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former Navy commander and F-18 fighter pilot, author of *Resurrect*

THE
BROTHERHOOD
CONSPIRACY

A NOVEL

TERRY
BRENNAN

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The Brotherhood Conspiracy: A Novel

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*To my sisters, Pat and Kathie;
And to my brother, Butch—
your years were much too short.*

THE PRESENT · TUESDAY, JULY 21

New York City

Open-mouthed, Tom Bohannon, executive director of the Bowery Mission in New York City, watched as an earthquake in Jerusalem changed the future of the world.

Television news helicopters hovering a few hundred feet over the yawning chasm of the Temple Mount broadcast a surreal scene. From the center of the crater came billows of white, smokelike, limestone dust. As if released from a subterranean faucet, torrents raged from both ends of the ragged “V” that cleaved the Mount in two from east to west. New rivers swept through the Kidron Valley from one end of the cleft and into the streets of Old Jerusalem from the other.

Bohannon stared at the television screen in mute shock. Moments before, he had watched the first ritual sacrifice in a Jewish temple in more than two thousand years—a temple that was hidden under the Temple Mount for a millennium, a temple that he had helped discover. Now, the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque had disappeared into the spreading cleft of the Mount’s platform, the flat stone base, supported by Herodian arches, upon which the Dome and the mosque once stood. Bohannon felt decades older than his fifty-eight years. His normally straight, strong six-foot frame sagged at shoulder and waist as huge slabs of the platform fell into the crater’s black maw.

Unseen, deep in the bowels of the Mount’s underground caverns, the Third Temple of God lay crushed under tons of stone and debris.

“It’s gone.”

Jerusalem

With the first shockwave, Captain Avram Levin was thrown off his high stool overlooking the banks of television monitors in the Aleph Reconnaissance Center. He crashed onto his right shoulder on the hard concrete floor. Pulling against the railing with his left arm, he was on his feet when the second shock hit. This one buckled the room in the middle, then a wave of movement flowed through the room, cresting as it hit the buckle. Half of the Aleph Center slipped away to the right amid a hail of sparks, taking screaming men and crashing equipment with it as it dropped into a crevasse where once was solid ground.

Levin's left hand throbbed as he squeezed the rail with all his strength, his feet trying to find purchase on the wildly dancing floor. Bile rising in his throat, Levin willed his eyes away from the ragged opening that had just consumed his men. He turned his gaze to the few monitors that were still transmitting. A gaping cleft spread across the Temple Mount, swallowing everything in its wake.



Eliazar Baruk was on his feet, stunned at the swiftness of the destruction, his eyes still glued to the now blank television screen. His right hand grasping the corner of his desk for support, the Israeli prime minister felt the eruption of random shifts ripping at the foundations of his office on Kaplan Street in Qiryat Ben-Gurion, between the Bank of Israel and the Ministry of the Interior.

Screams . . . shouts . . . running feet . . . crashing metal.

A massive chunk of concrete fell from the ceiling, crushing a corner of Baruk's desk. The door to his office splintered and snapped clear from its hinges. Andrew, his most trusted protector, clawed at the splintered wood trying to reach the prime minister. But Andrew was bulled to the side as the massive bulk of General Moishe Orhlon, Israel's defense minister, pressed through the shattered door.

"Moishe, call up the reserves . . . all of them," Baruk said. "Good God, what have we done?"

Damascus, Syria

Imam Moussa al-Sadr tore his kaftan from neckline to hem, fell to his knees, and pounded his fists into his chest. "May Allah forgive us," he whispered to the carpet.

Rocking on his haunches, his gaze went back to the carnage on the television screen filling the far wall. Disgusted with the so-called peace to which the Palestinians and Egyptians had capitulated, al-Sadr's rage overflowed during the Jews' sacrilegious blood sacrifice. Now, as he watched the Dome of the Rock swallowed by the abyss on Temple Mount and the Al-Aqsa Mosque crumble into dust, his fury erupted with the killing heat of molten lava.

"Fools!" al-Sadr screamed. "Traitors!" He pointed a long finger at the screen. "May Allah's curses be on you and your children." Falling to his knees again, he beat his fists into the carpet. "Fools . . . such fools . . ."

Minutes passed as the heaving in al-Sadr's body subsided. Then he rose—rod straight, face like flint, his eyes blazing with the fervor of a fanatic. He turned to the two men who were sitting with him on the floor rug. When he spoke, his voice was dead . . . cold. "Such fools. What did they expect they would receive from embracing peace with the infidels and the Jews? Look."

Al-Sadr shook his fist at the television screen. "Is this worth peace? Never. Never, at any price. But, now, these fools and their friends must pay the price of their treachery. Come, this is our time."

Washington, DC

"Walk with me," President Jonathan Whitestone said, grabbing the arm of the CIA director as he stepped through the French doors of the Oval Office and turned left into the colonnade on the west side of the White House.

"Well, Bill, we just watched the end of a very short-lived peace in the Middle East," said the president, pulling Director Cartwright closer to his side. "This Temple Mount disaster can ignite into World War Three at the whiff of a match. I don't trust the Israelis or the Arabs to keep their hands off the Mount. The Bavarian peace treaty is as shattered as the Mount itself."

President Jonathan Whitestone stopped abruptly and spun Bill Cartwright so they were face-to-face. "Bill, what is happening here? The Arab world is blowing up around us and now this fragile peace just got swallowed in an earthquake. Most of the time, it's the Jews and the Arabs that scare me, Bill. God knows what they're going to do about this political mess. But I'm even more frightened about what we just witnessed happening to the Mount. What do you think it means?"

The two men participated in a Tuesday evening Bible study in the White

House residence and had known each other since both served on the deacon board of Trinity Baptist Church in Dallas, fifteen years before.

“Mr. President, we both know that ritual sacrifice in the Temple started the clock ticking. Nobody knows how much time is left in these last days—maybe a year, maybe one hundred years, maybe a thousand. But the clock is ticking. And I believe that changes everything.”

“Everything?”

“Yes, Mr. President. We can debate the biblical meaning and implications, but our job is to understand the political and military implications of what we’ve just seen. We can’t trust what we trusted before. The world has changed on us. And we need to figure out how it has changed, who it has changed, and what we need to do about it.”

Whitestone shoved his hands deep into his pockets, his head bowed. “God help us, Bill. We’ve just left the era of history and entered an era that will be orchestrated by biblical prophecy. It’s hard to believe, but we’ve got to understand where this will take us.” The president lifted his head and put his right hand on Cartwright’s shoulder. “Find out for us, Bill. Get together whomever you need. But keep a tight lid on it. Find out where we’re headed . . . before we get there.”