

“Adam and Stephanie Parker have given years of their lives to prayer and the study of the word related to the unique dynamics that believers will face at the end of this age. *Left Alive*, is an epic, well-written, fictional story that will thrust its readers into the reality and urgency of the days that are ahead for those who believe. It is a **MUST READ!**”

Jaye Thomas

Song of Hope Ministries, Inc.

“This apocalyptic novel will pull at your heart and leave you on the edge of your seat as you see biblical prophecy come to life. Definitely a must read for anyone wanting a captivating story or has an interest in the end-times.”

Justin Rizzo

Worship Leader, Composer, Playwright

“The Parkers' research is astounding and profoundly comprehensive and will challenge the most dedicated believer and sophisticated intellectual to examine why we believe and do what we do in Christianity. His accurate portrayal of end-time events makes the reader see themselves in the stories and point them to Jesus. It won't take long before you grasp the Parker's deep seriousness, passion for combat, sly wordplay, and uncompromising love for God. This is truly a deeply satisfying read.”

Charles Morris

Pastor, Author, RSI Ministry

LEFT ALIVE

AN END TIMES NOVEL

ADAM & STEPHANIE
PARKER

Parker Studios, LLC

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To my best friend in the whole world, my husband. Without teaching me your in-depth knowledge of the end times, this book would have been absolutely impossible. Thank you for always inspiring me.

To my wife, who is my best friend and the one who has always been there, supported me, and put up with me. You are my better half and I could not do this life without you.

FOREWORD

Why is a book like Adam and Stephanie Parker's on the end times so critical in this prophetic hour of human history? Because Jesus gave us numerous signs and teachings regarding the end times and we need to understand them. Today one of the least understood and probably least studied biblical doctrines is the doctrine of eschatology. Eschatology is simply the term that describes what the Bible teaches about the last days. When we mention the last days we actually mean the months and years directly preceding the second coming of Jesus to return for His church. But He comes not only for the church, He also comes to bring about the restoration of the earth through a series of judgments that is beautifully described throughout the book of revelation.

Along with Jesus, the Bible tells us of numerous writers that were inspired by the Holy Spirit to write down the insight that they received from God regarding the last days. The prophet Daniel, for example, describes the urgent need for believers in Christ to understand what God's word actually reveals for His people and the nations. The last days will produce a people that will be very familiar with the events that will confront those living on earth in that day and hour.

While Daniel was serving in the court of the Persian empire, he received insight from the Lord that the 70 years of Jeremiah's prophecy of Israel's time in exile in the land of Babylon was coming to an end. As a result, Daniel began to seek the Lord for greater clarification and what God's future had in store for his people. Daniel began to fast and pray and

the Lord answered his prayer by giving Daniel very detailed information and specific events that revealed how God would deal with the nation of Israel and their place in the end times prior to the Lord's return. As Daniel pressed the issue and sought to receive a greater revelation of the events that would come about, the Lord instructed an angel to communicate to Daniel that the specific detailed information he was longing to receive, was actually reserved to be understood by those living in the end times.

In addition to Daniel, the apostle Paul also received great insight into the spiritual condition of society prior to the Lord's return. The Holy Spirit clearly showed Paul that massive deception and great immorality would be on the rise in the days leading up to Jesus' return.

The apostle John received a series of visions that revealed in great detail how the Lord will deal with the nations of the earth and how an end-time world leader will arise to lead many astray. This world leader will cause multitudes to reject the worship of the one true God and instead worship a man that will be known as the antichrist. John wrote all that he saw and entitled his prophetic revelation by calling it THE BOOK OF REVELATION.

Left Alive is necessary because it's a piece of prophetic fulfillment that promises us that God would release greater understanding to several of His servants about the last days. I believe you are holding this book, not by any mere chance or coincidence but because the Holy Spirit has directed you to purchase it or lead someone to give this book as a gift to you so that you would be one of those who will be better equipped to understand the doctrine of eschatology.

Take the time to prayerfully read this book and ask the Holy Spirit for insight and revelation. I am confident that the Lord will impart to you not only the necessary revelation that you will need as a believer with a better understanding of God's plan for the last days, but also to be one of His servants that He can equip and use to communicate with clarity and understanding God's plan for the church and the nations of the earth. May the Spirit of wisdom, revelation, knowledge, and understanding come upon you, flooding your heart and mind with great understanding of what He plans to do.

~ Carlos Sarmiento

Pastor Carlos Sarmiento is the Founder of the Orlando House of Prayer Missions Base, Forerunner Messenger Alliance, Author of Encountered By God, and has been preaching the Gospel for more than 25 years.

PREFACE

We believe we are living in the last days. We believe that either ourselves, our children or our grandchildren will be of those “left alive” when Jesus splits the sky, and we see Him coming on the clouds. If you are the least bit observant, you can look around the world today and see the signs Jesus’ disciples were asking about in Matthew 24, when they said, “Tell us, when will these things be, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” There is a growing sense of urgency in believers we hear from to prepare for hard times, to prepare for persecution, and to prepare ourselves and our children to be ready for what is coming.

Isaiah prophesied about a people who would call evil good and good evil. The apostle Paul wrote that “in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves... lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. We are seeing a generation who are so confused about who they are. Many of the things our parents’ and grandparents’ generations knew as foundational, unmovable truths are being questioned and discarded by young people and trumpeted by those now in seats of influence.

In this novel we see some of the difficult times and persecution we know are coming. We take the position that believers will be here for the tribulation that Jesus talked about in Matthew 24:21. We do not see a secret rapture described in scripture, but a rapture that takes place at the last trumpet where every eye will see. I know and have great

respect for many in the body of Christ who believe in a pre-tribulation rapture. However, I believe that it's possible this doctrine, if false, could be a stumbling block for many believers, especially in first world countries where Christians have not experienced persecution. Scripture is clear that the love of many will grow cold, people will be offended and there will be a great falling away from the faith. We do not want to be offended. We want to be prepared for what we know is coming upon the earth.

The knowledge of Jesus Christ has been and is still the answer for the Church today. This next generation is in need of a life-changing encounter with the person of Jesus. Men, women, and youth of all ages need to be pierced by the Holy Spirit to "count all things as loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus our Lord" (Phil. 3:8). We must declare to the world, that the only answer, the only solution, the only true peace is Jesus.

~ Adam & Stephanie Parker

CHAPTER ONE

*“And I saw in the right hand of Him who sat on the throne a scroll written inside and on the back, sealed with seven seals”
- Revelation 5:1*

Michael Hill looked on in horror as people, as far as the eye could see, were all walking in a trance toward a massive cliff. He yelled at the top of his lungs, “Stop! Turn around! You’re going to fall off!” It was like he was yelling into the wind. Everyone he could see didn’t even turn around at the sound of his voice. He wondered if they even heard him as they continued to walk forward, all the way up until the moment when they took their final step off the edge and plunged to their death.

As he continued to scream, he was able to see a few people turn their heads and stare quizzically at him before they turned back around and followed the crowd toward the cliff’s rim. He had yelled until his voice felt like sandpaper, when he finally saw only three faceless people out of the thousands turn and look at him, and then walk away from the cliff.

It was a struggle for those three people. The crowd was

massive and their momentum going forward made it look like the people were fish in a river trying to swim upstream, but he was able to breathe a sigh of relief when they made it past the crowd and to safety far away from the cliff.

It was a steady stream of people heading to the edge. It seemed like a never-ending line of people emerged from behind him and began the death march to the cliff. The new arrivals were ignoring his desperate cries of warning as well. It was like they were all sleepwalking and completely oblivious to what they were heading straight towards. He yelled over and over, "Wake up! Wake Up! There's a cliff; you're going to die! Wake up!"

Suddenly he wasn't sure where he was anymore. Something or someone was shaking him and he heard an incessant 'beep, beep, beep' in the recesses of his mind.

"Wake up. Wake up. You're going to be late for work, Michael. Wake up!" His wife Sophia tried to nudge him awake not so gently as she pushed her foot against his shin. "I have another hour until I have to wake up. At least turn your alarm off."

The pieces were starting to make more sense in his mind. He had been sleeping. It was just a dream, but it felt so real. He reached over and turned off the persistent alarm clock when he realized he was drenched in sweat from the dream. He never used to even remember his dreams, but, this last week, he had experienced the same dream every night. He tried to shake off the feeling of urgency the dream left with him. It left him wanting to shout from the rooftops, but not knowing what he was supposed to say.

He had no idea who he was supposed to warn or what he

was supposed to warn them about, but as he began to get dressed he had a growing feeling that something big was coming. Maybe that was his pessimistic side taking over he thought to himself as he got ready for work that morning.

He was a normal guy in many ways. He was a muscular man of average height and his job as a police officer in Omaha, Nebraska made him keep his hair short and face clean-shaven. He hated the city and looked forward to returning home each night to his little town, Nebraska City, forty-five minutes south of Omaha.

He had a family and they were a rarity in this day and age in every way. They were mostly happy and they loved each other. They spent time playing board games, going on adventures together, and talking over dinner.

They weren't perfect, they had their fair share of arguments too, but you could always feel the love they had for one another even when they fought. Yes, in many ways Michael was a completely normal guy. In every way, but one. Lately, he started to have crazy dreams. They felt so real. It felt like he was watching a movie as he would see the dreams unfold in his mind.

Everyone dreams, but this felt different. His dreams would stay with him for days playing the scenes over and over in his mind. Maybe he was going crazy. Maybe it was his brain just trying to shut off the absurdity of the propaganda machine that all the news stations had become.

As he was getting ready for work this morning, shaving, and watching the television, he couldn't escape the fact that the news had become less and less about the facts and more and more about trying to sell the general population stories

that would make them feel good and ignore the trouble all around them.

Maybe it was because he was a cop that he just couldn't make himself see through the rose-colored glasses everyone seemed to be wearing. Recently, even his youngest son, Miles, thought his old man had a few loose nuts. They used to be so close, but something happened when Miles had his twenty-first birthday. He started to change.

Michael remembered back when Miles was the tender-hearted little toddler that ran around the house. That little boy had once cared so deeply about what others felt, but Miles had allowed his strength of empathy to become his weakness. It was clear now that Miles had been slowly deceived by the common teaching that was all around them. Miles' desire to show love to everyone was warped into something ugly. He began to believe showing love to others required validation and support for their sin.

Michael wished he could go back in time and teach his son better. If he could do it over, he would instruct him that he should always show kindness, but that doesn't mean he should justify unGodly choices in the name of 'loving our neighbor.' Tolerating sin in the name of love was the mindset that led to a slippery slope of spiritual apathy in Miles. Once his son lost his convictions, it didn't take long before he lost his desire for a relationship with his family as well.

"Ouch!" Michael growled when his razor bit deep into his chin as his thoughts lingered on his unteachable son. Michael rinsed off his razor in the sink and decided he was done getting ready when his wife walked in.

His wife Sophia peeked her head in as she was walking by

the bathroom and teased him, "You know razors are sharp. Right?" She saw that he didn't appreciate her joke. She had known Michael her whole life and could tell his anger had a lot less to do with the cut on his chin and a lot more to do with something stirring inside of him. She stopped teasing and became compassionate, "Are you ok, Honey?"

Even after twenty-six years of marriage, she was still a spitball full of energy. She would complain to him that the children had left her body less than it was back in the early days of their marriage, but Michael didn't care. She was perfect for him. She sacrificed so much so that she could give life to two amazing boys.

But right now he could only think of one of their children, Miles.

"I'm great." Michael responded with just the right amount of cynicism and self-pity to make his wife put down the laundry in her hands and come over and give him a hug.

He inwardly scolded himself, "Great. Now I really feel like a schmuck. I can't even cut myself shaving without needing my wife to comfort me." All that anger seemed to dissipate as she wrapped her arms around him. She stood on her tiptoes to kiss his half-shaven face and rest her head with her auburn hair that smelled like pineapples on his shoulder. He marveled to himself as he felt all his worry dissipating, "How does she make me forget all my problems with one little touch."

He wrapped his arms around her, returned the hug, and enjoyed the embrace from the wife of his youth.

He married her when they were just kids. They met in high school and when they graduated they didn't want to wait another day to get married. So they didn't. Sounds like

those typical rebellious teenagers, but it really wasn't. He loved her and she loved him, but more importantly, they felt like God was calling them together for something bigger than just themselves. He believed it like he believed he needed air to breathe. They were soul mates for a reason.

He had always thought that this calling from God was to be an amazing dad and husband and to love his family well. Maybe even it was to help others with his job as a cop. Now he wasn't so sure. Did he miss God's voice all those years ago? Was it just teenage lust that made him want to marry that beautiful cute little five-foot brunette girl and not God bringing them together?

The more he felt the rebellion from Miles the more he questioned everything he ever believed. His son still loved the Lord. He believed that, but he was pulling further and further away from the family. From him. Nothing good could come from that. He was an adult. He had a right to make his own decisions, but it was more than that. He was seeing Miles pull away from some of the values that accompanied his Christian walk.

Michael would try to tell him "Being a Christian means more than just Sunday morning church, you gotta walk it out!" It didn't go well when he did that though. The most recent spat ended with Miles yelling at him that Michael's version of Christianity was short-sighted and intolerant.

Sophia sensed where his thoughts had turned. "Our boy is going to be ok. He loves Jesus and loves you. Don't forget that," Sophia said as she pulled away from the hug and went back to putting away the laundry.

"How did she do that? How did she know exactly what

I'm thinking!" Michael wondered for about the millionth time in their marriage. But she was right. It didn't do any good worrying about Miles. He just needed to give it to God and move on. His older son, John, needed him. He couldn't let Miles consume all his thoughts.

John was recently engaged to a girl, Katie, from Kansas City which was about two hours south of them. She was a beautiful Christian girl; it was going to be a great match. Michael felt a sense of pride and accomplishment as a father when he reflected on John who was secure in his faith and had much love for his family. Even though his priorities were shifting, as they should, to put Katie first, Michael could still feel the love and affection from John whenever they spoke.

Katie Williams was a newer addition to their family. It was hard for Michael to think of her without tears coming to his eyes. Having had only boys, it was such a pleasure at the thought of soon having a daughter in the family. Adult children, their trials and successes, and now the world news... It seemed the weight of the world was on his shoulders this morning.

The news was applauding yet another great move in Europe towards peace and saying that America must follow suit. France had come out as the leader of social reformation and their leader, President Elyon, had reaped the rewards. His policies had virtually eliminated all violence in the entire country since his election. Other countries were taking notice and considering following suit.

Not only had France experienced unparalleled peace and prosperity as a nation, but they also led the way two years ago in accomplishing the impossible. They negotiated a peace

treaty for Israel. France successfully brokered a treaty among the Arab nations surrounding Israel that called for an end to all hostility with their Jewish neighbors.

There had been attempts by many world leaders over the last two decades to enact a treaty that would end the conflict in the Middle East. It was the white whale of the political world and President Elyon was the first leader to actually succeed at it.

For two years the Middle East has experienced peace like it never had in history. The Jews and Palestinians lived in peace with one another and Elyon was declared a hero for bringing an end to the bloodshed that plagued the region for millennia.

Now, the news was saying that Elyon had the blueprint for peace and other nations should follow suit. The anchors were sharing the opinion of the American public that America should lead the way by following the example of France and take a similar course of action. They speculated that perhaps that way the United States could experience the same level of security and prosperity that France was enjoying.

Of course, Michael wanted peace and people to live in harmony with one another. He was a cop. Practically his entire job description was being a peacemaker. He just couldn't shake the feeling that something about the way it was going down across the ocean didn't sit right with him. He wished he could know more, but the news was only reporting the good and saying nothing of opposing points of view.

That was his first inclination that something wasn't right. Why are all the stories about the success in France one-sided? Where is the unbiased reporting? But it was more than that.

The news hadn't been unbiased in a while. There was just something that made the hairs on the back of his neck stick up whenever President Elyon's praises were sung by the news, but he couldn't quite put his finger on what it was.

Jacob Levi was the father of a traditional American Family. Sure, they were Jewish, but that's where their ethnicity ended. Judaism was just a last name to them, not a religion. Sarah and Jacob met and fell in love just like everyone else in the states. There was no arranged marriage, there was no being married under a chuppah or the bride carried on the chair or the groom stomping on the glass. There was a judge and city hall.

Their son, Benjamin, didn't go to Hebrew school or wear the prayer shawl like his devout and orthodox grandparents did. He played baseball and was lucky to make his math classes on time at the high school. Their daughter, Rachel, loved the violin and would play all day if her parents let her. She probably couldn't even tell you who Moses or the pharaoh was.

They hardly identified with their Jewish heritage, so why did it seem like everyone else only thought of them as Jewish? Everyone they came into contact with seemed to ignore that they were first and foremost American. That didn't matter. All that mattered was their last name, Levi.

It wasn't always like this. Sure, Jacob remembered stories his parents would tell of when it was like this back in Germany in WWII, but that was so long ago. To Jacob, that's all it ever was. Stories. Stories that would never happen again.

At least that's what he thought. He still hoped it would never happen again, but it did seem that things were different now than they used to be toward Jews.

It used to be that people would become outraged at any anti-Semitic comments made. Comedians would be ostracized if they crossed the line, and TV shows canceled if their jokes went too far. Now all that is different.

It had become the norm for Jews to be the punch line for others' amusement. It was nothing too terrible. It was mainly jabs about their physical appearance or greediness. Jacob had ignored all of that. It was after all just jokes.

Today it went further than cheap digs masquerading as anti-Semitic humor. At school, Benjamin refused to cheat for a boy who was failing math. Benjamin wasn't doing much better than failing himself, so it doesn't make sense why the boy wanted him to cheat for him on the test. Probably more Jewish stereotypes that all Jews are smart and successful.

When Benjamin refused to cheat, the boy became irate.

"Everything is handed to you on a silver platter, Jew. Show me your answers during the test or else!" The boy fumed at Benjamin with his hands clenched at his sides.

Benjamin responded, "I'm sorry, I just can't do that. You don't want to cheat off me anyway, like, I'm barely passing Algebra."

"Liar!" The boy yelled as he punched Benjamin square on the nose and walked away.

Benjamin stood stunned for a moment, then he began to process what had happened. Not only was prejudice evident in that boy, but he was surrounded by a crowd of students and even teachers all looking at him with what appeared to be

disgust.

Benjamin went up to one of those teachers that had her arms crossed and was staring at him and said, "Did you see that? He punched me."

It was clear she had no intention of holding that boy accountable when she icily told Benjamin, "Boys will be boys, now return to your class."

Jacob still could not believe that the teacher did nothing. He went storming into the school after he heard the story. He broke every speeding law on the way in, slammed his car door, getting his coat stuck in the door in the process. He had to pause his indignant march into the office long enough to unlock the car and retrieve his uncooperative jacket before resuming his furious steps into the principal's office.

"Jacob Levi here to see Principal Strand," Jacob said before he was even fully inside the doorway.

The principal must have been looking for him out his office window. He was up from behind his desk in seconds and to the door ushering Jacob into the empty seat in front of the desk. As soon as Jacob sat down in the oversized chair that seemed to swallow him whole, he felt dwarfed and like the underdog in a wrestling match as the principal towered over him sitting in his large formal wing-back chair in front of him.

Jacob tried to speak up and inform the principal of the injustice that had happened earlier that day, but before he could say a single word he was cut off.

"I understand there was some unpleasantness this afternoon during school between your son and another boy." The principal continued, "Before you say anything I want you to know that we have decided to be lenient on Benjamin's

behalf.”

Jacob couldn't believe his ears. On Benjamin's behalf? Surely there must be some mistake. The principal must not have gotten all of his facts straight, so Jacob, as calmly as he could, relayed the facts of the day including the teacher dismissing the assault against his son.

When he was finished telling him of the prejudice and assault his son experienced on school grounds, he fully expected a different reaction from the principal this time. Jacob looked expectantly at the principal waiting for an apology and a list of punishments the other boy would receive.

That is not what happened though. Instead, Principal Strand stood up over the chair that Jacob was sitting in. It was clear he was trying to feel superior and intimidate Mr. Levi in the process.

“Let me be very clear,” Principal Strand began with barely controlled rage. “Your son has instigated many arguments that, to be frank, deserved to be handled with a good punch to the nose. Today was the straw that broke the camel's back when he acted like he, a Jew, was morally superior. That boy showed restraint only punching him once and I personally commended him for that. You'd be wise to remind your boy of his place in the order of things and where he will always stand with a last name like 'Levi' and to conduct himself accordingly.”

It was then that Jacob knew something drastic and dangerous had shifted in the world. It was no longer silly jokes aimed at his people, but something far more serious.

“I guess that's irony for you,” he thought to himself. “I

haven't thought of the Jewish people as 'my people' since I was a boy at Saturday Sabbath meals."

Turning from his thoughts and momentarily stunned silence, he took a deep breath and stood to face the principal. Whatever the outcome, he would not face it sitting down in that chair of forced compliance.

Jacob spoke strong and clear without breaking eye contact with his fists balled at his sides, "So is that your final answer? No punishment shall be given to the boy who attacked my son?"

The principal simply nodded and got up and opened the door clearly showing the meeting had come to an end.

Jacob took a deep breath and mustered all the strength he had to stay in control of his emotions. He released his balled-up fists and looked the principal square in the eyes as he passed by him and smiled as he said, "Shalom" and then left.

The principal looked as if he wanted to explode at the single Jewish word uttered in his presence. Principal Strand sneered as he said one final threat, "And if you're thinking about going above my head... don't. I have the full support of the school board in how I handled this." And with that, the principal slammed his office door in Jacob's face.

Jacob may have left the meeting defeated in spirit, but his head was held high. He refused to show any signs of the sadness and fear that he felt in his soul as he continued his walk out to his car.

Just a few moments earlier, he had been filled with purpose and with righteous indignation, and a list of punishments suitable for the offender. Now, he walked out with only questions.

Is this how things started back in Germany? First a few jokes, then sanctioned bullying, and then....worse? He wanted to think it would end here. After all, it's only a broken nose. There are worse things, right?

But then he felt that prickling fear at the back of his mind remind him that's what he thought about the jokes.

When his wife would complain or worry about the rise in anti-Semitic jokes he'd tell her "It's only a few jokes. There are worse things right?" He would remind her of all the strides the world had made to accept Jews. Elyon had done the impossible in Israel and had become a beacon of hope to his people that things were finally moving in the right direction for the Jews. Jacob would tell his wife that it was only a matter of time before Elyon was able to do the same thing and help Jews throughout the rest of the world.

As Jacob got to his car and sat down in it, he wondered for the first time, "What if I'm wrong? What if the worse things keep coming?" He realized at some point he would have to do something before it got any worse, but he wouldn't think about that now. First things first, tonight he will tend to his son's nose and they will spend an evening together. Tomorrow he will remove him from that school. After that? He honestly had no idea.

President Xander Elyon was the leader of what had become arguably the greatest nation in the world. It was only because of him that France had become such a strong nation and there was an end to all violence in Israel for the first time

in history. France wasn't always the richest and most powerful nation. In fact, just recently, it was weak and riddled with turbulence and unrest, but then Elyon came onto the scene and everything changed.

Tall, with a muscular build and a face that looked like God himself, came down and sculpted it, he captured the hearts of his people instantly with his charm and charisma. The news outlets sang his praises as this unknown politician rose to power seemingly overnight.

He had never run for any political office prior to running for president and the media was astounded by his rise to fame. They loved him and their coverage of the months leading up to the election showed clearly who they favored and hoped would win.

He may not have been in the political world before he ran for president, but he was no stranger to power. His parents were some of the wealthiest people in all of Europe and spared no expense in making sure he was raised in the best boarding schools.

He always found it funny how some people felt sorry for him when they learned he grew up away from his family. He never understood why they felt that way as he never had a strong attachment to his parents or really anyone for that matter. All he cared about was himself and boarding school was a great place to make sure that he became the best version of himself possible.

It was when he was a senior at that boarding school that he learned how to tap into a power stronger than himself. He was in a private tutoring session with his math professor, Mr. Blackwood, when the teacher suddenly stopped talking about

the homework which sat in front of them and said, "I have been watching you since you first arrived, Xander. You are capable of greatness."

Elyon remembered how he smiled smugly looking at the discarded math books on the table knowing he was well ahead of most of the kids in his class.

That's not what his teacher was talking about. Mr. Blackwood corrected Xander and shook his head, "No, I'm not talking about school work. Yes, you will use your education, but it's a much bigger thing I am talking about. First, I have to know if you're willing to tap into something bigger than yourself. Something supernatural."

Elyon remembered how he filled his free time in the years leading up to that moment with Mr. Blackwood. He loved anything supernatural. He spent hours playing with ouija boards, dungeon and dragon games, movies with witchcraft, and horoscopes. From a very young age, he loved anything that made him feel connected to things he couldn't see, so he didn't hesitate when he answered, "Of course! If it helps me to be the best, then I want it. What do I have to do?"

Elyon could see it like it was yesterday. Mr. Blackwood stood up from behind the desk and sat on the edge in front of him, "I need more than a quick answer that you didn't think through. I have access to power you can't imagine. You will become capable of things you hardly believed possible, but you need to know what you are agreeing to before you say yes."

He waited to make sure he had Elyon's full attention before he continued, "There is a dark spirit that has been speaking to me about you for many years, Xander. It wants

you to give yourself to it fully." Mr. Blackwood closed his eyes and called out in an evil voice summoning something. Elyon didn't know what it was, but he had never felt anything like it before. All the windows were closed, yet there was a hot breeze that blew through the room.

Elyon remembered the cold feeling he felt in his stomach when Mr. Blackwood opened his eyes, "It's here with us, do you feel it, Xander?"

Even now thinking back, Elyon remembered the moment vividly. There was no denying Elyon felt it, he also felt fear, "Yes. What does it want?"

Mr. Blackwood had become agitated, "I told you. You! It wants you! If you are willing to completely surrender to it, it will give you every dream you have ever had. What do you want, Xander?"

Elyon stopped for a moment to think. His fear was completely forgotten, all he could think of was having his every desire satisfied. "I'm sick of being smarter than everyone yet being beneath everyone in status. I want power. I want to hold people's lives in my hands."

Mr. Blackwood nodded his head like Elyon was on the right track, "Are you willing to, of your own free will, accept the spirit into your life that will enable you for these things and more? Once you say yes, there is no turning back. You will be his, but he will make you great."

Elyon knew that was what he wanted more than anything. He wanted everyone to answer to him. He didn't care how it happened as long as he got what he wanted, "Yes, I accept it."

Instantly, Elyon felt something enter his body. His mind raced with thoughts he had never entertained before. He

never felt affection for anyone, but now he felt hatred toward everyone. His body felt like it was on fire with the sensation of another being consuming him from the inside. He was still himself, but he felt as if there was something else pulling on the puppet strings of his soul.

Before he told the spirit he accepted it, he felt it in the room, but now it was more than that. He could hear it whisper into his ear. As it spoke, it drew out each syllable in a long breathy hiss that smelled of sulfur, "Youuuuuuuu're miiiiiiiiiiiiine."

Mr. Blackwood reached over to his desk drawer. First, he took out a large dagger and laid it on the desk, then he took out a candle from his desk drawer and lit it before walking over to the wall and plunging the room into total darkness except for the single small flame. As he walked back to Elyon he grabbed the dagger and held it in his own hands as he faced Elyon,

"Acceptance of the spirit requires a blood sacrifice."

At that moment, he heard his new spirit guide whisper to him the name of a boy in his class that Elyon often made fun of for being a Christian. Elyon knew exactly what he needed to do. He grabbed the knife from Mr. Blackwood's hand and walked to the unsuspecting boy sleeping in the empty dorm room.

The memory of his first encounter with that spirit so many years ago was fresh in his mind four years ago when he heard that voice whisper to him yet again. This time it hissed into his ear a new word, "Preeeee-sssssssssi- deeeeeent"

He had learned early on to never disobey the voice. When he was in his twenties he tried to defy it one time. He recalled

that as his rebellious thoughts took root his body started experiencing a new sensation. His skin felt like it was on fire and like a thousand ants were crawling all over him. He had tried to get up and shake off the feeling, but the sensation only got more intense.

Next, he felt like his head was going to explode as a ringing in his ears became deafening. He had fallen to his knees with his hands over his ears screaming that he submitted to the will of the voice.

Since then, he never went against what the dark spirit told him to do, so he announced his candidacy the next day and the rest is history. The voice had led him on a path to power. It was a meteoric rise to power unlike anything ever seen before. The voice was right. He was meant to become president.

Under his rule for the last few years, France went from a poor economy and the highest murder rate in the world to the richest and safest country in the world. Every leader in the world wanted to be like his country and share in the success he was experiencing. Leaders of nations came to him begging to be told what to do to experience the same prosperity and success. When he created a successful peace treaty in the Middle East his status as the most likable, successful, and powerful man in the world became complete.

Having power over an entire country and influence over the entire world was more exhilarating than he could have ever imagined.

As Elyon thought back to all the encounters he had with the voice inside of him, he had a feeling the voice wasn't done with him yet. He had a nagging thought that wouldn't leave him alone: there was more that he was supposed to do. He

didn't need the voice to tell him this time; he wanted to do more. It didn't feel enough being the president of simply one nation, even if it was the greatest nation. He wanted more. He would make sure he had more.

CHAPTER TWO

“And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll? But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it.’ - Revelation 5:2-3

Cardinal Benedetto Francis was a small man with few friends. As a boy, he never seemed to fit in with the other children. They teased him for his small stature and wiry glasses. He assumed he didn't fit in with them because he was called to become a servant of the church, but things didn't become any better even as he took his orders and dedicated his life to the ministry. It still seemed as though he didn't quite fit in with the other members of clergy either.

His ideas and interpretation of the Scripture were radically different from his peers. He was obsessed with rebuilding the destroyed Jewish temple because he believed whoever rebuilt it would bring peace to the world.

His fellow clergymen tried to counsel him to the error of his ways, but he argued if his ideas were so wrong why did God bless him with continual promotions? God must agree

with his unorthodox theology because he continued to rise in authority and position within the Church.

He didn't know why thoughts about rebuilding the Temple to bring peace on the earth wouldn't give him any rest, all he knew is they made other people uncomfortable. In the end, he decided that he didn't care if it made them uncomfortable because felt like he would explode if he didn't do something about it.

One evening, as he was resting from his relentless research, he took a walk to clear his mind. As he walked down the alleyways of Rome he went down new pathways he had never taken before, completely lost in thought. Without realizing it, he had wandered miles away from the church and was in a strange part of town.

He found himself in a poorly lit alleyway that was once the heart of all Roman activity. He looked around at the cobblestone streets and imagined the horses that once carried Jewish captives into the city on these very streets almost two thousand years ago.

As he admired the history on the street he was walking, he noticed one stone that looked out of place. Surely his mind was playing tricks on him, but he decided to inspect it closer just in case. He bent down to one knee and, sure enough, one of the stones in the street had a small arrow carved on it.

He spoke aloud to himself, "That's weird. Why is there an arrow carved in a stone in the street?" He looked around to see if any others had the same arrow etched into them, but the one in front of him was the only one out of all the stones that had a carving in it. As he looked closer, he saw that it was pointing toward a building on the right of him.

There was a single cobblestone on the lower corner that matched the cobblestone in the street that had an arrow on it. Benedetto thought to himself, "Could it be a coincidence that there is only one stone in the street that doesn't match the others and it points to a building that has an identical, out-of-place stone? Surely that is more than a coincidence."

Cardinal Francis looked around to see if anyone else was watching him, but the very few people that were present in this poorly populated part of town were too occupied with their own affairs to pay him any attention.

Curiosity drew him to the stone in the building. As he inspected it, he tried to feign less interest than he felt. He wondered, "It's just a stone in a building, so why is my heart pounding; why am I excited about a stone?" But he knew why.

Just like he knew something had given him an obsession with the Jewish temple, he also knew something or someone had drawn him to this long-overlooked stone that stood ignored for almost two thousand years.

He ran his hand lightly across the stone on the building and was shocked to see the mortar begin to break away beneath his fingertips. He looked around one last time to see if anyone was watching before he began to chisel away in earnest at the mortar surrounding the stone. The mortar must have been extremely old because it came apart with ease and it didn't take long before the stone was removed revealing a small opening just big enough for a hand to fit through.

He paused for only a second at the thought of sticking his hand into a dark hole, but then curiosity overpowered his fear as he reached a fist into the hole to see what might be hidden

in the dark space.

I'm sure many would hope for treasure or gold, but he knew when he felt a decaying piece of paper that he had found something more priceless than anything like the commonality that would come from hidden treasure.

With extreme care and gentleness, he pulled out the artifact and saw that the parchment was a papyrus manuscript and was ancient. Sections would disintegrate in his hand if he didn't handle it with care, so he carried it like a fragile infant back to his quarters where he could examine it with the precision needed to preserve the decomposing material from further decay.

When he got back to his home, he gently laid the ancient paper on his dining room table. He saw that portions were already crumbling, so he laid them all on a surface and used specialized tweezers to put the broken pieces together as they originally would have been. It was like trying to piece together a two-thousand-year-old puzzle that would disintegrate with the slightest wrong touch.

Once he got all the broken fragments in order and lined them up with the larger still intact manuscript, he gasped as he saw what he had uncovered. It was an ancient map of the city of Jerusalem before it had been destroyed by the Roman invasion of A.D. 70. On that death march to this Roman city, a Jew must have hidden this ancient scroll in one of the houses being built at that time where it remained untouched until today.

As Cardinal Francis poured over every detail of the map he sank to the chair behind his desk. This ancient artifact clearly showed everything everyone ever thought about the

location of the Jewish temple was completely wrong. This map showed it was in a completely different location than everyone thought.

Rebuilding the temple was one of his odd dreams that made him an outcast his whole life. His interpretation of Scripture was so vastly different than everyone else. One belief he couldn't shake was that if he saw the temple rebuilt, he would, in his lifetime, see God on earth.

Now, the way to make that happen was right in front of him. It was in a location easily purchased. Rebuilding the temple was once again possible if the right person was in charge.

President Elyon's first act as president was to secure the hearts of the French people. Once he accomplished that, he wanted to secure the hearts of the people in the rest of the world. How he would do that was unclear until one summer morning when he was visited by Cardinal Francis of the catholic church.

Xander wanted nothing to do with organized religion and preferred to only pursue paths of spiritual enlightenment. So when his assistant told him that a clergyman was requesting a meeting, he refused.

"Tell him I'm a busy man and cannot meet with everyone who has a whim to see me," Elyon told his assistant, his usual charm wearing thin when it came to matters of religion.

His assistant relayed the message and tried to dissuade the cardinal from trying to meet with him, but the cardinal

refused to give up. He called every day begging for an appointment.

The cardinal begged, "Tell him I have a matter of grave importance that I must speak with him about at once. I will not stop calling until he sees me."

Upon the last message, the president put aside his hatred for religion and decided to speak with the cardinal. It was not out of the graciousness of his own heart, but when his assistant relayed the message the last time he felt that familiar warm breeze and tingling sensation he would often feel when his spirit guide was pleased. If the message pleased the energy surrounding him, he guessed he could suffer through one meeting.

So he summoned the cardinal to meet him on his way to a dignitary luncheon. They could talk on the drive. He figured that way he wouldn't be trapped into a long meeting with a boring religious leader.

When Cardinal Francis got in the car, President Elyon almost laughed out loud. The man was a joke. A balding head with a single wisp of hair going across his forehead trying, unsuccessfully, to hide his receding hairline and glasses that refused to stay on his nose that he was constantly pushing up were just a few of the many features that first stood out to him.

More than his physical appearance, there was the air about him. Fumbling to hold too many things and dropping them all as he got in the limo, Elyon smirked enjoying the display of incompetence set before him.

When Benedetto finally got in, he wasted no time and immediately began sharing about the scroll he had discovered.

Elyon hated to admit it, but this ridiculous man had his attention. Elyon had been waiting for an opportunity to show the world how everyone could benefit from his leadership, and it seemed this little man was delivering the perfect medium to accomplish such a task.

As Francis explained the map to him and outlined the actual location of the Jewish temple, the president was eagerly leaning forward knowing this would unite multiple races and multiple nations around a common goal.

“So what is needed from me to rebuild the temple?” Elyon inquired when Francis was finished.

Cardinal Francis explained, “All that is needed is for someone to purchase the land. That will take money. It needs to be more than that though. It needs to be purchased by someone who has a vision to bring peace to that region. Bringing back the synagogue will endear to every Jewish heart the man that accomplishes this. It will also secure the allegiance of the Arab nations as the Dome of the rock location will no longer be a point of division among the two religions.”

Elyon pondered all this for a moment before responding, “If done well, it will do more than unite those two groups of people. The whole world will be watching and will marvel at the man who was able to unite ancient enemies.”

“You could be such a man,” Cardinal Francis praised. “I have seen the way you have united your country. Everyone who follows you loves you. Many would even worship such a man.”

President Elyon chuckled angrily, suddenly remembering his early disdain for all this man represented by organized religion, “Are you sure you should be speaking with me then?”

Won't that go against the laws of your precious God?"

The cardinal shook his head emphatically 'no' as he responded, "I have been an outcast my whole life because I believe the Bible has been widely misinterpreted. Yes, I am a man of the cloth, but it has not been easy because I believe that the Bible says the opposite of what many teach. They teach that Jesus is to be worshiped above all else. Sure he was a good guy, but I believe one is coming who is far greater than Jesus ever was. He is who I have been searching for my whole life. If you can rebuild the temple, then I believe you are the man I have been looking for."

The president sat back with a satisfied expression on his face. Perhaps he had misjudged this little man, for he had just described what Elyon had believed about himself secretly his entire life. He was capable of great things and when the world saw what he was capable of, they would marvel at him and it would all begin with the rebuilding of the temple.

"I want you to quit your position in the clergy today. You are coming to work for me." The president said it as an order, not a request. You have the vision I want to see spread throughout the world. Our first order of business is for you to secure the purchase of the land. We must start the rebuilding of the synagogue immediately.

Jacob Levi's family were starting to feel some hope even though the world around them was crumbling. The attacks because of their lineage were increasing. Jacob pulled both Benjamin and Rachel from their schools and Sarah began to

homeschool them.

At first, the kids protested. Benjamin begged to stay in and promised he would avoid that boy from now on and there would be no more fights. Rachel cried that she would miss her friends at her high school, but in the end, both children came around to the idea of homeschooling.

It had become easier to sell them to the idea of homeschooling because each time they went out in public the attacks against them increased. They lived in a small town and they were the only Jewish family in the whole town, so it wasn't hard to pick them out when they went to the store.

Sometimes it was small things like people avoiding talking to them, or refusing to serve them at restaurants. Other times it was bigger. More recently, Sarah took the kids with her grocery shopping and as they were loading up the minivan, someone began throwing eggs at them. They left the groceries and quickly got in the van and went home.

Now, Jacob has told them that none of them are to even leave the house unless Jacob is with them. It's not that he is some huge man that would draw fear in the hearts of any who see them, but hopefully, it would be at least a small deterrent to have a man there. If not, at least he could draw the attacks until his wife and children get to safety.

As bad as things were, there was hope on the horizon. Jacob beamed to Sarah one evening, "It's so exciting what Elyon is doing! He might be the best leader I've ever seen! I'm still in shock that he proved where the original location of the temple is, bought the land and has already begun construction!"

Sarah beamed at the news that construction had finally

begun on the temple! A year ago and it wouldn't have phased her. They never even went to the synagogue in their neighboring town. They were Jews in name only and never practiced the faith of Judaism, but as the attacks against their people increased it drew them back to God in many ways. They started to wonder if this was like the trials of the Israelites of old. Was God allowing them to suffer because the Jewish people had rejected Him? Not because God was mad at them, but because he wanted them to return to Him because He loved them.

The Levi family were like those Israelites of old. Their suffering had turned them back to the God of their ancestors. They began reading the Torah together. They still never went to the temple in their neighboring city, but that was more due to the danger of being seen together with a group of Jews. It was a risk they did not want to take with their family.

So they studied the prophets of old together in the evenings as a family. It was like a passion was reignited in all of them of the excitement of waiting for the Messiah. Maybe all these troubles were pointing to the coming of their long-awaited Messiah!

It seemed the rebuilding of the ancient temple was the first step in waiting for the messiah and it was all because of President Elyon!

"Maybe he is the Messiah and will save us from all the troubles we are facing!" Rachel said as she clapped her hands together in youthful excitement.

"Maybe children, maybe, but it's too soon to tell." Their father replied. "For now we continue to pray to God for our persecutions to end and for him to send the Messiah to deliver

us.”

Sarah replied, “Your father is right.” She turned her attention toward Jacob and added, “but it does seem hopeful that things might soon change for the better for us now that the temple is being rebuilt doesn’t it?”

He nodded in agreement and they all prepared for their sabbath meal thinking about the temple being rebuilt for the first time in almost two thousand years. A monumental task that would normally take years to do according to the original specifications of Solomon’s temple. Somehow this miracle of a man, Elyon, had pooled all his financial resources and hired every available contractor in the entire region. It was said the whole project would take less than six months to complete.

Unfathomable! To discover the actual location of the temple, buy the land, and then rebuild it in such record time. This man was truly the first real friend to the Jewish people in a very long time.

CHAPTER THREE

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, 2 through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, 3 who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, 5 for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.” - 1 Timothy 4:1-5

Michael couldn't believe his ears. He knew things were headed toward a dangerous path for a while now. As a cop, he daily saw the rise in anti-Semitic actions. He looked on with disbelief as Bible prophecy was starting to come to life with the temple being not only rebuilt, but rebuilt in record time. It was the largest, most historically accurate building ever constructed and it was weeks away from completion. Those two things alone would be enough to have his head spinning, but now there was more.

There had been a rise in false teachers over the last decade.

It seemed every year, a once-respected Bible leader would fall from grace in either some hidden scandal coming to light or, as was more common now, coming forward with a watered-down truth of the gospel.

False teachers were not new. What was new was the once head cardinal, Cardinal Francis, coming out and publicly proclaiming that the majority of Christians throughout history have been misinterpreting the Bible.

He called a press conference and said in that 'I'm smarter than you, so you better pay attention voice,' "A common false teaching is that Jesus is the only way to heaven. That is simply not accurate. There are many paths to truth. As a former leader of one of the largest Christian denominations in the world, I implore everyone to listen to the sound of my voice and to relinquish the intolerant and hateful parts of your faith. Only adhere to those elements of your beliefs that promote tolerance."

Unfortunately, people listened to him and what was once a watered-down word became hardly recognizable as the Gospel anymore in most churches. People regularly claimed that Jesus was not the only way to heaven and that preaching sin was hate speech and should be punished. Free speech was no longer free if it was speaking about what the Bible calls sin.

As an officer, Michael saw the progression. It started with threats against people that spoke the truth about the Bible, but it quickly grew from there as more and more false teachers arose carrying the banner of the message of Cardinal Francis. It was like Christians who had been in church their whole lives no longer wanted to hear the truth. They sought out

teachers who would tell them what they wanted to hear and threatened and berated the preachers who spoke of living a life like Christ lived and having a standard of holiness.

The screaming mobs' cries of "How dare you judge me," and "I have my truth and you have yours" did not stop there. Instead, it grew to demands for justice against the intolerant. They claimed that it was the hate of the extremist Christians that was leading to so much social unrest and they must be stopped at all costs.

The tides of the opinion of the masses had shifted. They blamed Christians who they deemed too fundamental as the reason for their suffering and they wanted them to pay the price. Christians who believed a full-gospel message were starting to meet together in houses secretly as that was becoming the only safe way to talk about everything in the Bible without retribution from the public.

Michael's job as a police officer was to be a peacemaker. To stop injustice and fight for the rights of all individuals, but that job was becoming harder and harder every day. Call after call would come into the precinct. The 'extremist' Church was vandalized and burned down. Fundamental Christians had their homes broken into and their possessions stolen. 'Haters' who preached salvation from sins were beaten.

The response from his captain was always the same, "Stand down. Do not respond to incidents of violence, theft, or destruction toward an extremist Christian group."

Michael saw lawlessness increasing daily. They didn't call it lawlessness. They called it fair play and that they were saving the court's time for cases of true injustice. Whenever Michael would question the fairness of it all, he was met with

the same response. It's the Christians' fault. All they have to do is stop telling people the way they live their life is sinful and all the things they are enduring would end. Their unwillingness to stop shows just how extreme and dangerous their beliefs were and how important it was to send a message that they are stopped.

It was the worst where he worked in Omaha, but his little town south of there where he lived was not much better. His home of Nebraska City had less than eight thousand residents and was usually insulated from the craziness of big cities. That didn't seem to be the case anymore. Even his little city had a drastic rise in violence towards Jews and Christians.

It was not only here in the midwest. Michael was hearing reports like this from cities all over the country. It seemed that the higher-ups in every city were following a similar protocol. Laws were only applied to protect those who were not Christian or Jewish. If Christians didn't follow the teachings of Cardinal Francis they were deemed too extreme to deserve the protection of the law.

Michael came home from another day of not being allowed to help his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. He waved to his sons, Miles and John, who sat on the couch watching TV and then threw down his badge and belt on the table as he complained to his wife, "What is the point of being a cop if I can't help anyone!"

She gave a sympathetic smile, but before she could offer him comforting words Miles paused his show and piped in, "I don't know what you're complaining about. It's their own fault that you can't help them."

Sophia looked at him unable to hide her surprise as she

heard her son describe the persecution Christians were under. “You’re kidding, right? Please tell me you don’t believe that. You’re a Christian too. Your logic would mean dad shouldn’t help you.”

Miles responded, “I don’t know that I’d classify myself like that anymore. I’m more spiritual than religious.”

Michael couldn’t believe his ears. Was his son rejecting everything he had ever been taught to be true? Surely he was misunderstanding his meaning, but the more Miles spoke the more Michael realized the truth; Miles had wandered away from the faith.

Miles couldn’t leave it alone. He had to drive the point home of why he felt his parent’s beliefs were so wrong. He peppered each word like bullets aimed for the heart of his parents as he continued, “I’m not so ignorant to believe only Christians go to heaven. I’m not intolerant and unloving like most of you are. I believe that people aren’t sinning just because they make choices that are right for them.”

Sophia became angry at the changes she saw in her son, “What happened to you? Have you lost all common sense?” She tried to stop herself, but sometimes her mouth ran away with her. She always struggled to know when she should hold her tongue and when she should speak her mind. “We raised you better than that. There is no morality apart from God.”

Miles didn’t respond in kindness or humility to his mom out of respect for her. He lashed out with what felt like years of pent-up hostility, “Who are you to say what is right to believe? You’ve done nothing short of brainwashing me all those years growing up making me go to church and telling me Jesus is the only way to heaven. Closed-minded people

like this family are what is wrong with the world.”

Up until that moment, Sophia had hoped that her son was only pulling away from the family, but that his core values had stayed strong. The more he spoke though, the more she realized he was pulling away from everything he was raised to believe.

She wanted to change the subject and try and redeem the evening, “Let’s just have a nice night together, ok son? Dinner’s ready. I made your favorite.”

She smiled with more enthusiasm than she felt as she tried to muster up the strength for a happy family dinner. They all gathered around the table and Michael said grace. When he finished, the men sat at the table while Sophia went to the kitchen to bring in the dinner she was eager to surprise her son with.

As she carried the plate to the table, she remembered the many nights as a child when he would beg for Chicken Parmesan for dinner. It had always been one of his favorites, but she hadn’t made it in years because the government had passed legislation stating that eating meat was banned and labeled as cruelty to animals.

As a child and young adult, she must have read the verses in 1 Timothy 4:1-5 a hundred times that said in the end times people would be commanded to abstain from foods which God deemed worthy to eat.

She had never thought anything of those verses. It seemed impossible to imagine her life could be regulated by the government regarding what foods she was allowed to eat.

Like everything that had changed in the world, it started small. It started with increased taxes on the ranchers and

grocery stores that carried meat products. Over time those taxes grew to fines on the general population for consuming meat.

People found ways around the rules for a while. They'd buy meat from local farmers. Who would have thought there'd be a black market to eat a cheeseburger. It was laughable, but even that became cracked down on as of late.

Anyone could receive a fine for being caught in the possession of meat, but the harshest penalties were for those that performed the processing of meat for consumption. Those that butchered the animals would not only receive high fines, but all animals in their possession would be immediately confiscated and they would face a minimum of a year jail time for animal abuse.

Sophia always had chickens. When these laws came about, she was careful to follow them and not eat her chickens. She didn't agree, but it wasn't worth jail time to eat their favorite meals. She kept her chickens for their eggs and was grateful to at least have access to protein that way.

However, she saw her family splintering apart and she was desperate to bring them back together. A mom of adult sons has very few tools to capture her boys' hearts, so a good home-cooked meal was the first thing she thought of to bond them together again.

When she stood at the table, she proudly placed the steaming hot plate of Chicken Parmesan smothered in cheese on the table and beamed with anticipation of the joyful memories the meal would evoke in her youngest, wayward child.

The hope of new, sweet memories the dinner would create

was quickly erased as she saw Miles look at the meal in front of him and then up to her with eyes full of animosity and accusation.

Miles sneered as he asked her, "And what are we eating tonight?" He paused before finishing with hostility dripping from his voice, "Mother."

Sophia's smile instantly vanished. The pain mixed with love was palpable in each word she spoke, "I made it for you Miles. It's your favorite." She tried to remind him of better days and times when they had laughed around the table together as they shared this very meal, but he would have none of it.

Miles interrupted her stories of memories he didn't want to relive, "I knew your chickens weren't only for eggs. You claim to have the moral high ground as Christians, yet you break the law by abusing the animals in your care!"

John could see his mom becoming more hurt with each passing second and couldn't help but interject even if it made his brother mad, "Lay off of mom. She was trying to do something nice for you.... even though you've done nothing to deserve it!"

Miles shot his brother a look that would scare most men into submission, but not John. John just stared right back at him, not flinching or blinking. He would not back down when it came to protecting those he loved even if that meant protecting them from his over-eager brother.

Miles blinked first and looked away from John and back to his mother as he pushed the platter to the center of the table and away from him, "Well I won't be eating a meal that breaks the law. You're lucky I don't report you, mom!"

Sophia gasped at the sudden realization that her son seemed like he didn't even love her anymore. She didn't understand what she could have possibly done to make such a change in him. She looked at him with longing for the relationship she once had with him and wished she could have again. Her eyes began to fill up with tears.

She couldn't take another second and made up an excuse to leave the room, but all she was doing was trying to find a quiet place to cry and everyone knew it. She was crying for her son who was so lost and confused and also because she felt like a failure as a mother. Maybe if she was able to respond with soft words and more kindness in her tone he wouldn't have turned away from God. She wondered if his waywardness was really her fault.

Miles rolled his eyes as she left and his dad exploded in anger, "Have you no love for us or gratefulness for all we have done for you? You show no compassion to your mother in her pain? What is wrong with you?"

"Nothing is wrong with me! You're the one who is blind!" Miles yelled as he stood up from the table.

Michael realized he was letting anger control him and raised his hands in surrender and said, "We will talk later. Please Miles, remember who we raised you to be." And with that, he walked out of the room to comfort his wife.

John Hill was left to pick up the pieces of yet another family fight. It didn't use to be like this. They all used to get along so well. One big happy family they would often joke about together. Somewhere, all that changed. It seemed Miles

found the wrong friends who started to introduce him to dangerous ideas. They didn't call it dangerous. They called it free thinking, but Miles didn't see how it slowly changed him into something so much uglier than he used to be.

He used to be the kindest and most generous guy ever. He'd give up all he had to make someone else happy. He lived for the Lord and his heart broke when he made mistakes. Somewhere with his new friends, all that changed. He started attending their church that preached tolerance to all beliefs.

John had, with his parents, tried to tell his younger brother that it wasn't intolerant to simply say something was a sin, but that you still loved that person despite their sin. Miles wouldn't hear of it. He was starting to buy into the ideology that he was surrounding himself with. If anyone dared to say anything was wrong he called them hate-filled.

Calmly, John tried once again to win his brother's ever-hardening heart over to the truth, "Where does it end Miles? If there is no right and wrong, where is the moral line? You can't believe that you are like God and can decide what is right and wrong do you?"

Miles, still full of anger, had venom in his words as he spoke, "Yes! My truth is my own. I don't need you or the Bible to tell me what's right or wrong. I'll decide that for myself and until you accept me for who I am I want no part of any of you!"

With those last words, he turned and left the room and slammed the door behind himself. John sighed with a heavy heart knowing that whatever pain he felt his parents felt ten times more. As he went to sit alone on the living room sofa, he could hear his mom crying in the bedroom saying it felt like

death losing their child to the world.

Their pain was something more and more Christians were experiencing. It seemed every day more Christians were being enticed into Cardinal Francis' religion of acceptance of all beliefs and lifestyles and those who refused to follow were left picking up the pieces of broken relationships.

Christians were leaving churches that taught the Bible as the actual word of God in droves. Though young and still in his early twenties, John had never seen anything like it in his lifetime. How could so many people be drawn away by preachers speaking only what they wanted to hear and not speaking the truth? How could his brother be drawn away by such lies?

They had both grown up in the same house and were taught the same things. They went to church every Sunday and grew up knowing right from wrong, but somewhere Miles hardened his heart and in the process broke his parents' hearts.

In all the pain of the day, John decided to call and check on his fiance, Katie, before checking on his parents. He was so eager for the day when he would marry her and could comfort her daily, face to face and not over the phone.

Of course, weddings looked different now than they used to. The government no longer referred to the union of a couple as a marriage. The consensus among the general public was that marriage was a traditional, Biblical, and archaic institution.

Marriage was deemed a failed experiment. Those in favor of doing away with marriage stated the examples throughout history that they believed proved marriage as a dangerous

practice.

They would claim that in the 1950's it was racist because it only allowed people of the same race to marry. In the early 2000's they said it was homophobic and wouldn't allow the homosexual community to create an equal union. Every time the government would get involved and try to legalize change to marriage there would be another crisis to regulate.

To the majority of the world, the word marriage had become a hate word implying exclusivity and superiority. Marriage pointed to outdated traditions instead of the enlightened agenda of the current political ideologies.

Instead of trying to redefine marriage yet again, the government simply did away with validating traditional marriage in any way. There were no longer tax breaks for the married or a recognition of rights to property or the ability to share in a spouse's health benefits. Every financial incentive to marry was done away with and applied to a new concept called commitment contracts.

Commitment contracts were an agreement of intimate partnership for a specific length of time. It could be a contract with two people or with ten. It didn't matter how many, who or what was in the commitment contract. Anyone in the contract was entitled to large tax breaks for their relationship as well as recognition from the government that their relationship was legitimate.

Large ceremonies that looked like traditional weddings still took place, but the outcome was different. Now the end result was a short term contract that entitled those named in the contract to legal recourse for finances, property and other such rights once applicable only to married couples.

At the end of the contract term, those in the relationship could choose to renew the contract for another set of predetermined years or they could dissolve the contract with ease. Divorce was no longer a major legal hassle that took years to complete with fights in the courtroom. All you had to do was wait till the end of the contract and follow the plan laid out in writing. Every contract had a section for the dissolution and non renewal of the relationship. Divorce was built into the relationship as an inevitability.

1 Timothy 4:1-5 was coming to life before their eyes where the Bible prophesied that in the end times people would be forbidden to marry. It now made more logical sense to complete a commitment contract than it did to marry.

Christians had a choice to make. Would they take the financial and legal benefits of a commitment contract, but as a result have to plan for their eventual divorce? Or would they follow the traditional path of marriage that was created by God and not a man-made institution?

Many believers initially participated in commitment contracts. They vowed that they would stay strong in their beliefs and when the time came to renew, they would renew for the rest of their lives. However, that rarely happened. Relationships are hard and when the 'out' is already built in and planned for in advance the temptation to take the easy way is extremely hard to resist, no matter how good their intentions were.

Over time, Christian leaders started openly preaching to avoid the commitment contracts at all cost and have a traditional marriage. Marriage had become nothing more than a ceremony provided by a pastor. There were no longer

wedding certificates or legal incentives to getting married. It wasn't even possible to take a husband's name anymore legally.

The marriage ceremony that the world deemed antiquated was significant for those that chose that path. It was a statement that the couple was choosing to have their relationship be modeled after what the Bible deemed good and not after what the world deemed expedient and beneficial. It was a choice to deny themselves the privileges the government offered to those in a commitment contract and instead say that there was no end date in mind. It was a lifelong vow before God.

John was looking forward to his marriage, not just his commitment to Katie. So they planned a big ceremony. He wanted her to feel loved and adored and to know marrying her was the most important thing in the world, even as they were surrounded by so much chaos.

She wouldn't be legally allowed to take his name, but she told him that the government couldn't stop her from having all her family and friends call her by her new name. She said that on the day they would be married she would no longer be called Katie Willaims. To those who love her, she would forever become Katie Hill.

John lived in the country on a big piece of land with his parents and she lived in Kansas City. Her home was about two hours away southeast of him. Not terribly far, but in this crazy world sometimes it seemed like a lifetime away. Whatever problems he and his family were facing here as Christians were nothing compared to what Katie faced living in a big city. Things were so much more violent there and the police

force was practically powerless to combat the rising lawlessness. He worried so much for her so far away.

Their wedding was still nine months away, but the more the unrest seemed to build in society, the more he thought maybe it was better to do the wedding sooner than later. That way, whatever they faced, at least it would be together. His parents didn't agree, but that was probably because they worried for him. The plan was to move to the city once they got married so she could be close to her family and that scared his parents.

Scared or not, John was becoming more confident daily that it was his duty to protect Katie and that they needed to be married. John looked at the bedroom where he heard his mother weeping and decided he could wait till another day to tell his mom that.

Michael spent hours comforting his wife, well, trying to at least. He seemed at a loss of what to say to her. He was hurting too and just wanted to scream or throw something, but he couldn't do that right now. He had to be strong for her.

So he said all the things he thought might help. He told her that it wasn't her fault, that she was a good mom, and that Miles would come back around. He was just spreading his wings. Michael hoped he was right and Miles would come back around.

Sophia cried herself to sleep in Michael's arms and as he stroked her hair waiting for her to fall asleep he began to doze. That is when the dream began.

Michael was standing on a tall cliff similar to the one in his

previous dream that everyone walked off of, but it was different this time. There was a single cottage nestled comfortably in the tree line with a stone fireplace reaching above the roof. Out of it came a plume of smoke from the fire inside the home and a strip of wood hung above their front door that read, "Patterson Family."

Michael noticed the lush grass dotted with wildflowers surrounding the front of the home and a beautiful blue sky that seemed to stretch on forever. He felt such peace as he looked around him. As he took a few steps closer to the cottage and looked through the window by the dining room table and noticed a family inside. They looked so happy. A mom cooking at the stove and a father sitting at the table reading the Bible while a little girl no more than six years old and her baby brother sat on the floor in front of the fire playing with dolls.

It was such a beautiful picture, Michael wanted it to never end. It was a perfect family enjoying a perfect day together, but something was not quite right. Michael couldn't figure out what it was at first, but as he looked closer all around the cabin, he noticed a shadow lurking in the tree line just beyond their home. It didn't move like the rest of the shadows that bent in the proper direction according to the movement of the sun. Instead, it moved as if it had a mind of its own like it was alive, but it didn't have the form of either a man or a beast.

Michael had lost the safe feeling he felt just a few moments earlier, but it didn't matter. He had to figure out what he was seeing. The shadow glided back and forth as if it was pacing the length of the cabin eager to pounce on it. Michael approached it. He could see it, but it didn't seem to be able to

see him. At first, it looked as if it was faceless, but the closer he got the more that Michael could see it did indeed have a face. It was grotesque and disfigured and looked more like a beast than a human shrouded in a veil of black.

Michael shuddered and wanted to run away, but he knew he must stay and see what happened to the family inside the cottage who remained completely unaware of the evil that lurked just outside.

As the shadow left the woods and crept closer to the cottage, Michael could see clearly that instead of teeth it had sharp fangs and those fangs were dripping with blood like it had recently killed and eaten its prey. It looked hungry as it got closer to the little family.

Michael saw the mother set the dinner at the table and sit down. The kids came running and sat down too and they all joined hands and bowed their heads and prayed before they ate their meal.

The shadow sent a shriek into the air that brought with it many more shadows. They were all intent, it seemed, on harming this little family who felt safe in their hidden home and who had done nothing more than pray.

The home became surrounded by shadows and Michael knew death was just moments away for the residents inside. He tried to scream, but no sound came out. He tried to run to help them, but his feet stayed in place like they were cemented to the ground below him.

The little six year old girl inside the cabin suddenly turned from her meal and looked directly at him through the front window. She looked at him with eyes that seemed to bore into Michael's soul and with her voice she called out to him with a

strength and volume she should not have possessed and cried out, "Warn them!"

With that, Michael woke up with the words, "Warn them!" echoing in his mind.

He couldn't sleep after that and decided since his shift at work was only an hour away, he would go in early and get a head start on the day. When he came to his office to see the items to complete for the day, his eye caught on the top sheet. It was an order to raid and detain a family suspected of preaching hate. Their name was Patterson.