron Age. And, yes, without a doubt, it had become distinct from other religions as it replaced polytheism with the worship of a solitary God. The nature of this belief system was further developed in the period after the Babylonian captivity, eventually emerging as a firm religious movement. The Babylonian exile is the period in Jewish history during which a large number of Judeans from the ancient Kingdom of Judah were held captive in Babylon, the capital city of the Neo-Babylonian Empire. This was after their defeat in the Jewish-Babylonian War, in and around 600 BCE and the destruction of Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem, in 587 BCE. The event is known to be historical and is described in the Hebrew Bible. In the first century CE, Christianity emerged as a splinter movement out of Judaism in the Land of Israel under the Apostles of Jesus of Nazareth. It spread widely after it was adopted by the Roman Empire as a State religion in the fourth century CE.”

They both were taken aback as the front door opened loudly. Stephen entered, having unlocked it using his key.

“Would you like a cup of coffee?” Catherine offered it to him.

“That would be great,” Stephen replied.

Catherine went to the kitchen to get it after Stephen replied that he did.

“How was your quick trip to Paris?” Hans asked Stephen.

Placing the cell phone Waleed had given him down on a table in front of Hans, Stephen told him, “You and Catherine need to look at something recorded in this phone. A tourist present in the Paris mosque at the time of Aafia Bashir’s murder unintentionally recorded a video of it happening.”

CHAPTER 6

Rabat, Morocco **July 14, 2023**

The Alawi dynasty is the current ruling monarchy and royal family of Morocco. They call themselves Arab Sharifian and trace their ancestry to the Islamic prophet Muhammad through his grandson, Hasan ibn Ali. Their predecessors first migrated to the Tafilalt region of modern-day Morocco in the 12th or 13th century from Yanbu, on the Hejaz coast, in western Saudi Arabia. The city of Mecca is located in this country and is the birthplace of Muhammad, and also Medina, the site of his death.

Morocco's King is Mohammed VI. He became the heir apparent in 1999 upon the passing of his father, King Hassan II. Mohammed owns substantial assets in a number of Moroccan economic areas. An estimate of his net worth places it well above \$10 billion USD. He is the fifth wealthiest monarch in the world and the richest king in Africa. Mohammed enacted several reforms and created a human rights constitution shortly after taking the throne. Journalists, however, have documented horrific abuses of human rights as well as claims of high-level corruption there.

The biggest non-governmental organization in Morocco dedicated to civil liberties is the Moroccan Association

for Human Rights. The Administrative Commission and the Central Office comprise the organization's executive body. The AMDH strives to protect human dignity and to uphold, defend, and advance justice for all.

Sadly, Moroccan authorities have been suppressing the AMDH for the past 10 years by blocking and outlawing its events, including seminars, conferences, meetings, and local branch openings. The refusal of the authorities to provide receipts for necessary documentations has been impeding the head office's registration process. They are unable to do routine commercial operations, such as opening bank accounts, without such a receipt.

In Rabat, on the Rue Aguensous, there is an apartment complex housing the AMDH central office. Ali Ahmed had just arrived there today and cautiously opened the office door. Considering the hostility he and his colleagues had already faced, it was hard to foresee how far the authorities would go to keep them quiet.

Once inside, Ali checked to make sure the door was properly latched. It was a lame self-defense tactic, because Ali knew that the troops would just crash through the door if they turned up. As Ali approached his desk, he saw that everything was organized exactly as he had left it two days ago. Ali jumped a little in his chair because of a noise outside in the corridor. He calmed himself down as soon as he heard whoever it was leave the hallway. Ali was not normally a nervous person. On the contrary, he thrived in the face of hardship and difficulties. At thirty-four, he

had fought in numerous skirmishes and engagements. In 2010, he started his current Human Rights endeavor while still enrolled in the London College of Islamic Studies. Ali remembered clearly that he chose the institution because of its lauded curriculum. The school professed to teach a deep understanding of Islam within historical and modern contexts, while providing an opportunity to study the Quran, hadith and other Islamic texts.

But Ali's studies didn't end there. After obtaining a postgraduate degree, he moved back to North Africa and then traveled to a number of Middle Eastern nations in search of academics with knowledge that the institutions didn't teach. Presently, Ali was regarded as a prominent world authority on the Quran and a well-known advocate for the application of true Islamic law, called the *Shariat*, to all Muslim followers worldwide.

He glanced at one specific set of papers on his desk. On Thursday, January 13, 2022, he, in his capacity as the director of AMDH, along with his compatriots had issued a report as a global press release, entitled, *'A report on the reality of public freedoms in Morocco during the year 2021'*. After reading this, Ali recalled how happy they had all been, expecting that their efforts would lead to positive changes in their country. So, he decided to re-read it again, *'During the year 2021 and with the entry into force of the state of health emergency, the violent intervention of public forces, prevention, and repression became a basic rule with the justification of maintaining public order and public health. Thus,*

forms of peaceful protest became known as interventions by the authorities in charge of law enforcement. Recently, Morocco witnessed an exceptional and unprecedented decline in terms of freedom of opinion and expression in the media, the press, and blogging. The arrests and trials of journalists and bloggers continued within the framework of an authoritarian context characterized by repression and restrictions on media freedoms’.

Ali was caught off guard when the phone on his desk started ringing. The last time he tried to use it, the line was disconnected. When he answered, he heard a supple woman’s voice tell him something strange.

The caller said, “A package is at your door,” and she hung up.

Ali was accustomed to disturbances like these. Because of his vocal criticisms of the monarchy, he was somewhat of a celebrity in Morocco and never knew what to anticipate when he was contacted by anyone. It usually meant that when he opened the door, the military police would be there to take him to one of the jails to be questioned. But this time when he unbolting it, he was startled to see that there was indeed a small box in the corridor. With great trepidation, Ali picked it up and immediately looked at the delivery label on the front of it. Someone named Aafia Bashir had sent it out a week earlier from Paris, and the package was addressed specifically to him.

CHAPTER 7

Menton, France **July 29, 2023**

After Catherine, Stephen, and Hans had uncovered the most recent Vatican Bank scandal two years prior, they had been able to recover a substantial amount of the money that the dishonest Cardinal Giovanni Angelo Besciu had stolen from the Vatican Bank.

Most of what they got back was given to foreign charities to help the needy. A month ago, Catherine suggested that they meet with each of the beneficiaries to discuss the current status of the world and how they could all work together more closely to make it a better place.

Consequently, after invitations were sent out to the directors of the foundations, about fifty guests were in attendance at a party at Catherine's French country chateau near Monte Carlo on the French Riviera and Mediterranean Sea,

"Menton is situated on the border between the Italian Republic of Genoa and the Country of Nice, which is ruled by the Duke of Savoy. Prior to its addition to France in 1860 following the contentious French plebiscite, it was an enclave of the Principality of Monaco," Catherine was speaking to a well-dressed man from

Yemen telling him about her estate's commune. "It has always been a fashionable destination with grand mansions, picturesque gardens and bright sunshine for most of the year."

"The next stage of religious oppressions should be easy for them to pull off since some groups have successfully attacked Christianity over the past 20 years with their narratives denying Jesus Christ's divinity. As you are aware, Muslims and Christians together make up about sixty percent of all religion adherents worldwide," Stephen was standing by Catherine when he shared this opinion with a highly intelligent Black Muslim woman who had traveled all the way from Nigeria, in West Africa to be here.

While Catherine and Stephen were entertaining guests on the estate's lawns, Hans was having a rather contemplative conversation on the chateau's veranda with a man who was a professor at Columbia University and the coordinator for a number of civil rights organizations in New York City.

"A forum on human rights, democracy, and the rule of law was decided to be established by the Human Rights Council in United Nations resolution 28/14, which was enacted on March 26, 2015. The forum takes place every two years," the professor informed Hans.

"I'm rather familiar with the mission statement, "Hans told him, stating it, *"Human rights, democracy and the rule of law create an environment in which countries can*

promote development, protect individuals from discrimination and ensure equal access to justice for all”.

“If only they adhered to their statements of purposes,” the professor commented.

“I concur, completely,” Hans replied.

After listening in on the two men’s discussion, a man interrupted them, saying, “*We, the peoples of the United Nations, are determined to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and nations large and small.*”

After quoting the United Nations Charter’s Preamble, the Moroccan man asked, “Do either of you know where I can find Catherine Turrell in this maze of lovely people?”

Hans pointed out Catherine, and then he and the professor resumed their conversation.

The professor said, “What’s happening to Muslims around the world? They are placed in concentration camps in China. They are mass-murdered in Myanmar. They have been the focus of organized pogroms in India. They suffer everyday deaths in Israel, together with Christian Palestinians. Muslims are increasingly the targets of persecution and demonization in both Europe and the US.”

“The fate of Muslims in their own homeland isn’t any better. They are calling it *ethnic cleansing*. From one end of the world to the next, Muslims in Israel, Iran, Syria, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia in particular, live under tyrannical regimes, ruthless dictators, and murderous military juntas, with their most basic civil liberties and human

rights denied. In Yemen, they are being slaughtered and subjected to man-made famines, and if any journalist dares to raise their voice, he or she goes missing," Hans stated, feeling himself getting angry just talking about it. "In Denmark, Sweden, and elsewhere, thugs are burning the Quran."

"Excuse me are you Catherine Turrell?" the good-looking man asked when he finally reached her through the crowd.

"Yes," Catherine answered him politely.

He told her, "I need to talk to you about something urgent. My name is Ali Ahmed, and I lead the Moroccan Association for Human Rights as its director. Just four days ago, I received your invitation to visit this pleasant place, and last year you were gracious enough to give us a substantial donation to do our work."

"I'm glad you could make it," Catherine advised him. "What's so urgent?"

"It involves a woman by the name of Aafia Bashir. Do you know of her?" Ali asked Catherine.

Stephen became alarmed as soon as he saw the man approaching Catherine, heard him introduce himself, and speak the name of the woman who had been murdered in the Paris mosque. So he moved quickly to center himself between the two of them.

"What is it that you want to tell us?" Stephen asked Ali forcefully.

Ali reassured Stephen, "Be at ease, brother. Aafia Bashir sent me something and I don't know why or what to do with it."

"Continue," Stephen told Ali with his fists clinched.

"Have either of you ever heard of *The Quran Code*?" Ali asked them, being totally composed.

CHAPTER 8

Menton, France
July 30, 2023

When Ali approached Catherine at the party, she was a bit startled. But she and Stephen quickly came to the conclusion that Ali posed no threat. After a lengthy discussion about his possession, they extended an invitation for him to stay the night.

The next morning, Catherine, Stephen, Hans, and Ali were all sitting in the study of the chateau discussing the possibilities of a secret code being in the Quran.

After placing an item down on a magnificent marble coffee table, Ali told the other three, "I had no idea what it was when I opened the outer shipping box,"

Hans examined the small object's ring-shaped dials after picking it up. "It's a cryptex, an antiquated glass container that seems to be holding a small papyrus scroll."

After seeing similar ones at the Shrine of the Book museum in Israel, Catherine said, "This design looks like the many glass cylinders that hold the Dead Sea Scrolls in Jerusalem."

"The operation of a cryptex is comparable to that of a sophisticated padlock, despite claims made in a few recent book publications. To open it, you have to enter numbers in a coded sequence. An early example of this

kind of system was developed in classical Turkey. The Islamic engineer Ismail al-Jazari first described a combination lock design in detail in the twelfth century. He drew numerous illustrations of what appeared to be a cryptex in a manuscript dated as 1420," Hans stated firmly. "Throughout the Arab world, his writings were widely disseminated and translated into Turkish and Persian."

"I investigated it," Ali said. "There is a possibility that this glass cylinder is connected in some way to *The Quran Code*."

Stephen looked intently at the numbers on the dials and said, "To get what's inside, you need to figure out a number sequence code."

"In 1969, Rashad Khalifa, an Egyptian-American biochemist, began analyzing the Quran's divided characters in an effort to identify any numerical pattern sequences that might be present. More of what Ali discovered was revealed in his 1973 book *Miracle of the Quran: Significance of the Mysterious Alphabets*, which describes Quran initials and passages through enumerations and distributions," Ali shared more of what he knew.

Being a researcher, Hans stated, "Khalifa claims that the Quran contains features that are multiples of *the number 19*."

"A lot of people believe it to be true," Catherine continued, aware of the theory.

"Nearly every religion asserts that there are mathematical miracles of some kind in its texts. *The Quran Code's* proponents contend that because of its mystical structure, it's divine," Hans went on.

"Rashad Khalifa and his followers' theories have been proven false," Catherine stated. "Just like the hoaxes of the mystery religions perpetrated by charlatans claiming to possess ancient, secret knowledge involving magic numbers."

"It seems simple to figure out a code, to get what's inside," Stephen stated, thinking about it.

"If we can open it, maybe we'll learn what was lost and now has been found," Ali had already determined this as a possibility.

Observing the item's coiling within the cryptex, Catherine surmised, "It appears to be a riddle of some kind."

"Excuse me, I'll be right back," Stephen said, standing up abruptly and leaving the room.

Hans stated, "This object is fascinating," glancing directly at Ali. "This priceless item was just left outside your door by someone?"

"Yes, sir," Ali replied. "I have no idea who dropped it there."

"If you examine the scroll's parchment closely," Catherine was about to say something else as Stephen reentered the room.

"Pardon me again," Stephen muttered, raising his right hand, holding something.

“What are you doing?” Seeing it was a hammer Stephen was holding, Catherine immediately became concerned.

Without hesitation, Stephen proceeded to smash the glass cryptex with the hand tool.

“Good God, Stephen!” Catherine let out a scream.

“I suppose we could spend all day trying to open it, by figuring out those dials,” Stephen said, as the others began to settle down. “But this way was quicker.”

“Unbelievable,” Hans remarked, shaking his head from side to side.

Stephen picked the scroll up and unfolded it. Then he set it down on the table, and read what was written on it, “*The Abraham Lies,*” to an audible gasp from the rest of the group.

CHAPTER 9

Marrakesh, Morocco **August 2, 2023**

The meaning of the writing on the scroll Ali brought to them was unfamiliar to Catherine, Stephen, and Hans when they read it.

However, when Ali told them about a knowledgeable man in the Marrakesh Kasbah who could assist them in deciphering the secret of the scroll, they were all delighted.

Before they could say or do anything more, Hans put everything into perspective by saying, "A mystery is definitely unfolding."

Three days later, in Marrakesh, Catherine, Stephen, Hans, and Ali started trying to figure out the complex message of the cryptex scroll.

"The Marrakech Kasbah is situated to the south of the self-styled Medina of the city. The Almohad dynasty was in power when its main compound was first constructed in the eleventh century," Ali stated, acting as their tour guide. "Some historical sites in the Kasbah include the haunting Saadian Tombs, the Bahia Palace, and the Moulay Al Yazid Mosque, which is known for its tower. The proximity of the Kasbah to the main square of the city, the Djemaa El Fna makes it a site of great historical and architectural significance."

"It looks just like it does in movies," Catherine commented.

"I assume you know where we are going?" Hans asked Ali.

"Absolutely," Ali replied to Hans. "The Kasbah's distinctive features include the winding, labyrinth alleyways and lanes that round the Medina in the historic section of the old city. It is mostly known for its Souk merchants and its historic Riad courtyards, crammed with artisan goods of all kinds."

"These vendor stands are spectacular," Catherine commented.

"El Fna square is the primary meeting place for Moroccans. This ancient quarter, which lies in the center of Marrakech, is always bustling with people trying to get tourists to spend their money on its street entertainers, fortune tellers, and snake charmers," Ali said and made a funny motion with his hand, imitating one of the snake charmers.

"We're not here to bargain," Stephen said tersely.

"The square is also near the historic Bahia Palace from the nineteenth century. In 1859, a man by the name of Si Musa began construction on it. Although it is by no means the oldest, the palace is one of the city's most intriguing sights. Its name, which translates from Arabic to English as *brilliance*, accurately describes it. It is in the Medina near the Mellah, or Jewish Quarter, and is a great example of old imperial Alawite architecture," Ali stated.

"If memory serves me correctly, Si Musa was descended from a family of black slaves who worked for the Moroccan Makhzen royals and they were elevated the highest offices in the country," Hans said looking to Ali for a confirmation of this as a historical fact.

"Yes, he was first the hajib, or chamberlain, then *Grand Vizier* under Muhammad ibn Abd al-Rahman, who reigned from 1859 to 1873," Ali responded. "His son, Ba Ahmed followed in his footsteps, serving as chamberlain to Sultan Moulay Hassan. When Hassan died in 1894, Ba Ahmed led a coup that displaced Hassan's older sons in favor of his youngest son, Moulay Abd el-Aziz. The young sultan was just sixteen years old at the time, and because of his young age, Ba Ahmed appointed himself as his *Grand Vizier* and reigning regent. In effect, he became the *de facto* ruler of Morocco until his death in 1900. After his death, the palace was ransacked, and many of its valuables were pilfered and lost forever."

Catherine was lured in by a stunning silver necklace from a Souk trader who said, "Beautiful lady look at this."

The four of them were a little lost in the bustling Medina Market as Catherine and Stephen were strolling in front of Hans and Ali. However, Catherine lost all concentration when she spotted the piece of jewelry the vendor held out to her.

"C'est combien?" Catherine asked the man in French how much it was, stopping at his stand.

“Catherine we don’t have time to shop,” Stephen scolded her, repeating what he had just told Ali.

“There is always time to shop,” Catherine answered Steven with a sweet smile.

Hans and Ali continued walking and talking about some of the issues that had brought them to Morocco while Catherine and Stephen were busy negotiating with the Souk dealer.

“Muhammad is credited with using Tafsir for the first time in history. Islamic theology holds that the Prophet told his friends the verses or proofs from the Quran once Allah revealed them to him, frequently outlining their ramifications to enhance his companion’s comprehensions,” Ali stated to Hans. Some academics insist that Muhammad commented on the entire Quran, while others contend that because of a small number of hadith, he only addressed a portion of the revelations included in it.”

“That’s worthy of note,” Hans replied to Ali as he stepped over a beggar lying in the middle of the street.

“After Muhammad’s death, a new era of Tafsir began when his associates, the Sahabah, took up the duty of interpretations,” Ali said to Hans. “Most of the Sahabah only addressed what Muhammad had said and remain silent on issues pertaining to their personal outlooks.”

“Others like the renowned ‘Ibn ‘Abbās, used their proficiency with the Arabic language to understand and interpret the Quran. At this period, Tafsirs were only briefly and selectively covered. And, only particular words,

phrases, and verses were analyzed.” Ali was then told by Hans. “The Quran was still not fully interpreted, and commentaries were not separated from the various hadith collections nor written separately, mainly due to other occupations such as the assembly of the Quran.”

“By the time subsequent generations of scholars or the successors of the Sahabah emerged, the Tabi’in was drawing on a wide range of sources for Tafsir. The entire Quran is understood by removing narrations from Tafsir and placing them in their own books and literature.” Ali reported. “These texts provide historical details, grammatical explanations, and subjective viewpoints that are either accepted or rejected.”

“It’s only the genuine historical data we’re interested in,” Hans stated.

“A wide variety of Tafsir schools emerged during this period in various academic hubs, such as Mecca, Medina, and Iraq. In addition to the transmitted stories, Iraqi schools of Tafsir gained notoriety for their use of subjective analysis and the extensive use of *Jewish apocryphal* reports. Tafsir had not yet been separately compiled into a book, but instead, it had been passed down orally until this time. Instead, it had been collected, along with other Muhammad narrations, by Muhaddithun, the hadith experts, and was included in their hadith books under the heading of Tafsir. This suggests that during the early stages of its development, hadith scholars considered Tafsir to be an entirely unique

field. The expansion of their application and Mufassir's appearance in the age of the successors led to the development of an independent discipline of study," Ali continued to share his knowledge.

Stephen said nothing as he watched Catherine haggle with the street vendor over another piece of jewelry that caught her eye. But when he heard the name of 'Ibn 'Ab-bās, the greatest Mufassir of all time and one of Muhammad's cousins, a light went out in his head.

"He wants 2,500 dirhams for it, and won't go any lower," Catherine said, looking at Stephen for his assessment.

"If you like it, buy it," Stephen replied as he removed cash from his pocket.

"C'est un accord," Catherine confirmed the purchase with the vendor.

Stephen didn't notice the tall black man who was listening to Hans and Ali's converse because he was so pre-occupied on getting the bargain done so Catherine could own the piece of jewelry.

Suddenly, a loud explosion shook the ground. Hans, Stephen, and Catherine all fell to their knees on the ground, huddled close to one another.

While he was still upright, Ali told everyone else, "It's just some building in the Kasbah. When we came through the front gates, I noticed the warning signs."

Using his cane to stand up, Hans said, "It's the state of the world, these days."

CHAPTER 10

Marrakesh, Morocco **August 2, 2023**

Marrakech' Kasbah is a vibrant, busy old city with a colorful past, hospitable locals, and lots of noise. Usually, motorbikes are tearing through the souks' narrow, twisting lanes. There are donkeys everywhere pushing carts, and the air is heavy with the aromas of roast lamb and tagine.

Women wear headscarves in the Muslim nation of Morocco. Although, Marrakech is a popular tourist destination and therefore the dress code is somewhat more lenient than in other Muslim nations. However, savvy visitors still wear conservative apparel to not be conspicuous. Additionally, a lot of friendly people are willing to help you find your way especially if you ask for directions or seem to be lost. Children are schooled to alert you when a road is closed. But, being well trained, if you pay them, they're probably going to lead you down a road that leads to one of the shops instead of the location you requested.

Before arriving to Bahia Palace, Catherine and her group strolled through the Medina's cobblestone streets for nearly an hour. Along the walk, Catherine enjoyed the ambiance of the old city while listening to Hans talk about how everyone believed they were under attack after

an explosion and how the world had changed, lately. She totally agreed that the state of the world was dire and had gotten much worse over the last few years.

“Being spiritual is difficult when the world’s rulers are out of control, influencing people’s perceptions of what’s fashionable with their terrible technological innovations,” Catherine said to Hans.

Without having to ask for directions, Ali guided the others through the streets and showed them the route to the Bahia Palace. Having spent countless hours exploring the ancient city as a youth, he was familiar with every path that his group would travel upon to get there. When they finally reached the outside of its main entrance, he told his companions about its remarkable history.

“The palace was transformed into the home of the French resident-general in the city in 1912, after the establishment of the French Protectorate in Morocco. Following Moroccan domination, the palace served as King Mohammed V’s royal home before being given to King Hassan II’s Moroccan Ministry of Culture. It’s one of the most popular tourist destinations in Morocco,” Ali informed them.

“I love its design,” Catherine commented.

“On the gypsum friezes above two of the columns, you can read historical writing corresponding to the year 1898,” Ali said, guiding them through the South Gallery a few minutes later. “It says, *“This blessed Riad ended with the praise of God and his beautiful help; Ramadan 12, 1315.”*”

In five minutes they were at the door of the *Bureau des Archives Royales*.

No one was prepared for what they witnessed when they walked into the room. Rather than holding priceless documents and precious archives, it was empty except for an elderly man with a long white beard who was seated on a plain wooden chair and he had his arms folded together.

The elderly man whispered softly, "It's good to see you again, my young friend," once he noticed Ali standing in front of him. "Please introduce your friends to me. I am aware that they have come to see me to learn about Muhammad's secrets."

Ali suddenly remembered a passage from the Quran that the elderly man had shared with him years earlier. "The Messenger said, 'O you who believe! To succeed, keep God in mind, look for ways to be in touch with Him, and work for His cause. As for the disbelievers, they would not accept it even if they possessed everything on earth and the like and offered it as a ransom to save themselves from the agony of the Day of Resurrection. It is an agonizing punishment for them'."

The bearded old man smiled at his visitors and recited more from the holy book, "'the truthful will benefit from their truthfulness. They will have gardens beneath which rivers flow, wherein they will remain forever'."

"I wonder if these gardens are enjoyable right now for Aafia Bashir." Stephen asked. "Isn't that the reason we're here?"

The building shook violently as a sudden, deep-seated earthquake struck the city with force.

This time, though, everyone in Catherin's group remained standing.

"It's impossible to predict when the end will materialize," remarked the bearded, stone-faced old man once the terrible shaking stopped. "Therefore, we must always be prepared for it."

CHAPTER 11

London, England **August 3, 2023**

During the last three weeks, Aayan had been holed up at The Originals Hotel Notre Dame, on the boulevard de la Savonnerie, in Rouen, France. Knowing he didn't have time to waste, he tried to plan his departure from Europe very carefully. Yesterday, he finally found a contact in England who might be able to help him in do it. After considering the safest route, he concluded that taking an automobile to England was the best choice. Consequently, Aayan fled France early this morning after stealing a car. By midafternoon, he was navigating it on Stratton Street in London to reach his destination.

The May Fair Hotel is in a prime location with in London with Green Park and Piccadilly being only a ten-minute walk away. The opulent hotel offers a gourmet restaurant, a state-of-the-art fitness center with treadmills, weightlifting machines, and a spa complete with body, face, and massage treatments.

The fat Pakistani lawyer was not the kind of hotel guest who used the exercise center to keep in shape. Instead, he was overweight and consistently wore a poorly fitting suit that looked as though he had slept in it. At the moment, he was overindulging in the establishment's

upscale restaurant. Bits and pieces of sea food were pouring out of his mouth as he ravaged. The other guests in the five-star hotel were staring at him, perplexed as to how someone with such an offensive demeanor could be there.

Disregarding their gawking, the obese man's mind turned to his designs for Islamic terrorism, his cunning banking operations in Switzerland that laundered money, and his expanding COVID Test Kit counterfeiting business. For a short while, he ignored his meal to read articles that were being shared by some journalists around the world.

'The Panama Papers are 11.5 million leaked documents that were published beginning on April 3, 2016. They detail financial, attorney, and client information for more than 214,488 offshore private banking entities. Some dating back to the 1970s were created by and taken from a Panamanian offshore law firm and company named Mossack Fonseca. The shell corporations were used for fraud, tax evasion, money laundering, and to evade international sanctions. In October 2020, German authorities issued an international arrest warrant for the two founders of the law firm, on charges of running a worldwide criminal organization worth tens of billions of dollars'.

The lawyer remarked, "She deserved it," anticipating what would come next.

'In November 2018, the Times of Malta revealed that Yorgen Fenech, the Tumas Group businessman and the main suspect in the assassination of journalist Daphne Caruana Galizia, was the owner of 17 Black, the company listed as a target client for the

Panamanian companies. More recently, it has been revealed that 17 Black formed a strong part of an Azerbaijani Laundromat, a network of shell companies used to embezzle public funds out of Azerbaijan and pay bribes all around the world’.

“Pardon me, sir,” a server said. “Do you want desert?”

The obese man replied angrily, “No. Just bring me more coffee.”

The lawyer went back to the reports after the drink arrived.

‘Malta’s controversial ElectroGas dealings remain at the forefront of investigative interest, in terms of corruption claims. And, mounting allegations increasingly point to it being the main motive behind the brutal assassination of journalist Daphne Galizia. At the time of her murder, she was sitting on a collection of 200,000 leaked documents that, if released by her, were set to shake the country to its core, both financially and politically’.

The obese man cried out, “Waiter, bring me the desert menu.” Then he started reading again.

‘How some of this plays out is that Vitals Global Healthcare was chosen as the preferred bidder for a consortium operating Malta Hospitals in 2015. VGH was set to pocket more than €2.1 billion over 30 years. However, just 21 months into operations, VGH sold its concession to Steward Healthcare, leaving it €36 million in debt. The men involved in the deals have been accused of facilitating a coordinated act of modern-day piracy, corruption, and money laundering, among other crimes. The revelation has been a key focus in the public inquiry over the journalist’s murder’.

Those assholes are getting too close,” the lawyer decided, reading the familiar names.

‘After Daphne Galizia’s death, a group of 45 journalists representing 18 news organizations from 15 countries launched ‘The Daphne Project’ to continue her investigative work, including unraveling alleged connections between the Pilatus Bank in Malta, Azerbaijani politicians, and shady top Maltese politicians and businessmen including Yorgen Fenech who has been arrested for her murder. They all are linked to a wide range of corrupt entities including Italian organized crime and oil smugglers from Libya and Pakistan’.

With growing irritation, the lawyer thought, “We’ll buy off the judges if they get into the courts. We kill more of them if that fails.” Any journalist or judge in the world that could stand in the way was on his mind.

“I apologize for disturbing you,” Dr. Bhatti,” Aayan said firmly.

“Who are you? The lawyer asked him the pointed question.

“A mutual friend told me to get in touch with you,” Aayan answered.

“What do you want?” The lawyer inquired.

“I need safe travel,” Aayan replied. “In exchange, I know of something that will make you very powerful in the Muslim world.”

CHAPTER 12

London, England August 5, 2023

“Most people living in the world today don’t know much about what happened in the Middle East in and around 1974,” Hans said while lounging in one of Catherine’s plush chairs at her London apartment.

“There seems to be a lot going on there recently,” Ali said, “Bordering on some violent unrest since we returned from Morocco last month.”

“Is there a specific cause for the tensions that anyone can describe?” Catherine questioned, glancing over at Hans for a response.

“There’s something brewing,” Hans retorted.

“Petrodollars and Henry Kissinger’s grand plan,” Stephen suddenly burst out.

“What does that have to do with Muhammad’s hadith?” Hans asked Stephen.

“Oil, money, and power,” Stephen answered, Following the opening of China by President Richard Nixon, and soon after the US significantly raised the price at which it was selling grains and suspended the sale of gold in 1971, US attention turned to the Middle Eastern countries that exported oil. These nations’ oil prices quadrupled as a result of the US’s abrupt spike

in grain prices. Diplomats from the US permitted Saudi Arabia and other Arab nations to set their own prices for their oil, but threatened to declare it an act of war if they broke their agreements with the United States.”

“Until then many of the sheiks still rode camels,” Hans said sardonically.

“As a result of this, the 1973 oil crisis fixed the value of the dollar, compelling Saudi Arabia and the other OPEC members to strike covert agreements with Washington. Naturally, Henry Kissinger, Nixon’s National Security Advisor and Secretary of State, was the primary planner of these clandestine arrangements,” Stephen continued.

Slightly unaware of Stephen’s intended destination for this conversation, Catherine stated. “The agreements Kissinger negotiated stipulated that the OPEC countries would sell their oil only in dollars in exchange for Washington’s political and military protection.”

“Therefore, the gold-linked standard that predated Nixon was replaced by the petrodollar. The world market for US currency reached an all-time high once OPEC members fully endorsed this arrangement,” Stephen went on to say. “Petrodollars served as the foundation for American dominance over the world’s financial system, forcing other nations to purchase dollars in order to buy oil on the international markets. An additional requirement was that Saudi Arabia would put its excess oil revenues into US debt instruments and bond markets.”

“By 1975, all OPEC countries were trading oil in US dollars, which later became the accepted standard of commerce for the oil-producing nations. Trading oil for the US dollar also restored the demand for US currency in the foreign exchange markets. Petrodollar recycling is the phenomenon whereby oil exporting nations earn more money than they could possibly invest in their own economies and the surplus is held in the US debt securities. The term *petrodollar recycling* was coined by Henry Kissinger himself,” Catherine stated.

“Fast-forward to the late 1980s, when Wall Street and its large, predominately Jewish financial investors regulated the move to a digital platform system, and the situation in the financial markets started to blow up. It turned out that central banks could actually generate money by sending digital funds transfers to other banks.” Stephen said. “This phenomenon caused a huge divergence between the values of real assets and the values of stock markets, currencies, and especially the derivatives markets, where the values reached astronomical levels. As a result, the US dollar gained significant advantages and became the global reserve currency thanks to the petrodollar recycling system. Any buyer or importer of Arab oil would first need to purchase and keep US dollars, creating a robust demand for the currency around the world.”

Catherine then pointed out, “However, Kissinger’s plan has backfired big time. Or, at least that’s how it appears, save from a few insiders who steal government

contracts and benefits. His system has significantly hurt the US, not strengthened it. The OPEC nations have accumulated so many dollars over the past few decades that they currently have an enormous excess of US cash. These days, they are making wild use of them to acquire everything, anything of value. A Leonardo da Vinci artwork of Jesus Christ was just secretly purchased for \$450 million by the Saudi Prince Mohammed bin Salman going by the moniker MBS."

"The main players thought that the developments of the 1970s would strengthen economic relations during the ensuing few decades." Stephen continued, "But in reality, what they actually accomplished was laying an unsound basis for a high degree of social unrest, monetary imbalance, and dangerous potential conflicts, which are now unfolding."

"Saudi Arabia supplies nearly all of communist China's oil," Hans stated. "Of course, we are well aware of the location of the US war from 2003 to 2011, in Iraq. In addition to this, the regimes of Iraq, Azerbaijan, and Russia provide the lion's share of oil to democratic Israel. But sooner rather than later, the Middle East's wells will inevitably run dry or slow down, and this will have devastating consequences."

"With money exchanges and rising domestic interest rates, the US-based Wall Street bankers, their tightly controlled Federal Reserve System, and their billionaire hedge fund comrades are balancing out any devaluation

of their dollars, which is producing hyperinflation and higher taxes, worldwide,” Catherine said. “As opposed to making money from oil sales, the US is subsidizing and building a communist China by its purchases. And the Chinese are gaining enormous areas of land all over the world with their recently found wealth. How can this be a wise economic move when the US national debt has risen to over \$30 trillion?”

Hans chimed in, “The US is the world’s biggest arms seller. The country that purchases the greatest armaments from the US government is Saudi Arabia. Additionally, the US essentially finances Israel’s military war machine.”

“Indeed, the United States of America possesses the largest military force and is the world’s leading provider of armaments. This is partly because it has been supplying Israel and Saudi Arabia and its other friends in the Middle East with advanced combat jets. Like many other nations, Israel possesses an arsenal of aircraft. In addition to being the world’s leading supplier to the biggest exporters and dealers of weaponry, the US arms at least ninety countries. Naturally, a lot of the arms end up in the crime, terrorists and gang syndicates,” Catherine stated, becoming angry just thinking about its global destructiveness.

“This is called *democracy*,” Hans evaluated, cynically. “It’s hypocrisy.”

“*Pine Island Capital*,” Stephen exclaimed. “Antony Blinken is the current US Secretary of State, and he established this company in 2018 with other Jewish run

companies like CIT Group, Merrill Lynch and Goldman Sachs. Their success is due to collaborating with generals, admirals, and administration individuals to secure government defense and arms contracts. This all sounds like a repeat performance of the avowed *Realpolitik*, pro-Israel Henry Kissinger let's make a deal tactic when he was the Secretary of State."

"What's *Realpolitik*?" Catherine asked.

"A complete disregard for ethical considerations," Hans stated, "Politics and actions based on practical objectives rather than on ideals or morals."

"I hate to be demeaning," Ali declared, considering his ethical position as a human rights advocate. "But, how does all of this criminal US government business activity relate in any way to Muhammad's *lost hadith*?"

CHAPTER 13

London, England August 6, 2023

“In order to properly understand our goals, it’s important that we review the history of the Ottoman Empire, commonly known as the Turkish Empire in popular culture and historical texts.” Hans advised, “It ruled over a large portion of Southeast Europe, West Asia, and North Africa between the 14th and the beginning of the 20th century.”

“Mehmed the Conqueror besieged Constantinople, the capital of the orthodox Byzantine Empire, in 1453. The seizure of the city cemented Ottoman military and naval dominance in the Mediterranean and Southeast Europe. The European continent continued to expand as Suleiman the Magnificent moved west and overthrew the Kingdom of Hungary,” Catherine stated. “Following the capture of Constantinople in 1453, the Ottoman sultans proclaimed themselves the rightful Roman emperors, succeeding the Byzantine emperors who had previously held power from Constantinople. The sultans frequently used the names *Kayser-i Rûm* or *Caesar of Rome*, which were previously terms used to refer to the Byzantine emperors in its literature, based on the concept of the right of conquest.”

“Other sultans declared their governance in Egypt and other parts of the Middle East. The empire dominated most of Southeast Europe, western Asia, and North Africa, between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries. Theological and cultural conservatism in the European countries gradually hampered the Ottomans’ advancement in science, technology, and military power. By the nineteenth century, European forces would eventually undermine the Ottoman Empire’s stability due to its structure, which was based on Islam, the military and regal succession,” Hans elaborated.

“That’s when the Christians arrived,” Stephen commented.

“Precisely,” Hans replied. “As the empire spread into Christian Europe, its armed forces became more and more concentrated. One major benefit that the Ottoman army and government reaped was the distribution of Christian kings across Europe. Orthodox nations believed that Ottoman Muslims ruled more effectively than other Christian faiths. The Sultan, who was made a deity, oversaw both the military and the government. Because the sultanate was upheld by a single royal family, it was passed down by dynastic succession. Nearly every element of society was under the Sultan’s authority, including religion.”

“A shepherd and his flock,” Catherine commented, observing the similarities to Christian beliefs.

“As the empire grew, along with Muslims, other imperial subjects included Jews, Catholics, and Orthodox

Christians. The effective handling of multi-religious and multi-ethnic diversity is and was necessary for the control of an empire." Hans explained, further. "The Ottoman government permitted Jewish, Catholic, and Orthodox groups to practice their religion and customs with relative autonomy in exchange for allegiance to the Sultan, which was demonstrated through various taxes."

"In contrast to the persecution of Jews in Christian Europe, which resulted in their deportation in 1492, Jews were granted sanctuary in the Ottoman Empire in return for their allegiance to the Sultan. Instead of being viewed as second-class citizens, these groups were restricted to distinct economic and financial sectors that were hostile to the majority of Muslims. With a stronghold in the Middle East that comprised Syria, the sacred cities of Mecca and Medina in the Saudi desert, as well as North African territories like Libya and Egypt, the Ottoman Empire was physically overextended," Catherine went on.

"And, Europe," Stephen stated.

"Yes, of course," Hans agreed. "The Empire's influence reached all the way to Europe. In a similar manner, the Ottoman Empire stood for a vast pre-modern nation. However, governing such a vast area proved to be challenging for the government. Furthermore, the Ottoman government's influence in world politics was waning. It was outperformed by European nations throughout the preceding two centuries in terms of military prowess, technological innovation, and economic output. Also, Russia

became a formidable new foe. Many conflicts involving both internal and external forces led to significant land loss and catastrophic military defeats.”

“There was also an intellectual movement,” Stephen commented, knowing this.

“The immigration of European values like freedom, liberty, equality, and nationalism led to the rejection of the caste system that was prevalent in the developing world. The Ottoman Empire’s ultimate downfall and abolition following the Crimean War was largely caused by the French Revolution and the values of equality, liberty, and fraternity that it espoused.” Hans said, “The Ottomans had been surpassed by the West in nearly every regard.”

“What happened next?” Catherine asked.

“People migrated in search of this freedom. Often times, though, they didn’t find it. When one state intervened militarily or diplomatically, the other Great Powers reacted to restore their *balance of power* and population control,” Hans replied.

“What a novel term,” Stephen said sarcastically, referring to Henry Kissinger’s ploys using this name and political concept.

“The Ottomans were frequently successful in using the rivalry between the major nations to their advantage. Greeks, Armenians, and Jews consequently benefited disproportionately from greater trade with Europe as a result of their historical function as merchants, traders, and bankers within the empire. However, most Muslims and

Afro-Turks in the Ottoman Empire became completely subservient to their overlords,” Hans advised further.

“With the direction we were given at the Bahia Palace let’s see if we can piece together Muhammad’s hadith secrets in relation to the sale of US weapons, this shell oil game, and the Ottoman Empire.” Stephen said, mentally aligning everything together.

“The scholar Muhammad ibn Isma’l al-Bukhāri, who lived from 810 to 870, compiled hadith and a book of Sunnah, or acceptable traditions, known as the Sahih al-Bukhari. He began collecting a huge number of them somewhere around 846. It is one of the most treasured holy books in Sunni Islam, behind the Quran. This book is included in the Kutub al-Sittah, one of the six major Sunni compilations of hadith pertaining to the eminent Islamic prophet Muhammad,” Catherine continued. “It has ninety-seven chapters and an estimated seventy five hundred hadith narrations.”

“Ali gave everyone some guidance, saying, “I can give you a brief overview of its history. Scholars cannot agree on the exact number of hadith that are contained in Sahih al-Bukhari. The Sunnah, which is a narration of that tradition, and prophetic traditions are two examples of hadith definitions. Experts do estimate that there are over seven thousand full Isnad narrations in the Sahih, but the actual number is more like twenty five hundred because certain hadith are repeated, have different versions or are not genuine. The celebrated al-Bukhāri picked

these specific accounts from the six hundred thousand he had amassed over a sixteen year period. Some contemporary historians insist that after learning the works of Abd Allah ibn al-Mubarak when he was still a young boy, that al-Bukhāri began composing and reciting true hadith as an adolescent.”

“You are well versed in this field,” Hans complimented Ali.

“In 826 CE, when al-Bukhāri was sixteen years old, he made a trip to Mecca. Before moving to Medina, he spent two years living there. It was there that he wrote Qadhāyas-Sahābah wa at-Tābi’īn, a book on Muhammad’s associates and the Tabi’un. He also produced Al-Tārīkh al-Kabīr while he was in Medina,” Ali said further. “Al-Bukhāri is known to have traveled to the majority of the important Islamic educational centers of the time, including Syria, Kufa, Basra, Egypt, Yemen, and Bagdad, Iraq. Many of his teachings were promptly disregarded by academics there. “

“Al-Bukhāri taught believers the hadith he had gathered throughout the final twenty-four years of his life. He escaped to Khartank, an Uzbek village close to Samarkand, where he died in 870,” Saying this, Catherine turned and looked at Ali for some more guidance.

“The renowned Ibn ‘Abbās, also known as Abd Allāh ibn Abbās, lived from 619 to 687 CE and is recorded in multiple hadith collected by al-Bukhāri. He was a cousin of Muhammad and is considered the greatest Mufasssir

teacher of the Quran in history. He was the nephew of Maymunah bint al-Harith, who later became Muhammad's wife, and the son of Abbās ibn Abd al-Muttalib, Muhammad's uncle," Ali said, providing the additional historical background. "Because of his comprehension of traditions that are fundamental to the Quran, Ibn 'Abbās is known as, *The Teacher*."

"As the Prophet's condition grew worse, he reportedly remarked, *'Bring me some writing paper, and I will write a statement for you, after which you will not stray'*. This is according to documented reports that 'Ibn 'Abbās revealed," Hans stated what he knew. "But then Umar said, *'The Prophet is very sick, and we have Allah's book with us, and that is plenty for us'*. And there was a commotion and controversy about this among the companions of the Prophet. Then the Prophet gave them the order to go and leave him by himself."

"Does this mean that the last thoughts and words of Muhammad were not written down?" Stephen asked, confused.

"The reports in several hadith are confusing," Ali answered. "Take for example this supposed documentation of Muhammad's last words as quoted by 'Ibn 'Abbās, *'I have seen things at this place of mine that were never shown to me before. I have seen even Paradise and Hell. And, no doubt, it has been revealed to me that you people will be put to trial in your graves like or nearly like the trial of Masih Ad-Dajjal. The angels will come to everyone of you and ask*

him, What do you know about this man Prophet Muhammad? The faithful believer or firm believer will say, He is Allah's Messenger, and he is Muhammad, who came to us with clear evidence and guidance'."

After listening to everyone else describe the possibilities of a *lost hadith*, Hans said, conclusively, "It's clear to me that this coveted hadith wasn't found by anyone at the Paris Mosque."

Stephen said, "I agree. Somehow, already, word would have gotten out about its existence and discovery."

"Hans, why have you reached this conclusion?" Catherine asked him this in a concerned manner.

"*Al-Masih ad-Dajjal*," Hans repeated the name Ali just referenced.

When Hans said this, Ali just cringed.

"*It is a wicked figure in Islam who is associated with future events that will occur during the end times. It is also known by the name Dajjal. The Quran and Sunnah are the main sources from which its name is derived.*" Hans stated, "This study of the sacred writings reveals things like the universe's destruction, Judgment Day, and indicators of the final age. It will ultimately assert itself as God, posing as the prophesied Messiah."

"Jesus Christ," Catherine said. "You've got to be kidding me."

"The word Dajjal is not mentioned in the Quran, despite some hadith describing it, fearfully. Christianity asserts that the Dajjal comes from the Middle East.

However, other writings specify different precise regions for its appearance. The Dajjal will imitate Jesus' healing of the sick and rising of the dead, the latter of which was by some accounts only made possible by demonic assistance. It will appear before the Day of Judgment and trick a large number of people with deceptive information in communications," Hans went on, "The Dajjal is associated with the Deceiver in Hebrew texts and the Antichrist in Christian tradition."

"This is getting tense," Catherine moved in her chair, muttering to herself.

"Although its origins are unknown, the Middle East is where the Dajjal is most commonly seen, rising. With the exception of Medina and Mecca, *It* will visit every city on earth. It is thought that many will join his army after accepting him as a pretend Messiah. Among them will be Jews, Christians, Arab Bedouins, magicians, sorcerers, and especially the children of adultery, greed, and the advocates of violence. Moreover, an army of devils called the Jinn, the Shayāṭīn, or the shades of darkness, will unite with him, to produce never before seen terrors," Hans continued.

"*Truly by Allah, the Last Hour will not come until thirty Dajjals appear, and the final one will be the One-eyed false Messiah,*" Ali said solemnly. "Samra ibn Jundab, one of Muhammad's companions, claims that the Prophet made this statement at a ceremonial address he gave to his followers, following a solar eclipse."

CHAPTER 14

London, England **August 8, 2023**

An afternoon El Al Israel Airlines flight from London's Heathrow airport to the Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv, Israel takes slightly over five hours.

Aayan was flying on one today, sitting in the tourist cabin next to Bree Mahoney, a young Irish woman who got nervous easily and talked too much. Earlier she had told him that she was a reporter for the Irish Times and that she was on her way to Gaza City, Palestine, to cover the growing tensions between Palestine and Israel. Aayan decided he wasn't interested in the Israel confrontations and tried to ignore her incessant chatter. The reporters' itinerary differed greatly from Aayan's. He was traveling to Gaza searching for the missing hadith of Muhammad that was supposed to have been at the Paris Mosque, but was not there.

"Israel has conducted most of its military operations in or outside of the Gaza Strip since 2005. The struggle between Israel and Palestine started in May 1948. The Hamas organization, which has controlled the Gaza Strip since 2007, prevented significant conflicts with Israel. A surge in Israeli-Palestinian violence earlier this year in 2023 resulted in the deaths of at least two hundred and

fifty Palestinians, thirty Israelis, and two foreigners. According to Hamas, all of the attacks were reprisals for the destruction of the al-Aqsa shrine and the blockade of Gaza," Bree told the *Tiger Squad* killer.

"It's a troubled land, to put it plainly," Aayan answered. "Palestinians hate Jews and Jews hate Palestinians."

"In recent weeks, Israeli security troops have been preventing individuals from accessing the al-Aqsa mosque's enclosure in Jerusalem's Old City during prayer hours. In defiance, they held prayers outside. To ease the tensions, police were seen using skunk water and tear gas on them. I was assigned to write about this," Bree remarked.

The mercenary turned his back on her and closed his eyes thinking he didn't care who killed whom in Israel.

After a flight time of four hours, Aayan heard the captain inform him and the other passengers that the plane was getting ready to make its final descent into the airport. He turned to face Bree, who was staring at something on her open laptop.

"According to a new scientific study, Jews are the genetic brothers of Palestinians, Syrians, and Lebanese, and they all share a common chromosome lineage that goes back at least 4000 years," Bree told Aayan when she saw him looking. "It says here that '*all Arabs and Jews are descended from Abraham*'."

"Tell them both that, and see what happens," Aayan remarked tersely.

"This is from an old history book," Bree told Aayan, pointing to another description on her computer. She read, "*The history of the Jews and Judaism in the Land of Israel begins in the 2nd millennium BCE, when Israelites emerged as an outgrowth of southern Canaanites. The name Canaan appears throughout the Bible as a geographical area associated with that land.*"

"That's four thousand years ago," Aayan said, pretending to be interested in her reports.

The last one Bree found was about different empires and she read, "*Although it came under the sway of various empires and was home to a variety of ethnicities, the area of ancient Israel was predominantly Jewish until the Jewish-Roman wars of 66 AD until 136 CE. The wars commenced a long period of violence, enslavement, expulsion, displacement, forced conversion, and forced migration against the local Jewish population by the Roman Empire and its successor Byzantine State, beginning the Jewish Diaspora. After this time, Jews became a minority in most regions, except Galilee. Following the 3rd century, the area became increasingly Christianized. In 1517, the Ottoman Empire ruled the region, governing it until the British conquered it in 1917. The region was governed under the British Mandate for Palestine until 1948, when the Jewish State of Israel was proclaimed. This was made possible by the Zionist movement and its promotion of mass Jewish immigration into Israel.*"

"Isn't Zion one of two hills of ancient Jerusalem?" Aayan asked her.

“Zion appears in the Old Testament one hundred and fifty two times as a title of Jerusalem,” Bree explained. “Mount Zion is the place where Yahweh, the God of Israel, dwells as told in Isaiah 8:18, and Psalm 74:2, the place where he is king in Isaiah 24:23, and where he has installed his king, David in Psalm 2:6. It is the seat of the earthly action of Yahweh in history.”

As the jet plane began its last approach to land at Tel Aviv airport, it was suddenly tossed up and down violently by strong waves of turbulence. Even though the disturbance in the atmosphere was brief, lasting only a few seconds, the majority of the passengers became unnerved. Bree turned to look at Aayan and let out a relieved sigh when the shaking subsided. Despite the perilous circumstances, Aayan remained unfazed. At the time, the two travelers had no idea that they were in an aircraft that was flying them directly into an *Inferno*.

CHAPTER 15

Jerusalem, Israel August 8, 2023

The shuttle bus, which travels to central Jerusalem from Ben Gurion Airport takes about an hour, and provides a dependable means of transportation. Bree climbed aboard it shortly after Aayan, who had gotten on before her. They both let other people take seats who were now sitting in the back. As they boarded, Aayan kept a tight eye on the passengers to be sure that none of them was following him. He was uninterested when Ali, Hans, Catherine, and Stephen took their seats, even though Stephen did look a bit familiar, Aayan didn't notice them on the plane they all flew in on because they had been in the First Class section, up near the cockpit, and privacy curtains had separated them from each other's view.

Once the bus began its journey up the mountain towards Jerusalem, Catherine browsed through a tour booklet. *'The most direct way from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem is by way of Route 1, also known as the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv Highway. You can also take Route 443. It passes through the hills and offers beautiful landscapes'*.

As Catherine was scrutinizing their route, Hans was reading about the Holy Land.

'The Babylonian Flood Myth is a mythological story about a great destruction that once befell the earth. It is quite similar to the Biblical versions, except for the characters having different names, the place in time it happened being different, and other details. In most versions, one man is favored by God and chosen for the salvation of mankind. He is told by a god to build an ark with which he will save his family and the creatures of the earth. The Great Flood story that appears in many religious Bible histories is certainly not the only one of its kind. While archaeological and geological evidence shows such flooding was a fairly common occurrence in ancient Mesopotamia, it speculates that a catastrophic flood did occur there around 2800 BCE, and it eventually did serve as the basis for the Bible's Noah and the Ark story'.

What are you reading about?" Ali asked Hans.

"Water," Hans answered him flippantly, and then he continued reading.

'The Sumerian Flood Story, known as the Eridu Genesis, which tells a similar tale, is much older than any Bible story, though, being composed sometime around 1600 BCE. The Epic of Gilgamesh also tells of a Great Flood and a savior chosen by God to save mankind. This epic predates all biblical accounts by a thousand years. It is based strongly upon the Sumerian Flood Story version, which was passed down orally until it finally appeared in writing, in Iraq, and documented with the discovery of Tablet XI of the Gilgamesh Epic'.

"What kind of water?" Ali asked interrupting Hans again.

"A lot of water," Hans told him giving him a look to be quiet and returning to the story.

The Mesopotamian flood story was found in writing on an ancient cuneiform tablet. In this rendition, which is arguably the earliest great piece of narrative world literature, Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk, the biblical Erech, has various adventures on his quest to gain immortality. A hero named Ut-napishtim who has survived the Great Deluge recounts to Gilgamesh the story of the flood, which was a prelude to his being made immortal by the gods. He is the only man to ever achieve this feat, just like the Bible's Noah. Apart from having the same general outline, the parallels with the Genesis accounts are particularly striking. A connection between these stories was in fact proposed two thousand years ago by the first-century C.E. Jewish historian Josephus in Antiquities of the Jews, who clearly regarded them as narrating the same event. World religious history changed dramatically after the Great Flood, when God destroyed mankind because of his sins and idol worship. In ancient times, this was a period when people paid homage in a form of belief called polytheism, or the worship of multiple gods. These gods of Babylon and elsewhere were the descendents of other ancient gods and goddesses from previous religions in Sumer, Assyria, Egypt, and Ugarit. Eventually, the different pantheons were assimilated into the Greek and Roman cultures by creating new names and images for the same gods and goddesses, with kings, queens, and their priests continuing to be their vassals in power. However, the greatest transformation of thought after Noah saved the world

in the Bible was the transition of beliefs into monotheism, the worship of only one God. Unfortunately for mankind, the powerful kings, queens, and their priests became the chosen messengers of God and still ruled over believers in the societies'.

When the bus pulled up to the hotel where Ali, Hans, Catherine, and Stephen were staying, it was after midnight, and they all went to bed.

Stephen had chosen the hotel based on its attractive descriptions online which stated, *'The National Hotel Jerusalem is well situated in the center of the city. The Tower of David Museum of the History of Jerusalem and Sultan's Pool are two of the region's cultural treasures, and the Garden of Gethsemane and Temple Mount provide stunning views of the surrounding slopes'.*

CHAPTER 16

Jerusalem, Israel August 9, 2023

At eight o'clock the next morning, Hans was waiting for his breakfast in the hotel cafe while sipping tea. Right now, he was fulfilling his curiosity because of what he had been studying during the previous night's bus travel.

'Abraham, or, in Hebrew, Avram, lived in the early 2nd millennium BCE. He was the first of the Hebrew patriarchs and a figure revered by the three great monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. According to the biblical book of Genesis, Abraham left UR, in Mesopotamia, because God called him to found a new nation in an undesignated land that he later learned was Canaan. He obeyed the commands of God, from whom he received repeated promises and a covenant that his "seed" would inherit the land. In Judaism, the promised offspring are understood to be the Jewish people descended from Abraham's son, Isaac, born of his wife Sarah. Similarly, in Christianity, the genealogy of Jesus is traced to Isaac, and Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac is seen as a foreshadowing of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross. In Islam, it is Ishmael, Abraham's firstborn son, born of Hagar, who is viewed as the fulfillment of God's promise, and the Prophet Muhammad is his descendant'.

A hotel staff member said, "Good morning, sir."

Hans responded with a smile and adjusted his glasses before he continued to read.

'There can be no biography of Abraham in the ordinary sense. He died in Hebron, Canaan, today's West Bank of Israel. The most that can be done is to apply the interpretation of modern historical finds to biblical materials so as to arrive at a probable judgment as to the background and patterns of events in his life. This involves a reconstruction of the patriarchal age of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph early in the 2nd millennium BCE, which until the end of the 19th century AD was unknown and considered virtually unknowable. It was assumed, based on a presumed dating of hypothetical biblical sources, that the patriarchal narratives in the Bible were only a projection of the situation and concerns of a much later period, in the 9th century BCE, and of dubious historical value. According to the Talmud, the central text of Rabbinic Judaism and the primary source of Jewish religious law and theology, his father was Terah, and his mother was Amathlai. The term Talmud normally refers to a collection of writings, specifically relating to the Babylonian Talmud. Terah is an important biblical figure. He is mentioned in Genesis, the Hebrew Bible, and the Quran as a son of Nahor, the son of Serug, and a descendant of Shem, who was one of the sons of Noah. The sons of Shem were Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, and Aram. Abraham, the patriarch of Jews, Christians, and Muslims, was one of the children of Arpachshad'.

Hans started focusing on timelines while taking into account the historical context of the second century B.C. Abraham showed up here in Israel as a descendant of

Noah at the same time as the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, with its *Great Flood* myth component, first appeared in Mesopotamian and Levant literature. It seemed that the concurrent occurrence of all these activities was not merely a coincidence. Hans quickly looked this up on his laptop and saw,

'The Levant is a region in Southwest Asia, south of the Taurus Mountains, bounded by the Mediterranean Sea in the west, the Arabian Desert in the south, and Mesopotamia in the east. Mesopotamia is a historical region of Western Asia situated within the Tigris – Euphrates river system in the northern part of the Fertile Crescent. It is roughly located in the area of present-day Iraq, Kuwait and parts of Iran, Syria and Turkey. The civilization that developed in Mesopotamia and relocated from there is one of the earliest in the world'.

"Are you reading anything intriguing?" Being jovial, Catherine took a seat across the table from Hans and posed the question.

Hans countered, "The occupation of the West Bank,"

Catherine said, "God, it's good to be back here," taking a deep breath.

Stephen remarked, "Good morning," as he entered. "Boy, did I sleep well."

Catherine told him, "There's something soothing about the Holy City."

"I was delighted when the old man with the beard in Marrakesh advised us to start looking here, in Jerusalem," Hans remarked.

"We decided in London that anything Muhammad left behind should be here since he left the earth from Temple Mount," Stephen explained. "Ali will be right down, he's praying."

"The first gate," Hans remarked. "His ascent was from this place, in the Golden Dome, to that place."

"From the rock inside the Golden Dome that has come to represent Jerusalem, where time and space are nonexistent, Prophet Muhammad and the angel Gabriel rose into the skies. They arrived at the first gate of the seven heavens together. Gabriel requested permission to enter. The angel was recognized by the gatekeepers, who inquired about his companion. After discovering that he was the chosen one, they wondered whether Muhammad had been successful in his quest to unite his people in the worship of *one* God. After learning from Gabriel that Prophet Muhammad had succeeded, the angels greeted him and unlocked the first gate," Ali had told them of this the previous evening, and Catherine repeated it word for word.

"Don't you think it's a little far-fetched that we will uncover this ancient secret, considering the millions upon millions of seekers who have come here looking for a sign?" Stephen began by asking.

"They didn't know what it was," Ali said wryly as he came in. "All we need is a bit of *divine intervention*."

"But first, we need to figure out how Noah got to Israel from Mesopotamia, before we ask for an intervention," Hans remarked, looking rather subdued.

CHAPTER 17

Jerusalem, Israel **August 9, 2023**

Standing atop the Mount of Olives and looking down upon Jerusalem's Old City is a breathtaking experience. There are two cemeteries on the hills below. One is Jewish and the other is Muslim. In the distance is Gethsemane, the place where Jesus Christ endured his agony. The Western Wall, the Al Aqsa Mosque, the gilded Dome of the Rock atop the Temple Mount, the ancient city gates, and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, which houses the Stations of the Cross and the Rock of Golgotha, are all close by. The religious and historical significance of these well-known landmarks is undeniable and cherished, although the exact history of the Old City still remains a mystery due to a stormy past.

Standing with Hans on the hill, Catherine questioned, "How can anyone create violence in such a place of historical religious significance?"

"That's a question for the ages," Hans answered.

They began to walk and as they did Hans explained more of the history of Israel to her. "Shiloh is an Israeli settlement in the northern West Bank located 45 kilometers north of Jerusalem. The Hebrew Bible's Book of Joshua contains the earliest mention of it. The Tent of Meeting was

erected by the Israelites when they first arrived in the area. As a result, Shiloh rose to prominence as one of the most important holy sites in ancient Israel. At Shiloh the entire Israelite congregation came together and established the congregation's tabernacle. In accordance with Moses' instructions from God, the Ark of the Covenant was prepared to be housed in the tabernacle. It was a sacred chest that contained the Ten Commandments given to Moses by God. The *Holy of Holies* was the innermost chamber in the wilderness tabernacle, a room so sacred only one person could enter it, on the annual Day of Atonement, or Yom Kippur."

"The *Holy of the Holies* was a place in Jerusalem, also," Catherine stated.

"The Hebrew Bible and the Old Testament records that the tent sanctuary stood at Shiloh for three hundred and sixty nine years until the Ark was captured by the Philistines and they put it in the temple of their devil god Dagon who was the biblical Nimrod or Baal. After suffering plagues and other terrible disasters, by having it, *they gave it back,*" Hans stated humorously.

Stephen joined them with Ali walking next to him saying, "This place is mind-boggling,"

"The Tent of Meeting area was eventually relocated to Gibeon, which was turned into an Israelite holy city under King David and his son and heir King Solomon. The Ark of the Covenant was brought to Jerusalem by King David around 1004 BCE after he conquered the city and made it

his capital. According to the Hebrew Bible, Solomon built the First Temple in Jerusalem as a monument to God and as a permanent home for the Ark of the Covenant," Hans continued. "Ancient Jewish traditions viewed the *Holy of Holies* in the temple as the spiritual junction of Heaven and Earth, the *axis mundi*."

"The description of the First Temple is largely based on narratives in the Hebrew Bible, stating it was commissioned by the biblical Solomon before being destroyed during the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar II of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, in 587 BCE," Stephen added, knowing this as a fact.

"Although no remains of the First Temple have ever been found, most modern scholars agree it existed on the Temple Mount at the time of the Babylonian siege and there is a dispute concerning its builder," Ali clarified it.

"The Hebrew Solomon who ruled from 970 BCE until 931 BCE is described in the New Testament as a wise teacher who was surpassed in wisdom only by the Christians Jesus of Nazareth. Likewise, he is regarded as a highly significant Islamic prophet in the Quran. Solomon became well-known as a magician and an exorcist in largely extra-biblical societies. In Hellenistic times his name is invoked on amulets and medallions. This period in classical antiquity spans the years from the death of the Greek king Alexander the Great, in Babylon, in 323 BC to around 30 BC, when Cleopatra VII died and the Roman Empire began to rise," Hans continued.

"*The Ark* is seen in both Jewish and Christian traditions as a tangible representation of God's omnipotence and presence in the universe. The ancient Israelites carried it into battle and used it to bring down entire armies. Touching it resulted in immediate death since it was so sacred. In the sixth century BCE, Babylon was pillaged, and it vanished. Some claim that *The Ark* has been carefully guarded at the Church of St. Mary of Zion in Aksum for centuries." Stephen informed everyone.

"A virgin monk is the sole one responsible for its care. He will not be permitted to leave his consecrated grounds till his death," Hans stated.

"We're not here to find the Ark of the Covenant. We are looking for a possible, *lost hadith* of Muhammad," Catherine replied.

Hans made a suggestion, "Let's head to Temple Mount," briefly cutting short their enlightening conversation.

CHAPTER 18

Jerusalem, Israel August 9, 2023

As they made their way to the well-known location, all four members of the group continued their conversations, voicing opinions.

“The Golden Dome of the Dome of the Rock is an Islamic monument situated atop the Temple Mount and it represents Jerusalem. This shrine, despite its name, is not a mosque but rather a large octagonal building supporting a dome over a rock. According to the official account, it was constructed to honor Mohammed’s *ascension* to the paradise of Allah after his voyage from Mecca to the Al Aqsa Mosque, situated atop the Temple Mount,” Ali told his friends what he knew.

“However, Mohammed died in 632, five years before the Al Aqsa Mosque was built in 637,” Hans stated.

Disregarding this, Ali declared, “To honor his conquest of the Jewish city, Abd al-Malik erected the Dome of the Rock after taking Jerusalem from the ninth Caliph of Islam. And, it was constructed on the location of the Temple Mount, which originally housed the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem.”

“Whoever captured Jerusalem during the course of the following 1,300 years utilized the Dome of the Rock

as a testament to their success. After recapturing Jerusalem in 1187, Saladin turned it into a Muslim sanctuary," Catherine said. "The Crusaders turned Jerusalem into a Catholic citadel after taking control of the city in 1099."

"Two Israeli soldiers scaled the Dome of the Rock and raised the Israeli flag atop it after the Israeli army took over the Temple Mount in 1967, during the Six Day War. Moshe Dayan the Israeli Defense Minister at the time, ordered it to be taken down because he didn't want to see the Middle East erupt on fire," Stephen said. "The *Holiest of Holies* was located inside the Jewish Temple. Because its precise location is still up for debate, Orthodox Jews are afraid that someone may desecrate the old site. For this reason, Jerusalem's rabbis continue to prohibit their followers from entering the Temple Mount, although many Jews are nonetheless offended that a Muslim shrine sits atop the site of the Temple that housed the *Holiest of Holies*."

"It used to be easy to travel from the Mount of Olives to the Temple Mount through the Eastern Gate. Solomon constructed the first one in 960 BC. The old pillars inside the Eastern Wall gate and the stones beside it are both very old," Ali said. "Suleiman used the foundations of the old gates to build the current gate here around 1541 AD."

"This gate is extraordinary," Stephen stated.

"It certainly is," Catherine commented.

Hans was going to comment on the ludicrous allegation that Muslims had built a graveyard in front of it to

prevent the Jewish Messiah from arriving when there was a loud scream up ahead of them.

"*Mazel tov,*" A terrified Muslim woman was on her knees pleading with an Israeli army soldier to stop when an Israeli soldier yelled it at her. After he did this, the soldier struck her in the head with his gun's butt end.

Stephen took a step forward to confront the vicious fighter. The soldier signaled for him to back off with a lowered weapon. After doing this, he ran away.

"This is a city of peace," Ali exclaimed, examining the bleeding woman on the ground.

With tears streaming down her cheek, Catherine rushed over to the injured woman as well.

Hans let out an instinctive howl, "Call the police."

Ali remarked, alarmed, "Those thugs are the police."

A Muslim man hurried up to also help and exclaimed, "Bad times are coming with this Benjamin Netanyahu regime and his *democratic* dictatorship. The Zionists here are funded by the Zionist Jews who have power in the US government. I am a medical practitioner. Please allow me to take care of her."

CHAPTER 19

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The doctor identified himself as Muhammad Mustafa shortly after that. “I was a little surprised when you called me,” he said, glancing at Ali. “But given what transpired at the Paris Mosque with Aafia Bashir, we need to be ready for anything. Of course, I’ll try my hardest to help you in any way I can.”

Ali made a praising remark about Mustafa’s name meaning, *The Chosen One*.

Hans told Mustafa, “It was kind of you to treat her,” and he introduced himself, Catherine, and Stephen to him.

Mustafa answered, “There are a lot of attacks happening and there will be more.”

“What’s causing the recent tensions?” Catherine asked, still being upset by the incident.

“In July, during Tisha B’Av, a Jewish day of national mourning, the ultranationalist Itamar Ben-Gvir made a provocative visit to Jerusalem’s Temple Mount as one of his first actions as Israel’s minister of national security. Both Muslims and Jews hold this location in reverence. Netanyahu’s actions disregarded Hamas’s threats of dire consequences,” Mustafa responded. “This infuriated the

Palestinian leadership and aroused opposition from the Arab community at large.”

“He was instigating a reaction,” Stephen deduced.

Mustafa put it bluntly. “This was the first time in years that a high-ranking Israeli official had visited this shrine in Jerusalem’s Old City, where Israeli interventions had previously caused significant conflicts and repercussions.”

“Of course, there would be uproar,” Hans assessed. “It was obviously done intentionally.”

“Most Muslims and Palestinians in the region see these visits as a part of an attempt to grant Jewish worshipers more access to the Temple Mount and to change its status, especially when they are made by Israeli officials with Zionist and religious agendas.” Mustafa responded, “The site is treasured by Jews as the site of two ancient temples, and by Muslims as the Noble Sanctuary, the compound of Al Aqsa Mosque and other prominent Islamic shrines.”

“Were there any news reports of this incident?” Catherine asked.

“The visit was dubbed an ‘unprecedented provocation’ by the Palestinian Foreign Ministry, which also held Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu accountable for the blatant badgering on the holy site. But in the days that followed, there were no notable articles in the world news,” Mustafa reported.

“That’s odd,” Stephen said. “It sounds like a silent plan was being initiated.”

After learning of the Temple Mount episode, Ali said, "It seems that we're possibly not the only ones who know about a lost treasure of Muhammad emerging. It will definitely create a stir among Muslims worldwide if it is discovered."

"You are here for that reason. Am I correct?" Mustafa asked, "To track it down."

"Yes, we came here to search in the Temple Mount," Hans told him.

"What you're seeking is not there," Mustafa stated taking Hans off guard.

"What makes you think that?" Catherine asked Mustafa.

"I'll take you to speak with someone who is much more knowledgeable than I am about these matters," Mustafa replied, leaving Catherine without a clear response.

CHAPTER 20

Jerusalem, Israel **August 9, 2023**

The Chapel of the Ascension is a church and shrine situated atop the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem's At-Tur district. Zawiyat al-Adawiya is part of a larger complex that includes a Christian church and monastery, as well as an Islamic mosque. It stands on what is widely accepted to be the earthly location from which Jesus ascended into heaven after His resurrection. It contains a piece of stone that is thought to bear one of His footprints. More than 300 years after Jesus' death, the first Christians gathered in secret in this small cave on the Mount of Olives to pay their respects at the site.

When Mustafa informed Catherine's group that their destination was not the Temple Mount, they were all bewildered.

In any event along the way he was leading them on, Mustafa shared some of his first-hand knowledge of Jerusalem with the group.

"By the time the first pilgrims arrived in Jerusalem in 384, the veneration cave had been relocated to its current location. According to legend, a wealthy and pious Roman aristocratic woman named Poimenia from the imperial dynasty funded the construction of a Byzantine-style

cathedral built around what were *Christ's final footprints on earth.*" Mustafa came to a halt and emphasized this point. "The rotunda open to the sky was the first structure built on the site of the current chapel. However, a later tradition attributes the first Ascension Church to the Empress Helena, who claimed that during her pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 328, she found two spots on the Mount of Olives as being associated with Jesus' life. One was the exact location of the ascending Jesus and another was a sacred grotto associated with His teachings. Helena claimed to have had multiple supernatural experiences in the grotto, and when she returned to Rome, she commissioned the construction of two sanctuaries in these places."

"Why is there such unrest in the city?" Stephen asked an obvious question seeing violent disturbances occurring all around them.

"The new government," Mustafa answered, saying no more.

"It is definitely anti-Muslim," Ali said also seeing evidences of this.

With a sigh, Mustafa answered, "Yes, there has been a shift in Jewish power, and it has been catastrophic for Muslims." Then he resumed his description of their destination where he had left off. "The late seventh century saw the church's restoration. Inside, there was a central *Edicule* that at one time had the footprints of Christ in dust rather than stone. The restored church was ultimately destroyed and then reconstructed in the twelfth century

by the Crusaders. Subsequently, the church was mostly demolished by Saladin's forces, although the *Edicule* was spared. And, although it was greatly altered during Saladin's invasion of Jerusalem in 1187, this cherished edifice still survives today."

"How far is it from here?" Stephen inquired of Mustafa, suspecting a trap.

"Only minutes away," Mustafa said, seeing Stephen's worried expression. "Following its collapse, the Christians who had relocated to Acre abandoned the ruined church and monastery. During this time, Saladin built the Mount of Olives as a holy sanctuary entrusted to two sheikhs. The chapel was converted into a mosque with a *mihrab*. Because Christians made up the large majority of pilgrims to the site, Saladin approved the construction of a second mosque adjacent to the main chapel for Muslim prayer, but Christians continued to attend the main chapel as a show of harmony."

"So, they *prayed together*, in peace?" Catherine inquired.

"Yes," Mustafa answered. "Over the course of the next 300 years, tensions between Christians and Muslims in Jerusalem increased dramatically. There were times when the temple and its surrounds were abandoned and it decayed. By the fifteenth century, a dividing wall separated the damaged eastern side, which was no longer used for religious purposes. A Byzantine burial vault is located next to the historic Ascension Church, atop the mosque."

"Who's buried there?" Hans queried.

"For each of the three Abrahamic religions, this tomb is linked with a different female holy woman." Mustafa responded. "The oldest legend is that of Saint Pelagia, who built a cell on the Mount of Olives in the 5th century. After being converted, she lived a pious life as a monk there and is reputed to have worked numerous miracles. According to Christian mythology, her cell and burial place are located in the Zawiya, southwest of the ancient Church of the Ascension."

"A Zawiya is a Sufi Islamic prayer room," Ali explained to his friends.

"However, according to Muslim counter-crusade literature from the fourteenth century, this crypt is where the dedicated woman Rabl'a al-'Adawiyya was buried. In addition, since 1322, Jewish tradition has linked the woman in the tomb to the prophetess Huldah. We're getting close, it is not much further," Mustafa said.

"Another Muslim tradition attributes the grave to Rahiba bint Hasn, a woman of whom nothing is known," Ali stated unexpectedly.

The building Mustafa had described was visible to the group members up ahead. When they got there, everyone was shocked to find a shrine dedicated to Jesus Christ in such terrible disrepair.

"Be careful entering, it's dangerous," Mustafa warned the others.

“What brings worshippers here?” Hans inquired of Mustafa once they were all inside. “This is nothing like the Church of the Holy Sepulcher or the Temple Mount. Every time I go to either of those shrines, it’s always jam-packed,” Hans commented.

“The stone dome and the octagonal drum it rests on, as well as the outside walls, are Muslim modifications and only the arches and marble columns are authentic Christian structures.” Mustafa didn’t respond directly to Hans. “The chapel’s entrance faces west, and a *mihrab* on the south wall directs Muslim worshippers towards Mecca. The Ascension Rock stone slab is surrounded by the *Edicule*. In the Middle Ages, the piece containing Christ’s left footprint was moved to the Al-Agsa Mosque, while the piece containing His right footprint remained here. The faithful believe the imprints were made as Jesus ascended into Heaven, and are revered as the last place on earth touched by the incarnate Christ.”

Mustafa came to a halt as they walked through the chapel and passed by the *Edicule* to let everyone inspect it. They saw that it was roughly four feet long, three feet wide, and a little more than a foot deep. There was a colored rock in there, but it had no noticeable formed imprints and definitely no footprint impressions.

“Jesus Christ,” Stephen shouted, losing his footing after tripping over a small rock in the middle of the passageway they were on. “Oh, my God,” he went on. “I’m so sorry for swearing.”

“There is a set of stairs to your right,” Mustafa told Stephen, shining a light there. “We must go down them.”

“These stairs are slimy and slippery,” Hans warned Catherine who was now walking down them, behind him.

“What’s that stench?” Ali questioned.

“The Byzantine burial crypt is a section of a chapel that was once part of a convent on the Mount of Olives,” Mustafa explained, leading them to a concealed door only a few steps away that led to another passageway.

As the group moved past it and into a much more open setting, they went from being moderately anxious to becoming stunned. Everybody paused to take in their surroundings, realizing they were in a gorgeous, old chapel with pews and an altar that was exquisitely lit up with bright candles.

A lovely female voice from a dim corner of the crypt said, “I see our guests have arrived. Please come in so we can talk about why you were brought here.”

CHAPTER 21

Jerusalem, Israel August 9, 2023

After the woman emerged out of the dark, there was a perfect silence.

“My name is Maacah,” the Palestinian woman said, approaching Catherine slowly.

“I’m Catherine,” she introduced herself and went on introducing Ali, Hans, and Stephen.

“We know who you are,” the woman interrupted her. “We’ve been keeping an eye on you since you arrived in Jerusalem.”

“This is certainly an odd state of affairs,” Hans remarked, recognizing the non-gender specific Biblical name. “You did say Maacah, right?”

“Forgive the drama,” Maacah replied to Hans, glancing at Mustafa.

“Why exactly are we in this particular crypt?” Stephen inquired intelligently.

“We have to be careful when we gather,” Maacah stated simply. “Jerusalem is dangerous for an outspoken Muslim woman. Sit in the benches and I will explain why.”

“Is this a safe place for us?” Stephen asked the next obvious question.

“Terah was Noah’s ninth descendant, through his son Shem, and he is the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran,” Maacah declared. “They all lived in Ur of the Chaldees. His given name is Abraham, or the Akkadian Abram, and he was born in 1960 B.C. The family Abraham was born into worshiped pagan gods, as was typical in the country. The city of Ur was located in ancient Mesopotamia along the Euphrates River and was founded around 3,800 B.C. After the *Great Flood* around 2300 B.C, Noah’s son Shem and his descendants resettled there. In 1890 B.C. Terah, at the age of two hundred, decided to leave Ur with his own family. They moved northwest to the city of Haran which was in ancient Syria. In 1885 B.C. Terah, at the ripe old age of two hundred and five, died there. Only then did God command Abraham, at age seventy-five, to leave the city and go to the land of Canaan,”

“Yes, it is safe,” Mustafa finally answered Stephen’s question.

“It is believed that the first human being, Adam, originally received a stone from God to be used as part of an altar. Then, the stone was hidden for many years on a mountain, until Gabriel, the archangel of revelation, brought it to the Prophet Abraham to use in another altar. According to the Hebrew Bible, God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac there and he was going to do it to prove his faith. But a messenger appeared from God to stop him, and a ram was killed instead of his son. So, likewise, in this manner Abraham was called by God to

go by faith to the Promised Land of Canaan. Abraham's obedience is evidenced in his abandonment of idolatrous worship for his belief in the one true God. When he arrived at Shechem in the Hill Country of Canaan, the Lord promised Abraham that his descendants would own its land. The relationship of the people of Israel, Abraham's descendants, with the land of Israel demonstrates to the world the transcendent sovereignty of the one true God and how it involves an association to the land of Canaan," Maacah continued. "Their God is Yahweh."

"This was the transition from the worship of the many ancient Sumer Mesopotamian pagan gods to one God," Hans commented, knowing this.

"The Israelites occupied and conquered Palestine or Canaan beginning in the late 2nd millennium B.C. and the Bibles justify this occupation by identifying Canaan with the Promised Land, the land given to the Israelites by Yahweh. This God was an ancient Levantine deity and national god of the Israel kingdoms of Israel and Judah and he emerged as a divine warrior associated with Canaan," Maacah explained.

"He was a divine warrior?" Ali questioned.

"In the oldest biblical literature, he possesses attributes typically ascribed to war deities leading the heavenly army against Israel's enemies. The early Israelites were polytheistic and worshipped Yahweh alongside a variety of Canaanite gods and goddesses including El, Asherah and Baal. In later centuries, El and Yahweh became

conflagrated and other gods such as Baal and Asherah were absorbed into the Yahwist religion. Towards the end of the Babylonian Captivity in 538 B.C. the existence of other gods was denied and Yahweh was proclaimed to be the Creator God and the sole divinity worshipped by Hebrews. The Babylonian exile from 598 B.C. to 538 B.C. is the period in Jewish history in which a large number of Judeans from the ancient Kingdom of Judah were captives in Babylon, the capital city of the Neo-Babylonian Empire following the defeat in the Jewish Babylonian War and the destruction of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem," Maacah clarified it.

"So, there is a lineage line from Adam, the first man, through Noah, the man who was the chosen savior of mankind by God after the Great Flood, then to Abraham, the progenitor of the Israelites, who are God's chosen people, in the Promised land," Hans stated easily, emphasizing his point.

Hans' statements elicited no response from Maacah. Instead, she simply continued on with her renditions about the ancient religious histories.

"Asherah, along with Astarte and Anath, was one of the three great goddesses of the Canaanite religious pantheon, with her primary role being that of mother goddess. Canaanites associated Asherah with sacred trees, an association also found in the Israelite tradition corresponding to Eve in the Garden of Eden. Israel's association of Asherah with sacred trees is repeated over thirty

times in the Bible. Many of these citations are stereotypically used by the biblical writers to describe sites of idolatrous worship, implying that the worship of Asherah was an apostate behavior in Israel and improper for followers of Yahweh. Despite these and other references associating Asherah with apostasy, contemporary discoveries have further indicated that, at least in the opinion of some ancient Israelites, Yahweh and Asherah were appropriately worshipped as a pair, like Adam and Eve," Maacah continued.

"Like Adam and Eve?" Catherine questioned this.

"In 63 B.C., the Romans seized the city of Jerusalem. This placed the territory under the jurisdiction of the Romans, who administered the province through local authorities. The Roman occupation of Israel, when the army of the Roman Republic conquered the Hasmonean Kingdom, the ruling dynasty of Judea, in 140 B.C. to 37 B.C., in the Second Temple Period, was the last in a long line of invasions. It started with the Assyrians and the Babylonians, then the Persians and the Greeks with Alexander the Great in power," Maacah stated.

"After this, the world was transitioned once more, differently, from the worship of the ancient pagan gods and goddesses to a one God ideology by the birth of Jesus Christ," Catherine stated. "The angel Gabriel appears yet again as the messenger from God to announce His birth."

"Jesus was descended from the line of King David," Hans stated, "And, from Noah and Abraham. In Judaism

and Christianity the Davidic Line is the bloodline from which the Hebrew Messiah has a descent.”

“The David dynasty’s origins are shrouded in mystery. The *Tel Dan Stele* is the only mention of David outside of the Bible, and the archeological veracity of the United Monarchy of Israel is questionable. Around the 10th century BCE, Jerusalem was at least moderately populated, and Jerusalem and Judah were most likely merely Canaanite fortresses. However, Jerusalem appears to have been hardly built up until long after David’s death, calling into question the claim that it was the imperial capital depicted in the Bible. Even so, as for David and his immediate successors, many historians believe that David and Solomon are founded on ‘*certain historical kernels of legends*’ that most certainly existed in the past,” Maacah stated.

“These legends were transformed into self-serving *realities*,” Catherine remarked wryly. “What a novel idea,”

“At the Roman Empire’s height in the 2nd century, it stretched into Europe, North Africa and the Middle East. One reason Christianity was able to spread throughout the empire was that the Roman rulers viewed the new religion of Jesus Christ as something they could easily assimilate into their existing cultural and religious systems,” Maacah continued. “In the first and second centuries after Christ’s death, citizens in the Roman Empire worshiped multiple gods in a complex surreal pantheon. When they considered Christianity, they didn’t think that worshiping Jesus Christ meant they had to stop serving their other gods,

like Jupiter, Apollo and Venus. The ancient Semitic fertility and mother goddess Asherah simply became assimilated into these cultures.”

“She was well venerated,” Catherine stated.

“The belief that Christianity was compatible with what we now call paganism helped Christianity spread through the Roman Empire. Although some Christians argued there was only one God and they shouldn’t worship any others, this wasn’t how many in the Roman Empire understood Christianity during the time. In the first two centuries, persecution of Christians was ongoing. This didn’t change until the middle of the 3rd century, when campaigns promoted traditional Roman values and customs like sacrificing animals to pagan gods. The next major assault against Christians was the Great Persecution. Beginning in 303 A.D. under the Emperor Diocletian, it led to the death of many Christians. This period was the Roman Empire’s most severe persecution of Christians and also the last. Mostly because in 312 A.D., the Emperor Constantine I became the first Roman emperor to convert to Christianity. A year later, he helped enact the *Edict of Milan*, and made Christianity a recognized, legal religion within the Roman Empire,” Maacah said.

“There are a lot of similarities in these Hebrew and Christian Bible stories,” Hans said.

“The Romans and their allegiant Jews didn’t care what god was worshipped as long as they kept authority and territories,” Maacah went on to say. “Roman

Catholicism can be traced back to Jesus in the early 30s of the Common Era during the Roman occupation. After Jesus' death, His followers spread out over the world to establish a worldwide church, with the Bishop of Rome, in Rome, maintaining his primacy. In the centuries that followed the Jews, Christians and the others fought for supremacy everywhere in the world. "

"Why exactly are you telling us, all of this?" Catherine asked Maacah.

"Maacah is a holy woman," Mustafa told Catherine. "She has visions."

"There is an uprising coming," Maacah informed Catherine, "It involves many of these ancient gods from the past, mostly the malicious ones."

"Really," Catherine stated.

"Perhaps it's time to show them the rest of the cave," Mustafa suggested to Mustafa.

CHAPTER 22

Jerusalem, Israel August 9, 2023

In ten minutes Mustafa and Maacah had guided Catherine's group to another area of the underground. Since there were no pews for them to sit on there, they were all standing when Maacah started speaking.

"The Isra and Mi'raj are the two parts of a Night Journey to Jerusalem that Muslims believe the Islamic prophet Muhammad took from al-Haram Mosque in Mecca in a single night around the year 621 In the Isra portion, Muhammad is supposed to have ridden a winged horse to the Al-Agsa Mosque, at the Temple Mount, where he led previous prophets, including Adam, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, in prayer. In the Mi'raj he visited Hell and then ascended to Heaven and spoke to God. These occurrences are recorded briefly in the Quran and expounded on in the hadith, the holy book's additions. A reliable source for this event is 'Ibn 'Abbās, one of the Prophet's companions," Maacah began.

"The *ascension*," Catherine said looking around at the church they were in.

"Muhammad's first revelation, the founding event of Islam, was in 610 CE during which he was visited by the angel Gabriel, called Jibril, who revealed to him what

would later become *The Quran*, the Words of God. The event took place in a cave called Hira located on the mountain Jabal An-Nour near Mecca. Likewise, *The Torah* as a divinely inspired text was given to Moses by God himself on Mount Sinai during the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt which was the founding event in the formation of the Israelite religion," Maacah continued.

"Sounds similar," Catherine commented.

"The Arabs were polytheists at the time Muhammad accepted his calling. They revered the natural world, stones, angels, and devils. A special reverence was paid to the daughters of God as well as other national, regional, and household deities. Every tribe had a particular protector, a god to whom it turned when things were difficult," Maacah said, adding, "The origins of contemporary altars might have been found in the ancients' worship of stones."

"The sacred stone," Hans stated.

"One stone still holds a revered spot in the Arab heart. This is the one that fell from Paradise at the fall of Adam. Pure white it was and housed in a temple built by Seth, Adam's son, until a *Great Flood* ravaged the land, destroyed the temple, and buried it under mud and debris. Tradition relates that the stone remained hidden until Abraham sent his wife Hagar into the desert with their infant son Ishmael. One day, weakened by thirst, Hagar laid her baby down on the sand to rest. His fitful thrashings uncovered a spring of clear water near the site of the lost relic. It is said that an angel descended from

heaven and helped recover the sacred stone and that Ishmael rebuilt the holy house of Seth with the assistance of Abraham and the archangel Gabriel. This, in brief, is the story of the Kaaba, one of the holiest buildings in Islam," Maacah explained its significance.

"Gabriel reappears," Ali stated. "He is the key angel in all of these religious stories."

"It is clear, from a historical point of view, that when he was young Muhammad, participated in worshipping all the three hundred and sixty pagan gods in the Kabah in Mecca which was owned by the Quraish tribe. As Muhammad grew up, he was influenced by the monotheistic aspects of Christianity who condemned the polytheism at the Kabah. At some point in Muhammad's life, he was convinced by the Christians that polytheism was wrong and he began to reject the pagan gods he had grown up with by worshipping them. Muhammad was converted to the concept of monotheism through the influence and teachings of Christians. However, being a proud and nationalistic cultural Arab and wanting to preserve his traditions, Muhammad, decided to reform his native pagan religion," Maacah elaborated.

"He became monotheistic," Hans stated.

"In order to compete with Abraham of the Jews and Jesus Christ of the Christians, Muhammad took the most powerful pagan god in the Kabah in Mecca, the moon god Hubal, and called him *Allah*. Muhammad had a fairly simple plan. He exiled the heathen gods and declared the one

that remained to be the supreme god, rather than simply converting the Arab population to Christianity. Muslims refer to this divinity as Allah," Maacah explained, "As a result the religion of Islam came into being."

"Strong commonalities exist in all of these religious stories," Hans commented. "It usually includes a cave, like this one, the angel Gabriel and *Noah and the Great Flood*."

"The Black Stone is a rock set into the eastern corner of the Kaaba, the ancient building in the center of the Grand Mosque in Mecca, in Saudi Arabia," Maacah elaborated.

"There is usually a hallowed *Rock* in the story, too," Catherine commented.

"A sacred stone was given by God to Adam, and then brought to Abraham by the angel Gabriel. The holy Rock of Golgotha is in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and Gabriel announced the birth of the Jesus Christ. The Ten Commandments were given to Moses by God. The Black Rock appears for Muhammad to put it in the sacred mosque, with Gabriel revealing the Words of God of the Quran to him," Hans recounted specific parallels between the Abrahamic faiths.

"There are definitely replications," Maacah stated. "But we have to continue to emphasize the distinctiveness and magnitude of each prophet's total impact on the world."

"Please go on," Hans told Maacah politely.

"Muhammad was born in 570 AD into the Hashemite branch of the noble house of 'Abd Manāf. Though he

was orphaned at an early age, as Muhammad grew to adulthood, he never lacked the protection of his clan. His eventual marriage to a wealthy widow greatly improved his position as a merchant. Muhammad began to make his mark in Mecca by preaching the oneness of Allah, his new monotheistic philosophy. Then he managed to negotiate a pact with the tribal chiefs of Medina which only added to his reputation. This Muslim era dates from Muhammad's move to Medina in 622 CE. After his return to Mecca tribal leaders came in hordes to negotiate with him and ultimately to accept Islam. In reality, this meant little more than giving up their local pagan deities and worshipping Allah alone, which they did reluctantly. However, Islam was destined for a world changing role," Maacah stated.

"It was absolutely predestined," Catherine commented, agreeing.

"Under Muhammad's successors the expansionist urge of the tribes, temporarily united around the nucleus of the two sacred enclaves of Mecca and Medina. This coincided with the faltering empires of Byzantium and Sasanian Persia. Once called to the banners of Islam, tribes began a career of conquest that would fulfill their thirst for territory and plunder as well as the dictates of their new faith. The holy cities of Mecca and Medina were prosperous centers of a sophisticated Arabian culture as a result of the conquests that poured wealth into them from far beyond Arabia. Medina also developed into a center for Quran study, the birth of Islamic jurisprudence, and

the preservation of historical records. The Muslims basic Arabian nature first shows in the early mosques, which resemble the pre-Islamic temples, and in the pilgrimage rites, which are little altered from the paganism ones," Maacah told them.

"That was clever," Stephen remarked. "When Muhammad completed establishing it, Islam had its own legitimate and constantly growing power base, just like the Jews and Christians."

"These three Abrahamic religions also have a major commonality between them regarding evil," Hans stated, smartly, "He's called the Dajjal."

"The Prophet Muhammad's hadith state that the reward for praying in al-Aqsa Mosque is five hundred times greater than the reward in other mosques. Al-Aqsa Mosque refers to the entire structure, not only the covered southern structure. The Marwani Chapel, the Dome of the Honorable Rock, the old Aqsa, the terraces, pathways, arcades, wells, fountains, patios, the outer walls, and the major gates all make up the mosque. Muhammad's traditions link the al-Haram Mosque in Mecca, to the al-Nabawi Mosque in Medina, and he encourages Muslims to visit the blessed al-Aqsa Mosque with the intention of worshipping there. The Messenger mentioned the al-Aqsa Mosque and connected it to the Mecca traditions, stating, *'Whoever commences pilgrimage from al-Aqsa Mosque, all his past sins will be forgiven.'*" Maacah didn't comment specifically on Hans's keen observation of evil saying this. She

just turned around and disappeared in the same manner as she first appeared.

The strange woman's sudden behavior startled Catherine. She terminated the talk by declaring, "But, without Noah, his sons and their lineages, the complete credibility of the stories of the Jews, Christians, and Muslims —all falls apart."

CHAPTER 23

Jerusalem, Israel August 9, 2023

Once back at the National Hotel, the five people went outside to the bar area to talk about their experiences at the Church of the Ascension. They were relieved that it was not crowded and that only one man was seated alone at a table.

Mustafa took the lead in the talk. "Islam holds that Muhammad was sent by Allah as His messenger. Muhammad's coming was actually foretold by the Bible. According to the Quran, Muhammad's arrival is prophesied in Christian scriptures, and the Jews are to blame for removing his name from the Torah."

"In the Quran, Jesus actually predicts the coming of Muhammad, saying: '*O Children of Israel! I am the apostle of God sent to you, confirming the Law which came before me, and giving Glad Tidings of an Apostle to come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad,*'" Ali said.

"In the Quran in Surat 61 verse 6 it is written, '*And when Jesus, the son of Mary, said, "O children of Israel, indeed I am the messenger of Allah to you confirming what came before me of the Torah and bringing good tidings of a messenger to come after me, whose name is Ahmad. But when he came to them*

with clear evidences, they said, This is obvious magic’,” Mustafa went on to say.

“The ancient land of Mesopotamia, now Iraq, is the birthplace of the Bible from the Garden of Eden to Abraham, Daniel, and the Tower of Babel with its terror-god,” Hans confirmed.

“Moses, who lived in the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BC, is revered as one of history’s greatest prophets in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Both the Bible and the Quran identify him as the leader of the Israelites who created the Torah. The complete version of it is contained in the first five volumes of the Hebrew Bible, and is sometimes known as the Old Testament or the Pentateuch in Christianity. They are revelations from God that Moses received on Mount Sinai,” Catherine stated.

“Although the exact date of the Torah’s writing is unknown, it was probably finalized during the Babylonian exile, around 539 BCE. The oldest complete sets are still a mystery. Only, a few fragments from 1400 BC until 400 B.C. have survived,” Hans said.

“After Moses’ death, volumes were probably written by a number of authors over the course of a millennium,” Catherine added. “Flavius Josephus, a first-century AD writer says that the holy texts were always kept in the Temple, *‘until the temple in Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD’.*”

“When was the Old Testament written?” Ali asked.

“Between 1200 BC and 165 BC,” Hans answered his question easily.

"When was the New Testament written?" Ali then asked.

"Interesting questions," Catherine remarked.

"Opinions concerning the New Testament differ from one author to another. Their attitude with respect to identifying style differs greatly, which is a major difference," Hans remarked stoically.

"It was thought that the New Testament writings contained the inspired word of God spoken through the apostles and disciples. Nine authors and twenty-seven books were published between thirty-three A.D. and the year eighty A.D. Matthew, Peter, John, and St. Paul were among those who saw Jesus after His resurrection," Catherine said.

"The New Testament is divided into Gospels and Paul's Epistles. These letters to churches were primarily concerned with clarifying doctrinal truths about Jesus," Hans commented.

Ali noticed some further theological similarities when Hans and Catherine verified these narratives and commented, "In the same manner as the Christian decuples, Muhammad's companions recorded the hadith."

"Yes. Now, let's talk about the famous character Noah's roles in all of these holy books and the chronologies of his first appearances, anywhere," Catherine said.

"We should do this," Hans stated, affirmatively.

"Where do we begin?" Stephen asked.

“We know by our investigations that Leonard Woolley discovered ancient artifacts at Ur dating back to 5000 BC. For our purposes here the ones we are concerned with what relates to the 15th century BC. Woolley wrote, “*It was here that we found the alabaster lunar disc of Sargon’s daughter*,” Catherine told everyone.

“At Nanna’s temple in Ur, the daughter of Sargon served as her high priestess. She had access to everything that had been amassed over the preceding centuries, including all of the Sumerian historical documents,” Hans said.

“From 2285 to 2250 B.C., Enheduanna served as High Priestess under Sargon’s reign. She is well-recognized as *the earliest literary fictional writer in history*, and is credited with transferring oral traditions, mythologies, and records from Mesopotamia into written stories on cuneiform tablets,” Catherine said.

“Her creation *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is full of characters who are demons, heroes, and heroines. But in this Ur story from the twenty-third century BC, her Noah is named *Utnapishtim*, not Noah. Strangely, though, he appears three times in the Old Testament Christian accounts of the twelfth century BC, the Hebrew Torah of the fourteenth century BC, and in the Islam Quran from the seventh century AD, all portraying him *as Noah*. However, the Torah, Bible, and Quran are generally regarded as the result of divine inspiration and revelation,” Hans confirmed.

“According to the Torah, Noah walks with God and gets the divine order to build an ark. The Noah accounts from the Old Testament and this one are too similar to the myths of *Gilgamesh* to have been *created* as original. This demonstrates that the authors of *Noah and the Ark* just copied the account from *Gilgamesh’s* tablet story to incorporate it into their own stories,” Catherine said, evaluating it.

“Where did the name Noah come from?” Stephen asked Hans.

“It’s of Hebrew origin,” Hans replied curtly.

“Of course, we now come to the contentious little issue of Abraham’s legitimate ancestry,” Catherine went on, “If Enheduanna created Noah originally as a fictional figure with the real name of Utnapishtim in the twenty-third century BC *Epic of Gilgamesh* story, how can Abraham be descended from Noah?”

“Abraham was supposedly the ninth descendant of Noah through Shem,” Hans stated, pondering dates. “He was born under the name Abram in the city of Ur, in Babylonia, around 1100 BC. But, the deluge occurred before 2500 BC. “

As Ali listened, he considered the words on the scroll sent to him, which read, *The Abraham Lies*. He guessed that Muhammad might have learned about the rewriting and copying of historical stories. Considering this, he wondered what else Muhammad wanted Muslims to know that was written on the *lost hadith* they were trying to find.

Stephen was listening attentively to the others as they attempted to make sense of things that didn't make sense when he noticed the lone man at the table who was trying to listen in on their conversation. When Stephen gave him an intimidating look, Aayan returned his gaze with a mischievous smile that was intimidating.

CHAPTER 24

Jerusalem, Israel August 10, 2023

On a quiet, peaceful Thursday morning in Jerusalem, Stephen left his room and headed for the hotel lobby. He had not gotten a decent night's sleep because of the troubling look the man in the bar had given him. When he reached the lobby, he took a seat on a couch and read a collection of events that Catherine had documented, trying to wake up.

'Muslims who are residents of Israel or visiting the country and Palestinians living in East Jerusalem are normally allowed to enter the Temple Mount and pray at al-Aqsa Mosque without restrictions. Due to security measures, the Israeli government occasionally prevents certain groups of Muslims from reaching al-Aqsa by blocking the entrances to the complex. The restrictions vary from time to time and are most severe for Gazans, followed by restrictions on those from West Bank'.

'In April 2021, during both Passover and Ramadan, the site was a focus of tension between Israeli settlers and Palestinians. Jewish settlers broke an agreement between Israel and Jordan and performed prayers and read from the Torah inside the Al-Aqsa compound, an area normally off limits for prayer to non-Muslims'.

'On April 5, 2023, Israeli police raided Al-Aqsa, saying "agitators" who had thrown stones and fired fireworks at the police, had barricaded themselves and worshippers inside Al-Aqsa mosque. Following the incident, militants fired rockets from Gaza into southern Israel'.

'On 14 April, Israeli police entered the Al-Aqsa compound and forcibly cut wires to speakers in minarets around the mosque, silencing the call to prayer, claiming the sound was interfering with an event by the Israeli president at the Western Wall'.

'On 15 April 2022, Israeli forces entered the Al-Aqsa compound and used tear gas shells and sound bombs to disperse Palestinians who, they said, were throwing stones at policemen. Some Palestinians barricaded themselves inside the Al-Aqsa mosque, where they were detained by Israeli police. Over 150 people ended up injured and 400 arrested'.

'On 16 April, seventy thousand Muslims prayed in the Al-Aqsa compound, the largest gathering since the beginning of the world pandemic. But, police barred most from entering the mosque'.

'In May 2021, hundreds of Palestinians were injured following clashes in the Al-Aqsa compound after reports of Israel's intention to proceed to evict Palestinians from land claimed by Israeli settlers'.

"It's been progressive," Stephen concluded.

Sitting down beside him, Catherine remarked, "You look like Hell." She then said, grinning, "Actually, you're not too far away. Gethsemane is close by."

Just as Catherine was saying this, Hans and Ali appeared. "We think we have a lead," Hans remarked obviously being excited. "A call came through to Mustafa from Maacah this morning. There's been a possible discovery. "

"Where and what is it?" Catherine asked.

Hans started, "Muslims built a mosque atop the Temple Mount after they conquered the city in 637 AD. It was first a holy place for the Israelites and then for the Jews because it housed the First and Second Jewish Temples. Though a church was erected there shortly after Muhammad's death, the site was still essentially abandoned. There once was an intricate mosaic floor, some of which has subsequently been torn up and repaired."

"The actual date when the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Qibli Chapel were first constructed and who ordered its building is not known. But there is no doubt that it was in the early Umayyad period of rule in Palestine," Ali said.

"The culmination of a series of enormous structures on the Temple Mount that show the scope of Islamic domination over Jerusalem was built toward the end of the seventh century. The Dome of the Rock was the final project in Abd al-Malik's Islamization efforts, which he started in early 690 AD. It was built over *The Foundation Stone*, at the site of the ancient Jewish Temple," Hans continued. "We've already talked about some of this."

"The good news is," Ali began. "The largest mosque in the area, the Marwani prayer hall, was constructed by

the Islamic Waqf between 1995 and 2001. Its approximate size five thousand square meters and there is room for over ten thousand worshipers.”

Hans went on, “Within the Al-Aqsa mosque lays the Al-Marwani mosque, an underground prayer chamber with sacred vaults. It is situated forty-one feet below the courtyard beneath the compound’s southern corner and is encircled by twelve rows of arches and pillars in an expansive, open space.”

Mustafa entered the foyer and joined in the conversation right away. “The region, referred to as the Old Mosque by early Muslims and Solomon’s Stables by the Crusaders, was restored in December 1996 by the Jerusalem Waqf. During unregulated building, they destroyed a large number of the antiquities at Temple Mount’s Solomon’s Stables area. The original Herodias-style building was transformed into a mosque, and the surface of the structure’s stones was removed. The Waqf covered and plastered over the old Herodias decorations at the eastern Hulda gate.”

“You must be kidding,” Catherine stated.

“Thousands of items dating back to the First Temple era were eventually recovered during the subsequent procedures. Around a thousand ancient coins, Israelite bullas with ancient Hebrew inscriptions, ten-thousand year-old tools, Hasmonean relics from 50 BC, Egyptian Ptolemaic treasures from approximately two hundred BC, were found. Objects belonging to Herodian Jews who were

antagonistic to Jesus Christ, ancient stones with evidence of the destruction of the Second Temple, and other significant artifacts were also among the discoveries," Mustafa said, making a point.

"The project was called the *Temple Mount Sifting Project*," Hans exclaimed to Catherine and Stephen what he had learned after Mustafa called him. "Hundreds of truck loads of dirt containing ancient, valuable artifacts were dumped and discarded haphazardly in the Kidron Valley."

"The Temple Mount and the Mount of Olives are divided by the Kidron Valley at the eastern edge of Jerusalem's Old City. It crosses the Judean desert of the West Bank and heads east toward the Dead Sea, covering a distance of twenty miles and four thousand feet in elevation. The historic Mar Saba Christian monastery is located at the bottom of the valley. Wadi al-Joz is the Arabic name for the upper part of the valley. It is called Kedar in Hebrew and sits atop a ridge overlooking the valley." Mustafa informed the group. "The higher course is known as the Valley of Josaphat in the Hebrew Bible. It is found in Jewish end-time predictions, including the coming of the Messiah, the War of Gog, and Elijah's return."

"What are we going to do, next?" Hans enquired.

"My car and driver are waiting," Mustafa said. "We are going to the valley."

CHAPTER 25

Jerusalem, Israel August 10, 2023

“Take us the Kidron Valley,” Mustafa told the driver, loudly. “Make your way towards Bethlehem.”

“Are we going to Bethlehem?” Catherine asked, elatedly.

“We have to search the entire route where they dumped the loads of dirt extracted from the Temple Mount,” Mustafa told her, taking out a map. “The *Sifting Project* waste sites are marked on this chart drawn by Maacah’s people.”

“The Kidron Valley rises in the northern region of Jerusalem and splits the Mount of Olives from the Temple Mount before flowing into the Judean Desert and the Dead Sea. The valley is thought to be the one mentioned in Joel 3:2, 12, where God states that all peoples would gather in the Valley of Jehoshaphat to participate in their ultimate judgment,” Hans said hurriedly,, wanting to confirm this with Mustafa. “The New Testament says that Jesus and his followers left the Last Supper and crossed the Kidron Valley to get at the Mount of Olives.”

Recalling her previous visit there, Catherine stated, “Gethsemane is a garden across the Kidron Valley on the

Mount of Olives, a ridge on the eastern part of Jerusalem. It is believed to be the place where Jesus prayed the night before he was crucified.”

In three long hours, the group had inspected several of the locations marked on the map. The manner in which the soil had been emptied suggested that whoever had dropped the loads in the valley had done it haphazardly. The sides of the roadways resembled abandoned building sites where poor pile placements had occurred rather than an unloading in a sequence of well planned, recorded positioning. In addition, almost everywhere they looked had been plundered and all of sites were covered with garbage. An area they came to now was where some young boys were excavating large mounds of earth, seemingly looking for something. As Mustafa’s driver approached closer, the youths started hurling rocks at the car. They left quickly though when Mustafa gave them the order to do so. Regretfully, one of the stones thrown struck the car’s windshield, leaving a sizable, gaping hole in it.

Catherine commented on their situation, telling her friends, “This happened to me the last time I was in Jerusalem,” as she sat in the backseat listening to the wind blow through the glass hole. “We had a rental car and were exploring Jericho.”

“You were stoned,” Ali said, sitting beside her.

"It was scary," Catherine said in response. "The vehicle only had two windows left when we gave it back to the rental car company."

"What did they say?" Hans asked.

"That it occurs frequently," Catherine said.

"Our search could be futile," Stephen commented, glancing again at the map.

Hans said, "Let's look in a few more of these locations on the drawing." He was sensing that daylight was running out. "It seems rather reckless to be out here in the dark."

After forty minutes, they were only five miles from Bethlehem, sorting through dirt in another massive pile of rock and soil. There weren't any bad boys here, but they were all getting worn out from the long day.

"I love seeing this," Stephen teased Catherine, whose face was smeared with dirt.

"Take a look at this?" Hans cried out, holding up what appeared to be a possible find that was covered in filth.

Mustafa approached Hans to see what he had dug out of a little trench in one of the mounds. He looked it over and commented, "Now isn't that interesting."

"What is it?" Catherine asked as she approached the two men, with Stephen and Ali trailing closely behind.

"It's a Greek Orthodox, Christian icon," Mustafa replied to Catherine in response.

After giving it a thorough inspection, Stephen said, "It's not very old."

From the other side of the mound, a strange-looking Palestinian man with a severely disfigured face emerged and moved towards them. "The monks from the monastery have been digging in this area for weeks," he stated. "They haven't returned since they stopped looking here a few days ago. One of them must have dropped the cross."

CHAPTER 26

Bethlehem, Israel **August 10, 2023**

“Six kilometers from Bethlehem, the road to the Mar Saba monastery goes through the Palestinian Authority even though it is in an area under Israeli authority,” Mustafa informed everyone, “It’s one of the oldest continuously inhabited monasteries in the Christian world and has served for centuries as a center for learning with a significant impact on the Byzantine Church’s doctrinal progression.”

“Who lives here,” Catherine questioned, seeing the monastery appear ahead.

“A small group of monks,” Mustafa said, “Like most holy orders of its kind, the requirements for an austere faith are demanding.”

“A monk can be an ascetic who voluntarily decides to live a life of prayer and contemplation away from society’s conventions, or he can be someone who chooses to dedicate his life to serving God and others.” Hans said, “The idea is ancient and can be found in philosophy as well as in numerous different religions.”

“John of Damascus resided here among the monks. Soon after Muhammad’s death in 632, he lived as a writer from 676 to 749. He posed a challenge to Muslims, despite

his acquaintance with and criticism of the Quran, asking who in the world could attest that Muhammad received the revelations directly from God. The stories in the Old Testament, especially the one where Moses receives the Torah from God in front of the Israelites, were the ones that John supported. He questioned Islamic law, asking what scriptures and prophets in the Bible anticipated Muhammad's coming. In prophesy, this monastery will host the last Divine Liturgy prior to Jesus Christ's Parousia, or Second Coming," Mustafa went on with his descriptions of it, "It will be history's last view of a legitimate Christianity."

After parking the car, the driver said to Mustafa, vigorously, "I'm not going in there."

In less than a minute, after pounding repeatedly on the monastery's massive main door, the others were standing outside it.

"You can't come in," a young looking monk told Catherine when he saw her standing there, "Women are not allowed in here."

"Which phobias do you have, young man? What do you monks have in there that you don't want women to see?" Catherine asked him, showing her aggressive side.

"Exceptions to the rule are necessary in times of instability," a different monk appeared and proclaimed. He went on in a cordial tone to say, "Please come in. My name is Julian, and this amiable fellow is Luke."

Julian escorted them directly to a chapel after giving them a brief tour of the monastery. Presently, they were

all admiring its exquisite décor, artwork, and brilliant designs.

“The Mar Saba Monastery was founded by Saint Sabbas in 483 of the fifth century. Sabbas was born in Turkey and became an authority on the Bible after enrolling in a neighboring monastery at the age of eight. He settled in Jerusalem when he was twenty-seven, and that is where he studied in monastery founded by Saint Euthymius. Then, in 473 after the founder’s death, Sabbas left the monastery and went out into a nearby cave, similar to the one you visited in Jerusalem. The followers of Sabbas relocated to adjacent caves throughout the next several years, eventually leading to the formation of our Mar Saba monastery,” Julian informed his guests. “We live as hermits, free from the confusions of the outside world, those awful disruptions to an enlightened life.”

Stephen said, glancing at Catherine, “It’s certainly appealing.”

“No television? You wouldn’t last a week,” Catherine scolded him.

“The grave of the founder, Saint Sabbas is here along with his relics. Under a glass enclosure, he lies. The First Church of the Monastery, which was founded in 491 and is devoted to St. Nicholas, is located next to it.” Julian added, guiding them to see it. “It holds his sacred relics.”

“This is impressive,” Hans told the friendly monk.

“During the Iconoclastic Controversy in 726, Leo III, the Byzantine emperor, caused political and economic

splits throughout the entire Byzantine civilization. The Roman emperor issued laws outlawing the veneration of icons, which featured images of Christ or saints associated with Christianity. The less fortunate non-Greek Eastern peoples of the Empire, who were regularly invaded by the newly formed Muslim Empire, were usually in favor of iconoclasm. All religious artwork, save for their own, would have been destroyed if the emperor had been successful," Julian informed them pointing to some of the treasured icons as he recounted them.

Finally, puzzled as to why none of the others mentioned it, Ali questioned the monk, "How did you know we were in the crypt in Jerusalem?"

Julian responded, "It's not by accident that you were all sent to the Holy Land and finally came here. And, it is not always by choice what our fates hold." Julian turned to face Ali. "Even so, our actions do dictate life's directions."

"How did we end up here, really?" Especially, in a monastery I'm not supposed to be in?" Catherine questioned Julian with concern.

A composed-looking Julian told her, "As instructed, we have located the *lost hadith* of Muhammad. Now we all simply need to move forward, Catherine."

CHAPTER 27

Bethlehem, Israel **August 10, 2023**

In an hour, Julian and his guests were in the tower library of the monastery. The monk stopped suddenly to show them the stacks of old books and manuscripts that the monks had accumulated over the last fifteen hundred years. He pulled out one of the older ones and asked, “Have any of you heard of the *Secret Gospel of Mark*?”

After all of them said “No” that they had not, Julian began to elaborate on it.

“According to the researcher Morton Smith’s 1960 study, the Mar Saba letter is a Greek manuscript that was discovered in this monastery’s library in 1958. Two sets of photos are the only proof that remains of it. The epistle purportedly belonging to Clement of Alexandria contains the sole references to a *Secret Gospel of Mark* that are now known. Smith insisted that during the summer of 1958, he discovered the letter’s text scribbled inside the end papers of the 1646 printed version of Isaac Vossius’s *Ignatius of Antioch* while classifying documents here at Mar Saba. Consequently, Clement’s letter is referred to as the Mar Saba letter,” Julian informed them,

“Now that you bring it up, I do remember a controversy,” Hans told Julian.

"That's putting it lightly," Julian remarked.

"What do you mean?" Catherine asked.

"Well for one thing," Julian began. "Two passages from the *Secret Gospel of Mark* are quoted in the letter addressed to a priest named Theodore. One of the passages talks about *the mystery of the kingdom of God*. He challenges the *Gnostics* of the second century, the *Carpocratians*, who claimed to possess a hidden variation of it. Clement acknowledges having knowledge of a second, esoteric, or hidden gospel that Mark composed for *those being perfected*. At the same time, he says that this is not the true version that the *Carpocratians* coveted. He states that someone has tainted the original with their own spurious modifications. And, abruptly, the letter ends as Clement starts to explain the passages."

When Julian informed Hans, Catherine, and Ali that there had been a dispute in the monastery concerning Holy Scriptures, they remained silent.

But Stephen wasn't reluctant to ask the monk, "What kind of disagreement developed here about this *Secret Gospel of Mark*?"

Climbing up on the first rung of a ladder, Julian said, "Its authenticity."

"I seem to recall that the question of whether Clement wrote it himself is what is challenged," Hans finally commented.

Glancing at a unique book on the shelves in front of him, Julian continued, "After Morton Smith released it, in

1960, claiming the letter was genuine, there were many scholars who claimed it was a forgery, possibly by Smith himself."

"The ancient Jewish manuscripts known as the *Dead Sea Scrolls* found between 1947 and 1956 in the Qumran caves near the Dead Sea were written by *Gnostics* of that era," Catherine said. "The accounts of *initiation rites* in the papyrus scrolls are also contentious as being corruptions and fabrications of actual truths."

"What does the *Secret Gospel of Mark* describe?" Ali asked.

"Rituals of initiation," Julian stated. "However, that's not all."

"Is it off limits, or can you explain it?" Catherine inquired respectfully.

"According to some hostile beliefs, the real Jesus was a magus who was filled with the Holy Spirit, and the Christian movement had its beginnings as a covert organization that followed baptismal initiation rituals. The idea espoused that Jesus would have even gone so far as to physically unite with his disciples in such a ritual greatly unsettled Christians." Julian raised his eyebrows when he stated this to Catherine, "The *pastiche theory* was promoted by some who saw the story of the young man of Bethany in *Secret Mark* being clumsily based on the raising of Lazarus by Jesus in the Gospel of John and it was used to support homosexual and libertine interpretations of events."

Hans remarked, "The *Gnostics* were some real nasty cults. They tried to persuade Christians that Christianity was a fraud and that they needed to follow them instead. Their initiation rituals represented a return to the worship of pagan gods and hedonism."

Julian said forcefully, "And, their current ascent in the world is for the same purposes. They want to inculcate hatred and disbelief everywhere in the minds of dim-witted people in order to control entire religions and societies." He then placed an ancient book he had taken down from the shelf on a small table after he finished speaking.

"I presume that this book tells a true story," Catherine stated decisively, seeing him do it, and picking it up.

CHAPTER 28

Bethlehem, Israel **August 10, 2023**

“Why are we the ones chosen to do this?” Ali questioned Julian. “How did we get singled out to expose anything?”

Julian pointed to a long table with chairs and said, “We didn’t know exactly when you would arrive, so we hid the hadith in this book for safekeeping. Specifically, why are you the one chosen, Ali? Let’s discuss who is to blame for the increase in evil and violence in the world as well as solutions once everyone has taken a seat. “

“It’s a dilemma?” Catherine commented, referring to Ali’s question.

“Muhammad makes it very clear that he respects and acknowledges both Abraham and Jesus Christ and their teachings,” Julian began.

“So, what is the basis for Islamophobia in the modern era?” Catherine inquired.

“When viewed as a geopolitical force, it’s the fear, hatred, or prejudice against the religion of Islam or Muslims in general,” Julian replied. “At the moment it appears that money and the desire to occupy Israeli territory are the primary motivators and objectives. However, in the end, some of the players appear to want to

eliminate all religions but their own in order to govern the entire planet.”

“Why do you think Muhammad is so feared, Julian?” Hans inquired.

Julian answered. “From an Islamic standpoint, Muhammad was a believer of the same faith that was revealed to earlier prophets like Abraham, Moses, and Adam. Likewise, aside from Jesus Christ, Muhammad was one of the Major Prophets chosen by God to teach humanity. Muslims consider him to be the greatest and final of these prophets, the one who finished and refined these teachings into Islam. He initiated a brand-new faith that was based on the belief in only one specific God, Allah. He also claimed to be a descendant of Ibrahim, being Abraham, the father of the Abrahamic faiths. In his mind he was sent *to restore* the original religion revealed to Moses by God that was corrupted by the Jews and the Romans who completely distorted Christianity.”

“Is there any restoration revealed by the hadith you found?” Stephen asked.

Julian was about to unveil it when there was a soft knock on the door. Julian opened it, and Luke was standing there.

“We have another guest,” Luke said in a low voice.

“Who is it?” Julian queried.

“He has a Saudi appearance. He claims his vehicle broke down and wants to know if there are any overnight accommodations available,” Luke advised Julian.

Remembering the man with the arrogant smile from yesterday at the hotel, Stephen quickly braced himself for a confrontation.

"Tell him we're closed," Julian scolded Luke.

With Julian declaring the monastery *closed*, Aayan pushed Luke out of the way and stormed into the library, pointing a weapon at him. "Everyone stays still," he declared severely.

Aayan's threat was taken severely by the others, but Stephen chose to ignore it. He attacked Aayan when he was in front of him. His years of martial arts training rendered him nearly invincible in hand-to-hand fighting. Despite Aayan's military experience from the *Tiger Squad*, Stephen quickly rendered him helpless.

Unfazed by the hostile actions, Julian gave Luke an order, "Go get Anton and Lawrence. We'll give this fellow a room."

"Time to head out," Catherine muttered as she watched two enormous monks escorting Aayan to a subterranean cell.

"I assume we are taking the *lost hadith* with us?" Ali asked Julian.

"It's on parchment in here," Julian handed the old book to Ali. "The leaf is genuine since we were able to carbon date it to the seventh century."

Five minutes later as they made their way to the car which was now without their driver, Catherine asked Julian, "What do you suggest we do with it?"

“The answer will come to you, Catherine,” Julian answered her.

After watching them walk down the path to continue their journey, Julian decided to give his visitors something else and he hurried to catch up to them. When he did the monk told his visitors surprisingly, “After you complete this task, please come back here so I can explain the *Noah and the Ark* enigma to you. It’s truly quite a tale.”

CHAPTER 29

Medina, Saudi Arabia **August 14, 2023**

Medina is a city in western Saudi Arabia, around 275 miles from Mecca and 100 miles inland from the Red Sea. It is considered to be the second holiest city in Islam after Mecca and the location where Muhammad established the Muslim faith. Muhammad's body is buried in the Prophet's Mosque, which is situated in Medina's city center.

Though the early history of Medina is obscure, it is thought that before the Christians arrived, Jewish settlers lived in it as an oasis. The main Jewish immigration seems to have resulted from their forcible expulsion from Palestine in 135 CE which was under the rule of Roman Emperor Hadrian. In addition, it's thought that Arab tribes most likely occupied Medina at the time. However, the Jews made up the bulk of the region's population and development by 400 CE. When Abu Karib As'ad, the Sabaean monarch of Yemen, visited the colony that year, the knowledge and teachings of various Jewish rabbis he encountered had a profound impact on him. Consequently, he introduced the Hebrew monotheistic concept to his people, replacing their previous pagan belief system of worshiping several gods.

The Prophet Muhammad, however, wrote a fresh chapter in the history of the oasis when he arrived here in 622 while fleeing from Mecca. Thus, the prophet's journey is the first event in the Muslim calendar. Muhammad subsequently ordered in 624 that all prayers from Medina be focused on Mecca. He constructed a roofed shelter against a front wall, known as the *qiblah* wall, which was held up by palm trunk pillars. The covered gallery, which served as his companions' safeguard and was the forerunner of the covered oratories found in later mosques, was situated against the courtyard's opposing wall.

Catherine's group was behaving vigilant and had made plans to follow Saudi Arabia's dress code policies before traveling here. Because of the attire they were wearing, when they arrived in Medina, they all looked to be Muslims. Catherine wore an abaya and had her hair wrapped with a black headscarf. The males were all dressed in traditional white thobes. They had made their way to where they were now by using the Medina Hop-On-Hop-Off bus, and were gathered outside the Prophet's Mosque, staring in from the wall facing the *qiblah*.

"The Hajj is a simultaneous annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca, the main Muslim holy city. It is a period when Muslim unity with other Muslim peoples and their devotion to Allah are demonstrated, exhibiting a strong, purposeful brotherhood. It took place at the end of June this year," Ali's began explaining their present surroundings.

“According to Islamic law, Muslims must carry out this ritual at least once in their lifetime. The pilgrimage to Mecca’s well-known Kaaba, or the House of Allah in Islam, is known as the Hajj. As part of the Tawaf ritual, millions of Muslims circle the Kaaba, and many try to kiss the Black Stone in an effort to replicate Muhammad’s kiss on it,” Hans continued to explain some rituals.

“The Hajj is said to retrace the steps that Prophet Muhammad once traveled, which some say is the same path that the Bible’s Jewish prophets Abraham and Ishmael once took,” Catherine stated. “This is quite a view. What an absolutely magnificent looking city.”

“As we know, the Black Stone is set in the east corner of the ancient Kaaba of the Grand Mosque in Mecca. It is highly revered by Muslims as an Islamic artifact linked to Adam and Eve in Muslim history. Pagan people revered the stone at the Kaaba prior to the arrival of Islam.” Ali said, “Islamic tradition states that Muhammad supposedly inserted it intact into the wall of the Kaaba five years before his first revelation, in 605 CE.”

“The stone was broken into fragments since and is presently set into a silver frame on the side of the Kaaba. The exterior of it looks like a shattered, black rock that the worshippers once polished over,” Hans said, “Although the Black Stone is highly esteemed, some scholars stress that it is probably purely historical in character and does not hold any divine significance. Although, Islamic belief holds that it descended from heaven.”

“Millions of Muslims from all over the world go to Mecca to perform the Hajj. From there, many travel here to Medina, where they visit the Prophet Muhammad’s tomb to pay their respects,” Ali said.

“Medina has three prominent mosques, the al-Masjid an-Nabawi, the Quba Mosque, and the Masjid al-Qiblatayn. The Quba Mosque is the oldest in Islam,” Hans told everyone. “Which one should we begin looking at?”

“The location of the Quba Mosque is on the outskirts of Medina,” Ali informed his friends. “The mosque was located outside the city center when it was first built and the initial location in Quba gave it the name. It’s a significant spot in terms of our religion, since the Prophet himself erected this mosque and because he stayed there when he first arrived here from Mecca,”

“Let’s go,” Catherine declared to the group. “We seem to be going in the right direction.”

CHAPTER 30

Medina, Saudi Arabia **August 14, 2023**

“Billions of Muslims worldwide cherish the Quba Mosque, and its history, which is the second largest mosque in Medina and a place where they hope to go to at least once in their lives. It is said that this mosque provides blessings as the Prophet had mentioned, that whoever reads Namaz here will receive one Umrah, which is almost equivalent to going on a Hajj. For Muslims, each and every site of worship holds a special place in their hearts. And before their death, every one of them wishes to see a mosque that the Prophet Muhammad himself built.” Ali stated, continuing on with his descriptions of where they were at the moment

“Muslims pray five times a day,” Hans told Stephen, “Dawn, Midday, Afternoon, Sunset and Night prayers.”

“I know that,” Stephen answered, deciding that Hans was maybe telling him something else.

“There is a Prayer Hall encircling the central courtyard, with six enormous domes supporting it from a group of columns. Additionally, it has a portico that is two bays deep.” Ali continued on as they passed through the main entrance of the mosque. “These border the courtyard

on the east and west and separate the men and women areas.”

When they were in the center of the Prayer Hall watching thousands of people focusing their eyes and thoughts on the *qibla* wall, Catherine remarked, “Just to be here is a powerful experience.”

“It has a spiritually calming quality,” Hans told Stephen.

Stephen didn’t comment on Hans’ remark. He just looked around at the fabulous things close by in every direction.

Catherine knew how Stephen’s mind worked and she asked him quietly, “Are you assessing its value?” Then she added, “It’s incalculable.”

Hans couldn’t care less about the mosques’ worth. He just kept looking up being mesmerized by the brilliant overheard circular lights and the incredibly high and beautifully colored ceilings. As the four people stood in the Prayer Hall appreciating its absolute splendor, a Muslim man nearby could be heard speaking softly to a British visitor about the mosque’s renovations.

“For its construction, the mosque used local basalt stone. The mosque’s lower part, both internally and externally, displays the stone and its dark color. The upper part, with the minarets and domes, is whitewashed. The top edges of the mosque’s outline, including the edges of the arcades that surround the courtyard, are crenellated. The multi-domed profile of the mosque evokes the character

of the Ottoman section of the Prophet's Mosque. Around the base of the green interior of each and every dome runs a band with calligraphic inscriptions. The writings feature verses and entire shorter chapters of the Quran, the Surahs, along with the beautiful names of Almighty Allah. The mosque's four minarets were patterned after the Mamluk and Ottoman minarets in *Madinah*, two of which have been retained on the south-eastern Mamluk and south-western Ottoman corners of the Prophet's Mosque, and resemble the minarets of earlier versions of the Quba' mosque. All four minarets have two balconies supported by elaborate muqarnas. The minarets rest on square bases, and have octagonal shafts up to the second balcony, which then take on a circular shape up to the top."

When Stephen heard the man say a particular word, he knew he had the answer as to why they had come here to Medina.

"Islam is such a beautiful religion in the devout manner in which Muslims practice their faith and believe in Allah. It's a wonder why they're so threatening to others," Catherine said, listening to the ethereal sounds of the multitude of people praying in unison all around her.

"I think Ali's request for a divine intervention just happened again," Stephen whispered into Catherine's ear. "Our way is clear."

CHAPTER 31

Medina, Saudi Arabia
August 14, 2023

The Calling

Ninety minutes later, the group had gathered in another part of the mosque, waiting for someone to arrive. What had attracted Stephen's attention in the Prayer Hall was the word "minarets," being said which pertained to the towers from which Muslims were called to Salah devotion.

"He said there were living quarters for the imam, muazzin, and other mosque staff added, in here," Stephen told Hans, referring to the man who had described the renovations.

Hans was trying to understand exactly what Stephen was getting at and said, "The imam is the one who leads formal Fard prayers and the muazzin is the caller who cries out to announce prayer times, several times a day."

As they both reacted to the great energy in the mosque, Catherine and Ali were having a serious dialogue together.

"If you're not comfortable where you are, time goes by slowly," Ali told Catherine.

“And, it moves less quickly when you’re somewhere you shouldn’t be,” Catherine retorted, wondering if this was one of those times.

A moment later, a Muslim man walked speedily past them, obviously going towards the steep steps that led up to the tower of one of the minarets.

“That’s our guy,” Stephen told the others. “He’s heading up to check out the top landing’s loudspeakers, which amplify the call for afternoon prayers.”

“The Asr prayers, at three o’clock,” Ali confirmed. “Usually the muezzin makes the calling from the Prayer Hall, through the speakers up there. Or, sometimes, they have electronic recordings doing it.”

Stephen told Ali, “They’re having technical issues,” and he said no more.

After Stephen finished his sentence, he motioned for his three companions to stay stationary and silent. Then, following the muezzin, he went to climb up the minaret’s stairs.

Stephen became energized as soon as he entered the muezzin’s small chamber at the top of the tower. He didn’t need much time to knock the man out. When he was done, he peered out across Medina. Stephen knew the muezzin would use a megaphone to broadcast the call to prayer because the sound system wasn’t working, so he quickly grabbed it and put it to his lips.

When Catherine saw Stephen disappear up the tower stairwell, she felt a knot in her stomach. She had no idea

what he was planning, but she sensed that handling this situation wouldn't be simple. She guided Hans by the arm into the heart of the Prayer Hall, where a throng of people were praying and tried to blend in. Once Ali observed what Catherine was doing, he decided to follow them.

"What did Stephen mean when he said there are problems with the sound system?" Ali posed this question to Catherine while the three of them sat on the floor of the massive hall.

"He did something to it," Catherine replied minimally.

"When and how?" Ali questioned, startled.

Just as Catherine was going to tell Ali that Stephen had cut some wires to the mosque's audio system, she heard loud yelling coming from the direction of the minaret tower. The sound of Stephen's booming voice startled them because it wasn't your typical muezzin's call to prayer.

"When the terror birds attack and blood flows like a river, hold fast to the rope of God, all together, and be not divided," Using the muezzin's megaphone, Stephen was heard shouting the Prophet's message from the lost hadith that they had found, one earsplitting call in each direction.

CHAPTER 32

London, England
December 2, 2023

Stratton Street

After their traumatic experience at the Quba Mosque in Medina four months earlier, Catherine, Stephen, and Hans had left and returned to London. Today, Stephen and Catherine were in her flat going over a stack of foreign news items about the war going on between Hamas and Israel that started in October.

“When we were in Israel, we went straight through Gaza and the West Bank,” Catherine said.

“We weren’t expecting anything like this, but there was a sense of high alarm there,” Stephen remarked.

Stephen asked Catherine, “Ali still hasn’t gotten back to you?”

“No,” Catherine responded. “When we left Medina, I told him not to go back to Gaza as he planned. Before we left Jerusalem, we felt as though a major event was going to happen. It seemed like a carefully planned operation was underway.”

“Read this one,” Stephen told Catherine, handing her a report. *‘More than a month after Hamas terrorists launched an unprecedented surprise attack on Israel and infiltrated the*

country by air, land and sea on Oct. 7, the region stands on high alert amid fears of a wider conflict and thousands dead on both sides of the Israel-Gaza border’.

“It’s hard to tell what’s going on with these conflicting and biased news reports,” Catherine said to Stephen, picking up and reading another one. *‘The Hamas compound included a web of ‘underground terror tunnels’, as well as training areas and observation posts, the military said in a post on Telegram. Israel did not disclose the location of the compound’.*

“What is the number of Israelis killed or injured thus far?” Stephen asked.

“As of December 1st, approximately thirteen hundred Israelis, including almost four hundred IDF soldiers and sixty police officers have been killed. And, since October 7th, at least thirteen hundred have been wounded,” Catherine responded, aware of the figures.

“What about the Palestinians?” Stephen was curious about what numbers would come next.

“I have a summary report that was completed online,” Catherine picked it up and started reading. “Sixteen thousand dead, including seven thousand children, over forty thousand seriously injured, nearly two million displaced, a hundred mosques and three Christian churches wrecked, sixty or more hospitals and health clinics destroyed, most of them now without power or supplies, at least fifteen journalists killed. These figures keep adding up every week.”

"There is no question that Hamas attacking Israel in October was an act of war," Stephen stated, "And, considering the present situation, quite belligerent."

Catherine was not through yet. "A report done last week shows the abandoned and disarrayed hallways of the pediatric intensive care unit at Al-Nasr Children's Hospital in northern Gaza. There were several babies whose unattended bodies lay on hospital beds and they were *decomposed*. The hospital's staff and critically ill patients were forced to evacuate in early November as the Israeli military focused its ground assault on the city, with all hospitals being under fire."

"The hospitals and shrines being targeted," Stephen assessed, "is deplorable."

Hans materialized in the doorway before Catherine could continue. Having heard their last exchange, he said, "On Nov. 6, Israeli Air Force planes continued their bombing campaign throughout Gaza, striking about five hundred targets overnight."

"With its arsenal of US supplied powerful weapons and jet aircraft the Israeli army has wreaked the most catastrophic killings and destruction on humans in contemporary history," Catherine verbalized heatedly.

"Israel's shelling of Gaza in less than seven weeks is comparable to the years-long attack of Allied forces on German cities during World War Two," Hans chronicled.

"There are always two sides to the story," Stephen suggested, being pragmatic.

“Good Jews and Good Muslims and their religions are being savagely abused by the false leaders doing evils, who are seeking their own aims, not obeying God’s commands. The sacred Holy Land is being desecrated by them in doing Lucifer’s work,” Catherine put her feelings into perspective.

“What kind of planes is the United States selling or giving to Israel?” Hans asked Stephen.

“F-15 Eagle and F-16 Fighting Falcons make up the majority of the Israeli Defense Force’s air force. Israel is the biggest F-16 operator outside of the United States,” Stephen answered the question easily. “The companies supplying them are operated by men and women connected to the United States government. You, know they are *inside traders*, of a sort”

“You’re the religious scholar, here, Hans. What theory do you have for all this insanity?” Catherine enquired and added. “Palestinians are being buried in mass graves. The descriptions of doctors and the teams at Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital say they are doing their best to offer the proper Islamic burial rituals to the dead, hoping that their efforts will allow the deceased victims to rest in peace. Those doing the ritual washing of the bodies at the hospital say about eight percent of them, many being children are torn apart in pieces. They’re burying their limbs, and some bodies have their organs lacerated and exposed. They’ve never seen anything like it, with the puzzling wounds inflicted on their

mangled body parts. Killing children deliberately like this *is a war crime.*"

"It seems to me that some very rich, crazy and insane people in the world are actually trying to twist biblical prophecies to craft *The Rapture,*" Hans responded finally, having given this situation some serious thought over the last few days. "It is evil unbound. Furthermore, this appears to just be the beginning of their scheme."

"What the hell?" Catherine asked, completely stunned by Hans' response.

"Generally speaking, there are some believers who feel that *The Rapture* is imminent when Jewish people gain power and control in Israel. It holds the key to the beginning of the end times," Hans professed. "It will be a time when God will purify sinners and Jesus Christ will return to judge all souls. It appears these incensed people think we are on the brink of experiencing the most extraordinary sequence of events in human history, and God is preparing to assist Israel do it, in a supernatural way."

Stephen remarked cynically, "Some dead people on both sides are already experiencing the end times. They didn't witness *Rapture*, they faced *Gehenna.*"

"What will come soon are the antichrist and his seven year empire that will be destroyed in the battle of Armageddon." Hans continued. "Then Jesus Christ will set up his throne in the city of Jerusalem. He will establish a kingdom there that will never end."

“Suppose there’s no Jerusalem or Holy Land left?” Stephen stated, continuing to be cynical. “What if you’re right and the madmen, these power crazies go too far.”

“According to the Book of Revelation in the New Testament of the Christian Bible, Armageddon is the site of a terrible battle that is expected to occur at the end of time. The *Al-Malhama Al-Kubra*, as it is known in Islamic tradition, will be the bloodiest struggle in human history,” Hans asserted, “It occurs shortly before the Dajjal, the Anti-Christ, appears and this is referred to in Islamic hadith as Armageddon. Some contemporary Muslim exegesis or textual interpretations of the final conflict claim it is being produced by the inheritors of Rome including the Ottomans.”

“You’re not buying into this hypothesis are you Stephen?” Catherine asked, observing his facial expressions as Hans talked.

“Not at all, it has the tone of a work of fiction,” Stephen remarked.

Hans ignored Stephen’s comment about the surge of violence and evil in today’s world being a made-up story and continued, “According to some hadith narrations the *Malhama Al-Kubra* culminates in an apocalyptic scale battle that is so intense and horrifying, *if a bird were to pass over their flanks, it would fall down dead before reaching the end of them.*”

“Birds and death,” Stephen remarked, thinking about this.

“Various Islamic collections predict that cataclysmic indications will precede the approach of Judgment Day. For a time, the morally reprehensible would triumph. Usury, satanic music, fornication, rampant murders, lying, cheating, and a lack of interest in or knowledge of religion will be commonplace. There would be anomalous occurrences, like the increase in unexpected fatalities, frequent lightning strikes, devastating rains, a horrible drought, massive clouds of smoke, the opening of enormous earth cracks, the rising of the sun in the west, and an odd breeze that steals the souls of the faithful,” Hans described some hadith predictions aligned with the present conditions in the world.

“The mental horror non-believers will experience in the abyss and the state of joy believers will have in Nirvana,” Catherine continued. “Can you imagine your mind and soul being agonized like this for eternity? Think about it.”

Catherine’s cell phone rang as she was finishing her sentence. “Hello Mustafa,” she answered, recognizing his deep voice. “I understand. I appreciate your call.”

“What was that about?” Hans asked, watching Catherine look away.

“Ali is dead,” Catherine responded with tears flowing. “He was caught in a shelling. His head was blown apart.”

“Damn it,” Hans screamed out, becoming emotionally distraught.

“There is no happy ending to your Agamemnon story Hans. Do its authors believe that just prayer will stop this?” Stephen verbalized angrily. Then he commented on the good Ali did in his life to help people, “He died for *human rights*.”

Hans said, “I don’t know what to say,” as he went over to console Catherine who was crying and trembling.

Stephen’s rage over his friend’s death had not subsided. His thoughts were racing, trying to figure out what to do. Attempting to focus, he struggled to clear his mind of a menagerie of images connected to the conversation they were having prior to the distressing phone call about how well-planned evil acts affect *all religions*.

“The Israeli bomber jets are called the *Eagles* and the *Falcons*,” Stephen finally expressed. Then he remembered exactly how he felt high up in the minaret tower in Medina when he had cried out the message of Muhammad’s *lost hadith*, “*When the terror birds attack, hold fast, all together.*”

EPILOGUE

Jerusalem, Israel
December 9, 2023

Maacah had not been in Jerusalem recently due to the general pervasive sense of fright, particularly in the vicinity of the Mount of Olives and the Chapel of the Ascension. Thousands of Palestinians had already moved out of East Jerusalem, most of them against their will. Other holdouts were afraid to surrender their properties because doing so would acknowledge that their land was no longer legally theirs. The ones that remained lived in a constant state of fear, but they had nowhere to go. What was worse, anyone who gave up would have nothing left since the soldiers were stealing anything of value.

Still, Maacah had escaped all physical assaults up until this point. She was one of the Muslims who persisted mainly because they had to protect their sacred sites in Jerusalem.

Maacah had spent the last month monitoring the fighting and telling people who were against the atrocities occurring in Israel what she saw with her own eyes, on a daily basis. She was alert and ready for anything as she made her way into the chapel's crypt. The fact that it was empty and that no armed men were present made her at ease. She proceeded straight up a lengthy flight of

steps that led her to an upper level of the church that was strewn with trash. The condition of the building indicated that someone had visited without attempting to exalt Jesus Christ. When she arrived at the altar area, wine bottles were scattered everywhere, giving the appearance that a festive party was held there.

Maacah stopped dead in her steps as she heard abrupt, loud, and disturbing noises. Her first instinct was to look behind her to see what was happening, and when she did, there was nothing there. Maacah was no stranger to conflict. Her life's events were in line with what was happening in Israel at the present time. But there was something unsettling about the way things were right now, and she was feeling sensations she never experienced before.

"Why did you slaughter us?" a Muslim child's voice could be heard weeping.

"It hurts. I'm scared," a young Christian boy cried out meekly.

"Where is my other arm?" a little Jewish girl howled.

Maacah turned to face her right and noticed the faint shadows of the children drifting across the walls. "Such are their last memories of life on earth," she murmured to herself, "Anguish and dread."

Maacah saw something she had never seen before seen in her life as she drew nearer to the wall. She felt as if she would faint from the sheer intensity of electricity

in the air. There was definitely something ominous lurking there.

The petrified children were being told by a One-Eye beast to, "Come to me."

Maacah ran as fast as she could to get away from whatever it was. She stopped to regain her breath as she arrived at the main church area. But all of a sudden, she started to feel strange again.

Her eyes focused on the *Edicule*, the spot where Jesus Christ actually walked before ascending into heaven.

Like the last time she was in this church, Maacah was hoping to find the foot imprint of Jesus Christ there in the stone as she went closer. However, that was not the case. She began to quiver as she realized what was inside of it now.

The original right footprint of Christ, once set in stone, was no longer visible. Right now, three distinct sets of footprints were, together, in *newly formed dust*. Discovering that the imprints depicted descents rather than ascensions, it caused Maacah to believe that perhaps just a short while ago, the three prophets had returned to Earth together.

Maacah heard another strange movement not far away. But as she lifted her eyes, she no longer felt the horror she experienced when she had first seen the terrifying One-Eye beast Muhammad had warned his companions about.

Standing on the other side of the Edicule in front of her now was a more powerful figure than any horrifying creature. Maacah became completely ecstatic as soon as she realized who it was.

As a reward for leading a righteous and moral life, the angel Gabriel smiled and extended his hand to greet Maacah and the children into Paradise.

The End