

A NOVEL

# THE SCROLL

The background of the cover is a collage. At the top, there's a cityscape featuring a prominent golden dome and a minaret, set against a hazy, golden sky. Below this, a man in a dark suit is seen from behind, standing in a large, reddish-brown tunnel. The tunnel's walls are covered in faint, glowing patterns, and a bright light emanates from an opening at the end of the tunnel, where the man is looking. The overall color palette is dominated by warm, golden, and reddish tones.

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## PROLOGUE

*Jerusalem, June 15, 2012*

**D**avid Chambers raised his video camera and pointed it at a limestone facing that had fallen from the north wall and settled at the base of the narrow tunnel. He had seen fifteen such structural failures so far and wouldn't be surprised to see more. He was viewing work done two millennia ago—work that hadn't been seen for twenty centuries. What surprised him was that there wasn't more damage. He had been in tunnels that required weeks of clearing.

The light of the camera illuminated the larger stones that provided the structural support for the tunnel. At first glance they looked like the blocks he had seen at the mouth of the passageway, ten miles back. Aboveground surveys indicated the rough tunnel ran almost eleven miles. On even terrain, a man could make three miles an hour. Here, things went much slower.

Chambers directed the camera in a slow arc, letting the lens take in every detail. It was his first pass through the tunnel, and he wanted a record that he could study for years to come.

Archaeology had a reputation for excitement and startling discovery. Most days it was just plain hard, dirty work—labor that involved equal amounts of mind-breaking scholarship and backbreaking physical work. Scholarship, perspiration, and luck were the triplets of his science.

He turned off the camera and let the blackness envelop him. A second later his heart rate doubled, and he could feel his blood pressure rise. The last sensation, he figured, was more imagination than fact, but it was real to him.

“Easy.” He whispered the word to himself. He was alone in the tunnel. That was a choice made from ego and good archaeology. He wanted to be the first human to move the length of King Herod’s ancient tunnel since it had been closed so many decades ago; he also wanted to limit the number of hands and feet in the site until he recorded everything he could.

Chambers closed his eyes, as if preventing the darkness from pressing into his brain. He wiped the sweat with his free hand, transferred the camera, and did the same with his other hand.

“Breathe. Slow. Steady. It’s all in your head.”

Chambers held many secrets, but none he buried so deeply as his claustrophobia.

The darkness pressed on him, as if trying to shove him to the ground. Darkness had no mass, possessed no ill will, and was incapable of harming him. That’s what his rational mind told him. His *irrational* mind begged to differ.

Taking in a lungful of the dank air, Chambers forced himself to face his fear again. He had conquered many things in his life; he’d beat this too.

Two minutes later he turned on the StenLight S7 mounted to his orange helmet. The lithium-ion-powered lamp pushed back the blackness, reducing it to shadows tucked behind fallen debris. Following guidelines created by cavers, he also carried two other light sources for emergencies.

The presence of the light slowed his heart and his breathing. He took a moment to switch the batteries in the video camera. Once done, he started forward again.

Dust covered the stone floor, dust devoid of footprints. It gave him a sense of pride to know that he was the first man to lay tracks here in a couple of thousand years. That was the real reason he walked the ancient corridor alone. This was his find, and he had earned the right to be the first to walk its length.

King Herod—a vicious, paranoid Jewish king—built the tunnel

because he feared a revolt. His radically religious people didn't consider him one of their own. Strictly speaking, he wasn't Jewish. Yet Rome sanctioned the Edomite's throne.

History remembers his great success at building. His expansion of the second temple made it a worldwide wonder. It was the temple Jesus visited, the one in which He overturned the tables of the money-changers, and the place where he often taught. That, of course, was thirty plus years after Herod the Great's death.

"Herod the Great" was more than a title to the man. He believed his own press. But with great power came greater danger. The king grew more paranoid. Friction and suspicion filled his family, and fearing a takeover by his own sons, he ordered several of them executed. When the wise men from the East came and asked, "Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews?" Herod's fear erupted like a volcano. His order led to the slaughter of children two years old and younger living in Bethlehem, the ancient City of David where the prophets foretold the rise of one to rule the House of David.

That same paranoia led to the building of this tunnel. At one end was the Fortress of Antonia; at the other, Herodian Jericho. Chambers wondered if old man Herod had ever walked the length of the corridor.

The revolt Herod feared never came, but death did. Knowing that no one would mourn his passing, Herod gave his final royal decree: the killing of the Jewish elite he had gathered at Jericho. The slaughter was to take place upon his death. If the people wouldn't grieve him, then he'd give them something they could mourn.

The command was ignored.

"You may have been one crazy king, but you knew how to get things done." The whispered words echoed off the hard surfaces.

Sadness filled David. This was his last dig in Israel. He'd had great success, but it was time to move to another concentration. Many things drove an archaeologist to commit years to study and digging in the dirt.

Biblical archaeologists loved the history and significance of biblical sites. Some even undertook the work because of their faith. Chambers had been one of those; back in the days when he believed.

Now his faith was as dead as old man Herod.

He looked into the darkness ahead.

One mile to go.

A piece of aged, crumpled paper with a textured, mottled appearance. The paper is light gray with darker, brownish spots and creases, suggesting it is old and has been handled. The text "PART 1" is printed in a bold, black, sans-serif font in the center of the page. The corners of the paper are slightly rounded and show some wear.

# PART 1

## ONE

*Cambridge, Massachusetts, March 30, 2013*

It was a good wall, a wall anyone would be proud of. Situated in such a way that someone entering the condominium would see the items hanging on its pale blue surface before noticing the rest of Dr. David Chambers's large, sixth-floor residence overlooking the Charles River in the south part of Cambridge. The condo was close enough to Harvard to make commuting tolerable, and just far enough away for Chambers to feel free of the world's most prestigious university.

The condo was well above his professor's pay grade, but his last two books had done well enough for him to be free of money concerns. *Beneath Hostile Sands* sat at number six on the *New York Times* nonfiction best-seller list. It had been nine months since the announced discovery of Herod's tunnel. His publishers pressed him to include it as the final chapter in the book, then rushed to press. Then came the countless interviews. The academic papers he penned caused a furor in the tight-knit community of archaeologists, a community that never felt more alive than when being critical of one of its own. No one raised an accusing finger at his discovery. They couldn't. His scholarship was beyond criticism.

Chambers stood before the wall and gazed at the items hanging there. Together they summarized a twelve-year history of his spotless career. Someone in the Harvard PR department dubbed him the most interviewed scientist in the world. That was probably true. Society could only tolerate a few scientific golden boys. The astronomer Carl Sagan had taken the art of popularizing science to rare heights. Others followed: the physicist Michio

Kaku, astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson, and others were frequent guests on talk shows. The public had a hunger for news from the world of science—news most couldn't understand. The contemporary faces of science were those rare individuals who knew how to talk to the camera and do so in plain language. It was something at which Chambers excelled.

Chambers set a cardboard box on a narrow, art deco–style table. All the furniture in his condo centered on the 1920s style. Someone once asked why he chose art deco. He had no answer. His interior designer had suggested it, and it sounded good to him. He was a smart man, more intelligent and insightful than most, but he excelled in only a few things. In everything else, he was blissfully dense. Perhaps if his range of interests had been wider, perhaps if he had honed his other instincts to the same edge as those that guided his career, he wouldn't be doing this today.

He eyed the plaques, photos, and framed articles hanging against the smooth surface. He took the closest in hand and lifted it from its hanger. Like all its companions, the object had been professionally framed. Inside a silver frame rested the cover of his latest book. Chambers waited for a sense of pride to wash over him, but it never came. He put the frame in the cardboard box.

Next he pulled down the framed cover of *The Fingerprints of God*, his first book. That work had been far more religious in nature as he guided the reader through the greatest discoveries in biblical archaeology. To Chambers, however, it was also a scholarly nod to William Foxwell Albright, the founder of the biblical archaeology movement. It had been Dr. Albright's book *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra* that had birthed his interest in archaeology; that and the work of his father.

The thought of his dad soured Chambers's stomach. Those who knew Chambers knew of his father and assumed Chambers had chosen to follow in his old man's footsteps. Chambers never corrected the impression, nor did he encourage it. The only thing his father did to kindle the

archaeological spark in his son was leave Albright's book on the shelf. Chambers found it, and it set the course of his life.

Dr. Albright died in September 1971, two years before Chambers's birth. That didn't matter. Time meant less to an archaeologist than to others.

Albright, while hailed among biblical scholars, was not as orthodox as most thought. He believed the religion of the Israelites moved from polytheism to monotheism, an idea rejected by conservative Bible scholars. Chambers had wanted to honor Albright while correcting his "more liberal" interpretations.

The last thought amused him: how far he had come. Perhaps *bemused* was a better term. If Albright were alive today, he'd take Chambers to task for his newfound disbelief.

He set the framed cover in the box and followed that with plaques, awards, and articles about himself carried in *Newsweek*, *Time*, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, and a dozen other such publications. He removed photos taken of him with Larry King, John Anderson, Ted Koppel, and Jay Leno. He had other such publicity photos that never made it to the wall.

He paused before removing the last photograph. He studied it. The time: two years ago; the place: outside Tel Aviv; the woman: his fiancée. *His former fiancée*. Amber wore jeans, a dirt-caked, formerly white T-shirt, and a pair of gloves that seemed a size too large for her petite hands. The sun shone on her brown hair and sparkled in her blue eyes. The David Chambers in the photo smiled as well. In fact, he beamed. No man had better reasons to smile.

That smile would disappear a month later.

He snatched the photo from the wall and tossed it into the box. He heard glass break. He didn't bother to look at the damage.

He opened the single drawer in the table and removed a well-worn book. He pushed back the black leather cover and saw an inscription

bearing his name. Gently, he touched his mother's signature, then his eyes fell to his father's scribbling.

Chambers pursed his lips and threw the Bible in the box. Moments later, he sealed the box with packing tape and buried it in his closet: a cardboard ossuary holding the bones of his past.

He closed the closet door on his history and turned to face his future.



Dr. David Chambers sat in his new ergonomic office chair with his feet on the wide mahogany desk. By executive standards, the office was small, but it was still larger than the closets most professors were forced to use. Chambers was still young, so he would have to wait for older profs to retire or die before he could expect more elbow room. Unlike his home, the office was Spartan. A bookshelf lined one wall and needed dusting. Stacks of journals, scholarly white papers, and files stood precariously on the floor. One of his students, perhaps trying to impress his teacher, said, "It looks like the salt pillars along the Dead Sea." Chambers had laughed and pointed to the tallest pile. "That's Lot's wife." It was the kind of joke that only archaeologists would appreciate.

His eyes scanned a scientific journal that reported on grants given for scientific exploration. Any that mentioned Israel or Palestine he skipped. He was done with that phase of his studies but had yet to settle on a new discipline. His interest in biblical fieldwork had departed with his faith.

He had a friend who worked in pre-Columbian archaeology, specializing in the mysterious Olmecs in the lowlands of south-central Mexico. The people group flourished from 1500 BCE to roughly 400 BCE, a time period with which Chambers was familiar. Still, his academic focus had been on the other side of the world. He had deep doubts about his ability to raise money to fund a dig in an area about which he had never

written; hence the need for a friend with a credible reputation in ancient pre-Columbian history.

Perhaps he could call in a few favors and sign on as dig director, share a byline or two on some academic papers, and then fund his own dig. All that might take as little as five years—if he were lucky.

He decided to make the call. After all, any civilizations that sculpted three-meter-high human heads deserved a little attention. The recent attention and media coverage of all things related to the Mayan culture and calendar were certain to raise interest in Central American archaeology.

He reached for the phone. As he touched the hand piece, it rang.

“Yeow.” Chambers snapped his hand back, then chuckled. “What are the odds...” He answered. “David Chambers.”

“*Shalom*, Dr. Chambers.”

Chambers had no trouble recognizing the voice of his old friend Abram Ben-Judah.

Maintaining a running inside joke, Chambers answered Ben-Judah’s Hebrew greeting with the Greek word for peace. “*Eirene*.” Old Testament versus New Testament.

“It has been much too long since last we talked, my friend.”

The image of Ben-Judah flashed in Chambers’s mind: tall, slightly stooped, white-and-black beard, kind gray-blue eyes, and a face that looked a decade older than his seventy-plus years. “It has, Abram, it has. How is little Miriam?”

“My granddaughter is well and not so little anymore. She turns thirteen next month.”

“In my country, that’s the age fathers begin loading their shotguns.”

“Shotguns?”

“To keep the boys away.”

“Ah.” Ben-Judah laughed, but Chambers recognized a courtesy chuckle when he heard one.

“So who or what do I have to thank for the pleasure of this phone call?”

“First I must ask. Please forgive my rudeness.”

“You could never be rude, especially to a friend. What is your question?”

“Is it true, what I have heard?”

“That depends on what you’ve heard.”

“You have abandoned your first calling?”

Chambers was glad a grin couldn’t travel over phone lines. “I have not abandoned my calling, Abram, I’ve just chosen a new focus.”

No response. For a moment he thought the call had been cut off.

“You still with me, Abram?”

“I’m still on the telephone, my friend, but I am not with you on this new focus.”

“I’m sorry, Abram, but I’ve given it a great deal of thought. It is what I must do.”

“Is it what you *must* do, or is it what you *want* to do?”

Chambers rested his elbows on the desk. He didn’t want to have this conversation. “What’s the difference?”

“I think you know.” There was an edge to Abram’s voice, nothing unkind, but Chambers could hear the disappointment draping his colleague’s words.

“I don’t think you called just to scold me. What’s on your mind?”

Another long pause. “It’s time to come back to the Holy Land.”

“I don’t think so. My last trip was just that—my *last* trip.”

“God wants you to return.”

This time Chambers did laugh. “That’s odd. I didn’t get His memo.”

The laughter wasn’t returned. “We need you, Dr. Chambers.”

The formal “Dr. Chambers” told him Abram was serious. “There are scores of biblical archaeologists. You don’t need me. I’ve been lucky—”

“Do not blaspheme, my friend. Luck has had nothing to do with it. *HaShem* has had His hand upon you from the beginning.”

“If you say so, Abram. Look, I appreciate the offer, but I’m moving on to other fields. I can recommend a few archaeologists who will do a good job for you.”

“I want you, my friend.”

Chambers stood as if Abram could see him do so. “Why? Why me?”

“Because no one understands the tunnels beneath Jerusalem like you.”

“There are plenty of people who know about such things.”

“But not like you, my friend. You have made the discoveries. You know the topography like no other. It was you who found the ancient clay seals of King Hezekiah’s officials: Ahimelekh ben Amadyahu and Yehokhil ben Shahar.”

“Names unknown to almost everyone. So what? That was a lifetime ago.”

“Nonetheless, that find proved once again the accuracy and truth of the *Tanakh*.”

“The Old Testament Scriptures have been shown historically accurate before. Those finds are nothing new.”

That topic had been the primary cause for Chambers’s research. He had wanted to prove the Bible, both the Old Testament, what Abram called the *Tanakh*, and the New Testament, was accurate in every historical detail, and thereby prove its divine inspiration. He had helped achieve the first goal but lost all faith in the second.

“The Copper Scroll.” That was all Abram said, and he said the words as if he were breathing a prayer. “Who knows more about the Copper Scroll than you?”

“The Copper Scroll is not Scripture, Abram. You know that.”

“No, but it will lead us to . . .” He paused as if the word had stuck in his throat.

“Treasure?”

“Yes, but not just historical treasures like most people think. These objects *are* history.”

“You have your eyes set on finding the temple artifacts?”

“Don’t you?” Abram’s sigh carried over the phone. “Once we sat in the cool of the evening and talked about what the scroll might lead us to.”

“Good times, friend. Very good times.” Chambers could almost feel the breeze that pushed through the outdoor café as they sipped strong coffee and ate dates.

“Indeed, my friend. I long for those days and those conversations again.”

Chambers’s irritation slipped away. “Still, I don’t see how I can be of use to you. Others have sought the treasures and artifacts mentioned in the Copper Scroll. Very little has been found. I’m no magician. I can’t find what’s not there.”

“It is there, and I think that together we can find those items. Think what it will mean to my people. Think what it will mean to history and science. Of all men, you have the greatest understanding of the ancient tunnel systems and the ancient topography.”

Chambers closed his eyes. “Abram, my dear friend, I just don’t believe anymore.”

“I have a grant, a grant that includes your school.”

“Harvard?”

“Yes. The dig will be the most challenging you’ve ever faced and promises to be the most rewarding.”

“Abram, I don’t—”

“Billions of dollars are at stake. David, this discovery may prove as great an archaeological find as Carter’s discovery of the Tutankhamun tomb.”

Chambers tried to object but was stunned to realize that he couldn’t.

“I am authorized by my government to offer you a substantial reward.

I know you are a man of some wealth, but this will eclipse all of that. You would be financially independent, and you could fund your own future excavations.”

Chambers couldn't speak.

“Please, my friend. One more trip. For me, for your university, for science, and for yourself.”

Several minutes passed without conversation. Chambers appreciated the quiet Abram allowed him. Most likely, Abram believed that silence was better than rejection.

Finally, Chambers spoke. “When?”



Professor Abram Ben-Judah set the hand piece back in the phone's cradle.

A voice behind him said, “Will he do it?”

Abram didn't bother turning around. He knew who spoke. He also knew who else sat at the conference table.

“He will come.”

“You do not sound so sure of yourself.”

Abram inhaled deeply. “I said he would come. He will come.”



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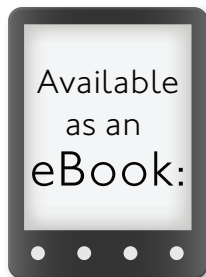
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