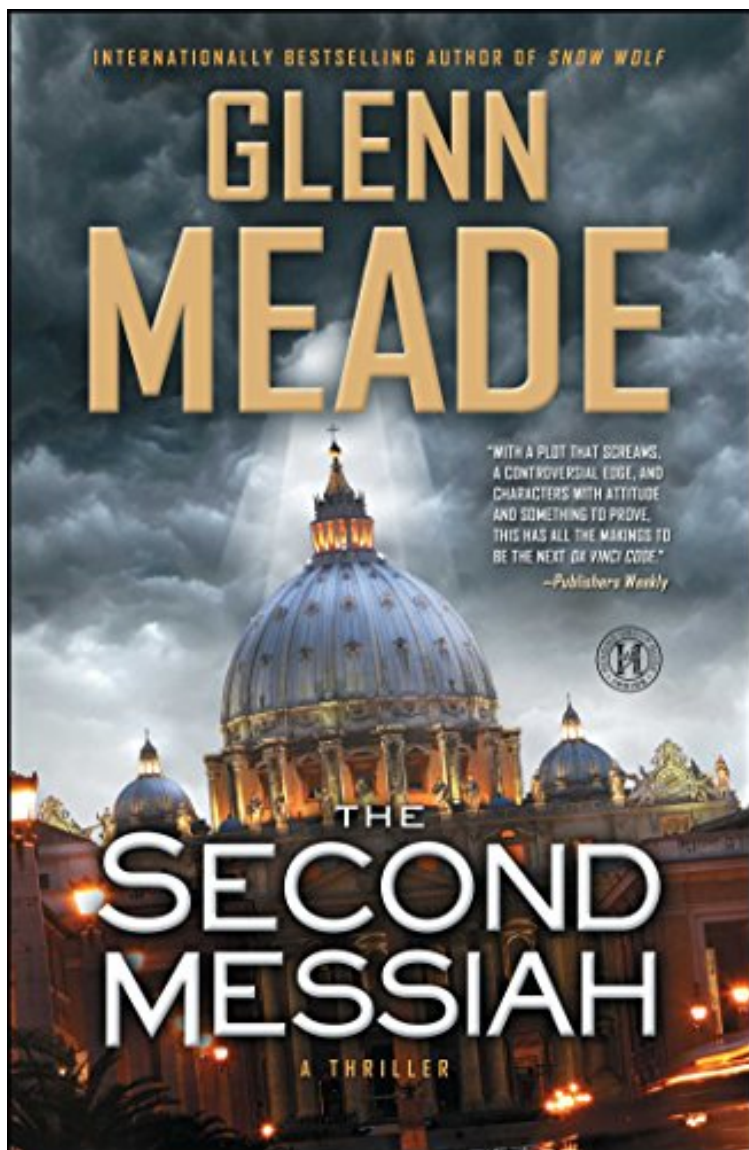


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The Second Messiah: A Thriller (English Edition)



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIn this new fast-paced thriller by internationally bestselling author Glenn Meade a fascinating battle emerges between archaeology and the church, with hidden secrets and murder. In the desert near Jerusalem, an archaeologist is murdered after he uncovers stunning evidence in a Dead Sea scroll about the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. The 2,000-year-old parchment containing enigmatic references to not one but two messiahs is stolen before it can be fully translated.In Rome, a charismatic American priest with long-hidden secrets is elected pope, setting off widespread panic among some of the faithful who

question whether he is the anti-Christ or the worlds new savior. As the conspiracy over the scroll explodes into a political and religious standoff, two people find themselves on the run, trying to stay one step ahead of unknown assassins in their search for truth. Archaeologist Jack Cane and Israeli police inspector Lela Raul must solve the mystery of the Second Messiah and uncover the real secret behind the message of Jesus before they are permanently silenced and the scroll and its contents are forever lost to humanity. Compared to the likes of Frederick Forsyth, John le Carr, and Tom Clancy, Glenn Meade offers a tantalizing blend of fact and fiction that will take readers on a thrilling ride from the first page to the last.

Extrait 1 EAST OF JERUSALEM

ISRAEL Leon Gold didnt know that he had two minutes left to live and he was grinning. Did anyone ever tell you that youve got terrific legs? he asked the drop-dead gorgeous woman seated next to him. Gold was twenty-three, a tanned, good-looking, muscular young man from New Jersey whose folks had immigrated to Israel. As he drove his Dodge truck with military markings past a row of sun-drenched orange groves, he inhaled the sweet scent through the rolled-down window, then used the moment to glimpse the figure of the woman seated next to him. Private Rachel Else was stunning. Gold, a corporal, eyed Rachels uniform skirt riding up her legs, the top button open on her shirt to reveal a flash of cleavage. She was driving him so crazy that he found it hard to concentrate on his job delivering a consignment to an Israel Defense Forces outpost, thirty miles away. The road ahead was a coil of tortuous bends. Well, did anyone ever tell you that youve got terrific legs? Gold repeated. A tiny smile curled Rachels lips. Yeah, you did. Five minutes ago, Leon. Tell me something new. Gold flicked a look in the rearview mirror and saw sunlight igniting the windows and the glinting dome of a fast-disappearing Jerusalem. There was only one reason he stayed in this godforsaken country with its endless friction with the Palestinians, high taxes, grumbling Jews, and searing heat. The Israeli women. They were simply gorgeous. And the Israel Defense Forces had its fair share of beauties. Gold was determined that Rachel was going to be his next date. He shifted down a gear as the road twisted up and the orange scent was replaced by gritty desert air. Okay, then did anyone ever mention youve got seductive eyes and a terrific figure? You mentioned those too, Leon. Youre repeating yourself. Are you going to come on a date with me or not, Private Else? No. Keep your eyes on the road, Corporal. Ive got my eyes on the road. Theyre on my legs. Gold grinned again. Hey, can I help it if you make my eyes wander? Keep them on the road, Leon. You crash and were both in trouble. Gold focused on the empty road as it rose up into sand-dusted limestone hills. Rachel was proving a tough nut to crack, but he reckoned he still had an ace up his sleeve. As the road snaked round a bend he nudged the truck nearer the edge. The wheels skidded, sending loose gravel skittering into the rock-strewn ravine below. Alarm crept into Rachels voice. Leon! Dont do that. Gold winked, nudging the Dodge even closer to the roads edge. Maybe I can make you change your mind? Stop it, Leon. Dont fool around, its crazy. Youll get us killed. Gold grinned as the wheels skidded again. How about that date? Just put me out of my misery. Yes, or no? Leon! Oh no! Rachel stared out past the windshield. Golds eyes snapped straight ahead as he swung the wheel away from the brink. A white Ford pickup appeared from around the next bend. Gold jumped on the brakes but his blood turned to ice and he knew he was doomed. His Dodge started to skid as the two vehicles hurtled toward the ravines edge, trying to avoid a crash. The pickup was like an express train that couldnt stop and then everything seemed to happen in slow motion. Gold clearly saw the pickups occupants. Three adults in the front cab, two teenagers in the open back a boy and a girl seated on some crates. The smiles on their faces collapsed into horror as the two vehicles shrieked past each other. There was a grating clang of metal striking metal as the rears of both vehicles briefly collided and then Gold screamed, felt a breeze rush past him as the Dodge flew through the air. His scream combined with Rachels in a bloodcurdling duet that died abruptly when their truck smashed nose-first into the ravine and their gas tank ignited. Fifteen miles from Jerusalem, the distant percussion of the massive blast could be heard as the army trucks cargo of antipersonnel mines detonated instantly, vaporizing Golds and Rachels handsome young bodies into bone and ash. The Catholic priest was following two hundred yards behind the pickup, driving a battered old Renault, when he felt the blast through the rolled-down window. The percussion pained his ears and he slammed on his brakes. The Renault skidded to a halt. The priest paled as he stared at the orange ball of flame rising into the air, followed by an oily cloud of smoke. Instinct made him stab his foot on the accelerator and the Renault sped forward. When he reached the edge of the ravine, he floored the brakes and jumped out of his car. The priest saw the flames consume the blazing shell of the army truck and knew there was no hope for whoever was inside. His focus turned to the upturned white Ford pickup farther along the ravine, smoke pouring from its cabin. The priest blessed himself as he stared blankly at the accident scene. May the Lord have mercy on their souls. His plan had gone horribly wrong. This was not exactly what he

had intended. If the pickups occupants had to die, so be it the priceless, two-thousand-year-old treasure inside the vehicle was worth the loss of human life but he hadn't foreseen such awful carnage. He moved toward the pickup. A string of deafening explosions erupted as more mines ignited. The priest was forced to crouch low. Seconds later his eyes shifted back to the upturned Ford pickup. He could make out the occupants trapped inside the smoke-filled cabin. One of them frantically kicked at the windshield, trying to escape. Nearby the sprawled bodies of a teenage boy and girl lay among the wreckage. When the explosions died, the priest stood. His gaze swung back to the burning pickup. The desperate passenger had stopped kicking and his body had fallen limp. As thick smoke smothered the cabin, the priest caught sight of the leather map case, lying wedged inside the windshield. He knew it contained the ancient scroll that had been discovered that morning at Qumran, and that the pickup was on its way to the Antiquities Department in Jerusalem with its precious cargo. But the priest was desperate to ensure that the scroll never reached its destination. His orders from Rome were clear. This was one astonishing secret that had to be kept hidden from the world.

Flames started to lick around the map case. Dear God, no. He scrambled down the rocks toward the wreckage. 2011 Glenn Meade | 2 ROME It began with an omen. Some said the bizarre event in the Sistine Chapel that midnight had been prophesied by Nostradamus, that it was a sign destined to happen. There were other signs. The Eternal City had an air of stillness, as if a storm were about to break, but that evening the sky was clear, a soft wind blowing from the west. Rome's usual aggression and bustle had become a hushed calm. On the main roads and along the Tiber, drivers occasionally pulled in, switched off their headlights, and turned on their car radios. Around a densely crowded St. Peter's Square, the media crews satellite dishes pointed skyward, as if seeking celestial guidance. Powerful television arc lamps illuminated the Sistine Chapel, while in the seedy pickup bars of the city's red-light district, even the prostitutes took time out from their evenings work to listen to the media coverage chattering from televisions and radios. After all, whoever was elected pope was predicted to be the last the man who would supposedly face Armageddon and hundreds of millions of people all over the world were anxiously awaiting news of his election. The previous pontiff had been dead for twenty-eight days. After the ancient rituals had been observed, his body embalmed, his papal seals broken, and his burial completed, a solemn procession of 120 cardinals of the Sacred College, dressed in red hats and red silk robes, had filed into the Sistine Chapel to choose a replacement to fill the Shoes of the Fisherman. After twenty-nine secret ballots, they had failed to elect a new pope. When the clock struck twelve and a candidate had still not been chosen, the church would face its fifth week without a leader. Among Rome's anxious clergy agreement was clear. By midnight, a decision had to be made. Cardinal Umberto Cassini thought he was about to have a heart attack. A small, scrawny Sicilian with watery brown eyes who usually smiled a lot, Cassini wasn't smiling now. Beads of perspiration ran down his face. His pounding chest ached with stress pains. The air in the magnificent fourteenth-century Sistine Chapel reeked of sweat. Every window and door was locked and the lights were on. The temperature was up to a humid eighty and the tense atmosphere was expectant. Cassini glanced at the wall clock: 11 P.M. Seated at his wooden table in the ancient chapel, Cassini shifted his eyes toward Michelangelo's powerful wall painting depicting the horrors of the Apocalypse. Umberto Cassini was experiencing his own terror. The history of papal elections was a stormy one. Cassini recalled a troubling fact the conclave of 1831 had lasted fifty-four days and in the process the indecision had almost ruined the church. Tonight it seemed another nightmarish tempest was unfolding. As camerlengo, the head of the conclave, Cassini was the man on whose shoulders rested the task of ensuring a papal successor was chosen. But the twenty-ninth ballot had been completed two hours ago and had failed to produce a pope. Cassini dabbed his brow and thought, Has God deserted His church in its hour of need? Of the three main candidates, none had the eighty-vote majority required to win the election. It had been like that for nearly two weeks, the voting almost equal among the candidates, and it had proved impossible to break the deadlock. It was obvious that the conclave was in turmoil. Cassini had prayed that the voting would reach a conclusion by midnight. Hoping to break the impasse, one of the Curia had proposed yet another new compromise candidate to join the other three contenders: the American, Cardinal John Becket. The strategy was obvious that Becket might split the voting pattern and break the deadlock. Cassini nervously licked his lips. Sixty minutes remained to midnight and the tension was killing him. He glanced over at John Becket, sitting at one of the tables opposite. He was an imposing figure. Tall and lean, with fair hair and gentle, honest blue eyes, the American was almost Christlike in appearance. His face was deeply tanned and his hands had the rough calluses of a laborer. The kind of tough hands that might have built this very chapel. And yet there was something strangely regal about him. Anyone in his company would at once have been aware of his incredibly powerful physical

presence. Those who knew Becket spoke of his unique personality and charisma. The son of a Chicago lawyer, he had proved a learned, devout priest who had chosen to shun the many comforts of his American homeland for a deeply religious life. An outsider, Becket had initially been considered a touch too young for the papacy at fifty-seven. This time, Cassini wondered which way the vote would go. The Conclave of Cardinals had retreated to pray and seek further inspiration from the Holy Spirit. They had returned and placed their folded voting slips, first onto a golden platter, then into a gold chalice, to signify they had completed a sacred act. Then they had filed back solemnly to their individual tables and chairs and waited for the three scrutineers seated behind the platter and chalice to examine the slips and count the votes. Now Cassini fidgeted nervously with his pectoral cross as the minutes ticked away. He saw the counters finish their work. One of the scrutineers approached him with the piece of paper bearing the result. As he anxiously unfolded the slip of paper and read, Cassini felt absolutely stunned. Cardinal John Becket 81 votes. It certainly wasn't the result Cassini had expected. Becket had not only completely changed the voting pattern, he had won. Despite the surprise result, Cassini felt overwhelmed with relief. He sighed deeply, felt the pains in his chest ebb away. The scrutineer made the announcement. Cardinal John Becket, eighty-one votes. As the remaining votes of the other candidates were read out, it hardly seemed to matter, for the tension in the chapel had been miraculously broken. All eyes had turned to John Becket, who simply sat there looking shocked, like a man who sensed danger all around him and saw no way of escape. He closed his eyes and his lips seemed to move in silent prayer. Umberto Cassini rose majestically, despite his puny size. Accompanied by the master of ceremonies and the three scrutineers, he approached Becket. As tradition required, he asked the question in Latin that the elected pope was required to answer. Do you, Most Reverend Lord Cardinal, accept your election as Supreme Pontiff, which has been canonically carried out? Becket was silent and his eyes remained closed. Cassini nervously repeated the question. Do you, Most Reverend Lord Cardinal, accept your election as Supreme Pontiff...? John Becket didn't reply. Cassini felt the tension rise in the chapel. Very slowly, Becket's eyes opened. He stood up from his chair, towering above Cassini and the others. Sweat glistened on Becket's upper lip. Camerlengo, I am deeply moved by my brother cardinals' faith in me. Words cannot express how humbled I feel. I honestly did not expect this result, which comes as a great surprise. Becket paused as he took a deep breath. I will accept my election, Camerlengo. I will accept in the name of Becket's voice faltered and his piercing blue eyes watered with emotion. Forgive me, please. But before I continue, before I choose a papal name, I must explain something important to all present. Something deeply private that I have told no one until now. A secret in my heart that I feel must be revealed. Becket's unexpected words had a stunning effect. An astonished hush settled over the chapel, as if all present expected a frightening confession. Cassini's eyes flicked nervously to the bewildered faces of the cardinals seated around the chapel, then over at the wall clock it was approaching midnight before he looked back at Becket. With respect, John, the rules make it quite clear. Your acceptance must proceed as protocol demands. I am aware of the rules, Camerlengo. But I feel compelled by the Holy Spirit to speak. And once I speak, I fear some of my fellow cardinals may wish they had not elected me as their pope. The chapel was deathly silent. It seemed as if someone had pulled the pin on a grenade and everyone was waiting for the explosion to go off. Cassini, his heart again beating faster, drew in a worried breath. And what is it that you wish to explain? For a time, John Becket didn't speak, and then he looked out at his audience. Long ago as a priest I made a promise to myself. A promise that if I was ever called to fill the Shoes of the Fisherman, I would do my utmost to fulfill certain personal goals. Those goals have been my lifelong ambition. Every pair of eyes in the majestic chapel focused on Becket. The fact that he was an American, born and brought up in Chicago, was only evident when he spoke. His Italian was reasonably fluent but America was there on his tongue like a visa stamp. The church is a rock, and I am well aware that rock isn't malleable. But I made a pledge to myself that I would seek a new era of honesty, of truth within the church. If ever I was chosen as Vicar of Christ, I promised that my papacy would mark a new beginning, one that would require your help and support. The chapel was terribly still. Tonight, as we sit beneath Michelangelo's vision of the Creation and the Flood, as we witness his frightening images of the Apocalypse, I am certain that what I propose may be seen by many among you as a threat. But I want to assure you it would not be so. It is something I am convinced Christ would have wished and which the church desperately needs. My promise was this: there would be absolute openness and honesty. There would be no more lies. No secrets kept from our flock or from the world. The church belongs to us all, not only to those who control the Vatican. A wave of disbelief spread through the astonished crowd. What exactly are you suggesting? asked one elderly cardinal, ignoring protocol. That we open the Vatican's doors to public scrutiny? That would be one intention of mine, Becket

answered firmly. Nothing would be concealed. Even the darkest secrets hidden in our archives would be made public. There was a gasp from the audience and then silence. Cassini, standing in front of Becket, felt his chest about to explode. Never in the history of the church had anything like this ever happened. Another cardinal asked, And the Vatican's finances? Made public also. There was a murmur of disbelief from the listeners. Then Becket's voice carried firmly over the hot, crowded chapel. Did Christ want lies told? Did He want secrets kept? Did He want those of us in authority to behave like secretive, petty bureaucrats and banking officials? I cannot believe that He did. Above all, Christ believed in truth, as we should. Another elderly cardinal spoke up. John, there are some things too dreadful for the world to know. Becket looked at the speaker, but his words were addressed to everyone present. You mean there are some things the Vatican would not want the world to know. Things it has kept secret by design, unpleasant mistakes it has made that its flock should never know of. But they should know. Not just Catholics, but Christians everywhere. Our archives will greatly concern them too. Christians all over the world share a common purpose, and they have a right to know the dark secrets that have been kept in Christ's name. Becket stared out at his audience, his arms held wide as if in pleading. We ask our flock to confess the error of their ways yet we refuse to confess our own sins. How can this be right? You have chosen me and those are my intentions upon accepting the papacy. It will mark a new day, a new beginning that will return all of us to the ways of Jesus Christ. I have spoken. Some of the older cardinals looked deeply shocked, as if the devil himself and not the pope had spoken in their midst. But most were profoundly moved, for it seemed a fresh blast of wind had suddenly blown through the musty Vatican corridors with the force of a hurricane. Every one of them knew he was in the presence of a man who radiated charisma and authority. Umberto Cassini was quite dumbfounded and suddenly fearful. He looked up at John Becket, who settled his piercing, honest blue eyes on his audience. As for your fears, I will ask only one question. Have you no courage, my friends? The Lord may give us the burden. But He will also give us the strength to carry it. I accept my nomination as Supreme Pontiff. Ego recipero in nomen of verum. I accept in the name of truth. And the name I choose will be Celestine. 2011 Glenn Meade

Revue de presse "The Irish-born author (Snow Wolf) teeters on the edge of genius and sacrilege with this thriller about a subject known since the time of Christ. When archeologist Jack Cane discovers ancient documents that point to the existence of another messiah, he also quickly finds out that both Israeli and Catholic authorities have reason to possess, or suppress, such documents. Racked with the pain of personal loss, he meets up with an old friend, Lela, who is part of an Israeli police team investigating multiple crimes, including a cold case involving the possible murder of Cane's parents also archeologists 20 years earlier. Some who have avoided Christian fiction or only dipped in will find this departure from the mold refreshing, even while some regular readers of Christian fiction may find certain passages revolting. Fans of Davis Bunn or Dan Brown won't bat an eye at Meade's unblinking look at the Vatican and the religious secrecy that fuels such novels. With a plot that screams, a controversial edge, and characters with attitude and something to prove, this has all the makings to be the next Da Vinci Code." (Publishers Weekly) Dan Brown meets Tom Clancy Glenn Meade sure knows how to get your pulse racing. I was gripped from page one. Whether The Second Messiah is fact or fiction is up for debate, but one thing for sure it's one heck of a thriller. You know you're in safe hands with Glenn Meade The Second Messiah is a rollercoaster of a thriller that lifts the lid on the inner workings of the Vatican and leaves you wondering just how much of the fiction is actually fact." (Stephen Leather, author of Nightfall) A thrill a minute. A cross between Indiana Jones and Dan Brown. Thriller readers will love this book. (Midwest Book) Tell Dan Brown to move over! It's Glenn Meade's turn. (Bookseller from Books Co. (Dayton, Ohio)) "Reading similarly to both a Thoenes novel and The Da Vinci Code, bestselling author Meade's The Second Messiah will keep readers on the edge of their proverbial seats . . . The Second Messiah reads quickly and will hold the readers' attention with its many plot twists. In the story, Meade also addresses the problem of suffering in an insightful comment from the pope. Fans of fiction tied to news headlines will enjoy this geopolitical thriller. Recommended for readers of Joel C. Rosenberg." (Christian Retailing) "This novel is a Da Vinci Code-type thriller, but its far more. The secret scrolls and chases are standard thriller fare, but deftly handled. Some of the characters are particularly captivating, especially the new Pope, a true follower of God who's tormented by his past and struggling with the future of the Church. This suspenseful book is well worth reading." (CBA Retailers + Resources) "Written in the mold of The Da Vinci Code, all the erroneous claims (thankfully) bestselling author Glenn Meade's latest geographical thriller, The Second Messiah, keeps readers on the edge of their proverbial seats with multiple plot twists." (Charisma) "Meade knows how to entangle, and untangle, an exciting array of characters and plots guaranteed to keep the reader hooked . . . a talented storyteller, he sets

the scene quickly before taking off on a rollicking ride that keeps the pages turning. Its a hard book to put down." (Crosswalk.com) Reads at a breathtaking, frantic pace from beginning to end. . . . A daring work of fiction that will have people talking. (Fresh Fiction) Praise for Glenn Meade's other work: "Meade's research is so extensive yet unobtrusive . . . that it is often easy to forget you're reading fiction and not history. This a completely riveting thriller in the tradition of the Day of the Jackal. A white knuckler!" (The Washington Post) "A writer of powerfully built and skillfully executed plots. Immerse yourself in his intricately woven intrigue and explosive action, and enjoy them thoroughly!" (Oleg Kalugin, former head of the KGB's First Directorate) "Fast, sly and slick, his thrillers deliver the goodstension, action, plot twists until the smoke finally clears." (Booklist) Deftly orchestrated. . . . One long, twisty, breathless chase. . . . Tough to put down (The New York Times Book) Rich in period detail, crisply plotted and paced. (People) Meade knows how to turn on the adrenaline. (USA Today) A tremendous sense of dramatic action and page-turning excitement culminating in a riveting, thought-provoking climax. (The Sunday Times) Another literate and suspenseful thriller from an estimable storyteller who proves that beginners luck had nothing to do with his impressive debut. (Kirkus s)