

# THE MARK OF THE BEAST

By

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## CHAPTER NINE

### THE DEDICATION

SAVE for the Bible record of the opening of Solomon's Temple, Cohen and his colleague-priests, had no precedent upon which to base their order of procedure as regarded the official opening of the Temple, and the consequent recommencement and reestablishment of the daily sacrifices.

Then, too, the ideas of the Jew of the period, as regarded worship, were more or less of a hybrid character, while the modern repugnance to blood-shedding, and all the consequent unpleasantness of the sacrificial ceremonies, caused the Jewish leaders to construct a very much more simple ritual than anything approaching the original Mosaic standard.

One thing had been decided by them in council, that was, to make this great epoch in their renationalization to synchronize with their New Year, which would properly fall the next month, on October 2nd, to be correct. The usual New Year's ceremony of Shophar-blowing would be observed.

Cohen, and his fellow priests, were early at the Temple, and long before the hour advertised on the programs - 7:30, every arrangement (from their stand-point) was complete.

At seven o'clock, sharp, the gun was fired at the "Palace Apleon," and the great silken flag, with its "Covenant" sign, flew out upon the breeze. The whole city and its suburbs were astir.

Suddenly a burst of brazen music rent the more or less silent air of the city, and Cohen and his fellow priests knew that the procession had started from the Palace. Soon it was in sight. Oh the wonder, the gorgeousness, the BLASPHEMY of it!

Riding on a white horse, there came first the standard bearer. The heel of the standard pole was socketed in a deep barrel of leather that ran from the saddle to the stirrup. The rider was a man of enormous strength, and he had need to be, to bear the strain of the breeze that tugged at the many square yards of white silk, of which the standard was composed.

Like the flag on the place, like the brand on the brows and right hands of many of the multitude, the "Covenant" sign appeared in the center of the standard borne aloft by that mounted bearer.

Behind the standard came the band, fifty mounted players. Behind the band there was a gap of sixty or seventy feet. Then, alone, proud, regal, handsome, mighty of stature, noble in pose, mounted on his jet-black mare, and attired as he had been overnight, rode Apleon, the Emperor-Dictator of the World. After him, but with fifty feet of space between, rode the ten kings, then their respective suites. Then came the Babylonian merchant princes, and others.

It was a triumphal procession for Apleon. For it was his name that filled throats of the acclaiming multitudes as they roared out their "Huzzahs!"

The scene in the Courtyard of the Temple was one of wondrous pomp, and of even deeper significance. As Apleon rode in, a fan-fare of trumpets gave him greeting. Then when the last intricate brazen note had sounded, the mighty multitude drowned even the memory of the trumpets, by the deafening roar of their Huzzahs!

Ten bugles sounded "Silence." It took a full minute for the command to pass from lip to lip to the uttermost reaches of the people. Then, in the comparative stillness, Apleon dismounted from his horse, took the diamond-studded key from the hand of the High-Priest, opened the door, flung it wide, and proclaimed The Temple opened, "in the name of Apleon, Emperor-Dictator of the World."

That opening word truly translated, meant, "in the name of the Devil, by the person of his Antichrist."

The High-Priest, standing on the top-step of the wide flight that led to the porch, faced the people and priests, and began to recite selected parts of Solomon's prayer at the Dedication of his Temple. These finished, he cried, with a loud voice:

"It having pleased our GOD to restore us, His chosen earthly people, the Jews, to our own land, and to our own beautiful Zion," joy of the whole earth, "we make the occasion to be as the beginning of a new era, a new year. And as the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron, in Egypt, saying: 'This month shall be the beginning of months: it shall be the first month of the year to you: so we proclaim to our people today, this month shall be the beginning of our New Year, and of a New Dispensation to us.'"

Dropping his proclamation loudness of voice, he slipped into his synagogue recitative tone, as he went on:

"On the first of the month, shall be a Sabbath, a memorial of blowing of trumpets and holy convocation. Ye shall offer an offering unto the Lord."

He signed to the Tokeang - the Shophar blower - and instantly the weird, curious, quavering, vibrating sounds broke on the still air.

As the last note of the shofar died away, Cohen cried:

"Let all the house of Israel, sacrifice unto the Lord!"

Lifting his hand as he spoke, a turbaned priest led a lamb to the foot of the altar. A gleaming knife, snatched from his girdle flashed for a moment in the air; there was a swift movement of the sacrificial priest's arm, a gurgle from the silent lamb, and the little fleecy thing sank dying upon the grating before the altar.

Only those immediately near could see all that followed, until the moment when the carcass of the lamb was reared to the grating on the summit of the altar.

A strange stillness rested upon the people gathered, as another turbaned priest brought a torch to fire the wood beneath the altar.

Before he could reach the altar, the voice of Apleon stayed his feet.

"Let no fire be brought!" he cried, in commanding tones. "I will consume the offering!"

He stretched his right hand forth, the fingers closed. Then opening his fingers, he drew back his arm suddenly, sharply, then jerked it forward again - it was the old mesmeric pass of the magicians.

Instantly, the interior of the altar blazed with long, fierce forks of many colored flames, and as they finally resolved themselves into a blood-red fiery cloud that hung over the sacrifice, the "covenant" sign floated in white amid the blood-red cloud. Another movement and the red cloud melted away, but like a quivering golden light the "Sign" remained an instant hovering over the altar. When that, too, melted, it was seen that not a vestige of the lamb was left.

Awed and silent, the onlookers wondered! For a moment George Bullen was puzzled. Then he recalled the words of prophecy, as regarded The Antichrist.

**"His coming is after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders . . . And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do."**

The greatest tribute that could have been given to the supernatural power exhibited by Apleon, was the awed silence, and the bowed heads of all who had witnessed his satanic miracle.

Its effect upon Cohen and the rest of the Jews, was, if possible, greater than upon any of the Gentiles who had witnessed the wonder.

Upon the awed silence there suddenly fell a deep growl of thunder. The startled people lifted their heads. With almost an instantaneousness, the heavens darkened. It might well have been a moonless midnight, so dark did it suddenly become.

The thunders roared and cannonaded, while fierce lightnings, like liquid fires, raced earthwards down the blackened heavens. No one, native of the land, or foreigner, had ever known thunder or lightning such as now broke upon them.

For days afterwards men were as deaf as though born thus, stunned by the thunder; and scores lost their sight from the lightning's flash, never to recover it again.

As sudden as the darkness, there now came a hurricane blast that tore at the Temple walls as if it would hurl its gold and marbles into the valley below. No man could keep his footing in the courtyard or on that summit, and everyone flung themselves prone to the earth - save Apleon. He stood smiling his sardonic, contemptuous smile.

Cohen and a few others crawled towards the wide, folding-doors of the Temple. But the hurricane was before them, and the doors slammed to, and, in some way jammed.

The horses started in stampede, terrified by the storm. Apleon spoke the one word "Soh!" and they stood absolutely still, save for a long, shuddering kind of shiver that ran through each beast at the same instant.

Now, for a few minutes, the thunder roared louder and deeper, until it drowned the thunderous roar of the wind. Peal followed peal with hideous, horrible swiftness. The lightning was a succession of fierce, white ribbons of blood-red flaming fire.

For ten minutes this extraordinary storm raged. There was not one drop of rain. Then, with a suddenness only equaled by that of the starting of the storm, it ceased. The blackness of the heavens rolled away like mist before the rising sun, and while all the western horizon suddenly glowed with the fierce red glow of a furnace blaze, the sun appeared once more overhead shining as though nought had happened.

The procession now re-formed, in the order in which it had arrived, and to the lilt of the gay music of the powerful band, the volatile spirits of the multitude revived, and the loud "huzzahs" rent the air as Apleon - the Antichrist - passed through the waiting masses of the people.

George Bullen contrived to keep Apleon full in view. In a general way no item of the procession of the ceremony at the Temple, or of aught else had escaped him - but it was in, and on Apleon that his special attention had been concentrated.

He watched the procession sweep through the great gate-way of the Emperor's Palace. Then, when the last of the guests had passed in, the huge folding gates closed, and the multitudes began to disperse.

The vast bulk of the people were lodged outside the city, and now poured out through the gates - for, with the practical re-building of the city, the exits had been made very numerous.

Bullen was lodging with a Christian Syrian about half-a-mile outside the city. He moved on in a line with one of the exodus streams.

As he cleared the city, he became conscious that just ahead of him there was a great and ever increasing gathering of people - a mighty throng, in fact. Arriving at the fringe of the crowd which grew closer and closer, as well as greater, every moment, he was amazed to see two very striking looking Easterns, clothed in sackcloth, and standing high upon a mound of stone. The appearance of the two men was extraordinary. The face of the elder of the two was cast in a wonderful mould.

George Bullen was fairly well versed in the facial characteristics of all the known races - past as well as present. But this man's face bore no relation to any type he had ever seen depicted. Eastern, it was, it is true, but unlike, and more beautiful than anything he knew of. The calm of it was wondrous, and George involuntarily found himself saying over: "**Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee,**" and instantly there flashed upon him, in connection with that word, one other: "**Enoch walked with God, and was not, for God took him.**"

"He might be Enoch returned to earth," he told himself.

The other man was a different specimen. His features were strongly Jewish marked. There was a fierceness of eye, a power for a blazing wrath in his deep-set orbs. Not that the first man's eyes and face were incapable of fiery indignation, but they gave indication of having been schooled by long intercourse with the divine keeping power of the GOD of Peace.

The men were evidently preachers - prophet-preachers. They spoke alternately, their voices clear, far-reaching, their tones perfectly natural - there was no raising of the voice - yet reaching as far as the farthest listener.

Their message was a Testimony to GOD, to His power, His might, His Holiness, even to His mercy.

They told of judgments, near at hand, upon all who would not cleave to GOD in righteousness. Then in deeply solemn tones, they spoke of the presence of the "Mark of the Beast," upon the persons of so many thousands of the people, and warned all who would not discard the badge, and throw over their allegiance to Apleon, - "The Antichrist - that they would presently share in the awful destruction which should overtake Antichrist and his followers."

A roar, savage and full as from ten thousand lions, with the snarl of wolves in it, greeted this last part of the testimony, while a thousand throats belched forth the cry:

"Down with them! murder them!"

There was a savage rush towards the sack-clothed prophets. But though the multitude of would-be murderers swept over, around, and past the mound on which the two faithful witnesses had been standing, and though they did not see them disappear, yet they were not found.

**"And when they shall have finished their Testimony, the Beast that ascendeth up out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them."**

"Yes," mused George Bullen, "when they have completed their Testimony," and not an hour, or a day before. For these are evidently GOD's two faithful witnesses, Enoch and Elijah, the only two men who never passed through mortal death, and hence are the only two saints who can become GOD's witnesses, in this hideous Antichrist time, for, as witnesses, they must be slain in the streets of the city of Jerusalem - "**where also our Lord was crucified.**"

There was much angry talk, and savage swearing among the enraged, mystified, disappointed multitude, at the loss of their vengeance upon the witnesses, but, had they known it, they had come off very lightly in being only disappointed, for GOD's witnesses had the power "**If any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies: and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed,**" and in the days that were to follow this first encounter with them, the multitude would learn this to their cost.

~ end of chapter 9 ~

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