

MICHAEL PHILLIPS

HIDDEN JIHAD

TRIBULATION CULT BOOK 3:
A NOVEL



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Hidden Jihad
Tribulation Cult Book 3: A Novel
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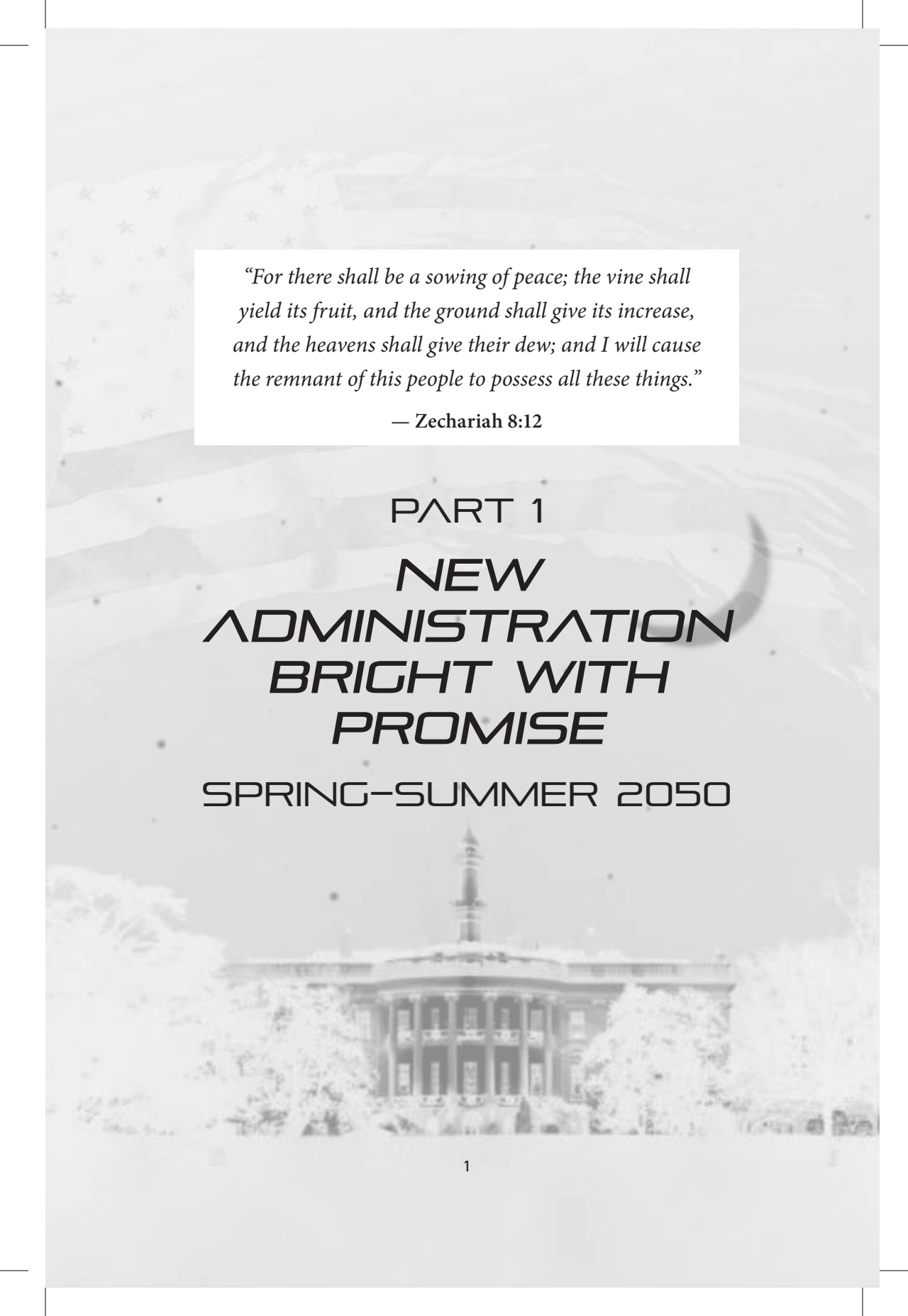
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“For there shall be a sowing of peace; the vine shall yield its fruit, and the ground shall give its increase, and the heavens shall give their dew; and I will cause the remnant of this people to possess all these things.”

— Zechariah 8:12

PART 1
**NEW
ADMINISTRATION
BRIGHT WITH
PROMISE**

SPRING-SUMMER 2050

THE WESTERN PRESIDENTIAL MANOR

MAY 2050

SILKY SOUNDS emanated from a seven-piece jazz ensemble to one side of an expansive lawn, bordered by trim hedges and colorful azaleas and rhododendrons.

Three smoothly seductive lead saxophones interweaving their interpretive harmonies created an atmosphere more evocative of New Orleans than what had been dubbed the Western Presidential Manor on Bainbridge Island. Opposite the musicians a lavish portable bar dispensed a full range of offerings. Wine, brandy, champagne, and assorted liqueurs, among the most expensive money could buy, flowed freely. Two or three hundred high-ranking and formally attired guests mingled casually, drinks in hand, amid an intoxicating aura of power.

The president had made no appearance yet. He was not expected to effect his grand entrance until every name had been checked off, and the elite from around the globe was on hand to witness his triumphant emergence.

The tidewaters of Puget Sound lapped gently on a four-hundred-yard length of private shoreline as carefully maintained as the manicured grass sloping down to it. Bainbridge had long represented one of Washington State's most exclusive districts, isolated as it was from the Olympic Peninsula to the west and the mainland to the east. Though serviced by a two-lane bridge at its northern extremity, the island was most easily accessible from Seattle by ferry, or, if you liked,

helicopter. That the island boasted as many private landing pads as swimming pools gave some indication of the tax bracket of its residents. Google-Microsoft, Amazon-Starbucks, Apple-Boeing, Social Media Enterprises LTD, Alaska-Delta, Global AI, and other notable Washington-based conglomerates maintained hideaway compounds here for the use of their executives.

This particular expanse of gravelly seafront and private harbor was now the most restricted piece of waterfront real estate in the country, guarded twenty-four-seven at both extremities by Secret Service agents with automatic weapons. A high electric fence surrounded the rest of the fifteen-acre compound. Well behind the main house sat a spacious helipad and hangars for two aircraft in addition to Marine One. The newly installed runway half a mile away could handle a modest-sized Bombardier or smaller private jet, but nothing so large as a commercial airliner. Air Force One was therefore hangared at Paine Field.

Neither rifles, fence, nor round-the-clock military guard, however, could prevent a steady flow of sea craft of all sizes and shapes, from tiny motorboats to luxury yachts and ferries, streaming by. Their owners and captains knew enough to keep their distance. Every vessel that ventured within a quarter mile was scrutinized and its identity quickly checked. This did not stop the passengers on those boats, large and small, from intently scanning the shoreline, binoculars keenly focused, to see whom they might be lucky enough to catch a glimpse.

The day was sunny, breezy, and warm—in the mid-sixties. On the shores of Puget Sound, it was as warm as anyone had the right to expect in May. Expansive gardens spread out from the lawn in all directions. The profusion of color from beds of tulips, daffodils, and roses bordering the larger flowering species, accented by infinite shades of fresh green tips bursting from trees and hedges and shrubs, evidenced spring in the full glory of its recreative miracle. Surely the northern hemisphere's month of May brought a smile to the Creator's heart, annually reminiscent of the eternal proclamation: God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.

All segments, not merely of US society but of the global family, had been included on the president's selective cast of characters for this

momentous day. The multi-varied dress and skin color told the tale. Burqas, niqabs, sarongs, sherwanis, even a few colorful African tribal costumes, were plentifully represented. With them walked black tuxedos and twenty-thousand-dollar dresses from the most exclusive Parisian designers. The guest list gave no doubt that Jefferson Fitzsimmons Rhodes was indeed the world's president. This gathering to celebrate the half-century mark over which history had chosen him to preside in every way confirmed him as the planet's most powerful and popular man.

Most of those who had been invited occupied the top rung of their respective ladders. Leaders from business and education, banking and commerce and law, and every other segment of society were on hand. This was the *crème de la crème*. Not just the movers and shakers, but those of a select elite who told the movers and shakers what to move and shake. Every major capital claimed representation on this day—Beijing, Buenos Aires, Edinburgh, Rome, Hong Kong, Mexico City, London, Tokyo, Moscow, Singapore, Shanghai, Baghdad, Berlin, Rio de Janeiro, Tehran, Kiev, Cairo, Paris, Ottawa, Sydney, Istanbul, New Delhi, Jerusalem, and all the rest.

Politicians, of course, dominated. Besides leaders from both houses of Congress and most of the justices of the Supreme Court, at least two dozen presidents and prime ministers, along with numerous foreign dignitaries, had flown in to this northwestern outpost on the opposite coast from the nation's capital. A surprising number of so-called holy men rubbed shoulders with them. They included ayatollahs, rabbis, cardinals, priests, ministers, and the especially revered new Dalai Lama. One small contingent from California, however, was noticeably out of place. The president had his own reasons for including them.

Bainbridge Island, on this day, was truly the center of the human universe. This was the president's shindig. He made sure he was surrounded by fawning admirers. Nor could anyone deny him such an obvious perk of his position. Who wouldn't relish in the luxury of being surrounded by so many in the political world, and from every nation on the planet, who thought he walked on water. In this era of unanimity and accord, what in former times would have been called

“the opposition” was almost a distant memory. This president, more than any other, had done what most would have considered impossible a generation earlier—united the human species. Its infinitely diverse coalitions seemed to be dwelling, as the saying went, with peace on earth and goodwill toward men.

At least so the president and his powerful and recently renamed Progressive Party led the US public and world to believe. Not even all his fellow former “Democrats,” however, endorsed the change which President Rhodes had unilaterally imposed. What about the party’s illustrious history that was intrinsically linked to the Democrat name?

More serious undercurrents than the name of his party existed within the Rhodes vision of utopia. Thought all but dead a decade ago, Christianity was showing surprising resiliency against the uniform onslaught against it from nearly every segment of society. It was unclear what role the churches and clergy of organized Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Protestantism, and Evangelicalism played in the sudden resurgence of interest in traditional spirituality. Whatever was happening seemed to have originated outside the world of official Christendom. Those who were paying close attention noted its genesis as coinciding with the publication of Dr. Charles Reyburn’s book *Roots: America Reclaims Its Heritage* two years earlier, just months prior to Rhodes’s landslide victory.

On his part, the president had given little thought either to Reyburn or Christianity since the death of his former friend and roommate Ward Hutchins on the night of the election.

Until planning this mid-century bash, that is. Suddenly the uptick of Christian activity appeared on his radar. In making out the guest list, he recalled a news briefing from several weeks earlier about a Christian event in Texas that, for unexplained reasons, struck him as worrisome.

Even with Ward gone, he couldn’t become complacent. Few things concerned him more than a rebirth of Christian fanaticism. He needed to know what was going on. He didn’t want news briefings. He needed someone on the inside. After some thought, the guest list had been revised accordingly.

A thorough contingent of the media had also been invited to Bainbridge Island—WNN, no secret the president's chosen mouthpiece, most prominent among the rest. All the other US networks and most of their reputable international counterparts were on hand as well, though with strict orders that they would film only the president's address later in the afternoon. No interviews with guests were allowed.

In the meantime the journalists and their cameramen waited inside several large rooms of the expansive Rhodes estate, cooling their heels with the same expensive potations being imbibed outside. They passed the time speculating on the nature of the president's upcoming address. It was billed as setting forth more significant policy initiatives than the bland predictabilities outlined in his State of the Union a few months earlier. The Presidential Manor had released a statement a week before, heightening rather than lowering expectations.

Anson Roswell, the president's press secretary, tagged it his State of the World speech.