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**Chapter 1**

The ground is hard, and the dust chokes his lungs, but he must run. The night is dark, and he stumbles on sharp rocks, but he must run. They have found him. He doesn’t know how, but they have found him. He follows the path away from town, away from his family, and away from his son. His legs are strong, incredibly strong. All in his family had this strength, passed down from the man who was healed by Jesus. The story passed down to him by his family was just as the Bible had recorded. Jesus was teaching in a home that was packed with people. Some men wanted to bring a cripple to Jesus to be healed. They couldn’t get through, so they climbed to the roof, cut a hole in it, and lowered the man down right in front of Jesus. Jesus smiled as he looked up at the faithful friends of this man. He looked intently at the man and said “Your sins are forgiven,” but that wasn’t enough for the Jewish leaders. Jesus showed his power as God by healing the weak, broken legs of this man.

His name was Johnathan. He followed Jesus after the healing, even walking the way of the cross that fateful day. He lost his friend at the cross execution that weekend. For months, Johnathan was amazed at the strength his legs now had as a result of the healing. Not just strong, incredibly strong. He found a job carrying bricks from the clay furnace to town, a hot, dusty five-mile walk he made many times a day. Most of his coworkers could make the difficult journey several times a day, but he did it ten times a day. At first, he walked as the others did, but soon he found that running with a sixty-pound sack didn’t even cause him to sweat. Many watched in confusion and fear as this man healed by Jesus sprinted through his day. He had six children, four boys and two girls.

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They all possessed the same strength in their legs and torso. They produced twenty children who also had the gift of strength. It seemed that the result of the healing was passed down somehow in the DNA of every family member until tonight. Tonight, the last relative of this family was running for his life. He had no children, and his only family was that of a friend who had died suddenly two years earlier. He had taken them into his small home and cared for them as a father would. Now, he was running, praying they would not find the family and mistake them for his offspring. He was run- ning wild, fast, incredibly fast, fueled by fear, angst, and hope—hope that he could out run the vehicle now careening over the dunes he was practically floating over. He caught the first bullet in the arm and didn’t event slow for a moment.

The next bullet slammed into his shoulder, slowing for a moment, then back to a full sprint. The next three bullets landed in his lower back, and he went down hard. He was lying face down, his spine now shattered, his powerful legs hanging limp and useless, he blinked as he was rolled over and a light was flashed in his eyes. “Stupid animal, do you think you could out run us for the rest of your life? You are a corruption of nature, a freak who will die alone, weak, and powerless. After we finish with you, we will kill your fam- ily, tearing each leg out of its socket before we slit their throats. Allah be praised, you will not live to destroy our faith!” The last thing the man saw were the pins coming out of the two grenades he held and the look of horror as the attackers knew their lives would be forfeited tonight in the name of the cause. “The SOTH live!” he cried, “Jesus will be made known again!” Then the flash of death came over them all.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Dr. Lyndon Johnson Batchelor, called Lindey by his friends, pushed the laptop away in frustration and confusion as he read yet another critique of his latest blog on the healing touch of Jesus Christ and the historical ramifications of it if Jesus was really God come down to man. As a professor of history and antiquities, Lindey was

fascinated by the stories of all the healings that occurred in the Bible when Jesus walked and ministered to the people some two centu- ries ago. There had to be hundreds, maybe thousands, who experi- enced his touch during those three years of intense, world-changing ministry.

The events recorded in the four gospels contained reports of many kinds of healings done in many different ways. Some of them happened face-to-face as Jesus reached out and touched people who were healed instantly. Other healings occurred at a distance, with just a word or a thought from the travelling teacher of a new faith. Some occurred because of a person’s faith, and others occurred in spite of their little faith. Some were healed as they cried out, and others were raised from the dead with no request made at all. Lindey struggled with the concept of miracle healings, but he was also drawn to the possibilities. His father had fought a valiant battle with leukemia, but had succumbed to the disease and passed away on a stormy night some eighteen months ago. His mother was brokenhearted to lose her partner of forty-five years, but she never questioned God or the reason her husband was called away at this time in their lives.

Lindey’s older brother, Brock, a pastor of a growing church in Atlanta, performed the service and brought hope and strength to the attendees there that day—all except for Lindey and his younger sister Gwen. Gwen was an avowed atheist, walking away from the family faith when she graduated from Georgia Tech with a degree in engineering. She received no comfort from Brock’s words, she just sat there, sad, lost, and feeling the pain of losing the one man she could always count on to love her with no strings attached.

Lindey listened to his brother’s words, words about eternal life, an active and fulfilling place with the creator, and an eternal future for all who put their hope in Jesus Christ. Lindey had embraced his father’s faith like all of the family, learned the Bible from his youth, and determined to walk with God as he entered college, and started his life teaching others at the university.

Now, after crying out to God to heal his father, only to see him die in pain and suffering, Lindey was taking time out to consider this God of love. Did he really love that deeply? Was he really that

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concerned about his creation, or had he lost interest, allowed things to unwind, get out of hand, and slip into the morass that most of the world endured at this time in history. No, Brock’s words fell on deaf ears for Lindey like they did for Gwen, but for very different reasons.

Qa’im, Iraq

The message had to be convincing but needed to be couched in enough mystery so as to allow for deniability in case she was discov- ered. Akifah was adept at computer hacking and knew this professor of history would not discover her ultimate plan until it was too late. She composed an e-mail that read:

Please, Dr. Batchleor, travel to Lebanon Connecticut, to start your journey. You will meet an old man who will tell you of the history of the people Jesus healed. I have read your blog and can see your interest is genuine and born out of a passion for truth. Your truth journey starts in Lebanon, Connecticut, where you will meet Edgar Collingsworth. Ask him why he hides behind such an English name when his real name is Ariz Mohamad Aasad.

She pressed send and knew this was exactly what the professor needed to start his journey to find the leaders of the SOTH. Then she would be right there by his side, ready to kill them all. Akifah was a devoted Muslim and an elite agent and assassin who was part of the Cleansing Group out of Iran. She had been trained for espionage and murder since the age of 17, when she discovered the SOTH were involved in her family’s mass extinction in a small town the SOTH had taken over in the early 1600s. She made a promise to their mem- ory that she would find the leaders of the SOTH and wipe them out with Allah’s vengeance. This American professor would be the lead she would follow all the way to the SOTH leaders.

Lindey eyed the e-mail with interest and doubt. Who would send such an e-mail and make it impossible for him to respond or even know who the sender was? He was interested enough to do a search of the town Lebanon, Connecticut, and of one of its elders, Edgar Collingsworth. The town had a modest beginning in 1700, where a group of families from England settled there, and lived for the most part, alone and sequestered behind large homes and larger walls formed by the connecting of each home at unique angles.

The Wikipedia report went on to reveal that this small town, today only 3500 strong, had produced seven governors, fifteen sen- ators, and thirty-three state representatives, all related directly to the seven families that founded the town back in 1700. That was interesting, but there was more. Lebanon, Connecticut, enjoyed a rich and religious history as well, sending out hundreds of Christian missionaries, mainly to the Arab countries where that faith was not honored and even illegal in some places. Lindey wondered why so many leaders and servants came from one small town, and who was Edgar Collingsworth? Once again, a few keystrokes later, and Lindey was looking at the handsome face of Edgar Collingsworth VII. This rendition of the Collingsworth clan was tall, fit, with fiery eyes that flashed of passion and love, even from just the digital rendition. He was a graduate of Oxford College in England, where he excelled in computer science at one of those DNA research companies.

He had been married for thirty-two years before losing his wife to an auto accident that left him paralyzed from the waist down. He moved back to Lebanon, Connecticut, ten years ago to serve as the town custodian, which was a position somewhat like a museum curator and historian all mixed together. Edgar VII fathered two chil- dren, both serving oversees in politics or in the government at very influential and powerful levels. The search did not reveal his home address, but it did show the address for the local office where he served four days a week. Lindey called his college employer and asked for a couple of days off to do some historic studies in a town in the Northeast. Five days later, he was on a train out of Philadelphia, PA, to Lebanon, Connecticut.

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Akifah tracked the professor’s keystrokes with the deft talent born of necessity and hunger. She knew that understanding how to hack a personal computer and follow every action taken was some- thing she needed to become an expert in, and she was. She saw the request for leave, the train ticket purchased online, even the hotel that Professor Batchleor was going to stay at, all neatly copied by the software program she had been trained on by certain members of the Cleansing Group, as they called their group.

It was more like a culture than a group. The Cleansing Group was created for one purpose only, to identify, track, and eliminate all families related to the sect of the healed, better known as the SOTH. The SOTH was formed after the people healed by Jesus began to experience an organized and deadly attack from several entities. Each person, who had received the healing touch of Jesus, was experienc- ing a residual effect, something that the supernatural experience left in their bodies. In fact, each person found they possessed certain physical, spiritual, and mental abilities they had not possessed before the encounter with Jesus. Each had also experienced the anger of the local Jewish synagogue where they were excommunicated and left with no communal support. Any person admitting to having been healed by Jesus was told to give glory to Jehovah and reject Jesus, or risk losing the opportunity to the Jewish support system they had known all their life. Many came forward and risked the shunning, as they told their stories, which were backed up by eyewitnesses.

The Jewish leaders were hopeful that by killing this renegade carpenter, and scattering his followers, they would end the move- ment like so many movements before had been ended. But this was not just another movement. Jesus had brought a message of love community, faith, and peace where the religious systems were bring- ing, well, religion. The people healed by Jesus had to be silenced, no matter what the cost.

Many of the healed came together after losing their place at the synagogue. They moved to small towns that did not seek to silence them. They lived out their lives in secrecy, but never between each other. They shared their stories often, with each other and their fam- ilies. One of the leaders coined the name SOTH, standing for “sect

of the healed.” They knew God wanted them to do more than live in hiding, that he wanted them to be part of the fledgling movement that was growing across the region through the apostles of Jesus. They began to connect with the apostles, asking to serve in the movement created by their newly found savior and healer, Jesus Christ. When the religious leaders scattered the apostles soon after Jesus’s death, SOTH members moved with them, spreading their influence and families throughout the Roman Empire.

The Cleansing Group began to grow as well. Several religious leaders met with Roman leaders to squash the Jesus movement. They asked for the “Christ ones” leaders to be rounded up and prosecuted for blasphemy. Rome didn’t care about petty Jewish squabbles, but they did care about maintaining order and control. The Jerusalem religious leaders caught on to this and painted a picture of social and political chaos if the movement was left unchecked. Some Roman leaders committed to work with some of the Jerusalem religious leaders and formed a pact dedicated to systematically wiping out all people who had experienced the healing touch of Jesus. This was the beginning of the Cleansing Group.

Today the group is larger, well-funded, extremely diverse, and unified around the total destruction of the SOTH relatives. It includes Muslims whose families experienced the power of SOTH members during the wars against the Jews and Christians in the first century. They see the SOTH as a direct threat to the Muslim faith, and the only choice they have is to kill the infidels whose DNA is an abomination to Allah. It contains nonreligious members who see this cultic group as a block to their plans to introduce a faith-free world based on man’s intellect and self-determined force of will. There are leaders from the catholic and protestant faiths, threatened by any- thing not part of their own religious control and power structure. They see the SOTH as a potential challenge to the well-established religion of the time. There are members of the satanic church who believe the SOTH are destined to cause a great ingathering soon as they share the proof of their experience with the world. This cannot happen in their eyes. There are even governments, The United States of America included, who want to capture and use SOTH mem-

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bers to fight against their opponents by accessing the powers of this supernaturally gifted population. These diverse groups, while never working together officially, have shared information and used each other throughout the centuries to achieve their goals of cleansing the planet of the SOTH at all costs.

Today, there are under one thousand SOTH members left in the world. They keep in touch by sophisticated software designed by some of the gifted members, and they are preparing to let the world know the realty of God and his son, Jesus. They possess certain arti- facts that have been hidden and held in preparation for the time God revealed they should be shared with the world. Things such as the nails used at the cross, the cup and plate Jesus used at the last supper, even the many Jewish treasures, including the Ark of the Covenant, protected all this time by Templar families. Yes, the world would see, the world would believe, and the world would return to the God who loves them enough to die and rise again for them.