

THE FINAL PROPHET

Book One of the Messiah Chronicles

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Chapter 1

New York City June 2014

The television studio, a vast jungle of electronic equipment, was teeming with frantic workers preparing for the most ambitious event of their careers. This day was the climactic moment awaited round the world. A daily avalanche of media coverage had prepared billions of viewers for this phenomenon. A live satellite uplink, carried from one orbiting dish to another over every corner of the planet, was to transmit the telecast of the century. One man would sit before the eye of humanity and speak to every living human being in the same instant. Nothing would ever be the same afterward.

The prophecies of spiritual masters and illumined visionaries heralded this event as the turning point in the evolution of human consciousness, the moment of mass awakening to a level of awareness and insight that would break through the opaque clouds of separate consciousness into the vistas of union with universal life. All work was at a standstill. Offices were dead silent as employees stood motionless before television sets. Millions upon millions were frozen into one common beam of attention. Instant translation of each word pronounced by the speaker into every known language would insure a synchronization of hearing and understanding, thanks to the colossal powers of techno-genius that circled the globe like one great nervous system, connecting every nerve to the central vortex of activity.

Satellite dishes looked toward the heavens in front of countless churches, temples, ashrams, mosques, universities, and hotels all packed with silent, expectant faces. Red lights flashed on and off with urgent words. Ten minutes and counting before the worldwide telecast. Cameramen adjusted their headphones, nerves on edge with the magnitude of the moment. Producers hurried back and forth, called out orders to assistants, checked their watches obsessively. Sweat gleamed on brows that had seen it all, veterans of the great feats of global broadcasting. But this one was different. This was an encounter between humanity and its destiny. This was the final revelation to a race come of age.

Technology and science had established this possibility now facing the world. History's painful road had reached its kairos time, its transitional point.

"Where is he?" Jeanne Fleming, network producer extraordinaire, shot out her question to no one in particular. The floor director looked anxiously into the control room, hoping somebody had an answer. He motioned like a panicked mime at the shadows commandeering the booth.

"You tell me!" yelled back an outraged director. His face ravaged by thirty years of

tantrums over tight deadlines and prima donnas, the man hadn't a drop of patience left in his system. Especially this evening. Frank Ross rushed out of the control room, into the studio, and sought out the producer like a loose bull in a Spanish fiesta.

"This is your fault, Jeanne!" She turned around and faced her assailant.

"How dare you! I had the agenda worked out to the minute."

Ross knew that, having done over twenty shows with her. But he needed to vent his frustration on someone. "What the hell are we going to do now?"

Jeanne removed a lock of red-dyed hair from between her eyes and took a deep breath.

"I was told by his people that they would have him here twenty minutes before air time."

"Twenty minutes? You know that's unheard of for a live telecast! Why'd you agree to that? There's half a dozen guys with heart conditions in this studio!"

"We're not dealing with someone whose schedule can be controlled!" Jeanne fired back angrily. "I did the best I could."

Ross turned in circles several times, taking in the hectic scene around them.

"I better not lose my job over this," he muttered.

"Take it easy, Frank. The world will wait for him."

The aging, worn out director stopped his anxious pacing. He looked into the eyes of his colleague. For an instant, he lost track of the noise whirling around them. Jeanne Fleming, aggressive go-getter and unflinching personality, felt herself soften as a smile crossed her lips. The reality of the moment came back to her and lifted her above the whirl of emotions that was such a part of her daily activity.

"They'll wait for him . . ." she repeated gently with a strange, distant voice. Ross felt a chill rise up his spine and goose bumps spread across his entire body. He was far from being religious, but there was something special sacred about this event. Even a jaded TV director recognized the exceptional quality of the moment.

"It's bigger than the Oscars, isn't it?" he said, paradoxically feeling the weight of worry evaporate from his chest and shoulders.

"You bet," Jeanne retorted.

"You go on back to your chair and do your job."

"Right," he agreed with a new determination. Ross watched her walk off into the crowd of technicians. He shook his head in amazement and returned to the control room.

"So what's the deal?" asked one of the assistants at the switch.

"You tell me," Ross grunted as he grabbed his headphones. The audio man looked up from

his vast board of knobs and buttons and nearly jumped out of his seat. Rex Conway, senior vice-president of programming, was standing over him peering through the wall-length window.

"Mister Ross, sir, I think there's someone here to see you."

Ross had just seated himself comfortably in his cushy swivel chair.

"Are you joking? We're going live in minutes."

"Not if the set is empty, we're not!" The VP was now in the control room, his cultivated baritone voice booming over the dozen people in the booth. Ross swallowed hard. Top brass only showed up in his work area when things were going very wrong.

"What's the backup plan?" the director asked as calmly as he could.

"There is no backup plan, Ross!" Conway cried out. The ugly tone of his voice clashed with his shiny, perfectly tailored Italian suit. Everyone seemed to shrivel at his rage. Conway looked at them with that arrogant air made possible by too much power and a huge bank account.

"We've got over five hundred million dollars of corporate sponsorship hanging on this thing. It's your job to make us look good."

"So do we run the logo and put up a 'please stand by' slate?" Ross dared to ask. The VP flashed him a disdainful look.

"Put a gazillion people on hold? It could start a war!" Conway nervously ran his manicured fingers through the scented grease holding his hair back. "I knew we shouldn't have agreed to this. It's too weird . . . and too dangerous."

He noticed that the pretty engineer by the vectorscope overheard him.

"What can you do when the President gives you a call and the World Federation Secretary himself walks into your office?"

He held in check a sheepish look which might have betrayed the limitations of the power that gave him his bombastic confidence. The young woman was not impressed. The eagerly anticipated presence of today's visitor to the studio obliterated all pretense to self-importance. A mind-bending breakdown of imaginary hierarchies and power bases had invaded the building since early morning. Nothing was the same, and the man had not even made his appearance.

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A door opened, and the prophet appeared, surrounded by a nervous entourage. A great hush came over the studio as he slowly walked toward the lighted stage where the cameras awaited him. Tall, intense, ruggedly handsome, he looked more like a film star than a wonder worker. But there was something about his presence that was unlike anyone else.

An aura of all-seeing awareness accompanied him like a luminous cloud. Those who came under his gaze, however briefly, were seen through and through. His disciples flanked his side more like bodyguards than devotees. Several hurried ahead and confirmed where he was to sit.

A make-up artist was angrily told to forget about powdering their leader's forehead. It just wasn't done. Producers, directors, and technicians watched with stunned silence as the man walked onto the set and took his seat. Presidents and other world leaders had come before them in the past, and these professionals had long ago lost any trace of fascination with celebrities. But this man was different. He was more than a famous person. In his wake, he seemed to carry some mysterious power from the heart of the universe. He had performed miracles before the eyes of a cynical, suspicious world. No one doubted anymore.

"Roll camera!" Ross shouted with a blend of relief and enthusiasm.

The prophet sat stoically before the eyes of the world.

"Many have come before to warn you of what lay ahead. But I have come to tell you that the warnings are over. The Tribulation, the age of transition, is here!

"Each of you who listen to me must awaken now to your true nature so that you may not only survive the cataclysms and tragedies that are about to devastate the world, but most especially so that you may participate in the rebuilding of the aftermath.

"A new beginning will rise out of the destruction and purification of the old. Prepare yourselves now to become instruments of the higher realm that seeks to bring light to this forsaken place. Otherwise you will be mere fodder for the terrible calamities that are already on their way.

"What is the nature of this change you must undergo? First, centuries-old misconceptions must be uprooted. Among them are the idolatry of the self and the legions of evil that come with it: separation, violence, greed, reckless abuse of the earth.

"Turn your attention from yourselves to the Source of your existence. This is what you were created to do and be: co-workers in the completion of creation, not its vultures and destroyers. You cannot participate in the building of a new age without serving a higher world by letting it work through you.

"How is this done?" He paused for a moment.

"We must get beyond religion."

The words were stated slowly and emphatically. A worldwide audience watched in stunned silence. The man on the television screen stared unblinking at the camera that was sending his message around the planet, live and instantly translated.

"The forms must die so that their true content can be released."

The serene speaker knew that every sentence he pronounced could be a death warrant. But

this moment was the climax of his strange and wondrous journey on this plane of existence. It was for this that he was born. Hardly middle aged, the prophet of the new millennium was a man of mystery. His life was virtually anonymous until the previous year when his fame exploded across the globe. Now he spoke from the depths of his mysterious soul to a critical mass of humanity. The outcome could change entire societies and lead to an enlightened epoch for all peoples.

"We are one family. All of our intuitions of the Sacred are partial truths. The time has come to tear down the barriers between us. Religious institutions have failed humanity and the teachers they claim to represent. A new day has arrived. Today, we can each recognize the oneness within all authentic religious teaching. We must now turn beliefs into experience. The only genuine sanctuary is within each one of you, not in buildings. Rituals are only useful if they lead us into the depths of our own heart."

A hushed crew watched intently in the darkness of the vast studio. The solitary man sat peacefully on a stool beneath a dozen lights. Alone and uncompromising, he addressed the world. In the bowels of the cavernous studio, hurried footsteps echoed toward the control room. An anxious Rex Conway burst into the room.

"We've got to cut him off! The phones are ringing off the hook! We'll lose every one of our sponsors!" Frank Ross rose from his chair and cried out impatiently.

"The World Federation has approved the appearance of this man on the International Link! What he says is their concern, not ours." The vice-president, more nervous than ever, was losing his mask of suave confidence and turning into a bundle of twitches.

"This heresy is not Federation-approved! It can't be! In less than a minute, the man's made himself the number one enemy of every religion on the planet!"

"So?"

Conway stopped short and looked into the eyes of the director. Their cold, disinterested gaze said it all.

"One more dead lunatic won't bring the world government to an end," he added with a certain pleasure. "He's making his bed. Let him lie in it."

The executive turned to the large window opening onto the studio. The solitary man was still talking in a slow and steady voice to a shocked world audience.