



In a post climate change divided America, California alone has prospered under rule by an A.I. entity and has walled itself off behind a border of electrified barriers and deadly drones. A band of young operatives plots to defeat the border defenses as a caravan of 100,000 desperate people approach the state.

# **EXODUS 2069**

## **BATTLE FOR A CLIMATE CHANGE PROMISED LAND**

by JAMES ESH


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# Exodus 2069

BATTLE FOR A CLIMATE CHANGE  
PROMISED LAND



JAMES ESH

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ISBN: 978-1-64718-436-0

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., St. Petersburg, Florida.

Printed on acid-free paper.

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BookLocker.com, Inc.  
2020

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data  
Esh, James  
Exodus 2069 by James Esh  
Library of Congress Control Number: 2020910348

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# JOSEPH

*January 31, 2048—Nebraska, South Midwest Federation*

Joseph Straily came into the world on a winter's morning that threatened to freeze your corneas and claim your digits if you dared venture forth into that cold. The polar vortex had once been held captive in its arctic circle prison by strong winds. But those prison bars were opened wide as the planet warmed, weakening the jet stream and setting the northern beast free to roam southward as it saw fit. The infant's mother, Jeannie, cradled her second child to her breast, bathed in oxytocin-fueled maternal joy, bonding with this new life that knew nothing of and cared nothing for harsh realities seeking to prey on him. For his part, Joseph was a blur of contented consciousness; life was as simple and inviting as a warm nipple.

The two-room shelter smelled of urine, feces, blood, and placenta-stained sheets piled in the corner. An exhausted midwife appeared much older than her thirty-five years as she gathered her supplies into a leather bag. She addressed the father in flat tones that could have been a recorded message. "Put the soiled linen outside in the snow until it melts enough to wash them. Be sure your wife takes the supplement pills on the dresser. Your food ration will be increased fifteen percent; the extra is only for the nursing mother. I will be back to check on you in about a week."

James Straily silently nodded without looking up from where he sat in a corner chair by the window, his attention focused on the storm outside. Every couple of minutes, he wiped away condensation on the glass with his sleeve to watch the falling snow be pulled in chaotic patterns by wind that howled its dominance. He bore an odd sense of detached calm, the calm of a soldier before the battle or a suicidal jumper standing on the precipice. James was not an unfeeling man. At the birth of his daughter five years earlier, he had felt the wonder of a miracle and the irrational burst of a father's hope that anything was possible. But five years ago, he had been a fifth-generation farmer, lord and caretaker of the Nebraskan ancestral lands first homesteaded by his great-great grandfather. He had defended his birthright against invading hordes of bean beetles and rust fungus expanding their tropical realms northward in the warming climate. But water is life, and crippling drought brought a final blow in the form of the great dust storms, ghosts risen from the grave of the Dust Bowl more than a hundred years past.

There were those who said the drought was caused by the California technology cabal when they began to control weather in the West. Others saw the hand of God delivering the end days, preparing the faithful for a Second Coming that would herald a new kingdom on earth. Some continued to place their faith in their own technology federation that promised redemption in an energy network of small nuclear reactors and water from the Great Lakes. But James could not lift his head far enough above the fog of his own failure to see or blame grand forces at play. In the fifteen months since losing his land, he had become just another mouth to feed, unable to provide anything of substance for his family. Public assistance for families with able-bodied heads of household was limited and would soon expire for the Strailys.

The unearthly howling outside called to him, urging him to do the right thing for his family. His eyes fixed upon little Linda pretending to nurse her doll at the foot of the bed. Words came in a gentle whisper.

“Goodbye, princess. I am so sorry. I love you more than you can imagine. You will be better off with Mommy and your brother when I am gone. Will you remember me? Please remember me and know that I did the best I could for you. Take good care of Joseph and be kind to your mother.”

Tears fell upon a tender smile as he recalled all the blessings he had once known in what now seemed another world, a world where life had sprung from the earth and children had a future. And then, peace, as he accepted the sacrifice before him. James Straily rose from his chair, walked slowly to the door, lifted the rifle from its rack high on the wall, and stepped out into the beckoning storm.



## REVEREND

*Twenty-one years later—March 10, 2069, Topeka, Kansas*

The Most Reverend Robert Jackson fidgeted with his tie in front of a full-length mirror in the dressing room adjacent to his office. He rarely wore a tie these days. It had been a staple in his youth when he'd felt the need to project a mature image. Self-conscious of his slender five-foot nine-inch stature and a face that seemed to shave years off his chronological age, he had sought to add gravitas through wardrobe. But now, in his late forties, the gray accents in his hair and ascendancy in the Christian Church belayed that concern, and the baby face lent an attractive youthfulness appreciated by his female parishioners. Today, the tie reflected his disquiet about the meeting he was about to take. After a long look in the mirror, he snatched the tie off and reprimanded himself for his insecurity. He stepped toward the office, paused, and then reached for a white clerical collar—the one with a solid-gold stud in front.

He closed the dressing room door behind him and crossed to where he stood looking out the floor-to-ceiling glass wall of his penthouse office above the choir loft. Reassured by seeing children at play outside the parish school, the two-story medical building, and the sprawling community outreach center, he was reminded of the good things he had accomplished and built for his parish family through meetings

like the one he was about to join. Still, these people always left him feeling a little dirty.

At the sound of the door opening, he retreated to stand behind his marble-top desk and turned to greet his guest. Bill Thomas crossed the plush red carpet and offered a handshake that both men held a little longer than necessary. Mr. Thomas's designer silk suit, worth more than most parishioners made in a year, was intended to impress or intimidate as needed. It did neither in this situation. Pastor Jackson was the charismatic head of Christ Our Savior, the largest megachurch in the entire US Christian Alliance. He had met with more important Eastern Oligarch figures than this one; they all wore the same pretentious "uniform." Still, he nervously buttoned his coat before sitting down.

The pastor signaled toward a chair across from him. "Welcome back, Bill. And may I begin by saying thank you for your organization's generous donation. It allowed us to expand the children's center and remodel the church sanctuary."

Mr. Thomas sat down and leaned back, crossed his legs, and silently looked around the office. He fixed his eyes on a seven-foot crystalline statue of Mary looking up at Jesus from the foot of the cross. "I think you forgot to mention remodeling your office. New desk?"

So, an opening jab. Bob was indeed self-conscious about the contrast between the opulent setting of his office and the impoverished lives of most of his flock. But people needed to see their leader as someone blessed by God's favor. He deflected the comment.

"This is where we conduct the business of the Lord. All for the greater glory of God."

"Right. So, what say we conduct some glorious business? We appreciate your sermons and outreach condemning the

West Coast Allied States and their AI masters as idolaters and heretics. There's still enough people and politicians on our coast who are believers, or are unwilling to say they don't believe, to keep the AI Party in the minority. But they are getting stronger and more difficult to control. We need to do more to discredit those communist California bastards." Bill pulled a cigarette and lighter from his inner coat pocket and leaned over the desk to grab a drink coaster to use as an ash tray. He lit the cigarette without asking if Bob minded and took a leisurely puff before continuing. "They haven't been hit by climate change like the rest of us, and they're really good at taking credit for dodging that bullet. But the fact is, the East Coast would be anarchy without a strong hand keeping things in order. And we both know the Midwest is going to be a third-world shit show long before that Great Lakes pipeline ever gets finished. So, we have a proposal for you."

The reverend squinted and leaned back to register offense at both the crude caricature of his native region and the secondhand smoke in his face. He fixed his eyes not too subtly on the cigarette as he spoke. "Bill, I'm glad our interests have aligned these past years. But the Midwest is where God's people live. He won't abandon them. The hand of the Almighty will be our salvation from your shit-show scenario."

Bill leaned forward, and his tone took a harsh turn. "And maybe what I'm proposing is the Almighty offering you His hand. Maybe this is your salvation. How 'bout you listen to me."

Pastor Jackson stiffened but didn't flinch. Without giving any ground, he said, "I'm listening."

"Your people are losing hope, and you're losing numbers. They need something they can see and hear and touch. They need a promised land. And you're the Moses who can lead them there. What we propose is a new Exodus, one quietly

financed by my people. You can lead a caravan of thousands, maybe hundreds of thousands of true believers to the closest thing there is today to a promised land, California. Now, they will try to stop you at the border, of course. Their whole population control crap won't allow it."

The eastern California border was infamously fortified, a Great Wall of electrified fencing, deadly drone patrols, and military checkpoints at major highways. It was a key element, along with restrictions on childbirth, in the program for maintaining a sustainable population as dictated by a governing artificial intelligence system. Although harsh, some would say ruthless, the AI was widely accepted within the state because it delivered stability and operated without favoritism or corruption, unlike the failed old political system.

Bill continued. "But if you're as good as we think you are, you will have too many people to be turned back or ignored. The whole country—hell, the world—will be watching to see what that inhuman AI overlord does with a real humanitarian crisis. The political divisions it will spark within the state and the images of callous disregard for human life just might bring down their whole system. And once you are there in numbers, you can spread the good word far and wide. Your people can take land for farms. The authorities will have to negotiate some kind of live-and-let-live with you. It might be something like the Quakers used to be in Pennsylvania, or maybe it will be you and your descendants calling the shots. We don't care. But with our support and your leadership, you can't fail." He smiled condescendingly. "God willing, of course."

The pastor realized his mouth was open and not saying anything. This crazy proposal threatened everything he had built and struggled to preserve. Abandon his home, his church? Moses? Who did they think they were dealing with? He barely controlled his disdain as he leaned in and locked

eyes. “What makes you think I would uproot my people and put them in harm’s way? And what’s in it for you? If you think you can control me, control us, by your financial backing, you are mistaken. My allegiance is and always will be to my Lord, and only to my Lord.”

“We know that; it’s why I came to you and not some televangelist swindler closer to home. There’s plenty of religious celebs who can be bought. But this has to be a legitimate grass roots movement. It has to be credible the way Gandhi and Martin Luther King were. You might have to face some people and pressure that make you wish I was all you had to deal with, but we think you have the courage and conviction to stay true to your beliefs. I hope it doesn’t require you to be a martyr, but it might.”

Bob recognized the attempt at flattery and evasion. “You didn’t answer the question. What’s in it for you?”

Mr. Thomas took a few seconds, then nodded his acquiescence. “Okay. Our people figure that, within three generations, the world’s population will be only half of what it is now, maybe less. The planet is going to keep getting hotter. That’s a fact. The question is, who’s going to make it and what kind of world will they live in? Right now, those socialists on the West Coast have the upper hand because they got a head start on mitigating climate change. But they’ve turned the land of the free and home of the brave into a land of the fee and home of the AI slave. On our coast, we prefer good old Darwin; let those who have proven themselves superior and successful survive. That can only happen if a strong hand can maintain order.”

Mr. Thomas tapped ashes into his makeshift ash tray and continued in a more somber, insistent tone, using the cigarette as a pointer aimed threateningly at the reverend. “This is a fucking war, and the winner gets to inherit the earth. Now, as

you have so eloquently preached, those AI-worshipping socialists have abandoned their god. But the more they prosper, the more people, the more youth, ours and yours, get sucked into their twisted ideology. That makes them a threat to your survival as much as ours.”

Bob had always concealed his contempt for the thuggish Oligarchy reps. He rationalized their mutual alliance as an innocent and rewarding acceptance of shared interests. Their financial support was life or death for those who turned to the Church in desperation. Now he was feeling cornered. He abandoned the pretense. “So how do I know you won’t desert us as sacrificial lambs at the California border? Thousands of martyrs would serve you well.”

Mr. Thomas relaxed and leaned back. His fish was on the hook; now just reel it in. “True enough, but we can do so much better. The religious community is the middle ground in this war. When California spurns you, we can openly bring humanitarian aid to our brothers and sisters in Christ for as long as it takes and in full view of the world media. And that is only the beginning. Your presence will stir civil unrest, and we can use that to strengthen the hand of dissident groups we know there. The threat of social chaos spreading from California will strengthen our hand on the East Coast.”

Bob Jackson would not be so easily torn from his ministry, his life’s work. “What about the church, the programs that are helping my people right now, right here?”

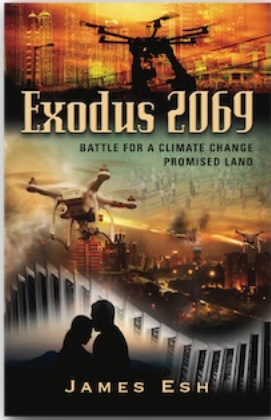
Bill answered with a shrug of his shoulders. “Not everyone will go with you. We can continue to support those efforts in your absence.”

The charismatic preacher experienced something he had forgotten possible; he didn’t know what to say. Bill’s words stabbed at a private wound kept hidden from the world. His own faith had been weakened by the despair and suffering of

those who trusted in him to deliver salvation but were destroyed, despite their faith in God and in him. He needed a tangible sign, a path to redemption, as much as anyone. But to abandon what resources and security he had been able to offer his flock—the church, the children’s health center, the food banks, and community outreach—was this revelation or temptation?

Mr. Thomas stubbed out his cigarette, stood and brushed his hands over his sleeves. He spoke casually. “I don’t expect an answer. You’ll need time to think and pray. You have two weeks. We’ll talk again then. While you deliberate, keep this in mind. This is going to happen, with you or with someone else. If you decline, you won’t be receiving any more support from the people I represent or anyone who does business with them. If anything were to happen to your beautiful church, you and your people would be on your own while you wait for the hand of God to save you.”

Reverend Jackson stared at the door after Bill closed it behind him. He had always considered money from the Oligarchy as divine providence. Now it appeared that a bill had come due.



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