

THE WISE MEN
of the WEST



VOLUME I: THE WEST

THE
WISE MEN

of the WEST

Successful
A

SEARCH FOR THE PROMISED ONE

IN THE LATTER DAYS

a novel by

JAY TYSON

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OR **OTHER**
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*If in the uttermost corners of the East
the sweet savors of God be wafted,
he will assuredly recognize
and inhale their fragrance,
even though he be dwelling
in the uttermost ends of the West.*

– FROM THE *TABLET OF A TRUE SEEKER IN THE BOOK OF CERTITUDE*

*I believe in the Father
I believe in the Son
I believe in the coming
of the Promised One
Who calls to all people:
Now the time has come—
One fold and one Shepherd,
the healing has begun.*

– FROM “*THE HEALING HAS BEGUN,*” A SONG BY DAVID NOLL (2001)

To everyone who has humbly hoped to see,
or prayed to witness,
the coming of the Promised One,
and to those who have longed to be
among the first generation of His followers,
this book is dedicated.

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A Few Notes for the Reader

OCCASIONAL NOTES OF GENERAL INTEREST have been added at the bottom of the page on which they occur. Additionally, for those readers interested in a more complete understanding of the historical facts upon which the story is based, please note that when the names of historical events or people first appear in the text, I have placed these names in italics. Details about them can usually be found in an online encyclopedia under the name thus provided. In cases where further sources of information might be helpful, I have provided an endnote leading to additional information and a bibliography at the back of the book. As to the cities, towns, and historic places mentioned, all of them are real, although a few might have changed names since 1843. The maps provided at the start of Chapters 9 and 12 will help the reader follow along.

Quotations from the Bible are taken almost entirely from the King James Version; direct quotes from Scripture are in italics. This was, by far, the most widely accepted English version of the Bible in the 1840s and remains one of the most widely used. In addition, when referring to a specific biblical quote, the narrative often provides only the chapter, not the verse. Anyone who is inclined to look up the quote is thereby encouraged to read the whole chapter and thus to understand the quote in greater context.

Similarly, quotes from the Quran, also in italics, are generally taken from George Sale's version, translated in 1734. This was the first version to be translated directly from the Arabic into English and one of only two

A FEW NOTES FOR THE READER

English versions available in the 1840s. It remains one of the few versions that attempt to translate every word into English rather than leaving several transliterated Arabic words in place. It also provides a wealth of explanatory notes helpful to the Western reader.

I have striven to the best of my ability to provide an accurate description of the times, places, and people. I trust that the scholar who focuses on the particular details of the history of any of these places will indulge occasional inaccuracies I might have inadvertently included. This is, necessarily, my own individual understanding of history. As such, it can never be authoritative nor is it intended to be. Although many of the ideas are rooted in the teachings of the Baha'i Faith, some of my own extrapolations may also be found. I hope the reader will take all of them as an opportunity for reflection and discussion, and as a doorway to a more detailed study of the history of these times, rather than as an end in themselves.

Many first names in the Middle Eastern world are simply Arabic versions of biblical names. Where this occurs, I have typically added the Western version in parentheses upon the introduction of the character to assist the Western reader.

The reader will note that I have adopted the convention that pronouns that refer to any of the Messengers of God will normally be capitalized out of respect and also as a way to distinguish references to Him from references to others. Two exceptions to this rule are noted: (a) pronouns among the words or thoughts of someone who does not recognize the validity of the Messenger are not capitalized and (b) when discussing the messenger in relation to God, his pronouns are not capitalized as he exists in the state of utmost humility in that relationship.

As in most historical fiction, I have refrained wherever possible from introducing direct interactions between historical characters and fictional characters. In the few instances where this necessarily occurs, I have made every effort to keep these interactions as historically plausible as possible.

A Note of Gratitude

NO ONE CAN SPEND SIX YEARS writing a book without obtaining significant insights and help from many he finds along the path. Space does not permit me to list all that was done by those of you who helped me, but you know.

First, I thank my wonderful wife for all her patience and wise advice. For perspectives from various religious traditions: Susan Maneck, Soheil Sohrab, Habib Hosseiny, Joel Smith, John Vincent, Craig Shere, Bhabani Pattanayak, William Collins, Paula Drewek, Wade Fransson, and Betti and Robert Knickerbocker. For pointers, ideas, encouragement and general help: Emily Goshey, Scott Duncan, Peter Murphy, Rodney Richards, Jim Traub, Robert Stockman, and Julie Geredien.

And finally to all reviewers who assisted in checking the manuscript, the authors of the wonderful sources I've used (listed in the bibliography), and the publisher's talented team, I am deeply grateful.

Foreword

SOMETIMES THE DIVINE COMES in the guise of unanticipated and even seemingly unfortunate circumstances. And often God answers our longings and prayers in ways counter to our aspirations and expectations as the deepest lessons are revealed in the most jarring parts of our journey.

Thus are the similarities between the path that inspired Jay Tyson to write this book and that taken by its two main protagonists, Zach Thompson and James Lawrence. Zach, the son of a pious and successful American shipping company owner, and James, a scholarly British Orientalist, are typical nineteenth century gentlemen on an atypical journey. Setting out upon the inspiration of an idea, they soon find that idea shifting in ways they couldn't have imagined.

Tyson's journey toward writing *The Wise Men of the West* began with a modern mechanical mishap in 2013, but its roots trace back to the previous autumn, when he visited the lovingly preserved farmhouse of William Miller in Low Hampton, New York, and conversed with some of its Christian Adventist caretakers.

Miller, a nineteenth century military veteran and farmer, also found his life's journey taking unexpected turns when his personal study of the Bible led him to the conclusion Christ's return was imminent, and he was called to preach accordingly. The resulting "Great Disappointment"—when Christ didn't descend to Earth from the clouds in 1844—was regarded by many as Miller's great failure.

But what if he wasn't so wrong after all?

FOREWORD

Tyson's visit to Miller's farmhouse was inspired by his belief that there was much to be learned from this dramatic turn of events.

Eight months later, after selling the old family home, Tyson was making his way along the Ohio Turnpike in a rented truck carrying three large pieces of old family furniture back to his current home in New Jersey. He began reflecting on his earlier visit to Miller's farm and the implications of Miller's insights.

"A thought came to me that it might be possible to write of a couple of Christian Adventists who were willing to travel in search of the return of Christ, people who expected a more conventional return rather than the mega-miraculous one from the sky," Tyson recalls. "Within a few minutes of thinking this thought, the truck I was driving started to shake violently."

He pulled over and contacted the rental agency, and the truck was soon in a shop. But the repairs would take an entire day.

"So I suddenly had twenty-four hours with nothing to do," Tyson states. "But I had a pad of paper and a pencil, so I started my exploration of how such a story might unfold. That was six years ago. It is wonderful to be finally bringing this to a conclusion!"

And now we as readers can benefit from the conclusion of Tyson's work. We can begin our own journey, traveling alongside Zach and James as they move toward and through the Holy Land, an ancient region in which they find new hope. It is as much a profound inward spiritual quest as it is a physical trek. Tyson's deep knowledge of religion, geography, and history create a rich and immersive reading experience. *Wise Men* is a trip well worth taking. My hope is you enjoy and appreciate it as much as I have.

– Mark Heinz, Editor

List of Fictional Characters

	Name	Relationship/Role	1 st Ref
1	Zach Thompson	Main character—a true seeker	Prologue
2	Gabriel Robinson	Nephew of Zach	Prologue
3	Sarah Thompson Robinson	Sister of Zach/Mother of Gabriel	Prologue
4	Isaiah Robinson	Husband of Sarah/Father of Gabriel	Prologue
5	Josiah Thompson	Father of Zach	Prologue
6	Daniel Thompson	Brother of Zach	Prologue
7	Clara Thompson	Wife of Daniel	Prologue
8	Jeremy	Zach’s assistant & traveling companion	Chap 2
9	Hezekiah Mulligan	Traveling acquaintance on Hudson River	Chap 2
10	Elijah Goodman	A follower of William Miller in England	Chap 3
11	Rev. Wilson	Adventist minister	Chap 5
12	Rev. Woolworth	Anglican priest	Chap 6
13	James Lawrence	Orientalist & traveling companion	Chap 7
14	Father Timothy	Catholic priest	Chap 8
15	Father Alexi Kallistos	Greek Orthodox priest	Chap 10
16	Shaykh Hakim	Muslim Shaykh from Akka	Chap 10
17	Siyyid Youssef	Traveling companion—Akka to Jerusalem to Tiberias	Chap 11
18	Moshe	Jewish keeper of the Cave of Elijah	Chap 12
19	Suleiman	Host in Jerusalem	Chap 15
20	Musa	Traveling companion—Tiberias to Karbila	Chap 16

Historic (non-fictional) characters: There are many figures from the nineteenth century (or earlier) who appear in the book. They are introduced in *italics* in the text to distinguish them from the fictional characters listed above.

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of the WEST



Introduction

THIS BOOK IS AN INVITATION. It is an invitation to revisit and re-evaluate a question people began asking two centuries ago: “Are we living in the ‘latter days’ as described in both the Old and the New Testaments?”

And the people of those days had good reason to ask. Granted, a few have asked this question in every age, but in the early 1800s there were some particularly good reasons to raise this question more earnestly. When the disciples asked Jesus for a sign of the time of His return, He gave them a very clear one, stating the gospel would be “*preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations*” followed immediately by His words “*then shall the end come*” (Matt. 24:14). With the development of ocean-crossing ships, European explorers and missionaries had carried the gospel to all nations across the globe and borne witness to His truth to the entire world by that time.

There was also a sense that old ways were ending and something new was stirring. The Dark Ages of Europe had ended with the Renaissance, or rebirth, of the quest for knowledge and understanding. This led to the Age of Discovery, the Age of Reason, and the birth of America as the first major modern republic. The careful study of science in those days was beginning to yield its first fruits of technology, whether for good or ill, in the form of the steam engine and the cotton gin in the late 1700s and steam-powered riverboats and engines pulling wagons on short railroads in the early 1800s. For many people, it indeed seemed to be at least “the close of the age” if not “the end of the world.”

* The phrase translated in the King James Bible as “end of the world” has been more accurately rendered in more recent translations as the “close of the age” (or “eon,” which was the actual word found in the earliest Greek manuscripts.)

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So people began to wonder, to ask about, and to investigate the question. Several religious movements were born, particularly in the northeastern part of the United States, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Its very title reflected the belief of its founder, *Joseph Smith*, that the biblical “latter days” had indeed arrived. Others included many of the Adventist churches, whose belief in the second coming (or advent) of Jesus can be traced primarily to the teachings of a preacher named *William Miller* of Low Hampton, New York. In 2012 I visited his farmhouse there, which has been lovingly preserved by the members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. From them, I learned more of his story. The dialogue started back then has led, however indirectly, to the writing of this book.

Mr. Miller found solid biblical reasons to believe the latter days were near at hand. He followed Jesus’ instruction to look to a particular part of the Book of Daniel in order to understand the time of His return. Tens of thousands gathered in great camp meetings to listen and prepare for the great event. But when the predicted date arrived in 1844, nothing happened (or so it appeared). Although Mr. Miller remained convinced his understanding was essentially correct, most of his followers were downcast and disillusioned, while scoffers loudly ridiculed them. Ever since, the date has been known in Christian circles as “*The Great Disappointment.*”

Some returned to their Bibles to see how they might recalculate the date and wait again. Some decided that a spiritual event must have occurred in heaven and that the promised return of Christ on Earth would have to wait until some unspecified time in the future. And some decided to abandon any attempt to understand biblical prophecy or even to understand religion itself.

But apparently no one stopped to consider the possibility that they might have correctly understood the *timing* while misunderstanding the *manner* in which Christ would return. No one seems to have learned a lesson from the Wise Men of the East, who traveled from ancient Persia to find Jesus at the time of His birth and who understood not only the timing of His arrival but also the manner. They were not dissuaded when they found a recently-married couple – a carpenter and his wife, who had recently given

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birth. These were people of such humble means, that on the night of the babe's birth, they were unable to find room at an inn, and thus had to place Him in a manger where animals fed.

In spite of the physical appearances, those Wise Men were somehow able to recognize the future spiritual King and Savior. They were wise indeed.

Alas, in the mid-1800s, during this period of intense anticipation about the coming of the Promised One, it seems that there was no one in the West wise enough to undertake a similar search. But it leads us to wonder: What if such men had existed? What would they have found if, at that time, they had put aside the common, literal understanding of how Christ would return, pursuing instead the notion that Christ might return in a manner similar to His original appearance? What if they sought a return similar to that of Elijah, who arose in the form of John the Baptist, as Jesus Himself had explained (Matt. 17:10–13)? What would some nineteenth century wise men have found if they were looking for someone who would go forth in the spirit and power of Jesus in the same way that John the Baptist went forth “in the spirit and power of Elijah” (Luke 1:17)? If He returned in the same manner as Jesus' first arrival—as someone who was physically normal but who had super-human spiritual power, knowledge, understanding, and compassion—would they have been able to find Him?

This book is an exploration of what they could have found. For even in the mid-nineteenth century, there were clues scattered across humanity's scriptures and collective consciousness—clues that could have been gathered and connected by anyone sufficiently detached from preconceived ideas and dedicated to a far-reaching search.

* * *

THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE imminent return of Christ did not end in the West when He failed to materialize from the literal clouds in 1844. While the recalculations pushed the date forward, the evidence of the closing of the past age continued to mount as new inventions and the Industrial Revolution created an ever-more-rapid rate of change. The vast destruction of the American Civil War was also seen by many in apocalyptic terms (“Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord” is the opening

INTRODUCTION

line of the “Battle Hymn of the Republic”), with American losses far greater than any other war the country has endured, before or since.

And from the Jewish perspective, the evidence was even stronger. In many Old Testament prophecies, both the “latter days” and the coming of the Messiah are closely associated with the return of the Jewish people to the Holy Land. The Jewish return movement started in the early 1800s and continued through World War I, when the British abruptly ended centuries of Islamic control over the region. Then, through an astonishing chain of events (including the horrific and genocidal Nazi attack on the Jews of Europe) and against all imaginable odds, the state of Israel was reborn in 1947 and was able to stand against neighboring nations bent on its destruction.

Thus, the many Old Testament prophecies of the return of the Jewish people to the Holy Land in the “latter days” were fulfilled. However, since those prophecies also predicted the coming of the Messiah in the latter days, Jews, Christians, and even Muslims were left to ponder anew the question: Where is the missing Messiah? How could God have dramatically fulfilled this half of the promise of the latter days without fulfilling the other half?†

Most of the literature on both Christian and Jewish expectations of the 1840s covers not only the expectations that people had but also how God failed to meet their expectations. This story is different. Although it touches on the failure of some prophetic expectations, it is focused on the one substantial success now known to history.

So this book is an invitation to explore, or perhaps re-explore, these questions.

It is also a tapestry woven of both fiction and history. It’s a story that seeks to convey a feeling of the experience of historical events through fictional characters without changing history itself. We will witness it through the eyes of a pair of fictional wise men, who were both capable of connecting the dots of the prophecies of the Old and New Testaments and had the means to pursue this question on a journey eastward.

† To this day, some Jewish groups refuse to recognize the legitimacy of the state of Israel because the biblical prophecies are so clear that the return to Israel can only happen in association with the coming of the Messiah.

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The Wise Men of the West are explorers, both physically and spiritually, who, much like the Wise Men of the East in Jesus' age, set out in search of the Promised One of their religion. Their journey provides us with the opportunity to explore many of the ideas of their time as we travel from America to London, then on to Rome, then to the Holy Land, and, from there, yet farther east, ultimately to the land of the original Wise Men of the East, the land of Persia, where the prophet Daniel had his visions of the latter days, the visions that Jesus Himself cited as holding the key to answering the question of the time of His return. Along their route, they will discover that their search for the return of Jesus is just a part of a far larger story—a story that bridges and connects all the prophetic religions of humanity.

In John 14:2, Jesus explained that He was going ahead to heaven to prepare a mansion for His followers. But He also said that in His Father's house, there are many mansions, thus suggesting that there could be many legitimate religions. A careful inspection of their scriptures shows that each of the former religions has prophecies that are fulfilled in the latter ones and that can serve as tunnels linking these mansions. This book is an exploration of some of those tunnels and the connections they imply.

Like all good explorers, we must be prepared to learn something new. And like all good explorers, we must choose our route carefully. Lessons learned at the early stages of this journey are vital as they become the foundations for further lessons that will become understandable only at a later stage of the journey.

So come, let us join our explorers now on their two-year saga in search of the Promised One to learn of their discoveries, which can transform the present cacophony of human religious experience into the most marvelous melodies and the most heavenly harmonies the world has ever known.

VOLUME I
THE WEST



The Adoration of the Magi



Prologue:

ON THE TWELFTH DAY OF CHRISTMAS...

“AN EPIPHANY,” EXPLAINED ZACH to his inquisitive young nephew, Gabriel, “is the sudden realization of a truth, as if revealed by God. And God showed the Wise Men how to find the infant Jesus. That’s why we call this night our commemoration of the *Epiphany*.”

It was evening on January 5, 1843, and Zachary Thompson was returning from the Epiphany church service with his sister, Sarah; Sarah’s husband, Isaiah Robinson; and their son, Gabriel, who was nearly nine years old. The twelfth and final day of Christmas would be celebrated tomorrow, and they were all looking forward to gathering with the rest of the family at the family home in the port city of Perth Amboy, New Jersey.

Walking along the frozen mud ruts in the street at this time of year was daunting. Horses and the carriages, carts, and wagons they pulled had churned up the muddy street by day, and the cold night air had frozen it. A dearth of streetlamps did not make the trek any easier. But the stars were shining brightly, like glittering jewels in the crisp, clear night sky, which reminded them all of that magnificent night so long ago.

“I’ve always enjoyed the Epiphany story,” remarked Zach wistfully. “The coming of the Wise Men from the East to find Jesus at His birth... there is something almost magical about it.”

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Traditionally, most of the churches believed the Wise Men arrived on the twelfth night after Jesus was born, which is why the Epiphany service was held on that evening.

“I really like the story too,” offered young Gabriel.

“Ah, I reckon you do,” replied his father with a smile, “especially the part about the gifts that the Wise Men brought. Why, just think: If the Wise Men had not appeared with their gifts, we might not have the tradition of giving gifts at Christmas!”

He reached down to tickle his son a bit.

Everyone chuckled. But for Gabriel, it was more than the gifts. He, too, loved the magic of the story.

“Uncle Zach,” he inquired, “how did the Wise Men know that they should look for a bright star? And how did they know that they should travel to Jerusalem to look for the baby Jesus? And where did they come from?”

“This son of mine is always asking questions,” Sarah said wearily. She had grown tired of trying to answer them all.

“It is good to ask questions,” replied Zach with a smile. “Let us see if we can find some answers.” He patted the boy on the back and said, “The Wise Men, or ‘*Magi*’ as they were called in the earliest versions of the Bible, came from the priestly class of far-off Persia, east of the Holy Land. They traveled a long time, crossing the wide desert on camels in search of the newborn Jesus. But I don’t really know much more about it than that. Perhaps when we are together with your grandfather tomorrow, you can ask him yourself. He has studied many things.”

* * *

ZACH’S FATHER, JOSIAH THOMPSON, was sixty-eight, a considerably advanced age for that time, and had not been feeling well. He remained at home in the care of Zach’s older brother, Daniel, and his wife, Clara, along with Gabriel’s three-year-old brother, Timothy.

By the following day, Josiah was feeling a little better, and so they enjoyed their traditional family gathering, took down the Christmas wreath, and shared the dried fruits, nuts, and other edibles that had adorned it, along with a big family meal.

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Josiah had founded and run the family's shipping business, although he had recently turned most of the control of it over to Daniel and Zach. He was a Quaker, of the Orthodox branch. They believed in studying the Bible and quietly reflecting upon it. They participated in the more traditional "programmed" services.

Josiah had long ago taken an active interest in Bible studies for himself. Zach shared this interest with his father, more than his brother and sister or their spouses. Josiah and Zach were particularly interested in understanding the Bible's prophecies, from both the Old and the New Testaments, and how these might pertain to the current age—a topic that was much discussed during those days.

At dinner, Zach said to his father, "Yesterday, Gabriel asked some questions about the story of the Wise Men, which I was unable to answer."

He asked Gabriel to repeat them.

"Hmmm," Josiah replied ponderingly. "Those are excellent and deep questions and not so easily answered. Indeed, how would some priests from a foreign country with a foreign religion know of the signs of Jesus' birth? Even the Jewish priests were uncertain of the time of the coming of their Messiah. We know that the Wise Men were guided by a bright star, but who told them to look for a bright star at that time? And who told them that they should make the dangerous, thousand-mile journey across the desert to reach Jerusalem in order to search for the Holy Child? We know they came from the East—and Persia was the vast empire that dominated all of the lands east of the Holy Land in those days. In Persia, there was a class of wise men, called magi, who studied all the sciences and the prophetic books of their religion, which was the ancient religion of Persia. It had been taught about a thousand years earlier by a prophet of those days, whose name was *Zoroaster*."

Gabriel was enthralled as his grandfather continued, "This prophet, Zoroaster, taught that there was only one God, just as Abraham and Moses had. And so, in those days, when most of the world believed in many gods—a god of the thunder, a god of the sea, a god of crop growth, and so on—there were two nations that believed there was only one God. One was the nation of Israel in the west. The other was the nation of Persia in the

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east. And between them lay the vast desert of Arabia. So for centuries, they did not have much contact with each other.

“A few centuries after Zoroaster’s life, when the leaders of the Israelites were misbehaving and not following the laws of God, God sent them various prophets to warn these kings that they must change their ways or God would stop protecting them. Alas! Those kings were so arrogant that they did *not* change their ways. And soon enough, a strong army arose from Babylon, which is near Persia. It rode across the Arabian desert, conquering cities and kingdoms and taking their people as prisoners back to Babylon to work as slaves for their king. When this army reached the Holy Land, they did so again. And so, the Israelites were conquered. Everyone and everything of importance was taken away to Babylon.”

Gabriel’s mind turned to harrowing imaginations as he struggled to fathom God’s wrath in the form of Babylonian armies as Josiah continued his tale.

“But then, while they were captives in Babylon, a mightier monarch, *King Cyrus* of Persia, sent his armies to subdue Babylon. So both the Jewish people and the Babylonians became captives of King Cyrus. Now, when the King discovered that his Jewish captives were also believers in one God, just as he and the rest of the Zoroastrians of Persia were, he recognized that the Jewish people were special. With the help of some miracles you may have heard of in the Bible stories, he was eventually convinced to allow the Jewish people to return to Jerusalem to rebuild it. So even though there were the vast Arabian deserts between these two peoples, there was a connection because they both believed that there was only one God.

“And just as the prophets of the Old Testament heard the words of God and thus were able to predict many things that would come true, so also apparently God must have spoken to Zoroaster, who taught many things to the people. According to the records of some of the earliest Christians, one of the things God taught Zoroaster was that another Messenger would come after about a thousand years and that his people should look for a bright star at that time. That would be a sign that it was time to search for the one who would be called ‘the king of the Jews.’ It was this teaching of Zoroaster that started the Wise Men on their search for Jesus. When they found Jesus, their joy was not simply in finding Him

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but also in realizing that the ancient prophecy of their own prophet had indeed come true.”

Josiah sat back, feeling that this was an adequate, if somewhat simplified, explanation of the things he himself had learned, mostly from his readings of stories of the Old Testament and from the *Syriac Infancy Gospel*, a translation that he had acquired in recent years.¹

Gabriel had been watching his grandfather with searching eyes. He was pleased to have some answers to his questions and fascinated by the new possibilities those answers presented. But he was not completely satisfied.

“Thank you, Grandfather, for telling me all of these things, but I have one more question.”

“And just what would that be, young man?” replied Josiah with a jovial smile.

“Well, since Zoroaster gave his people the right teachings—there was only one God—and also the right teachings about how to find the baby Jesus, why is there no Book of Zoroaster in the Bible? There is a Book of Zechariah and a Book of Zephaniah, but there is no Book of Zoroaster.”

Josiah was surprised at the penetrating depth of this question. He looked at Zach, and then they both looked at Sarah. She rolled her eyes and shrugged. “As I’ve told you, he likes to ask questions.”

After a thoughtful pause, Josiah replied, “Well, I can see you have been studying the names of the books of the Bible from A to Z. It’s wonderful indeed that you know them all so well. And your question is a superb one too. I can only say that the books of the Old Testament are about the revelations that God gave to the prophets and Messengers of the Jewish people, which is to say, Moses and the other descendants of Jacob. As Christians, we have inherited the Jewish scriptures and traditions but not those of Zoroaster.”

He turned to the others at the table and mused, “It is indeed strange, though, as I think about it. We have been celebrating the success of the Magi’s search for more than 18 centuries now, and yet during almost all of that time, no one from the West has bothered to inquire about the background and details of the prophet whose remarkable prophecy started those wise men on that wonderful search. I’ve heard tell that the holy book of the Zoroastrians was first translated into a European language by a French-

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man named *Anquatil-Duperron* just a few years before I was born, and the first small parts were translated into English only about 20 years ago. English-speaking scholars have known for nearly 150 years that the Wise Men were led by a prophecy of Zoroaster, yet no one seems to be interested in going to the sources of that prophecy. Perhaps...” Josiah paused, looking at each person around the table, and then said, “perhaps someday one of you may help to discover more about Zoroaster and the Wise Men yourself.”

The other adults dutifully returned the patriarch’s glance, but Josiah’s idea seemed to strike a deep chord with Zach; his eyes glinted with enthusiasm.

Gabriel also smiled broadly at this notion and seemed pleased with the answer. But his curiosity was still not satisfied.

“Grandfather,” he continued, “some of my friends tell me that someday soon, Jesus will come down to us from heaven and return to visit us here again. Some say He will take us all up to heaven. They tell me of all sorts of amazing and frightening things that will happen when He comes back. Is that true? If He could do that, I asked my friends, why didn’t He do that when He came the first time?”

Josiah thought this question over for a moment. Then he replied in a careful, measured tone, “People have many different expectations about how Jesus could return. But they often fail to understand that God does not need to act according to people’s expectations. His knowledge, power, and wisdom stand far above any human expectations. When Jesus, the Messiah, was in the Holy Land 1,800 years ago, the Jewish people had many expectations that God would send a strong, military Messiah who would lead the Jewish people to overthrow their Roman oppressors. But instead, God sent a seemingly powerless teacher who taught about loving your enemy and praying for those who persecute you. A few centuries later, the world saw how these humble teachings did indeed conquer the whole Roman Empire. But those who had clung to their old expectations had already been left behind—cast out of Jerusalem and out of the Holy Land.

“Jesus may return again soon, in any one of many ways. It is my dearest hope that you will not allow your attachment to any particular expectation, or the expectations of any friends,” Josiah nodded toward Gabriel, “to

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cloud your thinking and to cause you to make a mistake like the one made by some when Jesus came the first time.

“Your friends have raised an interesting point. But I would ask you to remind them that Jesus *did* come down from heaven when He came long ago. He showed us that the real Jesus was not a body but a spirit. And although there were miracles accompanying His birth, His greatest miracles were His teachings, which gradually spread until they overcame the entire Roman Empire. In truth, the spirit of Jesus came down from heaven. But His body appeared first as that of an infant—a unique infant indeed, who was found by some very wise men. Should we expect that His return would be any different?”



The Great Meteor Storm of 1833



Chapter 1

THE QUEST BEGINS

“ZACH!” YELLED CLARA. “ZACH, come quickly!”

Zach dropped the tools he had been using to repair the cabin inside one of his father’s schooners and scrambled up onto the deck to find out what the commotion was all about.

“It’s your father,” she yelled in a distressed tone from the shore-end of the pier. “You need to get home *now!* I don’t know how much longer he will last.”

Clara had been caring for Josiah for several weeks. He had been unable to completely shake off the illness he had developed over the Christmas period.

Zach threw on his overcoat and quickly wrapped his scarf around his mouth and nose to protect against the cold air of late January as he hustled toward Clara. “What happened?” he inquired as he reached the end of the pier.

“I don’t know for certain, but his fever seems to be up again, and he’s asked that you and Dan and Sarah come to his bedside. He wants to have a talk with all of you.” She paused and then added grimly, “Maybe a *final* talk.”

Zach and Clara moved quickly past the wagons and horses at the end of the pier, over the frozen ground, up the hill on Smith Street, then to the left for a short distance on Water Street. The Thompson home sat at the top of a small ridge, overlooking the Arthur Kull Sound and Raritan Bay. The winter sun was already beginning to set over the low hills to the southwest.

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As they hurried along, Zach was thinking of the special bond he felt with his father due to their shared interest in Bible studies. It had started for them one clear night almost a decade ago, on the deck of one of their ships returning from England, when a huge display of falling stars, later known as the *Great Meteor Storm of 1833*, was witnessed by all on board. It prompted a sense of foreboding among many of their first-class passengers, who knew from the Bible that the falling of the stars from heaven was one of the signs of “the end of the world.”

But one passenger—a young Greek priest on his way to start a ministry in the small Greek-American community of St. Augustine—explained that “the end of the world” was a mistranslated term. He noted that in the original New Testament—which was written in Greek—the term that was used was “eon.” Thus, the phrase was more accurately understood as “the end of the eon” or “the end of the age” rather than the end of the physical world. He assured the passengers that although there might be good reason to worry about the many changes that this new age might bring, the world itself would not end.

This insight led Josiah to a long train of thoughts, during his daily practice of silent reflection, concerning the best manner in which to understand the other prophecies of the Bible, particularly those that refer to the “latter days.” After careful study and much pondering, he and Zach reached the conclusion that many of the references to the outwardly miraculous return of Christ at the end of the age were meant to be taken metaphorically, or spiritually, rather than physically. With this in mind, Josiah had begun to realize that just as with the close of the Jewish age some eighteen centuries earlier, the greatest miracles associated with Christ’s return would be *spiritual* in nature.

Several preachers in America and England had reached the conclusion that the “latter days” spoken of by many of the prophets of the Old Testament had arrived because by now the gospel had been preached in all nations. Jesus Himself had said, in Matthew 24:14, that this would be the sign. Some, including *William Miller*, the famous preacher from Upstate New York, had done specific calculations based on clues found in the New Testament Book of Matthew and the Old Testament Book of Daniel and

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concluded that Christ would return in 1843 or 1844. Both Josiah and Zach found these explanations compelling.

Thus, by 1842, he and his father had both concluded that Christ would return not from the sky, as many believed, but initially as a child, just as He had appeared previously; that He would come from the East, most likely from the Holy Land; and that He would make Himself known in some way within the next two years. Josiah had also expressed the hope that he and Zach would be able to sail to the Holy Land in order to be among the first people to find Him. But now, as Zach hurried toward his family's home, he wondered if his father's poor health had put an end to this hope.

Clara and Zach ran up the front steps leading to the high porch overlooking the bay, hastily entering the house and then dashing up to Josiah's room. They found Dan already there, along with Sarah, Isaiah, and young Gabriel, who had managed to follow along with his parents.

Josiah was propped up by a pillow, but he was looking pale and gaunt.

"I'm glad to see you all here now," said Josiah in a slow and somewhat strained voice, "and I want you to all listen carefully to what I have to say so you will all understand me clearly and remember everything after I am gone." He paused to catch his breath while everyone stood in hushed silence, teary-eyed and keenly aware of the gravity of the present moment.

"I am very pleased with you all. You have all done well during these past several years, helping your mother during her final years and now helping me since I've been on my own. But I'm not sure how much longer I'll be here, so I want to tell you plainly what I want you to do once I'm gone."

He turned first to Daniel and said, "Daniel, you've been managing the shipping business I started nearly 25 years ago, and you've been doing a very fine job of it, so I want you to continue to manage it." "Tis a fine and growing business, and I expect it will stay that way if you manage it right. And I know you can do it; you seem to have a knack for it."

"Yes, Father," replied Dan. "I'll do my very best to keep it going strong."

"I'm sure you'll do it well. But I won't allow you to keep all of the profit for yourself, do you hear? You'll need to share as much of the profit as Zach needs, and up to a third of the assets as well, for I have a special task for him.

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“And also for Sarah. Although she and Isaiah are prospering lately, I want you to set aside some of the funds to ensure against any misfortunes that may come their way in the future. Also to ensure that their children are properly educated so that they may always be able to thrive.”

“Yes, Father, I will certainly do so.”

“Do you solemnly promise?”

“Yes, indeed, Father...I solemnly promise.”

“Very well then,” Josiah replied.

Daniel and Clara had been unable to have children, and Zach had never married, so Sarah and Isaiah’s children were Josiah’s only grandchildren.

Turning now to Sarah, he said, “You make sure to take good care of young Gabriel and young Timothy as well, and any others that you and Isaiah bring along. You’ll bring them up strong in their character and strong in their faith. Do you solemnly promise?”

“Oh, yes,” replied Sarah with tears in her eyes, “of course, you may rest certain that Isaiah and I will do our very best to see them raised properly.”

“Very well,” he replied.

Then turning, he said, “And now to Zach, with whom I have had such a wonderful bond over these past many years. For he, most of all, has shared my particular interest in the Scriptures, and through our study of them together, we have learned many a wondrous thing. All of you know of our studies and of our special interest and expectations concerning the times in which we live based on what Jesus taught about the prophecies of Daniel. You no doubt have heard me express my hope of traveling to the Holy Land this year or next and my hope of being among the first to witness His appearance there. And Zach has spoken of his desire to join me in that journey.

“Alas!” continued Josiah. “It looks as if God will not allow me to reach that Promised Land. I may not be with you much longer. And even if I recover from this, I will be far too frail to undertake such a journey.

“But Zach is young and strong, bright and brave,” he added, looking admiringly at his younger son.

At nearly thirty-five years of age, he was at the height of his manhood, having developed his strength from the chores of the shipping business and his intelligence from the many people he met while sailing, in addition to his

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penchant for reading. He sported a broad moustache, which added intensity to his brown eyes, and dark brown hair.

“He shares my interest and has no family responsibilities,” Josiah continued. “Therefore, Zach, I ask you to travel to the Holy Land this year on my behalf and to search there for any clues regarding His appearance until you find Him, if you can. If nothing can be found by the end of next year, then return here to help your brother.” He paused, and then added slowly, “But if you should find anything, send home news of the Glad Tidings, and then do whatsoever He commands you to do. You’ve heard your brother solemnly promise to cover the costs you may incur. I know you will not be wasteful in your use of this money. Now will you solemnly promise to undertake this journey?”

Without thinking much about the implications, Zach simply said, “Yes, Father, I solemnly promise.”

“Wonderful! We have all heard the vows you have taken concerning how you must carry on after I am gone. Now I can rest peacefully knowing that you will carry them out. And remember, after I am gone, I will still be watching over you, helping you, to the utmost extent possible, to carry out your promises.”

Darkness was falling, so Clara lit the lanterns and candles to provide some much needed light for the room.

Josiah said he was feeling better now, so Clara ladled out some soup for him from the large kettle that remained warm as it hung over the main fireplace. He sipped a little, but then said he was feeling tired and bid them to go about their normal business so he could sleep.

Clara made him as comfortable as possible and reminded him to call out to her if he needed anything during the night. The siblings spoke in hushed tones about what their father had said. They agreed that his spirits seemed lifted after he had said it, and they hoped that he would recover from the illness soon. Sarah and Isaiah returned to their home nearby.

Josiah did not call out at all that night, and everyone rested peacefully. However, in the morning, when Zach went to look in on his father, he came out with a grim expression and summoned Dan and Clara.

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“Yes, he seemed to be in good spirits after speaking with us last night,” Zach said, “but apparently it was his final rally.... It looks as though he passed away quietly in his sleep sometime during the night.” Clara gasped. Dan hugged her and said how sorry he was to hear the news.

Then he said he’d go down to Sarah and Isaiah’s home to let them know, while Zach said he’d begin arranging plans for the funeral.

* * *

THE FUNERAL CAME AND went, with a great number of family friends and well-wishers stopping by to give their condolences and offers of help.

Dan had lost his great mentor, but there would be no major changes in his daily life. He had effectively been running the shipping business since their mother had passed away two years earlier.

For Clara, her caretaking role was now lighter, and she would be able to focus on helping Sarah more with her children.

And for Sarah and Isaiah and their family, little would change as they were already raising the children as Josiah had instructed.

But for Zach, adhering to his father’s wishes meant a big change was coming—for his immediate future at least.

Not that he objected. He was a natural adventurer and relished the opportunity to travel. He had sailed with his father to England a couple of times and several times on his own on business matters.

But to go all the way to the Holy Land! That was some serious traveling. His father had spoken truly: Zach was fascinated with their studies of the Bible and particularly with the preaching of William Miller, the self-taught minister from Upstate New York who had followed Jesus’ guidance regarding prophecies from the Book of Daniel, which were clearly pointing to the return of Christ, possibly as soon as that very year—1843. So his father’s assignment fired his imagination. But after a few days, it settled down, and he began to think of the practical difficulties of the task.

About a week after the funeral, while running some errands, Sarah stopped by at the Thompson family home and found Zach there. After inquiring how he was doing after the departure of their father, she asked, “Zach, are you *really* planning to sail to the Holy Land? It is such a far,

distant place, and I should think the journey would be fraught with much danger.

“And besides, if Christ should return next year, as Father and you seem to believe, we will all hear about it soon enough, I suppose, even if we don’t see it as instantly as many expect. Isaiah and I could really use your help here, and I’m certain Daniel and Clara would appreciate your assistance in managing the shipping work.”

But Zach replied firmly, “Sarah, I *must* go, first and foremost because it was the dying wish of our father. You were there—you heard it. I promised him that I’d go. But beyond that, it is an event of *enormous* importance. The whole Christian world has been waiting for this for more than eighteen centuries. Besides, I do not have any legitimate reason *not* to go—I am a sailor, so travel upon the sea is no difficulty for me. If I had a wife and children to look after, I might have some excuse.”

Zach thought momentarily about Ruth, the only woman he had seriously courted. She was soft-spoken, was very kind, and had a tender heart. Alas, while they were courting, her uncle perished in a storm at sea. This alerted her to the dangers of a sailor’s life, and her interest in Zach waned. Her decision, not long thereafter, to marry a different suitor had wounded his heart so deeply that he lost all interest in courtship and began to regard himself as being married to the sea and the sails.

“But as you know,” he continued, “it seems that neither luck nor God’s beneficence have favored me in this respect. Perhaps He has other tasks in store for me. And although I don’t have sufficient money of my own for this journey, Father has provided for that through his instructions to Dan. Who else has such an opportunity?”

“Those alone are sufficient reasons for me to go. But beyond that, Father was right in saying that I shared his interest in understanding the prophecies of the Bible, and particularly in understanding all about Mr. Miller’s study of the prophet Daniel. The coming two years are not just any years. They offer an opportunity of a lifetime...nay, the opportunity of nearly two millennia. I would have loved to travel there with Father, as he had contemplated, but I am still happy to travel there on my own and to discover whatever I can, as he has requested of me at the last.”

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Sarah sighed and rolled her eyes.

“I don’t know why so much attention should be paid to this particular prophecy over all of the many prophets in the Bible. There must be a thousand prophecies in the Bible. So out of all those, your William Miller has selected one from Daniel and has tried to demonstrate that it points to the return of Christ this year or next.”

“Sarah,” Zach said ardently, “perhaps you have not heard the whole of it from Father or me previously. It was not Mr. Miller who selected that particular prophecy. It was Jesus Himself. He pointed to it directly when the disciples asked Him concerning the time of His return. Do you remember your Bible studies? Do you remember chapter 24 of Matthew? ‘Tell us, when shall these things be?’ the disciples asked, ‘and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?’ Jesus described that it would be after a long time—that wars would pass, and rumors of wars and earthquakes and various other problems, ‘but the end is not yet.’ He went on to describe many conditions to look for. Various religious leaders may debate the meaning of those descriptions, but in some respects, it doesn’t really matter, because in addition to describing the conditions, He also gave us *the time* He would return.”

“He did?” Sarah objected. “I don’t remember reading that.”

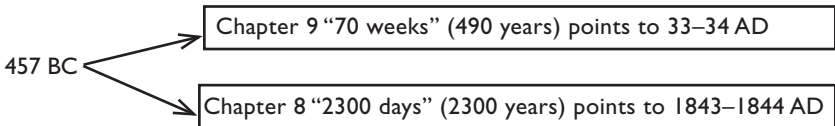
Zach continued, “Well, when they were speaking in 34 AD, He did not say, ‘I will return 1,810 years from now.’ That would no doubt have been too long a time for His followers to bear. So He answered with a somewhat hidden reference. Instead of saying it explicitly, He simply told us to look at two visions of the future, which the archangel Gabriel gave to the prophet Daniel and which Daniel recorded in his book, in chapters 8 and 9. Clearly, it would take some pondering to understand exactly what was meant by those prophecies. I’m not even certain that Matthew himself understood since he added a parenthetical note after Jesus cited these prophecies, saying, ‘whoso readeth, let him understand.’

“And it seems clear that Daniel himself did not understand the exact meaning of the visions he had witnessed, for when he asked the angel, near the end of his book, how to understand their meaning, he was told not to worry, ‘for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end.’

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“But now the gospel has been preached to all nations, so we *have* reached the time of the end. We, as the readers, *have* understood. Here, let me show you.”

Zach took out a sheet of paper and a pen and sketched a sideways-looking V. At the junction on the left, he wrote 457 BC. “Both prophecies are dated from the year that the king of Persia directed the Jewish people to rebuild Jerusalem after its destruction by the Babylonians.” Then he added two references:



“One of these two prophecies from Daniel—the one from Chapter 9—clearly points to the crucifixion of our Lord. And it was perfectly accurate—a prophecy undeniably fulfilled exactly 490 years after the starting date. Now, if we use the very same method and the very same starting date for Gabriel’s other prophecy, it brings us directly to 1843–1844. It would make absolutely no sense for one of these to be perfectly correct and the other one to be all wrong.

“So to summarize, it is *very* clear: The disciples asked Jesus when He would return. Jesus gave a description of the conditions to expect and then gave a date by referring to Daniel: 2,300 years from the year that the edict was given to rebuild Jerusalem—a date known to historians. That, then, is either this year or next. Depending on how you count the year zero, it is either 1843 or 1844.”

“I see,” replied Sarah cautiously, recognizing that Zach would not be dissuaded. “And I recall Father’s unusual belief that Jesus would return in much the same way as He had appeared the first time—first as a child with innate knowledge and only later as a great teacher.”

“Exactly,” Zach said. “The belief is less common but *not* unheard of. Some of his thinking was inspired by the teachings of the *Reverend George Bush* in New York, whose careful analysis of the original Greek and Hebrew words pointed us away from the more commonly accepted understandings.

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Perhaps we can go into these in detail at another time. But suffice it to say that our father was not content to wait here for the news of Christ's new teachings to reach America. Instead, he dearly wanted to search in the Holy Land for himself. And *that*," concluded Zach, "is why I must go."

Sarah was gazing out the large front window of the house, which provided a magnificent view of the southern tip of Staten Island and the northern side of the Atlantic Highlands, which together formed the Raritan Bay on which Perth Amboy was located. As she watched a sailing ship that was gradually disappearing below the far horizon, she thought about the long journey. "You will be on your own, and it is so very far away. If you must travel, you should find someone to travel with you, for your own safety at least."

"I greatly appreciate your concern, Sarah," Zach replied sincerely, "and I clearly would have preferred to have the companionship of our father as we traveled. I, too, have been thinking about how much better it would be to travel with a companion. And with that in mind, I have been planning to write to Mr. Miller himself to inquire if I could meet with him to discuss my plans and to find a willing travel companion."

"Do you think he would go with you?" Sarah asked with surprise.

Zach chuckled. "No indeed. He is no doubt too old to make the journey—you know he is nearly as old as Father was. And besides, from his talks and writings, he seems quite fixed on the idea that Jesus will return from the sky rather than appearing in a manner similar to His original appearance. But...perhaps he has heard of others who would entertain the notion and who would be willing to join me in my travels."

"Well, for your own sake, I hope you are successful in finding someone."

"Thank you. But, of course, I do already have someone who will be with me."

"Oh? And just who might that be?"

"Do you remember how, just before Father passed, he assured us that he would do his best to watch over and guide us? I do believe he will be with me."

"No doubt," replied Sarah with a note of skepticism. "I just hope he will be able to deflect the swords of the pirates or the pistols of the highwaymen you are likely to encounter."

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As she turned, she noticed the longcase clock in the corner. “Oh! I must get to the fish market before it closes. I appreciate your sharing of your thoughts about all of this. I’m not certain if I agree, but at least I understand a little better now. And I do hope you will succeed in finding a fellow traveler.” She bade him farewell and was off to complete her errands.

* * *

ON A RAINY DAY about a week later, Zach started the melancholy task of sorting through his father’s papers and other belongings. He wanted to save anything that pertained to his father’s study of the Scriptures while at the same time separating out the things that Daniel would need to continue to effectively run the shipping business.

The process called to Zach’s memory almost everything he had known about his father. Josiah Thompson had been a member of the Quaker community of Perth Amboy, which was originally the capital of the province of East Jersey. Born in 1775, he had some early recollections of the latter part of the Revolutionary War, but he was far too young to play any role. In 1790 he apprenticed himself as a sailor on the merchant boats that plied the inland waterways of the Raritan and Hudson Rivers, both of which terminated at or near Perth Amboy. Some years later, he was hired as a hand on one of the great sailing ships that crossed the Atlantic for ports in Europe. With the expanding volume of trans-Atlantic trade, he rose quickly through the ranks on the ships, becoming a captain by 1804. This enabled him to have a share in the profitable trade. Shortly thereafter, he married Dorothy, a devoted young woman from their Quaker Meeting. Daniel arrived on the scene in October 1806, while Zach was born in April 1808. After a couple of miscarriages and a sister who died as an infant, Sarah was born in 1814. In those days, there was frequent harassment by the British Navy, but after the War of 1812 ended, the outlook for American trading looked promising; by 1816 Josiah had done well enough to become the owner of his ship. He soon added a few river sloops and barges that would collect goods from ports on the Raritan, the Hudson, and Long Island Sound for transshipment to Europe. Thus, he started his own shipping company, and it had prospered handsomely.

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Zach mused at how fortunate or foresighted his father had been in choosing Perth Amboy as a location and in choosing shipping as a trade. The new country was growing rapidly, and the expansion of its trade was facilitated by a host of canals that were opening large areas to commerce. Even before the canals, the tonnage of shipping on the Raritan and Hudson Rivers was among the highest in the nation. The canal linking the Hudson River to Lake Champlain was completed in 1819, providing access through the north end of the lake all the way to the southern edge of Canada.

The Erie Canal opened in 1825, expanding the reach of shipping to the west end of New York, and through its connection to the Great Lakes, its reach had expanded along a route of well over a thousand miles into the heart of the continent. Many of the Erie Canal workers were even now working on a new canal to connect the small town of Chicago, at the end of the Great Lakes, to the mighty Mississippi River. These, together with a network of other recently opened canals, funneled food and products from almost the entire northeast, as well as parts of Canada and the Great Lakes region, down to the ports of New York and Perth Amboy for shipment abroad. It was no surprise to Zach that the years had been so busy and so profitable.

Among the Quakers, many believed the return of Christ referred to a spiritual event. However, the Quaker practice of quiet reflection upon Scripture led Josiah to notice, in the prophetic books, references to future events that seemed too specific to be understood in spiritual terms alone. He could not escape the conclusion that a Christ-like figure would appear once again to mankind, just as Jesus had appeared eighteen centuries earlier and as Moses and Abraham had appeared many centuries before that.

Like much of the Orthodox Quaker community at that time, he had been giving more attention to the Scriptures than the earlier generations of Quakers had. But unlike many of his fellow Quakers, he believed God would once again speak to humanity through a Messenger who would have the same “spirit and power” as Jesus, just as John the Baptist had appeared with the same “spirit and power” as Elijah, according to the opening chapter of Luke’s gospel.

Had not Jesus Himself confirmed to His disciples that John was the return of Elijah? Josiah felt certain that in a similar manner, the spirit and power of Jesus would return as a new Messenger but not necessarily bearing

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the name “Jesus,” in the same way that John did not bear the name “Elijah.”

He used to ask, “Does not even the Book of Revelation tell us that He will bear a new name? Go, look at chapter 3 verse 12 and see for yourselves.”

He believed that the new Messenger would not descend from the physical sky, contrary to what Mr. Miller’s followers generally believed. “Nay!” he used to say. “That kind of thinking is what caused the Jewish people to miss Jesus 1,800 years ago. Nay indeed! We shan’t make that mistake again.”

So it was fair to say that his perspective on this question was not the usual one—neither by Quaker standards nor by Mr. Miller’s.

Since the descriptions of the *conditions* for the return of Christ were so open to interpretation, Josiah was not inclined to put too much weight on those prophecies. But the one thing that seemed most clear to him was the reference to a specific *time* of the fulfillment. It was back in 1834, while he was studying these time-related prophecies and shortly after his discussions with that Greek priest about the “end of the age,” that he first read of the teachings of William Miller. He found much of Miller’s understanding of the time prophecies to be thoroughly sound.

Josiah’s wife, as well as their older son and their daughter, had taken little interest in such thoughts. But Zach was of a similar mind, and they had spent many a wonderful evening pondering various biblical passages together and sharing their understandings of what these must mean. They had gone together to hear Mr. Miller speak in New York City in 1840 and again in nearby Newark as recently as last May.

Among his father’s papers, Zach found a set of notes that Josiah had taken from Mr. Miller’s talks and publications that seemed to summarize Miller’s teachings, or at least the parts that Josiah could agree with. It was dated from the previous June, a month after the Newark talk, so it was unclear as to how much of this came directly from Mr. Miller and how much was Josiah’s own thoughts. But Zach found it to be a useful summary that he wanted to review, so he added it to his collection of the papers to be saved.

* * *

ZACH HAD BEEN CONTEMPLATING the prospects of his travels to the Holy Land for a few weeks, trying to anticipate the difficulties that might

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arise. Sarah was not the only skeptic. His neighbors and many of his family's friends tried to emphasize the dangers involved, without seeing its importance. He himself was beginning to have his own doubts. But then something occurred that established in him an unyielding determination to undertake the journey, while silencing the objections of family, friends, and neighbors. It was a sign in the sky.

Walking home shortly after sundown in mid-February, he noticed a comet low in the southwestern sky. This was not entirely unusual; he had seen Halley's Comet while on one of his Atlantic crossings to England with his father in 1835. But during the course of the next few weeks, this comet grew brighter and brighter, reaching such brilliance it could be seen clearly even during the daytime.

Soon excited talk of it was on everyone's lips. No one could remember ever having seen or heard of such a spectacularly bright comet. Many recalled the Great Meteor Storm ten years earlier. Many, including Zach, also remembered the famine of 1816 during the "*year without a summer*," which afflicted both North America and northern Europe. They wondered if these were the signs of the times, as given in Luke 21:11: "...famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven."

And combined with the widespread discussions about Christ's return, many were asking if this was "the sign of the Son of man in heaven," of which Matthew had written in chapter 24 of his gospel. It seemed clear that something portentous was happening, causing worry in some quarters and near panic in others.

The brilliance of the comet continued to grow during the first week of March. At that point, the comet had a two-pronged tail, with a length that spanned a quarter of the sky. It remained as long and as bright until March 21, when it started to gradually decline. When people checked the records, they all acknowledged that there had never been such a brilliant and long-tailed comet. ‡

For the Christian world, it was impossible to ignore the connection to the story in Matthew of how a similar comet or bright star had signaled the Wise Men from the East to start their journey in search of Him who "*is born*

‡ The comet would come to be known as "*The Great Comet of 1843*."

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the King of the Jews.” And so it became the cause of great discussion in all of the newspapers, as well as among a great many people, as to what might be the significance of this startling sign at this particular time. Was this indeed a sign of the things that Mr. Miller and other Adventists had foretold?

To Zach, it was an undeniable signal that now was the time to begin once again the search for the coming of the Christ, just as the Magi had done.

At this point, he resolved to put aside any reservations or nagging concerns from friends and neighbors and to dispatch a letter to Mr. Miller himself, requesting permission to visit him at his home in order to discuss in greater detail his understandings of Daniel’s prophecies and his own plans for traveling to the Holy Land to search for additional signs or indications of the coming of the Promised One until, God willing, He was found.

He posted his letter on March 21 and was anxiously hoping to hear back within a couple of weeks. But early April arrived with no return letter. So he wrote again, with a bit more urgency in his tone, explaining his intent to leave for England early in the summer. A letter came back after a fortnight from Lucy Miller, Mr. Miller’s wife, who apologized on her husband’s behalf for the delay and explained that he had suffered from a serious attack of a skin disease, erysipelas, while preaching near Sarasota Springs in mid-March and how he had spent two weeks there just to recover enough strength to make the journey home. He was still recovering, and she would send word when he had recovered sufficiently to receive visitors.²

While waiting, Zach proceeded with other plans for his travels. He considered how he might carry the money he needed to pay for all of the costs of such an extended journey. Paper money might be difficult to exchange, at least at a fair price, in such faraway places. Coinage—even gold—would likely weigh too much to constantly carry. (And he knew the only way to make sure it was safe was to keep it on himself always.)

Then he recalled a story he had read as a youngster from *The Travels of Marco Polo*. It described how they had purchased fine jewels, which they had sewed into undergarments that they wore at almost every point and how they kept a diligent eye on them whenever they took the opportunity

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to bathe. When they were in a sizable city, they would remove a single jewel and exchange it for local currency, which would carry them a long way.

Thus they traveled safely all the way to China and back. So Zach had the local tailor make such a garment, having an inner lining with many small pockets, without explaining its purpose. He estimated the cost of travel for almost two years since he wanted to be able to remain in the Holy Land until the end of 1844, if necessary. His father's account had sufficient funds, and so he set to work gradually converting the funds into gemstones and secretly sewing them, one by one, into the pockets of this unusual undergarment.

He prepared a list of all the things he would need for the journey, but the thing he needed most was a well-seasoned traveling companion. He hoped Mr. Miller might have some suggestions.



Chapter 2

DISCUSSIONS ON AN UPSTREAM JOURNEY

IN MID-MAY, ZACH RECEIVED another letter from Lucy Miller stating that her husband's health was gradually improving and that he could receive visitors so long as their stay was not protracted or stressful. Zach responded immediately, advising her of his itinerary.

Zach planned to ride one of the Thompson schooners scheduled to head up the Hudson with the next load of goods for farmers in the Albany area. From there, he knew he could find other boats that could carry him through the locks around the rapids and then up to the canal at Fort Edward. Canal boats were in service now, and they reached up to Whitehall, which, according to Lucy, was but six miles from the Miller farm.

Zach loved sailing, so having a water path from his home to Mr. Miller's suited him just fine. The overland routes by horse or carriage were jarring on public roads, and the turnpikes were not much better, there being virtually no paved roads. A few short railroads had been built but none through the countryside along the route to Whitehall.

He preferred to not travel alone, so he asked one of the company hands, Jeremy, to join him on the journey. He was a bright lad of eighteen years who had recently started with the company. He had also shown some interest in religious issues.

By the following Thursday, May 25, the schooner was fully loaded with its wares for sale, and so they set out up the Hudson River early the next day.

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The Hudson was a long, flat river—virtually at sea level for the 150-mile journey from Staten Island to Albany. It was easy sailing with warm spring breezes and dramatic views of the Palisade cliffs of northern New Jersey and the Catskill Mountains farther north. Beyond these, there were many pleasant hills, woodlands, and farms on both sides of the river, all in full springtime bloom.

Many other boats were making their journeys, including the occasional steamboat, which had been plying these waters since Robert Fulton launched the first one—*The Clermont*—on this river, a year before Zach was born. Some travelers liked the reliability of the steamboats, but Zach disliked their noise and black smoke. He preferred the quietude and the fresh air of sailing. It provided him with plenty of time for reflection, and he was in a mood for reflection about his upcoming journey.

Zach had been thinking about the comet that had shone so brilliantly in the March sky and the story of the Wise Men of the East, who had also seen some brilliant star—perhaps a comet—that had prompted their journey to the Holy Land. How fascinating a story that was! He thought back to the explanation that his father had provided at the end of the past Christmas season and the questions that Gabriel had raised.

“Hey, Jeremy,” he asked as they sat on the deck watching the scenery, “do you know anything about the story of the Wise Men of the East?”

“The Magi?” Jeremy replied. “Well, we hear the story every year at Christmas service. They were from somewhere in the east and saw a bright star and followed it until they found the newborn Jesus.”

“Yes,” replied Zach, “but there is much more than that. Comets or other bright stars appear in the sky from time to time, and people, especially wise people, don’t just get on a camel and start a thousand-mile journey every time this happens. They were wise men, who had read their own scriptures. And there must have been something in their scriptures that told them at least approximately when Jesus was to be born, which country to travel to, and to look for a star as a sign that it was time to commence the search.”

Jeremy considered this all for a moment and said, “Perhaps so. I’d never really thought about that.”

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So Zach continued, “My father read that the Magi came from the land of Persia. The people there followed a religion started by their prophet, named Zoroaster, who wrote their scriptures a long time ago—almost as long ago as the days of Moses. He learned that it was a prophecy of Zoroaster that led the Wise Men to the infant Jesus.”

“So...”

“So here’s my question: If Zoroaster was able to accurately prophesy of the time and country of Jesus’ birth, was he a true prophet like the prophets of the Old Testament? Or was he a false prophet?”

Jeremy puzzled over this a bit. If Zoroaster had been a false prophet, he wondered, how could he have accurately foretold the coming of Jesus? But if he was a true prophet, why was it that no one in the West seemed to pay any attention to his religion?

Finally, he said, “Maybe he was a false prophet who was very clever and somehow figured it out, or he maybe was inspired by Satan.”

“I’ve thought about that answer myself,” said Zach, “but then I came across Jesus’ own explanation of how to tell a false prophet from a real one. Do you remember it? It’s in chapter 7 of Matthew, where, after warning us to beware of false prophets, He says, ‘*Ye shall know them by their fruits... A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.*’

“So Jesus Himself is telling us that if the prophecy was accurately fulfilled, that is, if the fruit was good, it must come from a true prophet. Jesus said false prophets *cannot* bear good fruit. Moreover, if it had been a bad tree, it would not have endured from the time of Moses to the time of Jesus. It would have been ‘*hewn down, and cast into the fire*’ a long time ago.

“But as to why the scriptures of Zoroaster are not included in the Bible and why no one seems to read or learn about His teachings, I really have no idea. Every year at Christmastime, we celebrate the birth of Jesus, and 12 days later we celebrate the Epiphany—when the Wise Men successfully concluded their search—a search that was initiated by an ancient Zoroastrian prophecy. And yet we never seem to stop to inquire about its source or what its accuracy should imply.

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“All Christians will readily explain that they believe in the truth of two religions, Christianity and Judaism. But I myself have no idea why they ignore the third religion when the evidence of its truth is recalled every year at Christmas.”

Jeremy was puzzled. “Maybe they figured that there were enough prophets in the Old Testament already and they really didn’t need any more,” he offered. “Or maybe they just didn’t want to include any that were from so far away as Persia was.”

“Yes,” replied Zach, “that’s what my father thought. Yet if they had included Zoroaster’s prophecies, perhaps the Jewish people would have had more success at recognizing Jesus, at least at the time of His birth.

“Also, the Jews weren’t always far away from Persia. Do you recall the story in the Old Testament of how the Jewish people were conquered by the Babylonians and taken away from Jerusalem, living in captivity in Babylon?”

“Yes indeed.”

“And how, after a few years there, Babylon itself was captured by the Persians and thus both the Babylonians and the Jews became part of the Persian Empire?”

“Yes, I remember the story of the mysterious hand, which wrote on the wall, and how Daniel was the only one who could read the writing on the wall and understand it.”

“Well,” Zach explained, “at the beginning of the Book of Ezra, it says that God inspired the Persian king, Cyrus, to allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem and to decree that the temple of the Jews should be rebuilt. It is entirely different from the story of the struggle in Egypt between Moses and the Pharaoh. The relations between the Jews and the Persians were good in that they both recognized there was a single God who guided them both. Also, Isaiah says, in chapter 45 of his book, that the Lord called Cyrus His ‘anointed,’ which is a term that is reserved for a king who was supported by God.

“So in both the story of the rebuilding of Jerusalem and in the story of the Magi, that is, in both the Old and New Testaments, we find the beliefs of the Persians treated as if they were a true revelation. And yet no one today seems to acknowledge it.”

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“Well, that’s an interesting thought,” Jeremy said. “I guess the preachers I’ve heard have just bypassed this lesson.”

They sat quietly for a moment, watching the passing hills in the afternoon sun and thinking.

Then Zach added, “One other lesson that my father learned from the story of the Wise Men: Don’t expect major miracles and don’t have preconceived ideas about how He will appear. Think about this: The Wise Men were looking for ‘*He that is born King of the Jews,*’ right?”

Jeremy nodded. “So the Bible says.”

“And yet they were willing to leave Jerusalem—the royal city of the Israelites where the outward kings would be—and go instead to Bethlehem, a city without a single palace! They did not restrict their search to young princes nor to royalty. They were willing to look even among humble people in the most humble of places.

“The Jewish people had many prophecies about the coming of the Messiah. But when these referred to a ‘king,’ the religious leaders imagined He would be an earthly king with weapons and armies instead of the spiritual king that He was. It was no wonder Jesus later referred to such leaders as ‘blind.’ They did not seem to be able to understand the spiritual dimension of any of the prophecies. But the Wise Men had eyes that were spiritually open. They did not allow outward appearances to fool them. And my father was determined that we should approach our journey to the Holy Land in the same way.”

Jeremy knew all about the plans for the journey—it was much discussed among the family and staff of their shipping company. He asked, “Do you think you might find some new wise men from the East when you get there? I mean, if they had a prophecy of the coming of Jesus 1,800 years ago, perhaps they have another one for His coming now. And besides, the comet we all saw was so large that I suppose everyone in the entire world saw that sign. How could anyone miss it? Perhaps they are even now planning their own travels.”

“Now that’s a fascinating thought,” Zach replied. “I hadn’t considered it before, but yes, I suppose it is entirely possible that others from Persia or elsewhere may be preparing to make the same journey. I’ll have to keep my eyes open for them as well.”

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“I have no doubt that you are well qualified to make the journey, and you’re more likely to succeed than anyone I know,” offered Jeremy confidently.

“Thanks,” Zach replied with a smile. “If God is willing, I will succeed, and if not, at least I’ll have carried out my father’s wish.”

* * *

ALTHOUGH THE SCHOONER COULD sail at night, they anchored that evening at Saugerties to drop off some passengers and take on a few others. The following day, Zach was chatting with one of the new passengers, Hezekiah Mulligan, an older gentleman who apparently sailed the Hudson often. Zach mentioned that he was traveling to Whitehall to meet with Mr. Miller, and Hezekiah noted that he was familiar with the Millerites.

“Why, just a couple of months ago, as I was making the trip up to Albany, I had a long conversation with a group of them. They were returning from a trip to Illinois to meet with *Joseph Smith*, of Mormon fame.”³

Zach had read of Mr. Smith and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Mr. Smith claimed to have been directed by an angel to find several golden plates in a hillside near where he lived in Upstate New York and then was guided by the angel to translate these into the Book of Mormon, which had been published in March of 1830.

Mr. Miller’s spiritual quest, although less miraculous and more methodical, was happening at the same time; he first made his views public in the summer of 1831. Both presentations had been preceded by over a dozen years of preparatory experiences, study, and reflection. Both of them had their early religious awakenings in the years of 1816–17.

One of the things that attracted Josiah and Zach to Mr. Miller’s teachings was that he was not a self-promoter. He had never desired to start his own denomination but rather to open the eyes of people in many existing churches.

After several years of self-study of the Bible, Mr. Miller had come to his conclusions about the imminent coming of Christ, but he was not inclined to share them publicly. Although a part of his conscience was urging him to share his findings with the rest of the world, he promised God that he would

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speaking only if someone asked him to speak. And as it happened, someone came by later—on the very same day he had made his promise—and asked him to speak at a nearby church. He kicked himself for making such a promise, but how could he now refuse? Thus William Miller’s preaching career was launched.

As to Mr. Smith, although he attracted many followers early on, some of his teachings about angels bearing golden plates had been too strange for many of his fellow residents in Upstate New York to tolerate, and so some persecutions began. Thus, he and his followers migrated, following the path of some of their successful missions, first to Ohio, then Missouri, and then western Illinois.

Zach asked Hezekiah, “What did Miller’s followers have to say concerning Mr. Smith?”

“Well, they were a bit disgruntled, I must say. They had traveled all the way to the Mormon town *Nauvoo*, in western Illinois, on a mission to share Mr. Miller’s teachings, especially those concerning the timing of Christ’s return, to see if they could reach some mutual understanding. Yet they didn’t achieve their goal, as Mr. Smith was quite fixed on the particulars of his own understandings. So they returned empty-handed.”

“So what do you think of Mr. Smith and his followers?” Zach inquired.

“Me? Well, I really don’t know what to make of them. One of my cousins heard Mr. Smith’s preaching early on, and he was so impressed that he headed west to join them. They’re very dedicated—I’ll give you that. But I’m not so sure about those plates of gold buried in a hillside in Palmyra... seems a little odd to me.”

Zach agreed. “Perhaps Mr. Smith received some teachings that were golden. I mean, we speak of gold to describe things that never deteriorate—things that last forever—like the ‘Golden Rule.’ That’s a kind of golden tablet I could understand as coming from an angel. But if he was talking about the actual metal from the ground, that doesn’t sound like the kind of thing that angels carry around.”

“Well, who knows?” replied Hezekiah. “And who knows what will become of Mr. Smith and his followers? But one thing I’ll say for him. He has warned us about the slavery question, that it may lead us to a terrible war, and I have no doubt of that.”

“Are you an abolitionist?”

“I am,” replied Hezekiah firmly, “and I’m not afraid to say so. I was mighty pleased when our state of New York outlawed the practice 16 years ago. It should’ve been sooner.”

“Most of the slaves in New Jersey have been set free,” offered Zach rather sheepishly, “although I’m afraid it hasn’t been fully outlawed in our state yet.”

As Quakers, his family had opposed the practice of slavery for several generations. “Some are called ‘indentured servants for life,’ but it amounts to just about the same thing, I’d reckon.”

* * *

UPON REACHING ALBANY, ZACH heard a whistle and then the screech of brakes as a steam train arrived in Greenbush, on the opposite shore. He shot a quizzical look at a fellow passenger on the deck. “I didn’t realize that they’d completed the eastbound line,” Zach said.

“Yes sir,” the passenger replied. Zach could tell he was a local. “Completed it just last fall. Now you can leave those bumpy wagons or carriages behind and ride in smooth comfort all the way to Boston—and on a regular schedule too.”

Zach wasn’t much more enthusiastic about the steam engines belching smoke along the railroad lines than he was about the steamboats belching smoke on the rivers. Still, he had to concede the benefits of routes that ran east to west, such as the Boston–Albany one. These routes didn’t lend themselves to river or canal travel, since the rivers ran mostly north to south.

It was late on Saturday when they reached the dock. They remained on board the following day as work was forbidden by law on the Lord’s Day, including the work of operating the canal.

Zach had started a diary to record the events of his travels. While he was sitting on the deck in the morning sun, Jeremy pulled up a chair.

“I was thinking about our talk yesterday, as well as other ideas I had heard from your father—about how most people, if they are inclined to consider the topic at all, speak of Christ’s return as the end of the world, when the most extreme things will be happening.”

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“Yes,” Zach acknowledged, “that’s very often what they think. The prophetic parts of the Bible are written with spiritual language, in a way that fires the imagination and demands attention. Yet when people read them in such a material age as ours, they are easily mistaken to predict material events instead of spiritual ones.”

Jeremy explained how some of his friends pointed to several passages in Matthew in which Jesus speaks of the “end of the world.”

“My father taught me about that,” replied Zach. “In every place He used that phrase, the actual word He used was ‘eon,’ at least according to the oldest versions of the text, which are in Greek. Thus, He was speaking of the end of the eon, or age, not the end of the physical world.

“Moreover, in chapter 9 of Paul’s letter to the Hebrews, he refers to Jesus’ sacrifice of His life as having happened ‘now, once in the end of the world.’ Clearly, the physical world did not end after the crucifixion of Jesus. But it certainly was the end of their eon—that is to say, it was the end of the Jewish age.

“So we believe that Christ’s spirit will return next year, in the person of a new Messenger, and this will mark the end of the age in which we have been living but not the end of the physical world.”

“Well, that’s quite different from what most people say,” Jeremy answered, “but it does make sense. However, one of the other quotes that my friends sometime cite comes from Matthew 24. It is the one about how the sun and the moon would be darkened and the stars would fall from heaven. They think that this would destroy the earth entirely.”

“That’s an excellent example of the spiritual language I mentioned,” replied Zach. “Most of those listening in the pews hear this description and think of it as something new. Yet if they read their Bibles carefully, they would understand that this kind of description was used by many of the Old Testament prophets—Isaiah in chapters 13, 24, and 60; Jeremiah in chapter 31; Ezekiel in chapter 32; Joel in chapters 2 and 3; and Micah chapter 3, at least. When Jesus’ disciples heard these words, they no doubt thought of the similar language that these Old Testament prophets had used. But in Acts 2, Peter clearly explained that the reference from Joel was already fulfilled with the coming of Jesus and the Pentecost.

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“If the physical sun were actually darkened and if the moon turned into blood back then, as Peter said, then why were such extreme events never recorded by any of the historians of those times? Surely everyone would have noticed it. And again, the physical world did not end at that time.

“So it seems very clear to me that Peter, as well as the Old Testament prophets, are using these terms spiritually, not materially. The people of Jesus’ time were living in a spiritually darkened age, when the spiritual light—which religious leaders are supposed to supply—had been lost and the reflection of that light had been eclipsed, much as the light of the moon is eclipsed when it passes through the earth’s shadow, sometimes turning it blood red.

“And in the same manner that the stars serve as reliable guides when we wander, across deserts or seas, so also the religious leaders are supposed to provide mankind with reliable guidance for our spiritual lives. Yet in the time of Jesus, as well as today, most of these guides are lost—which is to say that these stars have fallen.”

“We do live in an age of great darkness,” Jeremy concurred. “There are so many different religious denominations, and they don’t seem to agree on much. I think some of the leaders spend as much time denouncing each other as they spend on providing spiritual guidance. Even many of the founding fathers of our country seemed to think that God created the world and then left us alone. How can we know what to follow when we are being led in so many different directions?

“Like Mr. Mulligan, I, too, see the evil of slavery, and yet so many preachers, especially in the South, seem to condone it. I also see the terrible problem of drunkenness and how many of our workers can’t do their work much of the time because they love their drink.”[§]

“So,” Zach replied, “you can begin to see how when the prophets use the term ‘darkness,’ it has little to do with the absence of physical light and everything to do with the absence of spiritual guidance.”

“Yes, I can see that,” Jeremy replied. “But one of my workmates cites Luke, where it says in chapter 21 that *‘heaven and earth shall pass away.’*”

§ Historical note: Per capita alcohol consumption reached an all-time high in the U.S. in the 1820s, which sparked the creation of the American Temperance Society in 1826. They worked for many decades to educate Americans on the problems of excessive alcohol consumption.

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“Well, that can be understood in a couple of ways,” Zach said. “Certainly the disciples, and indeed all of the Jewish people, had a very limited understanding of life in the afterworld and how it was related to life in this world. Jesus’ crucifixion and His triumph over death created a whole new way of thinking of the spiritual heaven and earth for Christians. The limited Jewish concepts have indeed passed away.

“But even if we are thinking on a more physical level, we have to acknowledge that Copernicus has transformed our understanding of the physical heavens by placing the sun in the center of it. And likewise, our original understanding of the physical earth—that it is a flat disk extending outward to some unknown edge—has passed away. So the ‘passing away’ of heaven and earth could also be understood as the passing away of old conceptions rather than the physical heaven and earth.

“And so it goes with every one of those references to the amazing things that are to happen upon Christ’s return. People’s minds easily jump to the physical understanding. They do not usually stop long enough to ponder the spiritual meaning. They are unacquainted with the other parts of the Bible that could shed some illumination on these inner meanings. And though they may have had, in former ages, guides that could help them understand the spiritual meanings, those stars are now fallen, and we live in an age of spiritual darkness.

“I dare say that even if some of the knowledgeable religious leaders might be inclined to consider spiritual alternatives, others are keenly aware that the material interpretation draws crowds to the pews and inspires them to empty their pockets into the collection plate. I mean, if the physical world will end soon, you aren’t going to need your money anymore, are you?”

Zach had his doubts about the sincerity of some of the preachers he had heard.

He continued, “In Matthew 24 and 25, where we find most of Jesus’ prophecies, He gave us many signs of what to look for as an indication of the coming of the latter days. He described a long period of history, with its persecutions, wars, pestilence, and earthquakes as well as false prophets and divisions in the church so that Christians would betray and hate one another. And because of this iniquity, *‘the love of many will wax cold.’* Surely

we have seen these divisions as various denominations have broken away during the Reformation and as millions that have died in the resulting wars since Martin Luther's days.

"But He gave us a simple sign to look for: He said that the gospel of the kingdom would be preached '*unto all nations; and then shall the end come.*' And as I said, this is *not* the end of the physical world but the end of the *age*, when we can expect His return to open up a new age.

"Surely with the explorations of the world during the last three centuries, the gospel of Jesus has been preached to all nations. I've read Madagascar—the last nation to receive Christian missionaries—received them in 1818. And even areas that aren't nations, such as the interior of Africa, were opened to the gospel just last year. It is abundantly clear that we are living at the end of the age as Jesus Himself described it.

"He tells us to count the years according to the prophecy of Daniel, which is exactly what Mr. Miller has done, and this clearly points to 1844 as the year of fulfillment.

"In Matt 24:16–20, He speaks of it as a time of great testing requiring the greatest detachment both from the things you own and from family ties. I have felt this during these past few months as many people have questioned why I should leave my life of comfort in Perth Amboy. But Jesus has warned us to be ready to let go of such attachments, so I will not look back.

"As to verse 21 and the 'great tribulations' that are to be expected, most people understand these to be tribulations that will be visited upon the unbelievers. But I am not so sure."

Jeremy raised an eyebrow, but Zach continued: "Remember that in the days of Jesus, there were many people—most of the Jews in fact—who hoped to see the Messiah. Yet their leaders all had particular expectations of the manner of His appearance. Many imagined He would lead an army that would put the Romans to flight and would sit on the throne of King David. Others imagined that He would be able to part the sea, as Moses had done. Certainly He would exalt the Jewish religion and not allow Gentiles to be followers.

"So His appearance caused much tribulation among the Jews. Some were humble enough to recognize that their former expectations might be

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incorrect and that God, in His all-knowing wisdom, might have a greater plan in store. Thus, they were able to recognize the truth of Jesus' teachings.

"But others, perhaps misled by their own religious leaders—whom Jesus Himself denounced as 'blind guides'—clung to their own pre-determined views and ignored or even persecuted Jesus' early followers. Those leaders seemed to be telling God, 'Unless you send a Messiah according to my expectations, I will not believe!' Spiritually, they were lost.

"But there is another tribulation. That first spiritual tribulation begets an outward tribulation: Since people are, in large part, spiritually lost, they make decisions out of ignorance or from a material perspective, and these decisions lead to outward problems for their whole society.

"When the majority of the Jewish people turned away from Jesus, they put their trust in political and religious leaders who were ready to rise up against the Romans. But that approach led the Romans, less than 40 years later, to destroy Jerusalem and not too long thereafter to banish the Jewish people from the Holy Land—a great tribulation that they continue to suffer to this very day.

"So I wonder whether we will follow the same pattern in this age. Most of our religious leaders insist that their own particular expectations must be fulfilled. Yet their expectations differ. It is impossible that all of them could be correct. How much tribulation must occur in peoples' manner of thinking before they are willing to recognize that God's fulfillment may be different from what they were expecting?"

Jeremy sighed. "I suppose that is true. Most people, perhaps all, will have to go through the anguish of letting go of *something* if all are going to come to a common recognition of the new Messiah."

Then he added, "And what about you, Zach? Have you thought about the fact that you, too, might have some misunderstandings and might have to change something about your own expectations?"

This caught Zach off-guard, and the notion made him uneasy.

After a pause, he replied, "Yes, the thought has crossed my mind. I can't rightfully ask others to approach the task of seeking the Messiah with humility unless I do the same myself. I don't know what things I might tend

to cling to, but I pray that I'll have the humility to let go of my own misconceptions when the time comes."

He paused again, as if trying to envision it, and then continued his review of the twenty-fourth chapter of Matthew: "In verses 23–25, Jesus warned the disciples about false prophets, whom we can know by their fruits, as we discussed the other day. He warned that some of these would call themselves 'Christ.' My father and I agreed that this indicates that the Promised One—the return of Christ—will not actually use the same name. Rather, He will be called by a 'new name,' as mentioned in Revelation 2 and 3 and again in Isaiah 62.

"But as to where He would appear, Jesus simply said it would be 'out of the east' as lightning, which apparently comes typically from the east and travels to the west. That is why I am traveling to the east—to the Holy Land.

"He spoke of the sun being darkened and the moon not giving forth her light, as we discussed earlier. And as I previously noted, my father and I believe that His coming on the clouds with great glory is a metaphor for His spiritual greatness, just as He arrived before with enormous spiritual power even though the spiritually blind could not perceive it at that time."

By this point, Jeremy had opened Zach's Bible and was following along in Matthew 24 as Zach explained their understanding of the verses.

"It says here, '*But of that day and hour, knoweth no man...*'" pointed out Jeremy.

"True. And I have no doubt that we will not be able to predict the exact *day or hour*," replied Zach. "But Jesus and Daniel gave us a way to determine at least the *year*. And perhaps Jesus was referring to the men of His time. After all, why would God have provided Daniel with the prophecies of the time of the end if He did not intend for the people of that time to understand them?"

"Still, it is certainly true that many will not understand. He compares it to the days of Noah. Most people laughed at him until it was too late. And He compares it to a thief in the night, who comes quietly and leaves before the owner of the house realizes what has happened."

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“That sounds quite different,” Jeremy noted, “from the Christ who descends with a trumpet blast.”

“Exactly my point!” declared Zach. “The spiritual coming is with a trumpet blast, as in verse 31, but the physical coming is quietly, as a thief, as in verse 43.

“In short, every one of the verses of prophecy can be understood in a spiritual sense. Yet there are many people who think only of the material sense and thus become lost.”

“Well, you’ve certainly given me a lot to ponder,” said Jeremy.

Zach replied, “I am grateful for your questions. They cause me to think further as well.”

By now the sun was setting over the western horizon, and it was time to find a meal and some rest in preparation for tomorrow’s journey.

* * *

ON MONDAY THEY BOOKED passage on the *Pocahontas*, scheduled to depart on the following day. It was one of the newly built sailing canal boats specially designed to carry goods and passengers not only on lakes and rivers but also through the locks on the Champlain Canal. It had masts that could be lowered for passage under the low canal bridges and keels that could be raised to allow passage through the shallow locks. These boats could reach the north end of Lake Champlain in Canada. And up there, the *Chambly Canal* was scheduled to open the following week.

The captain had a load that would be among the first to be delivered from Albany directly to Montreal on the St. Lawrence River. The boat would pass through 12 sets of locks: six going up the Hudson and another six in the canal leading from Fort Edward to Whitehall and Lake Champlain. The captain, crew, and cargo would continue from there descending again through the new locks almost to sea level near Montreal. “Such a marvelous feat of engineering!” thought Zach.

As they sailed upriver toward Fort Edward, Zach was thinking about his father and what his father might have said when meeting Mr. Miller. He recalled the notes from Mr. Miller’s talks he had found

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among his father's papers and got them out of his sack to review. They read:

*Read the Bible for yourself so that you will not be led astray!
The question of 'When?' is not so difficult. Jesus' disciples asked
Him in Matthew 24.*

*'Tell us, when shall these things be?' (v3) i.e., When shall You
return?*

*First described what sounds like a long period of time. But says
that the end is not yet (v6).*

*Also certain signs of times & the increase in wickedness & lack
of love for God.*

*Then says, "gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the
world for a witness unto all nations; AND THEN SHALL THE
END COME."*

*Today, the gospel is preached in all nations, so we know that the
end is at hand!*

Josiah noted many ideas given about the meaning and exact interpretation of the signs and how they might apply and continued:

*But, besides signs, there is a single verse that points to the
number of years. v15*

*He tells us to look at the prophecy of the "abomination of desola-
tion, spoken of by Daniel the prophet." (Also in Mark 13:14)*

*In the whole Old Testament, one thing about all the prophecies:
They are descriptions of future events; almost never call out the
exact year these events will happen.*

*The only exception to this rule is Daniel. Several key numbers
are found in his visions.*

*This is why Jesus pointed us to a few particular chapters in
that book.*

*Book of Daniel—comprised of 12 chapters. 1st six are history
of miraculous things that happened to him. How he, with most of*

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the people of Judah, were taken into captivity by the Babylonians. Through his ability to interpret king's dreams, he rose to prominence & won the king's favor.

He read the mysterious writing that appeared on the wall in the king's palace. Interpreted it, accurately forecasting downfall of the Babylonian king at the hand of neighboring Persia.

Daniel rose to prominence in the Persian court when king's hungry lions refused to destroy him while confined overnight in their den.

Last six chapters of Daniel cease to be narrative. Describing series of dreams and visions Daniel had. References found here to "abomination of desolation" & "transgression of desolation"—only in Chapters 8, 9, 11 and 12—nowhere else in the entire Bible!

So we know exactly where Jesus was pointing.

Chapter 8: One saint asked another how long until the desolating sacrifice would end. The other says, "Unto 2,300 days; then shall the sanctuary be cleansed."

In sum, we have from both Matthew 24 and Mark 13, Jesus' clear statement that He will return will be at the time of the end & that it is associated with the end of the transgression of desolation, which is at the end of 2,300 days.

God, speaking to Daniel through Gabriel, was saying something very specific here. This number is not one that might have been mistranslated & not a rounded number, like 2,000, which could have originally been "thousands." It was not even like 2,400, as in as a couple dozen hundreds. A very specific number, found nowhere else in the entire Bible. It seemed to be pointing to a very specific point in the future.

But even Daniel could not understand the vision back then. And apparently it was intended that he would not understand it. Gabriel said "Understand, O son of man: for at the time of the end shall be the vision" (v17). At the end of the chapter: "shut thou up the vision; for it shall be for many days." Even Daniel, the great interpreter of the king's dreams, confessed that he was astonished and "none understood it" (v27).

We would be lost were it not of God's grace.

We had a number, but we knew not what it meant nor the starting point from which to count. How could we understand something that even Daniel could not?

But here & in Chapter 12, Daniel says we will understand it later, for the visions are 'closed up and sealed till the time of the end' (12:9).

Now we are living at that time of the end—that time when the gospel of the kingdom is being preached in all the world, just as Jesus said. Now is the day in which that vision can be unsealed! (This gave him courage & cause for hope.)

A "day" in the realm of the saints refers to a year in our world (for there are other references in the Old Testament where the term "day" is used for a year — Num 14:34 & Ezek 4:5).

2,300 normal human days is a little more than 6 years, and clearly, nothing significant happened 6 years after Daniel had seen this vision.

But even when we know it is 2,300 years, how shall we find the starting point of those years?

Many were perplexed by this. By God's grace, he realized: The revelation Gabriel brought in Chapter 8 was linked to the revelation Gabriel brought to Daniel in the latter half of Chapter 9. These are the only 2 revelations brought by Gabriel in the entire Old Testament!

Here he again spoke of the abomination of desolation & here he referred to the crucifixion of our Lord, Jesus Christ. This vision served as the key, which removed all doubt about the first vision. For though it was a vision of the future from Daniel's perspective, from our perspective, we know it was clearly fulfilled in 33–34 AD.

8:25: Gabriel describes "cutting off" of the Messiah during the 70th "week" after issuance of the commandment to rebuild Jerusalem, that is, before the end of 490 years in human terms.

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The “cutting off” of the Messiah is a clear reference to the crucifixion of our Lord. A clearer reference could scarcely be imagined! Isaiah used the same term in chapter 53 of his book, describing how the Savior would be “cut off out of the land of the living.”

We know exactly when that happened. If we measure the “week” & “days” described going backward from the crucifixion, again taking a year for a day, we come to the year 457 BC. And when we check all of the known records, we find that, yes indeed, Artaxerxes, the king of the Persian empire at the time of the Jewish captivity there, issued a commandment to rebuild Jerusalem in that very same year! (See Ezra 7:11)

Now it becomes clear & certain that these two visions from Gabriel are correctly measured from 457 BC. The vision of Chapter 9 describes 70 weeks, that is, 490 days in the Lord’s terms—490 years in ours. Sometime during the last “week” (7-year period), the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would be “cut off.” This happened exactly as foretold!

Now we are certain of two things:

- 1. The term “day” in the Bible’s prophecy means a year in human terms AND*
- 2. we should start out counting from 457 BC.*

Understanding both & returning to the vision of the 2,300 days from Chapter 8, we are certain now that transgression of desolation should end 2,300 years after 457 BC.

That brings us to the year 1843.

The Book of Ezra even gives us the day from which the time is counted: “first day of the first month of the year.” In the calendar of Persia, this is the spring equinox, or March 21.

At the bottom was a parenthetical note, with questions that Josiah had added:

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(Does he know that there is no year zero in the calendar, so 2,300 years after 457 BC is actually 1844 AD? And what of the 1260? What of the return of Elijah as John the Baptist? Will that occur again?)

It was unclear to Zach how many of these ideas were directly from Mr. Miller and how many were from Josiah's own thinking. But he found the notes to be a fairly accurate summary of his own discussions of the prophecies with his father.

It was perfectly clear to him: Daniel's chapter 9 prophecy of the crucifixion of Jesus was unquestionably fulfilled. Using the same "day for a year" principle and the same starting date, Daniel's chapter 8 prophecy of "the cleansing of the sanctuary" would certainly be fulfilled in the coming year or two. Jesus Himself had equated this prophecy with His return when He answered His disciples' questions about this in Matthew 24.

Zach recalled from conversations with his father that the last three parenthetical questions were things he wanted to ask Mr. Miller. Zach was glad to have this summary and several other useful notes that his father had left. He recalled his father's final promise to help him as much as he could, and he felt that these notes would certainly do so.

The sun was nearly set by the time he finished reviewing the notes. After a modest meal with Jeremy, it was time for them to retire to their cabin below deck in the boat, which continued sailing through the night until it reached the next lock.

The boat reached Fort Edward on the following afternoon, the last day of May, and stopped for the night to discharge and pick up some passengers as well as some goods.

Fort Edward marked the spot where the Champlain Canal branched away from the Hudson River. The muleteers, whose animals pulled the canal boats, adhered to the speed limit of four miles per

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hour, so the 25-mile trip, including passage through the six sets of locks, made for a long day's travel. But by dusk they arrived at the village of Whitehall, where they soon found the local inn and enjoyed the relatively spacious quarters, a welcome relief from the cramped cabins of the boats.



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About the Author

JAY TYSON grew up outside of Detroit, Michigan, and graduated from Princeton University with a degree in civil engineering in 1976. Shortly thereafter, he married Eileen Cregge. They spent four years in Liberia, where Jay worked on road construction projects. They also spent seven years in Haifa, Israel, where he assisted with historic restoration at the Baha'i World Center. They returned to New Jersey in 1989, where they raised two daughters and Jay continued his career in civil engineering.

Raised in a Presbyterian household, Jay was apt from an early age to deeply ponder spiritual matters. The suicides of three men in his upper-middle-class neighborhood over the course of a few years caused him to question the idea that material success holds the key to fulfillment and happiness.

He became a member of the Baha'i Faith in 1970 and has long observed a daily regime of reading scriptures or books on religion and religious history. *The Wise Men of the West* is his first novel and reflects his commitment to studying religion, history, and geography. Jay may be reached at Jay.Tyson@SOOPLLC.com.

VOLUME II: THE EAST

THE
WISE MEN

of the WEST

Successful
A

SEARCH FOR THE PROMISED ONE
IN THE LATTER DAYS

a novel by

JAY TYSON



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