

On The Run – Left Behind Kids 10

Jerry B. Jenkins and Tim LaHaye

Category: fiction religion

Synopsis:

Over tragic news about their friends, Judd and Ryan set out for Israel to discover the truth. The trail leads them to a surprising find and into the hands of the Global Community.

Back at home, Vicki, Lionel, and their friends plan to carry out another mission at Nicolae High. but not without great danger. What if they get caught? Will Vicki be sent back to the detention center now that Bruce is gone?

Follow Judd, Vicki, Lionel, Ryan, and the growing Young Trib Force as they continue their heroic journey through the earth's last days.

Tim LaHaye, who conceived the Left Behind series, is a former educator, minister, and prophecy scholar. His forty non-fiction works have sold more than 11 million copies. He and his wife, Beverly, live in Southern California.

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A LEFT BEHIND Book

Tim LaHaye

WITH CHRIS FABRY

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To Kirsten

What's Gone On Before

Judd Thompson Jr. and his friends are involved in a dangerous adventure. The global vanishings of millions of people have left them without family. They decide to spread the truth—that Jesus Christ has returned for his true followers.

When the Global Community begins World War III, beloved Pastor Bruce Barnes is killed. The kids realize Ryan Daley is missing.

They discover that Ryan is being held hostage along with Darrion Stahley, the daughter of a high-level Global Community officer. Judd and his friend Vicki find Darrion's father and rush toward Chicago to rescue their friend.

As the bombing of Chicago begins, Ryan and Darrion escape their captors and try to get away. At a Global Community outpost,

Mr. Stahley is mortally wounded, but before he dies he and his daughter express a belief in Jesus Christ.

After finding Darrion's mother, Judd and the others pull together as the world continues to spin out of control.

1

“Judd, help!”

The girl sounded desperate. He tried to place her voice, but he couldn't. Judd called back, but she didn't seem to hear.

“Judd, we need you! Hurry!”

“Nina!” Judd said as he awoke. He tried to shake the dream but couldn't. Judd had met Nina in Israel while traveling with Bruce. Because her father was such an outspoken Jewish believer, Nina, her brother, Clan, and Mrs. Ben-Judah were in constant danger.

Nina's helpless cry haunted Judd as he collected himself.

There was a pain deep in his chest. Could the previous day have been a dream? Could Bruce really be dead? Judd sat up and listened to voices in the other room. Judd had come to Loretta's—Bruce's secretary at New Hope Village Church—house when he heard Chloe Williams was in trouble. The search for Ryan had been exhausting. Judd had fallen asleep before he found out what happened to Chloe, and now he listened as Loretta and Buck Williams talked in hushed tones in the kitchen.

Loretta wept about Bruce. Buck assured her she wouldn't have to handle the arrangements for Bruce's body.

“But I don't think I can handle the memorial service either,” Loretta said.

“There's so much to prepare.”

Buck said he would take care of both.

“It feels so good to have people in this place again,” Loretta said.

“Y'all stay as long as you need to or want to.”

“We're grateful,” Buck said.

“Amanda may sleep till noon, but then she'll get right on those arrangements with the coroner's office. Chloe didn't sleep much with the ankle cast, but she's sleeping hard now.”

When Loretta left for the church, Judd went to the kitchen to talk with Buck.

“I heard you had quite an experience with Ryan,” Buck said.

“How is he?”

Judd told him. He asked Buck's advice about Mrs. Stahley and Darrion.

"That's a tough one," Buck said.

"You want to get them into hiding as fast as you can," Buck said.

"If the Global Community wanted

Mr. Stahley that bad, they'll come looking for the rest of his family. Sounds like they know too much. "

"What happened with Chloe?" Judd said.

Buck quickly explained that Chloe had received a message from her father to get out of downtown Chicago. She was talking with Buck on a cell phone with a cop right behind her. Chloe didn't want to stop. Then the bombing began.

Chloe's Range Rover was thrown off Lake Shore Drive and landed in a tree. That's where she stayed until Buck found her.

Buck was interested in Ryan's story. Judd explained how they found him and how Ryan helped save their lives.

"Mr. Stahley gave his life for his daughter," Judd said.

"We may all be asked to do that," Buck said.

"I'm not sure how much Nicolae Carpathia knows about my faith, but he's sure to find out at some point. We have to be ready for whatever comes."

"Is Verna Zee a Christian too?" Judd said, referring to Buck's co-worker, also staying at Loretta's house.

"No," Buck said.

"I may have put myself in real danger when I brought her here. My hope is that she'll hear the message and respond. If not, I'm in trouble.

Carpathia hasn't given any indication he suspects anything, but if Verna tells my superiors, it's only a matter of time. "

"Do you talk with Carpathia?" Judd said.

"Last night in fact," Buck said.

"He wanted to know about the coverage of the war here. His voice got real emotional when I told him. He said it was a tragedy."

"Makes me sick," Judd said.

"Is that all he said?"

“No, he wanted me to come over there and cover meetings in Baghdad and New Babylon.”

“You’re not going?” Judd said.

“I told him I was working another story,” Buck said.

“He’s getting another guy.”

As they talked, Buck turned his attention to the papers scattered across the dining room table.

“Bruce’s notes,” he said.

“Chloe had them with her in the Rover. I have to put them back together.”

Judd helped get the transcripts in order. Buck had a huge job ahead of him. He not only had to read the massive pile of pages but also edit it for the church.

“Can I ask about the other story you’re working on?” Judd said.

Buck reached for the phone.

“Hang on,” he said.

Buck called Ken Ritz, a pilot who had flown him to New York just after the disappearances.

“I know you’re busy and probably don’t need my business,” Buck said, “but you also know I’m on a big, fat expense account and can pay more than anyone else.”

Judd wondered where Buck needed to go so soon after his wife’s accident.

“Israel,” Buck said to Ken Ritz.

“And I have to be back here by Saturday night at the latest.”

Vicki awoke and heard someone crying. For a moment she couldn’t figure out where she was. Judd’s house, she thought. He had asked them to stay at his house while he went to Loretta’s. Vicki had crashed in Judd’s parents’ room. Chaya sat on the edge of the bed, her shoulders shaking.

“Are you OK?” Vicki said.

Chaya shook her head.

“I couldn’t sleep,” she said.

“I called my father about my mother’s funeral. He said I shouldn’t bother. He doesn’t want me there.”

“That’s all he said?” Vicki said.

“He asked about Bruce; then he told me this would be our last conversation.”

“He can’t keep you away from your own mother’s funeral,” Vicki said.

“He said he would turn his back if I came. I have betrayed the Jewish faith by becoming a Christian. I have betrayed him and the memory of my mother. “

Vicki put an arm around Chaya as the older girl sobbed.

“I prayed that her death would soften him,” Chaya said. She was clutching the note she had found in her mother’s hand.

“At least you know where your mom is now,” Vicki said.

“I know she’s in a better place,” Chaya said, “but my father”

Lionel and Ryan were in the kitchen fixing breakfast. Ryan held out a plate to Vicki when she sat down.

“You’re our guests so we’re pulling out all the special food,” Ryan said.

“If I can keep him from eating it all,” Lionel said.

Ryan and Lionel seemed to be working together. Their rivalry the past year had been fierce at times, bickering and fighting almost daily. Vicki wondered how long the truce would last.

As they ate, although they were sad, they kept remembering funny stories.

“When I moved into Bruce’s house, I forgot my toothbrush,” Vicki said.

“I asked Bruce if he’d take me to buy some toiletries, and he got all serious. He told me he’d never had a teenager in his house and knew there were things I’d need. He was about to launch into this big speech about growing into womanhood when I stopped him and said, “Bruce, I just need a toothbrush.”

“Everyone laughed.

“What do you think Bruce would say about Darrion and Mrs.

Stanley?” Ryan said.

“He’d be proud of what you did,” Lionel said.

“If you hadn’t been there, they might not have made it. They sure wouldn’t have heard about God the way you told them.”

“None of it would have happened if I hadn’t gone to see Bruce,” Ryan said.

“He started the whole thing.”

Chaya had talked with Loretta late the previous night and brought everyone up to date on Chloe and Buck. Though Amanda was safe, Rayford Steele remained with Nicolae Carpathia.

Amanda said Rayford was flying to New Babylon.

“Carpathia gives me the creeps big time,” Ryan said.

“I think he’s Satan himself. “

“That’s not what Bruce told us,” Lionel said.

Chaya nodded.

“Bruce taught that the Antichrist would not be indwelt by Satan himself until halfway into the Tribulation.

The guy’s evil, no doubt. But even with the war and all the death, things will get worse. “

Darrion rushed up the stairs.

“Turn on the television!” she said.

“Why Israel?” Judd asked Buck.

“I’ve heard that’s the one place the war hasn’t touched.”

“I’m not covering the war,” Buck said.

“Then why go?” Judd said.

“I’m not sure how much I should tell you,” Buck said, “for your own safety.”

“With what we’ve been through,” Judd said, “I don’t think you could tell me anything that would endanger my life more than us hiding family members of a Global Community traitor.”

“In the middle of trying to find Chloe yesterday, I got a call from Dr.

Chaim Rosenzweig,” Buck said.

“He’s friends with Rabbi Tsion Ben-Judah.”

Judd reminded Buck he had met the rabbi’s wife and two adopted children on his trips to Israel. Buck looked away.

“We watched the rabbi’s televised speech too,” Judd said.

“And Bruce kept us up to date. It was exciting to watch the rabbi speak to all the new believers in Teddy Koliak Stadium. What’s happened?”

“They can’t find him,” Buck said.

“Dr. Rosenzweig said he was going to Nicolae for help and I begged him to leave Carpathia out of it. I haven’t heard anything more, but I assume the prophecy from the two witnesses at the Wailing Wall is correct. Dr. Ben-Judah will be protected in spite of the murders. So I feel I have to”—“Wait,” Judd said.

“What murders?” Buck stared at him.

“You’d better sit down.”

Lionel flicked on the television in the kitchen. The Stahley girl looked upset. Mrs. Stanley was there a moment later and watched with her arms folded.

The news anchorwoman was nicely dressed, but the worry showed on her face.

“This report out of Chicago has pushed aside war news,” she said.

“An international business leader and a high-level member of the Global Community is dead this morning. Maxwell Stahley, who made his fortune in international security, was found dead of a gunshot wound in an office building in a suburb of Chicago.”

Video footage showed men carrying Mr. Stahley’s body from the Global Community building.

“Mr. Stahley was found alone in a pool of blood in a first-floor entryway,” the woman said.

Mrs. Stahley covered her mouth and turned her head.

“He wasn’t on the first floor,” Ryan said.

“He was on the fourth floor with the other guy.”

“Also missing are Stahley’s wife and daughter,” the anchor said. A picture of the Stahley family flashed on the screen.

“I hate that picture,” Darrion said.

“The motive is not clear,” the woman continued, “but a source close to the Global Community confirmed that a large amount of money had been taken from one of Stahley’s bank accounts in the U.S.”

“They found it already,” Mrs. Stahley said.

“I transferred the funds last night.”

“Will they be able to trace it to Judd?” Vicki said.

“I put the money into several different accounts to be safe,” Mrs.

Stahley said. She looked at Vicki.

“One of them was Judd’s.”

A spokesman for the Global Community appeared on a satellite hookup. He vaguely answered questions about the war, then turned to the Stahley report.

“We must let the investigation run its course,” the man said.

“This is a great personal loss of a devoted colleague.

I do believe it will be important to focus on the mother and daughter at this point. They may be in danger, or perhaps they know something about the murder. “

“You wanna find them because they know what’s really going on,” Ryan said to the TV.

“Are you suggesting his wife and daughter might be responsible for the murder?” the woman said.

“We’re not ruling anything out at this point,” the spokesman said, “but we would like anyone who has any information on the whereabouts of these two to get in touch with the Global Community immediately.”

A phone number flashed on the screen.

“That guy looks nervous,” Vicki said.

“My husband left important documents behind,” Mrs. Stahley said.

“Documents that might save our lives.”

“Where are they?” Vicki said.

“That’s the problem. They’re at our house in a secret place.”

The phone rang. Chaya answered. She looked startled, then covered the receiver with her hand.

“It’s Loretta,” Chaya said.

“The police just called the church.”

“Who was murdered?” Judd said, sitting warily.

“I found this out from Dr. Rosenzweig,” Buck said.

“He respects Dr. Ben-Judah but couldn’t understand why such an educated man would throw away his reputation by proclaiming Jesus as the Messiah. He was afraid religious zealots would kill Ben- Judah.”

“And they did?” Judd said, holding his breath.

Buck shook his head.

“Chaim called to tell me about the rabbi’s wife and children.”

“No!” Judd gasped.

Buck’s voice grew tense.

“All killed,” he said.

“I’m very sorry.”

The words felt like a sledgehammer. The air went out of the room and Judd couldn’t speak. Couldn’t think. Buck kept talking, but Judd couldn’t concentrate.

“Chaim said Ben-Judah’s house was burned to the ground,” Buck was saying.

“You sure it was them?” Judd managed.

“Chaim says it was a public spectacle. I assume the rabbi is in hiding. At least I hope so.”

“That’s why you’re going to Israel?” Judd said.

“It’s not what Carpathia thinks, but yes. I need to find the rabbi.”

Judd put his face in his hands.

“The dream,” he said.

“I had a dream about Nina last night.” Judd explained his relationship with Nina, Clan, and their mother. They had taken Judd in. They had driven him to historic sights in Israel and explained their social customs. They had eaten together and talked about their faith. Judd had invited them to America. Now they were dead.

Or were they? He could hope. Judd thought a moment.

“Maybe they’re just trying to lure the rabbi out of hiding. If he thought his family had been killed, he’d come out for sure.”

“What could he do if they’re dead?”

Judd slammed his fist onto the table.

“I don’t get it,” he said.

“The two witnesses promised protection, right?”

“Moishe said anyone who threatened the rabbi would answer to him,” Buck said. “I thought the rabbi’s family would be protected, too.”

“I don’t think they’re dead,” Judd said.

“Dr. Rosenzweig wouldn’t have told me that unless it was true,” Buck said.

“You said yourself Carpathia has the power to make people believe a lie,” Judd said.

“But there’s no reason,” Buck said.

“You’ve just gone through a gut-wrenching experience with Ryan. You’ve lost Bruce. Now this.

I don’t blame you for being upset. But you have to face the facts.”

Judd wanted to keep arguing, but he knew he shouldn’t.

“I need a favor,” he said.

“Don’t panic,” Lionel said, though mention of the police startled him.

“We don’t know what they want.”

Chaya looked upset.

“The officer told Loretta someone used the church phone to call Mr. Stahleys office yesterday,” she said.

“Loretta told them it might have been Judd. She hung up and realized he might be in danger.”

“Great,” Lionel said.

“The church was our best hiding place for the Stahleys. Now that’s out.”

“I was the one who made the call,” Chaya said.

“They’re looking for me, not Judd.”

“Doesn’t matter,” Lionel said.

“We’re in this together.”

The phone rang again. Lionel waved the rest off and looked at the caller ID. It was blank.

“Yeah, he’s not here right now. Can I take a message?” Lionel said.

“This is the police,” the man said.

“We’re investigating a murder. Do you know where Judd Thompson is right now?”

“I’m not sure,” Lionel said.

“He was gone all night. What precinct are you with? I’ll have him call when he gets back.”

The phone line clicked.

“Funny,” Lionel said.

“Since when do the police not want anyone to know who they are?” He looked at Mrs. Stahley and Darrion.

“We need to get you out of here fast.”

Before anyone could move there was a knock at the door.

“I don’t like it,” Buck said.

“Don’t treat me like a kid,” Judd said.

“I’ve been to Israel before.”

Buck folded his arms.

“That’s not the point.”

“It can’t cost much more to let me fly with you,” Judd said.

“As soon as we touch down, I’ll be gone.”

“I’m not against you going to Israel,” Buck said.

“I’m just not in a position to let you go with me.”

“Where else am I going to find a way over there when there’s a war on?” Judd said.

Buck sighed.

“I don’t know. I just can’t handle the responsibility of”—“You don’t have any responsibility,” Judd said.

“All I need is a way to get over there so I can check on Nina and Clan.

That’s all I’m asking. “

“I know this news hurts,” Buck said, “but I’m doing something that could get me killed. I just can’t take you. I’m sorry.”

“If you don’t help me out, I’ll find my own way,” Judd said.

Judd dropped the subject. If God really wanted him to go to Israel, God could work it out without Buck’s help.

Judd helped Buck finish organizing Bruce’s transcripts. Buck said he was going to pack and then try to reach Dr. Rosenzweig.

“The old man knows he’s being watched,” Buck said.

“But I think he’s trying to tell me, in a cryptic way, that Dr. Ben-Judah is alive and safe somewhere.”

Chaya slipped to the garage with Darrion and Mrs. Stahley.

The girl and her mother climbed into the trunk. Chaya waited for Lionel’s signal and opened the garage door.

“I hope this works,” Chaya said to herself.

Vicki opened the door. A tall, thin woman with glasses greeted her. Vicki remembered the woman from the hearing she had been given at Nicolae Carpathia High School.

“Candace Goodwin,” the woman said. Vicki showed her into the living room. As she did, a huge crash of pots and pans clattered behind Vicki. Lionel stood in the kitchen in the midst of the furor. The noise lasted a good twenty seconds as the boy clumsily picked up, dropped, and kicked several pans. Vicki

introduced Lionel. Vicki could tell that the social worker was ready to get down to business. Her face was tight, and she looked like she had aged since the last time Vicki had seen her.

“If you recall,” Mrs. Goodwin said, “I’m with Global Community Social Services.” She pulled out a yellow legal pad and scribbled some notes.

“I remember,” Vicki said.

“I told my story to you and got sent to the Northside Detention Center.”

Mrs. Goodwin grimaced.

“I didn’t want to do that, but you wouldn’t cooperate.”

“What are you doing here?” Vicki said.

“It’s my job to know these types of things,” Mrs. Goodwin said grimly.

“The real concern before us is what you’re going to do now.”

“What do you mean?” Vicki said.

“We received a report about your guardian’s death,” Mrs. Goodwin said.

“How could you possibly” “Do you deny it?” Mrs. Goodwin said.

Vicki bit her lip.

“No,” she said.

“But he wasn’t my guardian. He was my adoptive father.”

“We have some important matters to discuss,” Mrs. Goodwin said.

“You’re a ward of the state now.”

“Does that mean what I think it means?” Vicki said.

“Unless we find a suitable alternative,” Mrs. Goodwin said, “you could return to NDC.”

Vicki gasped. With the war and mayhem around the world, she had thought she might be able to slide through the cracks in the system. How could they have discovered Bruce’s death so fast? she thought.

“I have a place to stay and friends” Mrs. Goodwin’s beeper sounded.

She handed Vicki her card.

“I need to talk with you about something later,” she said.

“I’ll be in touch.”

Judd came through the door as Mrs. Goodwin was leaving.

Vicki explained the situation and told Judd about the police call.

“Chaya drove the Stahleys somewhere,”

Vicki said.

“I don’t know where. We just wanted to get them out of here.”

“If it was the Global Community on the phone rather than the police,” Lionel said, “we might have company soon.”

“Better they find us than Chaya,” Judd said.

“I’d rather they didn’t find any of us,” Vicki said.

Judd called Ryan into the meeting and told them about the Ben-Judah family. The kids were crushed. Ryan said he had been looking forward to meeting Nina and Ben and helping them adjust to American society. Vicki stared off into space.

“I wonder if that’s what we’ll have to go through,” Lionel said.

“The persecution of people who believe in Jesus is increasing.”

“This is going to hit Chaya hard,” Vicki said.

“She thought the Ben-Judahs might talk to her father.”

Judd told them of his desire to go to Israel.

“I want to make sure,” he said.

“I think God is drawing me back there, and it may be because the family isn’t really dead.”

“You don’t trust Dr. Rosenzweig?” Vicki said.

“I don’t trust anyone who says Nicolae Carpathia is a good man,” Judd said.

“It’s not fair,” Ryan said.

“You’ve been to Israel twice, and Bruce promised. You ought to take me.”

“Hang on,” Lionel said.

“You’re going to Israel because you have some kind of feeling?”

“I can’t explain it,” Judd said.

“What if it’s a bad piece of pizza?” Lionel said.

“Come on, Judd, we can’t just go running off whenever we feel like it.”

The phone rang. Lionel looked at the caller ID.

“No number,” he said.

“Let’s get out of here,” Judd said.

Chaya drove Mrs. Stahley and Darrion to Bruce’s house and put them in a secluded room downstairs. When they were settled, Mrs. Stahley became emotional.

“What will they do with my husband’s body?” she said.

“I assume they’ll keep it until the investigation is complete,” Chaya said.

“I want to see him,” Mrs. Stahley said.

“It doesn’t seem real to me.”

“Mother--,” Darrion said.

“It’s not that I don’t believe your report,” Mrs. Stahley said.

“I need to see my husband’s face.”

“You have to resist that,” Chaya said.

“The Global Community wants you to come forward. If they find you, they’ll twist things and make you look like the murderer. “

“She’s right, Mother,” Darrion said.

“We must hide.”

Judd and the others joined Chaya at Bruce’s house. Mrs. Stahley and Darrion excused themselves while the group met.

When Judd told them the news about the Ben-Judah family, Chaya shook her head.

“When will the insanity end?” she said.

Judd asked Chaya’s advice on the trip to Israel.

“Travel anywhere is risky right now,” Chaya said.

“I still don’t get it,” Lionel said.

“Why does God want you in Israel?”

“I woke up thinking about the Ben-Judah family this morning,” Judd said.

“Maybe they’re still alive. And who knows, if Buck can’t find Dr.

Ben-Judah, maybe God will let me help.”

“I don’t see how it’s possible.” Vicki said.

“Mr. Williams won’t take you, and you sure can’t get a flight anywhere with the war going on.”

“Maybe you’re right,” Judd said.

“Maybe this was all in my head.”

“I’m sorry for interrupting,” Mrs. Stahley said, slipping in the room.

“I know how you can get there.”

“You do?” Judd said.

“The only person who worked with my husband that I trust is Taylor Graham,” Mrs. Stahley said.

“I wanted to call him when Darrion was taken, but Maxwell wouldn’t allow it. He knew Taylor can be pretty high-strung.”

“Sounds like my kind of guy,” Ryan said.

“How can he help us?”

Judd glanced warily at Ryan.

“Us?” he said.

“He’s been our family pilot for years,” Mrs. Stahley said.

“He’s flown us around the world several times.”

“Cool guy,” Darrion said.

“He’s let me fly before.”

“Right,” Ryan said.

“No, really.” Darrion rolled her eyes and smiled.

“Okay, it was on autopilot, but it still felt like I was flying.”

“Wouldn’t they have taken possession of your plane by now?”

Judd said.

“We keep it in an underground hangar near the house,” Mrs.

Stahley said.

“Maxwell used the Global Community-supplied aircraft for business, but no one knows where our private jet is. The trick will be getting onto the property. I’m sure the Global Community is watching it.”

“Can you get in touch with this guy?” Judd said.

“I can try.”

Mrs. Stahley reached the pilot’s answering machine, then dialed his pager.

“What do you hope to accomplish with the trip?” Mrs. Stahley said.

“To find out about the Ben-Judah family,” Judd said.

“Which brings us back to me,” Ryan said.

“What happens if you’re over there and you get into some real trouble?” Ryan flexed his muscles and Darrion smiled. Judd explained Ryan’s wish.

“Judd won’t admit I can take care of myself,” Ryan said.

“After what you accomplished yesterday,” Vicki said, “I would think Judd would jump at the chance.”

“I agree Ryan proved himself,” Judd said. He held up his passport.

“But it’s not practical. He doesn’t even have one of these.”

Chaya’s eyes widened.

“I’ll be right back,” she said, running from the room. Soon she returned, holding a white envelope.

“What you said about Ryan going with you?” Chaya said.

“It is practical.”

She handed Judd the envelope. Judd opened it slowly, then let out a low whistle.

“What?” Ryan said, grabbing the envelope.

“It was going to be a surprise,” Chaya said.

“Bruce told me that on his next trip to the Holy Land he was taking Ryan with him. He filled out the paperwork and sent in Ryan’s “ “That little picture!” Ryan said, his mouth open wide.

“Bruce wouldn’t tell me what he was going to do with it.”

Ryan pulled out the crisp, blue passport and opened the cover to see his picture inside. He touched it gingerly, as if it were a treasure. A yellow Post-it note was stuck to the back. In Bruce’s familiar handwriting Ryan read out loud, “For Ryan. It’s your turn finally.”

Vicki gave Judd a look.

“Don’t take sides on this,” Judd said.

“You know it’s too dangerous “ “Judd,” Vicki said, “we watched Ryan dodge bombs and bullets yesterday and save Darrion’s life. I’d say he’s earned a chance, don’t you think?”

“If God wants you to go,” Lionel said, “it looks like he wants you to have some company.”

Chaya handed Ryan a page from Bruce’s manuscript.

“I copied this for you,” she said.

Over Ryan’s shoulder, Judd read the page. Bruce wrote, I’m so excited the process is complete. The next time I set foot on Israeli soil, I’ll get to take Ryan. He talks constantly about going. I’ve had to say no twice. This is going to be such a surprise. I can’t wait to see his face when I show him the passport and tell him he’s going with me.

Ryan looked at Judd with tears in his eyes. Judd shook his head.

“We don’t even know if this Graham guy will fly us,” Judd said.

“Us?” Ryan said.

“Yeah.” Judd smiled.

“Us.”

Judd and Ryan arranged a meeting with Taylor Graham at a donut shop inProspectHeights.

“I don’t want to tell him everything,” Judd said.

“I know Mrs. Stahley trusts him with her life, but we have to be careful.”

Graham looked like a swimmer—tall, tanned, and muscular.

They bought coffee and donuts and sat in Judd’s car.

“I have to tell you,” Graham said, “I didn’t know I’d be dealing with a couple of kids.”

Judd glanced at Ryan, who rolled his eyes.

“I wouldn’t even be talking to you unless the Mrs. had asked.”

“I understand your concern,” Judd said.

“You’re safe with us. I assume the Global Community is looking for you, too.”

“They found me already,” Graham said.

“Since my boss was grounded for a few days, which I still don’t understand, the GC had me do a V.I.P

run to Dallas yesterday. Didn't get in until early this morning."

"The CC told you Mr. Stahley was going to be grounded?" Judd said.

"Said he was out for at least a few days and might not be back," Graham said.

"I do what I'm told, but first thing on the list when I got back was to check with him and find out what's going on."

"So you don't know anything about why Mr. Stahley was out?" Judd said.

"If you know something, tell me," Graham said.

"You sure you can trust us little kids?" Ryan said.

Graham ignored him and listened intently as Judd explained the events of the previous day. Ryan told the pilot how he had gotten entangled in the kidnapping and about some of the kidnapers' conversations on the phone.

"What did the guy in the trench coat look like?" Graham asked.

Judd told him. Graham shook his head.

"Corny bit it, huh?"

"What?" Ryan said.

"Cornelius Van Waylin," Graham said.

"Supposed to be Max's friend. They were together a few years ago before this whole Global Community deal. Had a falling out. Corny had it in for Max from the get-go."

Ryan described the other man who had gotten away.

"Doesn't ring a bell," Graham said, "but Corny had lots of people working for him, inside and outside the GC."

"So will you take us?" Ryan said.

"It's probably about the safest airspace in the world right now," Graham said, "but you have to pass through some hot spots. Why Israel?"

"It's a personal trip," Judd said.

"I promised Ryan we'd"—"OK, you can cut that stuff," Graham said.

"I'm not gonna risk my neck on a joyride to Jerusalem because somebody has an itch. I'll ask you one more time. Why are you going?"

Judd was in a corner. If Graham was working with the GC, he and Mrs. Stahley were in trouble. But if he offended Graham, he might lose his best chance for a trip to Israel. Before he could answer, Graham

turned to Ryan.

“What’s your name again?” he said.

Ryan told him.

“I want you to buckle your strap tight around you,” Graham said.

“Now.” He turned to Judd.

“As fast as you can, flip the front seat back and climb next to your friend.”

“What’s going on?” Judd said.

“Two GC guys walked into the donut place after we ordered,” Graham said.

“I didn’t think much of it. When the second car pulled up I got a little antsy. Then I saw someone who looks a lot like the guy you said ran away from sector four last night. I figure we ought to do something.”

Judd was in the backseat and barely buckled in when Taylor Graham pulled away from the curb. Judd had no idea his car could move that quickly or that it could look so easy.

“Yeeehigh!” Ryan said.

“While we’re in the process here,” Graham said, “tell me why you need to go.”

“Some friends of ours were killed,” Judd said.

“I don’t believe it. We want to find out what happened.”

“You think they’re still alive?” Graham said, taking a curve hard.

“Maybe it’s blind hope,” Judd said, “but I have to know.

They’d do the same for me. “

Judd couldn’t see either of the other cars now. Graham turned onto a frontage road that paralleled an expressway and sped toward an intersection.

“I’ll take you on one condition,” Graham said.

“We’re not telling where Mrs. Stahley is,” Ryan said.

“I don’t want you to,” Graham said.

“Then what’s the condition?” Judd said.

Vicki met with Chloe later in the day. Chloe hobbled around on a cane, needing crutches but unable to manage them with her sprained wrist. Chloe brought Vicki up to date on the adult Tribulation Force.

Buck's co-worker, Verna Zee, was back at the Global Community office and would return later that night.

"We need your advice about Darrion and Mrs. Stanley," Vicki said.

"Where do you think they should stay?"

"Here," Chloe said. She told Vicki where to find a key in the kitchen.

"Bring them over while we take Buck to Palwaukee Airport. Verna's staying downstairs. You can put Mrs. Stahley and Darrion in the garage apartment. It's not fancy, but no one will find them."

"What about Loretta?" Vicki said.

"She'll need to know."

"I'll tell Loretta," Chloe said.

"You stay with them and bring whatever they need. I'll have Loretta say you're trying to get over Bruce's death and you need a little privacy. "

"That wouldn't be far from the truth," Vicki said.

Chloe put a hand on her shoulder.

"Hang in there until the memorial service," she said.

"I'm sure that will bring healing to us all."

The phone rang and Chloe handed it to Vicki.

"You'll never believe it," Judd said. The car phone was noisy, and Judd sounded out of breath.

"We're on our way to Israel!"

"Great," Vicki said.

"When do you leave?"

"The pilot will take us on one condition," Judd said.

"He wants to go right now—no packing, no good-byes. Ryan hasn't let go of his passport, and I have mine."

"Why does it have to be all of a sudden?" Vicki said.

"Can't explain," Judd said.

"Just be careful. And make sure you get Mrs. Stahley and Darrion to a safe place."

"It's already taken care of," Vicki said.

Vicki told Judd the group would pray for him and Ryan, even though she didn't know exactly what to pray. When she hung up, Buck came in with his luggage. Rayford Steele's wife, Amanda, was there to drive him to the airport.

"I want to ride along," Chloe said.

"Are you sure you're up to it, hon?" Buck said.

Chloe's voice was quavery.

"Buck, I hate to say it, but in this day and age we never know when we might or might not ever see each other again."

"You're being a little dramatic, aren't you?" he said.

"Buck!" Amanda said in a scolding tone.

"You cater to her feelings now. I had to kiss my husband good-bye in front of the Antichrist. You think that gives me confidence about whether I'll ever see him again?"

Vicki smiled. Buck had been properly chastised. Vicki got in touch with Chaya.

"We have a couple people to move," Vicki said.

Judd was impressed with Taylor Graham's abilities behind the wheel. He also had keen insight. Graham whipped the car into a drive-through canopy and let the car idle.

"What's wrong?" Judd said.

"Helicopter," Graham said. When the pilot was sure they weren't being followed, he headed for the Stahley mansion.

"The place'll be watched closely, so we'll have to go the long way around," he said.

"I hope you guys are in good shape."

On their way, Nicolae Carpathia's voice interrupted the news reports on the radio. He talked in his usual overly humble manner.

"Make no mistake, my brothers and sisters," Carpathia said, "there will be many dark days ahead. It will take a huge supply of resources to begin the rebuilding process, but because of the generosity of the seven loyal global regions, the world will see the largest relief fund in the history of mankind. This will be given to needy nations directly from New Babylon. The relief effort, under my direct orders, will be handled in a swift and generous way.

"Continue to resist those who speak out against us. Continue to support the Global Community. And remember that though I did not seek this position, I accept it with resolve to pour out my life in service to the brotherhood and sisterhood of mankind. I appreciate your support as we set about to stand by each other and pull ourselves out of these troubled days to a higher plane."

Ryan shook his head.

“He’s saying that because people want to hear it.”

Judd waited to see any reaction from Taylor Graham. The pilot concentrated on the road ahead. Judd explained how he and Vicki had gotten onto the Stahley property.

“You’re lucky the dogs didn’t tear you apart,” Graham said.

Graham drove into a different entrance to the forest preserve, farther from the Stahley estate. Instead of staying in the parking lot, he stopped at a hidden gate in a wooded area. Graham unlocked the gate and drove deeper into the woods. A few hundred yards farther they found a gravel path with warning signs posted every few yards.

“I didn’t know this was here,” Judd said.

“No one’s supposed to,” Graham said.

“I usually have my four-wheel drive. It can get nasty out here when it’s wet.”

The car snaked through the underbrush, and the terrain gradually inclined. Finally they went straight uphill until the ground leveled and they came to a clearing. Graham parked the car under a huge willow tree, and the three hiked along the edge of the woods.

“See anything out there?” Graham said.

Judd saw the edge of the Stahley estate in the distance and the iron fence he and Vicki had climbed. Between them and the fence were acres of rolling, green land.

“I see some pine trees and a lot of grass,” Judd said, “but nothing that looks like a plane or a landing strip.”

“Good,” the pilot said.

Graham showed them to a small grove of trees and knelt in front of a brick-sized stone.

Underneath, Judd saw what looked like a fishing-tackle box.

Graham opened the lid. Inside was an airtight instrument panel covered with buttons and knobs.

“I’ll need you to stay here and work the runway,” Graham said to Judd.

“Ryan, you come with me, but you have to stay low. When we’re in the clearing, we’ll be easy to spot.”

Ryan smiled at Judd and raised his eyebrows.

“We have an underground tunnel that connects the mansion with the plane hangar,” Graham said.

“It’s hard to find, so I’m assuming the Global Community people haven’t located it yet.”

Graham pointed to the panel.

“This is our backup entrance,” he said.

“When Ryan and I make it to the entrance, I’ll give you a thumbs-up. You press the black button and hold it until we get inside.”

“How long will you be in there?” Judd said.

“It’ll take a few minutes’ prep, maybe fifteen or so,” the pilot said.

“When you hear the plane start, flip the green switch to the “on” position. Pull the top down and replace the stone, then run like mad straight toward that tree.”

Graham caught Judd’s eye.

“This is important,” Graham said.

“If something goes wrong, you’ll need to find the road and get back to Mrs. Stahley. If we’re clear in there, the sound of the plane is bound to alert them. If you’re slow and don’t make it, I’ll leave you in a New York minute. “

“I’m not slow,” Judd said.

“I’ll make it.”

“Good,” Graham said.

“There’s an old stump about ten yards in front of the tree. The door to the plane will be open. Got it?”

Judd nodded. Ryan held up both thumbs and the two took off, running close to the ground.

Vicki and Chaya helped Darrion and Mrs. Stahley get settled in the garage apartment. Mrs. Stahley had found some clothes in Bruce’s wife’s closet that fit, but the two had little else.

“The apartment doesn’t have a phone,” Vicki said, “so we’ll get you a cell phone to use in case of an emergency. It does have a complete kitchen, so you won’t need to go out.”

“This is very kind of you,” Mrs. Stahley said, “but where will the hiding end? At some point they’ll track us down.

And when they do, you’ll be caught in the middle. “

“God put us together for a reason,” Vicki said.

“He wants us to help. We’ll take this a day at a time and pray Cod leads us.”

Darrion flipped on the television. The reporter stated that Nicolae Carpathia would speak from New Babylon within the hour.

“I can’t wait,” she said sarcastically.

Ryan watched Taylor Graham give Judd the signal. Before them, a grassy door in the side of the mountain opened. Ryan and the pilot scurried in. Graham hit a button that closed the door.

While the pilot readied the Learjet, Ryan walked around the hangar. The place was massive. Tools hung from one wall. In another area Ryan found fuel pumps. Ryan couldn't believe the interior of the plane. Leather seats complete with video monitors were neatly positioned about the cabin. In the rear of the plane Ryan found electronic equipment.

"We can hook up with satellites," Graham said.

"We can hear and see just about anything we want up here."

"Cool," Ryan said.

Graham showed Ryan how to close the rear door once Judd was aboard.

"You do what I say," Graham said, "whether your friend makes it or not.

Understood?"

Ryan nodded, but he knew he wasn't going anywhere without Judd.

Judd waited for any sign of the plane. He had seen the hill open, but now, as he looked closely, he couldn't tell where the door had been. If Graham hadn't given him the tree as a reference, he would never have found the correct spot. He still couldn't see the landing strip.

A line of geese flew overhead in a perfect V. A squirrel skittered about searching for nuts in the dry leaves. Winter was coming. Instinct told the animals to prepare. Judd felt the same way about his life. He had survived nearly two years of the Tribulation. What lay ahead was more frightening than anything they had been through.

Judd heard an engine and at first thought it was the plane.

To his left he saw a four-wheel drive vehicle bounce up the hill and around the tree line. A man with binoculars surveyed the landscape. Judd hit the ground and stayed there. Moments later he heard the engine rev. He lifted his head and saw the car near the willow tree. Two men disappeared beneath its branches.

Come on, Graham. Hurry! Judd said under his breath.

Ryan watched the pilot leave the plane and grab a nozzle outside.

"If we didn't have this," Graham yelled, "we'd have to refuel some where along the East Coast. Once we're airborne, I'm not stopping until we hit the Holy Land," Ryan heard something beep behind him.

"Hey, Mr. Taylor, sir," Ryan said, "there's something going on with your computer back here. The one with all the lines on the screen." The pilot shut off the fuel and replaced the nozzle. He jumped into the cabin and quickly closed the door. He had a worried look on his face as he ran to the cockpit.

"What's wrong?" Ryan said.

“We’ve got company,” Graham said.

“Better get strapped into your seat.”

“But I thought you wanted me to close the door once Judd”—“There’s no time to pick him up,” Graham said.

“I just hope Judd has the sense to throw the switch and stay where he is.”

“But you can’t leave him!” Ryan said. Ryan’s words were drowned by the roar of the jet engine as it came to life.

Loretta was glad to see Vicki.

“You can use that apartment as long as you need it,” she said.

“I don’t want to impose,” Vicki said.

“That’s the last time I want to hear a thing about it,” Loretta said.

Vicki smiled, and the two hugged.

Verna Zee joined them at the kitchen table. Vicki could tell by the way Loretta served food and coffee that hospitality came naturally to her. She could also tell that Verna wasn’t a people person. When Loretta talked, Verna fidgeted with her napkin. Verna was probably perfect at barking orders in the newsroom, but she was out of her element here over coffee and cookies.

The conversation turned to Bruce. Loretta politely asked if Verna had ever been involved in a church.

“That’s a laugh,” Verna said.

“I’ve probably been to church about a dozen times my whole life. And that includes weddings and funerals.

“My dad was an atheist,” Verna continued.

“My mom grew up in a strict home. Her parents said it was evil to watch TV.

Couldn’t go to dances or drink anything stronger than Kool-Aid, and that may have been too strong, I don’t know.

When she got old enough, she turned her back on religion and said yes to my father. Then I came along.

“So you never went to church as a child or as an adult?”

Loretta said.

“The idea of attending church was never discussed,” Verna said.

“Wasn’t an option.”

“And what do you think about God now?” Loretta said.

“I don’t think about it,” Verna said.

“I figure if there is a God out there, a force or a being of some sort, he’ll weigh my good and bad points.”

“But haven’t you ever been curious?” Loretta said.

“Most people look for some kind of deeper meaning in life than what they see from day to day.”

“I don’t have time for deeper meaning,” Verna said.

“I do what I do and leave it at that.”

“That seems kind of sad to me,” Vicki said.

“Mr. Williams talks about journalism as a noble profession. Seeking truth and all that. But you’re saying”—“Buck Williams and I are different people,” Verna said.

“If he wants to be motivated by the truth, fine. But I don’t do it because a God is standing over me wagging his finger.”

Vicki backed off and let Loretta take over.

“I think what Vicki is saying is that without some kind of deeper purpose, life is empty. To do what you do, you have to be motivated by more than your paycheck, right?”

“Look, I’ll admit I don’t live the happiest life on the planet,” Verna said.

“I’m skeptical. I see the glass as half empty. But I like being this way.”

“What did you make of the disappearances last year?” Loretta said.

Verna shook her head.

Loretta took a long sip of tea and leaned back in her chair.

“Verna,” she said, “I’d like to tell a skeptical journalist the true story of what happened to me. That is, if you want to hear it.”

Verna looked about nervously and sighed.

“I guess I don’t have anything better to do,” she said.

“I’m listening.”

Judd heard the plane engine come to life. He flipped the green switch to the “on” position as Graham had said. He shut the box, replaced the stone, and kept his head down.

The door in the side of the hill opened, and Judd spotted the plane.

Then his jaw dropped. The grass in the middle of the clearing moved.

As it did, a black line of asphalt appeared as far as he could see.

Judd looked left and saw the two men hop in their vehicle and speed toward the clearing. Should I run or stay? Judd thought. If I hunker down here, they won't find me. But what about Ryan? I can't leave him alone.

Judd waited until the men were a safe distance past him; then he stood and ran.

"How'd you get the runway to do that?" Ryan said.

"If you look closely at the field," Graham said, "you'll notice that part of the grass is greener than the rest. We put in artificial turf and motorized the strip so it would stay hidden. When I trip the wire at the end of the runway, it triggers the turf to return."

Ryan saw something move in the distance and let out a whoop.

Judd was running like the wind.

The pilot cursed.

"He should have stayed put," he said.

"He's going to make it," Ryan said.

"Not if those guys see him," Graham said, pointing to a car in the middle of the runway.

Judd ran as fast as he could up the hill, then picked up speed as he reached the clearing. He could see the stump of the tree. To his right, Mr. Stahley's Learjet whistled and picked up speed. To his left were the men in the car. He heard them honking their horn and yelling, but he focused on the tree stump.

He crossed the runway and jumped onto the stump as the jet roared toward him.

"Slow down!" Ryan yelled.

"There isn't time," the pilot screamed.

"He's right where you told him to be!" Ryan said.

"It's not fair. Those other guys will get him for sure if we don't pick him up."

"Those guys will get all of us if we don't get out of here right now," Graham said.

The car sped toward Judd. He saw one man pull a gun and hold it out the window. The plane was going too fast. Suddenly it slowed and nearly came to a stop as he timed his jump and fell perfectly onto the cabin floor at Ryan's feet.

"The pilot was going to leave you," Ryan said.

“I convinced him to stop.”

“Stay low,” Graham said from the cockpit.

“These guys are armed to the teeth.”

“I’ve never seen you run that fast before,” Ryan said, as he buckled his seatbelt and leaned toward the floor.

“I’ve never had to run that fast before,” Judd said.

“Hang on,” Graham said from the cockpit. He swerved off the runway and barely missed the four-wheel drive. Judd heard a bullet ping off the glass in the cockpit, and Graham smiled.

“Bulletproof,” Graham said.

“But I hope he doesn’t try for the fuel tank.”

The car turned around and followed them. Graham had trouble getting back on the runway, but when he did, the plane shot forward.

“They’re gaining on us!” Ryan shouted.

“I’m not worried about them,” Graham said.

“I’m worried about those guys up there.”

Through the front of the plane Judd could see another car parked across the runway near the end.

“How are you gonna get around that?” Judd said.

“Hang on,” Graham said.

“We either get this rig in the air now or we’re finished.”

The plane accelerated and lifted its nose. Judd heard a thud beneath them, and then they were airborne.

“Yahoo!” Ryan shouted.

“We’re on our way to Israel.”

“What was that noise?” Judd said.

“Landing gear,” Graham said.

“One of the tires clipped the car. We’re on our way, but we might have trouble landing.”

Loretta began with her childhood. She had been raised in the South, where church was part of her

routine.

“It was our meeting place,” Loretta said.

“Social and spiritual at the same time. My father taught Sunday school.

My mother led Bible studies in our home. But something was missing, and I didn’t realize what it was until the disappearances. “

Verna rolled her eyes.

“You mean that it was God,” she said.

“You said a little bit ago that if there were a God, he could weigh your good and your bad,” Loretta said.

“I’ve been a member of this church for more years than I care to admit. I’ve served on just about every committee and group they have. If somebody had made a list of people most likely to go to heaven, I’d have been at the top, right up there with the pastor. “

“And you don’t think you measured up?” Verna said.

“I know I didn’t measure up,” Loretta said.

Verna shifted in her seat and put her hand on her chin.

“The night people vanished, I went to the church and found Bruce Barnes, one of our pastors. We knew what had happened.

We watched a video the senior pastor made. That’s when I understood my life was a fake. I wasn’t a true Christian. “

“This is all fascinating,” Verna said, “but”—“Bruce Barnes taught me everything,” Loretta continued.

“I learned more from him in the last two years than in the sixty before it combined. I’m not blamin’ anybody but myself. My daddy had gone on before, but I lost Mama, all six of my brothers and sisters, all of their kids, their kids’ husbands and wives. I lost my own children and grandchildren. Everybody.

“A couple of weeks before it happened, one of my daughters was over here with her children. I was reading one of those picture Bibles for little kids to my grandbaby. The child was no more than three years old, and she looked up at me with these huge, brown eyes and said, “Grandma, do you have Jesus living in your heart?” I was so pleased. I was glad my grandkids were growing up in a good home. And if I’d have listened closer to what that little child was saying, I wouldn’t be here today. “

“If that were true, then I wouldn’t have a place to stay and you wouldn’t have a new sermon,” Verna said.

Loretta leaned closer.

“I had the sermons memorized,” she said.

“I didn’t have a relationship with God.”

When the plane made it past the East Coast, Judd and Ryan relaxed a little. Judd told Ryan he was lucky he didn’t have to endure the cramped legroom of a commercial flight. In the Stahley jet, they could both get up and walk around.

“There are soft drinks and snacks in the kitchen area,” Graham said.

Judd made the pilot some coffee and sat near the cockpit.

“I knew the Global Community boys underestimated how tight Max and I were when they asked me to run the Dallas flight for them,” the pilot said.

“I didn’t know what was up, but it was clear they trusted me and not him.”

“Did you find out stuff about Carpathia?” Judd said.

“Enough to make me think there was something wrong with the guy,” Graham said.

“Max felt that way when he was checking out his brother’s death.”

Ryan looked at Judd. Judd knew what he was thinking. Maxwell Stahley’s brother and his wife hadn’t died. They had been raptured. Judd nodded at Ryan.

“What else do you know about Carpathia?” he said.

“From Max and some of the security taps we had, I know he’s not too happy with that rabbi.”

“What do you think Carpathia’s next move will be?” Ryan said.

“The war has put him in a perfect position,” Graham said.

“This is what he wanted. With people vulnerable, they’ll look for help. The Global Community will give it. With the one-world currency almost in place, he’s moving toward a cashless society.”

“Everything will be electronic?” Ryan said.

“Exactly,” Graham said.

“And if he taxes every transaction, you can imagine the billions he’ll rake in for his New Babylon then.”

“How can people let him get away with all that?” Judd said.

“You know he’s a fake, right?”

“I know Max had strong suspicions,” Graham said.

“Carpathia wants to own the major media so he can control the press. He’ll replace the three ambassadors who revolted with leaders who agree with him. That’ll bring the Global Community back to ten regions.”

“Ten leaders!” Ryan said.

“Can you believe it?”

“What?” Graham said.

“Did I miss something?”

Judd wondered again if Graham could be trusted fully. A man who would risk his life for them surely needed to know why Nicolae Carpathia was doing these things. But should he hear it from me? Judd thought. Could giving him that information prove costly in the future?

Vicki was content to listen to Loretta’s story. Chloe and Amanda arrived and joined the others at the table. When Loretta was finished, Chloe told Verna how she and Buck had met because of the Rapture, and how she, Buck and her father had become believers in Jesus Christ.

Loretta refilled Verna’s cup with coffee. Verna warmed her hands over the steam and sighed.

“You guys like to gang up on people, don’t you?”

Everyone laughed. Verna shook her head.

“Those are interesting stories, but it seems a little wacky.”

“What’s so strange?” Loretta said.

“The whole thing,” Verna said.

“My dad warned me there’d be people like you. And not only you, but Buck is mixed up in it too. Nicolae Carpathia trusts him!”

“Verna,” Chloe said, “Loretta didn’t have to welcome you in here. We didn’t have to offer this information. We’re telling you this because we care.”

Amanda defended Buck.

“If there’s one person on the planet you should trust, it’s Buck Williams,” she said.

“You and Buck have been at each other’s throats for a long time,” Chloe said.

“He’s told me about your fights.”

“I think the war made our skirmishes look petty,” Verna said.

“Your skirmishes were petty,” Chloe said.

Verna stood and leaned against the wall.

“I’ll tell you the truth,” she said.

“I’ve been a little bit jealous of Buck’s assignments. Buck is everything I wanted to be, and the more I

look at his copy, the more it steams me. Compared to him, I feel like a college kid trying to put sentences together.”

Amanda wandered out of the kitchen, then called for Chloe to come into the living room. Vicki followed and saw a news bulletin on television. People were crowding around an airplane tarmac.

“There comes Rayford,” Amanda said.

“Thank God he’s OK.”

The flight crew, followed by seven ambassadors, gathered around the microphone. Finally the camera pulled back to show Nicolae Carpathia descending the steps. Vicki was amazed at the man’s ability to strike just the right pose and expression. He appeared concerned, grave, and yet somehow purposeful and confident.

As lights flashed and cameras whirred, Carpathia resolutely descended the steps and approached a bank of microphones.

Every network insignia on each microphone had been redesigned to include the letters “GCN,” the Global Community Network.

A woman broke from the crowd and ran directly for him.

Security guards who stepped in her way quickly realized who she was and let her through.

“Is that Hattie?” Chloe said suddenly.

“Who’s Hattie?” Verna said.

“Carpathia’s fiancée,” Chloe said.

“It is her.”

Vicki thought Carpathia looked embarrassed and awkward for once. He welcomed the woman to his side, but it was clear he was upset. Hattie leaned in to kiss him, and Carpathia pulled her ear to his mouth and whispered something. Hattie looked stricken.

“Poor girl,” Chloe said. Hattie tried to pull away from Carpathia, but he grabbed her wrist and kept her standing next to him at the microphone.

“It is so good to be back where I belong,” Carpathia said.

“It is wonderful to reunite with loved ones. My fiancée is overcome with grief, as I am, at the horrible events that began a few hours ago. This is a difficult time in which we live, and yet our horizons have never been wider, our challenges so great, our future so bright.

“Even though we have all suffered a great tragedy, I believe we are destined for prosperity if we commit to standing together. We will stand against any enemy of peace and embrace any friend of the Global Community.”

The crowd, including the press, applauded with just the right solemnity. It made Vicki sick. Besides, she

was eager to see how Darrion and Mrs. Stahley were.

Ryan sensed Judd's uneasiness. The pilot needed to hear the truth, and Ryan wanted to give it. If Graham was interested, Judd could join in. If not, Ryan could play the mouthy kid.

Judd flinched when Ryan first began; then he saw where Ryan was going and backed off.

Ryan told his whole story. When he got to the end and described his last meeting with Bruce, Graham was quiet.

"Must have hurt a lot to lose a friend like that," Graham said.

"More than you can know," Ryan said.

"Bruce taught us a lot about the Bible and about what's going to happen in the future."

"OK, I'll bite," the pilot said.

"What is going to happen in the future?"

"If I'm right," Ryan said, "everyone's going to go through some scary stuff. But people who don't believe are going to be in worse trouble than they could ever imagine."

"Max's brother talked to me once about this stuff," Graham said.

"I didn't listen all that closely because I thought he was a kook. But if what you say is right, the end isn't that far off."

"Exactly," Ryan said.

Judd took over. Graham spent the hours throwing questions to both boys. Ryan was amazed at how much they both remembered from Bruce's teaching.

After the press conference, Vicki listened as Chloe pulled Verna aside.

"Verna, the information you know about Buck could ruin his career."

"It could ruin a lot more than that," Verna said.

"Will you keep quiet about what you know?" Chloe said.

"It depends. What do you think Buck would be willing to offer in exchange?"

"You know as well as I do Buck would never work that way," Chloe said.

"I figured that."

"As far as we're concerned, the most important thing is what you decide to do about Christ," Chloe said.

"But you know our very lives depend on you protecting Buck from your bosses."

“Cameron’s only boss is Carpathia,” Verna said. She shook her head.

“As much as I admire the man and what he’s been able to do for America and the world, I hate the way he controls the news. We journalists are supposed to be fair. Unbiased.”

“So you’ll help us then?” Chloe said.

“When will Cameron be back?” Verna said.

“Sometime over the weekend,” Chloe said.

“And one more thing. Promise me you’ll come to the memorial service for our pastor.”

Verna bit her lip.

“I don’t know why I’m saying this, but OK.

I’ll wait till I talk with Buck, and I’ll be at that meeting Sunday.”

Chloe smiled, then laughed when Verna said, “I just hope the floor doesn’t fall through when I walk in.”

Taylor Graham landed the Learjet on a private airstrip near Tel Aviv. Judd and Ryan prepared for a rough landing. Graham masterfully landed the plane, then got out to inspect the damage.

“Doesn’t look too bad,” Graham said.

“I know a guy who can fix it and keep quiet. We won’t have to go through customs, but we’ll probably run into some Global Community checkpoints on the way.”

“We?” Judd said.

“If you don’t mind the company,” Graham said, “I’d like to go along. I might be able to help you find the people you’re looking for.”

Judd stammered.

“We ... wanted to do this on our own.”

“Hey, I’ll back off,” Graham said, putting up both hands.

“A little rest by the seashore sounds good to me. I’ll wait to hear from you. “

Judd conferred with Ryan.

“What about the checkpoints?” Judd said to Graham.

“Won’t the GC be looking for you?”

“I have a fake ID,” Graham said.

“My CC connections could come in handy, but”—“If you’re willing to follow our lead,” Judd said, “we want you to come with us.”

“Hey, I’ve followed so far,” Graham said.

“I’ll give my mechanic a call and get a car.”

Vicki checked on Darrion and Mrs. Stanley. Chaya was with them. She had brought dinner and the cell phone.

“We saw Carpathia,” Mrs. Stahley said.

“Made me sick,” Darrion said.

“That man is the reason my father is dead.”

Chaya motioned for Vicki to step outside.

“I didn’t want them to know this, but there’s been a strange car across the street all afternoon.”

“You think it’s GC?” Vicki said.

“I’m not sure,” Chaya said.

“I had Lionel create a diversion so I could come over here. The social worker, Mrs. Goodwin, called. She wants to meet with you.”

“At the house?”

“I told her you were out and she seemed nervous,” Chaya said.

“She said she’d meet you at nine o’clock at that coffee place on Rand Road.”

“I don’t like leaving Mrs. Stahley and Darrion,” Vicki said.

“Did she say what she wants?”

“She wouldn’t tell me,” Chaya said.

“Just to meet her there tonight.”

Vicki told the Stahleys she had to go out and that they should not answer the door if anyone came. Chaya drove Vicki to the coffee shop, and they looked for Mrs. Goodwin. They parked across the street and waited until they saw the woman walk in.

Chaya stayed in the car while Vicki went inside.

“I’m glad you’re here,” Mrs. Goodwin said when she saw Vicki.

“Let’s go to my car.” The woman looked upset.

Vicki didn't know if she should get in. It could be a trap.

Vicki looked inside. The car was empty.

"Is there a problem?" Mrs. Goodwin said.

Vicki shook her head and climbed in.

"What did you want to talk about?" Vicki said.

The woman shook her head.

"I know I shouldn't be here," she said.

"Your house is being watched by the Global Community.

They say you may be hiding a murder suspect. "

Judd and Ryan located the garage near the hangar and found three vehicles stashed by Mr. Stahley.

"He was prepared for everything," Ryan said.

Judd chose a late-model sedan that looked like it could move fast. Graham got behind the wheel, and Judd did a double take. The man had sunglasses, a mustache, and a goatee.

"You grow hair that fast?" Ryan said.

"Another precaution," Graham said, with a hint of British accent.

"From here on out, I'm Geoffrey Croton. Jolly old chap from just outside London, you know."

"I always wanted to meet somebody who talked like that," Ryan said.

"Sit back and relax," the pilot said, as he revved the engine.

"We've got a long drive ahead and who knows what in between."

"Murder suspect?" Vicki said, stunned. Was this woman giving information for Vicki's own good, or was she a pawn in the hands of the Global Community?

"Who am I supposed to be hiding?" Vicki said.

"I don't know exactly," Mrs. Goodwin said, "but it must be someone pretty important. I got wind of it earlier this afternoon."

"Why are you telling me this?" Vicki said. Mrs.

Goodwin looked about nervously.

"Ever since that day at the school, I've thought of you. The way you handled yourself under the pressure of our questions and the way you talked about what you believe."

“That’s why you’re here?” Vicki said.

“Partly,” Mrs. Goodwin said.

“You deserve every chance I can give. First, you need to know about the call that came in about you. All calls are monitored. It was from Barrington, from a Mr. Stein.”

“Chaya’s dad!” Vicki gasped.

“He told us about your father’s death and gave us information about your religious views, things I already knew from your answers at the hearing.”

“Did he say anything about me hiding someone?” Vicki said.

“No, that was another source,” Mrs. Goodwin said.

“All I know is that you’re in great danger.” Mrs. Goodwin started the car.

“I can’t stay here. We need to keep moving.”

Vicki looked behind her to see if Chaya was following them.

She thought she saw her once, but lost sight of the car in traffic.

Mrs. Goodwin drove through town and parked on a residential street.

“This should be OK,” the woman said.

“What are you afraid of?” Vicki said.

“The Global Community,” Mrs. Goodwin said.

“You have to find another place to stay tonight.”

“I have one,” Vicki said, “but I still don’t know why you’re helping me.”

Mrs. Goodwin had avoided eye contact with Vicki. Now she turned in her seat and pursed her lips.

“I work with troubled kids everyday,” Mrs. Goodwin said.

“There are thousands who have been left homeless because of the disappearances. I’m sure a lot of them have fallen through the cracks.”

“I wish I had,” Vicki said.

“I’m glad you didn’t,” Mrs. Goodwin said.

“I talk with some pretty tough kids. You’re the first one who seemed to have more direction than the people trying to help her.”

“Ma’am?” Vicki said.

“Your principal, Mrs. Jenness, and the other teacher, Mrs. Waltonen,” Mrs. Goodwin said.

“They put up a front that they had it together. I could tell they were scared.”

“Do you know anything about Mrs. Waltonen?” Vicki said.

“I saw her at Judd’s graduation, but I haven’t heard anything more. “

Mrs. Goodwin said that Mrs. Waltonen and Coach Handlesman were both at a re-education facility. Mrs. Goodwin said, “From the moment I heard you, I knew at some point I needed to talk with you.”

Vicki held her hands open as if to say, “I’m all ears.”

“I’ve tried to be a good person all my life,” Mrs. Goodwin said.

“When I was a kid, they called me Goody Two-Shoes. I was at the top of my class academically. I volunteered for social organizations. I was popular.”

“You look like you could have been a cheerleader,” Vicki said.

Mrs. Goodwin smiled.

“Varsity squad. When I went to college, I studied to teach disabled children. I worked with Social Services and saw how much help they needed, so I took this position.”

“How does that fit with me?” Vicki said.

“When you spoke of your faith,” Mrs. Goodwin said, “you didn’t talk about living up to rules and regulations. That’s what I’ve always thought about religion. You do your best and hope.”

“That’s what most people think,” Vicki said.

“I’ve cornered the market on helping people,” Mrs. Goodwin said.

“I’ve gone overseas to feed the starving; I’ve worked at soup kitchens in the city. I’ve even taken people into my home to give them a place to stay. But I’ve never felt accepted by God.

I’ve never really been sure like you. Over the last few months, I couldn’t get what you said out of my mind. I knew I had to talk with you. When the call came about your father, and I got wind of what the Global Community was saying, I had to come. “

“I’m glad you did,” Vicki said.

“So tell me,” Mrs. Goodwin said, “how can you be sure God accepts you?”

The sun was coming up when Ryan, Judd, and Taylor Graham neared Jerusalem. Ryan pointed each time he saw a familiar biblical landmark. He couldn’t believe they were so close to the Sea of Galilee. Then came Nazareth.

Judd pointed out other spots he and Bruce had seen from their earlier trips. Ryan asked questions as they passed roads leading to Jericho, the Dead Sea, and the Jordan River. A few miles from Jerusalem, Ryan spotted a sign for Bethlehem.

“Don’t get too excited,” Graham said.

“Lookup ahead.”

Ryan saw a line of cars and what looked like tollbooths.

“It’s a GC checkpoint,” Graham said.

“Let me do the talking.”

They waited in line a few minutes, then pulled forward to a uniformed Global Community officer, who asked the nature of their visit.

“My good man,” Graham said in his cockney accent, “we’re on holiday.

Seeing the sights. Enjoying the safety, if you know what I mean.”

Graham laughed and handed the man the passports.

“Don’t suppose you’d know how we could get in to see those shouting chaps down at the Wailing Wall, would you?” he continued.

“We’ve seen them on”—“This is not a tourist center,” the guard said, looking closely at the passports.

“Why do you have the two Americans with you?”

“They’re in my charge for a few days,” Graham said innocently.

“As I said, we’re on holiday.”

The guard bent down to look at Ryan and Judd. He handed the passports back.

“You may go,” he said.

“We passed our first test,” Graham said.

“Now where?”

Judd handed him an address.

“We’re going to the Ben-Judah house,” he said.

“I want to see it myself.”

Vicki remembered praying that God would use what she had said in the meeting at the school. She hadn’t planned on it affecting Mrs. Goodwin.

“You know about my parents and how the rest of my family disappeared,” Vicki said.

“And I know about Pastor Barnes and how he helped you,” Mrs.

Goodwin said.

“I want to know that God accepts my efforts.

And I want to be sure about what’s to come. “

“God always keeps his word,” Vicki said.

“The prophecies in the Bible are coming true all around us. So you can be sure that what God says will happen.”

“I believe that,” Mrs. Goodwin said.

“The Bible says that if you confess with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. “

“That’s it?” Mrs. Goodwin said.

“That’s the beginning,” Vicki said.

“So all the good I’ve done is worthless?” Mrs. Goodwin said.

“All I needed to do was believe something?”

“Somebody explained it this way,” Vicki said.

“Suppose everybody in the world is required to jump to the moon.

That’s the goal. Some people jump really high. Some people can’t jump at all. Some don’t even try. But no matter who they are, no one can jump to the moon. “

“What’s the point?”

“God is holy. He’s perfect in every way. So those who want to follow him have to be perfect. But we’re not. We sin. And sin separates us from God. The good things you’ve done are like those jumps. They were a good try, but you’re never going to make it unless someone takes you there.”

“And that’s where Jesus comes in....”

“Exactly,” Vicki said.

“Jesus was God in the flesh. He lived a perfect life and paid the penalty so you could be accepted by God. That’s why I know you can be sure about heaven. Jesus said whoever believes in him will not die but will have eternal life.”

Mrs. Goodwin looked toward the street, deep in thought.

“So if you don’t do good things to get to God,” she said, “why do them at all?”

“When somebody has given his life for you,” Vicki said, “you want to love and serve him with everything you have.”

Judd gasped when he saw the Ben-Judahs’ house. It was nothing but a charred pile. Smoke still filled the air. The area was cordoned off by police tape.

“The reports about the fire were right,” Ryan said.

Judd asked Graham and Ryan to stay put while he looked around.

“Be careful what you say,” Graham said.

Judd walked the street, asking for anyone who spoke English.

He came to the house next door where he, Nina, and Clan had slipped through a secret passage. A boy who looked about fifteen sat in a small garden with a water fountain.

“I speak English, yes,” the boy said.

Judd let himself inside the gate and sat down. The boy was average in size, but a little heavy.

“You have seen the news,” the boy said.

“My house is famous because it’s the one next to that mess.”

“I’m Judd Thompson,” Judd said, as he stretched out his hand.

“My name is Samuel,” the boy said.

“Nina and Clan were friends of mine,” Judd said.

Immediately, Samuel closed his eyes and let his head fall to his chest.

“You could get in trouble mentioning their names in this neighborhood,” he said.

“I can’t talk about them. My father does not permit it.”

“} remember your house,” Judd said.

“Nina, Clan, and I went through the tunnel” Samuel put up his hand.

“I must go,” he said.

“Please,” Judd said.

“I don’t believe they’re dead.”

Samuel shook his head.

“You are wrong,” he said softly.

“I’ve come a long way,” Judd said.

“Tell me what you know.”

Samuel raised his voice.

“I am glad they are dead! We are better off without those who would blaspheme the name of God.”

Judd saw two men pass near the garden and walk on. Samuel lowered his voice.

“Why should I believe you?” he said.

“You could be working with the attackers. You could be one of them.”

Judd knew he had to be careful, but he felt he should trust this boy.

“I am a believer in Christ, as were Nina and Clan,” Judd said.

“For some reason, God sent me here. If you know anything that would help, I want to hear it.”

Samuel looked toward the street again and leaned close, barely moving his lips.

“I will do better than that,” he said.

“I will say good-bye to you and go inside the house.

Wait a few moments, then go to the side entrance. The door will be unlocked. “

Samuel stood, shook hands with Judd, and left. A few moments later Judd went inside. Judd heard a noise and found a stairwell leading to a basement.

“Welcome to my hideaway,” Samuel said.

“My mother no longer lives with us, and my father has left for work. He let me stay home today.”

“I’m glad,” Judd said.

“Now maybe I can get to the bottom of this.”

Samuel led Judd to a small room with a computer and some electronic gear. Judd waited while the boy retrieved a video camera.

“You must understand that what I am about to show you must not be revealed to anyone,” Samuel said.

“I understand,” Judd said.

Samuel hooked up the connections.

“You were right about the passageway,” he said.

“We allowed Nina and Clan to go through our home. But my father said the risk was getting too great. When the rabbi went on television and proclaimed Jesus as the Messiah, our whole community was under suspicion.

“I have known Nina and Clan for years,” Samuel said.

“I knew them before their father died and Mrs. Ben-Judah married the rabbi. It was a shock that their stepfather had betrayed the faith, but I never held them personally responsible.”

“Do you know anything about what they believed?” Judd said.

“We had many talks in this very room,” Samuel said.

“After my father sealed up the entrance, I still met with them.

They were very frightened. “

“And for good reason, it sounds like,” Judd said.

“I will tell you about the day it happened,” Samuel said.

“But I must warn you. You may not wish to hear or see what is on this videotape.”

Judd nodded.

“I want to see all of it,” he said.

Vicki led Mrs. Goodwin in a simple prayer.

“God, I know I’m a sinner and I need your forgiveness. I believe Jesus died for me, and I ask you to come into my life now. Forgive me of my sins. I don’t trust in myself or my own goodness anymore but in your Son, Jesus.

Amen. “

Mrs. Goodwin said, “Amen.”

Samuel prepared the equipment and sat in front of the video monitor.

“Before I show you this, I will tell you about that day,” he said.

“I’m ready,” Judd said, taking a deep breath.

“I was sick that day. My father let me stay home but told me not to go outside. I couldn’t sit in the garden or go onto the patio. I had nothing to do but watch television and read. In the afternoon, I sat near the window and watched traffic, waiting for my father.

“That’s when I saw the van. It pulled into a parking space down the street. No one got out. The glass was tinted, so I couldn’t see who it was. It just sat there. Mrs. Ben-Judah came outside for something,

and I saw movement inside the van, just shadows.

“I had no idea how it would turn out,” Samuel continued, “and you should not think I am able to tell the future, but I pulled out my video camera and used the zoom lens to get a better look. As I turned it on. Dr. Ben-Judah’s driver pulled up. Nina and Clan got out. “

Samuel paused. Judd nodded, and the boy pushed the Play button on the camera.

Mrs. Goodwin drove Vicki back to the coffee shop. Headlights flashed brightly in the rearview mirror.

“Someone’s getting out of that car,” Mrs. Goodwin said.

“Do you want me to keep going?”

“No!” Vicki said, recognizing Chaya. Chaya tapped on the driver’s window. She looked angrily at Mrs. Goodwin, then at Vicki.

“Are you all right?” Chaya said.

“It’s OK,” Vicki said.

“Mrs. Goodwin and I were just talking about some really important stuff.”

Chaya looked relieved.

“Good,” she said, “but I need you to come with me, if you’re through.”

“We’re finished.” Mrs. Goodwin smiled. She took Vicki’s hand and squeezed it.

“Find a safe place and stay there.” She handed her card to Vicki.

“Call me at this number when you get settled. I’m sure I’ll have more questions.”

“How did you find us?” Vicki said when she was in the car with Chaya.

“I lost you when you turned off the main road,” Chaya said.

“I thought she might take you to the detention center, so I went there.

I waited a while and then went to Loretta’s to see if you were there.

That’s when I found this.”

Chaya handed Vicki a piece of paper. Vicki unfolded it and saw Mrs.

Stanley’s elegant handwriting.

“They’re gone, Vick,” Chaya said.

“Darrion and Mrs. Stahley are gone.”

Samuel's camera work was shaky. Judd could see the unmarked van in the background. Nina and Clan got out of the car and went into their house. They passed the two guards at the front door, posted by Dr. Ben-Judah for his family's safety.

Judd felt queasy watching the video, like there should be an eerie soundtrack to go along with the pictures.

"I turned off the camera, and then it started," Samuel said.

"I turned the camera back on as quickly as I could."

The tape jumped to a horrifying scene. Several hooded thugs shot automatic weapons at the house. Judd couldn't see the guards of Dr. Ben-Judah, but there was little return fire.

The camera pulled away from the window, and Judd heard the heavy breathing of Samuel saying something in Hebrew. There were shouts on the street and confusion.

"I did not know what to do," Samuel said, as Judd watched.

"I froze. Then I placed the camera on the windowsill and went into the other room."

With the camera's zoom pulled back, Judd could see the entire scene.

One thug stood by the van and waited. Shots rang out inside the house.

More shouting. Then Mrs. Ben-Judah was dragged outside. Judd heard Nina cry out. He couldn't watch.

"What did Nina say?"

"She cried for her mother," Samuel said.

"I will translate for you."

Next, Nina was brought into the street. They're making an example of them, Judd thought.

"Where is he?" the thug said.

"Where is the rabbi?"

"I will not betray my father!" Nina screamed.

"Tell us now!" the man screamed back.

Such courage, Judd thought. In the face of death, Nina would not give them any information. Clan was dragged out last. A man ran to the van and brought a container inside the house.

"Spare your life," the thug sneered at Clan.

"Tell us where your father is."

Clan stammered and looked into the face of his hooded captor.

“Now! Before it is too late!” the man screamed.

“Let me see your face,” Clan finally said.

The man was standing over Clan and facing the camera. He lifted his mask and bent low. Judd could see the man had a heavy, black beard and a mustache.

“Now, tell me! Where is Tsion Ben-Judah?”

Clan spat in the man’s face.

“You insolent”—“I would rather die than betray my father!” Clan said.

Those were Dan’s last words.

A crackling sound grew in the background. One of the thugs yelled, “The rabbi is not inside. What now?”

“To the university,” another said.

As the van pulled away, Judd heard a siren in the distance.

Neighbors waited a few moments, then rushed to look at the three lifeless bodies. Then the screen went blank.

Judd could not speak. The horror of what he had seen was too much.

“No matter what one thinks of their beliefs,” Samuel finally said, “they died honorably.”

“They were treated like animals,” Judd choked.

“I do not know where the rabbi is,” Samuel said.

“Maybe his driver saw what happened and found him before the others. No one knows where he took him. On the news, the driver claims he knows nothing.”

“The report I heard was true,” Judd said.

“My friends are dead. We came here for nothing.”

“I have not been able to show this to anyone,” Samuel said.

“Not even my own father. I do not know what to do with it.”

Judd heard the front door open, and a man called for Samuel.

“Here he is now,” the boy said.

Judd went to the side door. Samuel ran after him.

“Take this with you,” Samuel whispered, shoving the small videotape into Judd’s jacket pocket.

What’s taking Judd so long? Ryan thought, as Taylor Graham snored. When Judd finally returned to the car he looked worried. Ryan woke the pilot, who suggested they find a hotel. They checked into the King David and found their room.

“I’m gonna crash for a couple hours,” Graham said.

“Wake me when you need me.”

Ryan sat with Judd. He had never seen his friend so depressed. Judd flicked on CNN, but Ryan turned it off with the remote.

“Talk to me,” Ryan said.

“Why did we come here?” Judd said flatly.

“And with a guy we’ve just met. It was crazy.”

“You know we had to check on the Ben- Judahs,” Ryan said.

“God wanted us here.”

“Maybe he did, maybe he didn’t,” Judd said.

“Looks like a wasted trip to me.”

“What did you see in that house?” Ryan said.

Judd told him about the video. Ryan cringed when he heard the details.

Judd pulled out the cassette.

“No one sees this, and no one gets access to it,” Judd said.

“I’m putting it in the safe downstairs.”

“Then what?” Ryan said.

Judd shrugged.

“As long as we’re here, you might as well see the sights,” he said.

“And the most impressive are at the Wailing Wall.”

“What do you mean they’re gone?” Vicki shouted.

“I told them to stay put.”

“Read the note,” Chaya said.

Vicki couldn't believe what she saw. Mrs. Stahley's beautiful handwriting cut Vicki to the heart.

Dear Friends, the note read, Darrion and I have appreciated your concern and sacrifice. You have risked your lives for our safety and we thank you. However, our very presence puts you in danger. We cannot do that any longer. We believe God will protect us and you. Thank you for your kindness.

Sincerely, Louise Stanley.

“They must have overheard me when I told you the house was being watched,” Chaya said.

Vicki shook her head.

“I hope she knows what she's doing,” she said.

“Where do you think they went?” Chaya said.

“I don't know,” Vicki said.

“I just hope we can find them before the Global Community does.”

Judd secured the videotape at the front desk. He placed the key in his wallet. Near the elevator Ryan tapped Judd on the shoulder and nodded toward the front of the hotel. Judd saw Buck Williams.

“He's traveling as light as we are,” Ryan said.

Buck was shocked to see Judd and Ryan.

“You're taking a big chance.” Buck said.

Judd explained what they had learned about the Ben-Judah family.

“Have you heard anything from Dr. Ben-Judah?” Judd said.

“Nothing firsthand,” Buck said.

“I just came from the airport and met one of the rabbi's friends. He said Rabbi Ben-Judah called him once and said that I would know where to start looking.”

“Where's that?” Ryan said.

“No way,” Buck said, shaking his head.

“You two are out of this. The authorities are even trying to pin the murders of his family on the rabbi.”

“That's loony!” Ryan said.

“I agree,” Buck said, “but the people out to get Tsion will stop at nothing. His driver was killed in a car bombing.”

That's why I'm saying you two should get back to the States. "

"If that's so," Judd said, "they're following you right now."

"I've taken precautions," Buck said.

"I'm registered here under the name of Herb Katz. I'm going to my room to make a few calls and get some sleep. I'll see you when I get back home."

Vicki and Chaya went back to Bruce's house. Lionel was still there, and the two brought him up to speed.

"If Mr. Stahley had a secret hangar for his plane," Lionel said, "you can bet he had another secret house or cabin somewhere."

"Still," Vicki said, "you have to believe Mrs. Stahley will try to get back to her place for the documents she talked about."

"There's no chance," Lionel said.

"The Global Community goons will be crawling all over the place. Plus, we've got problems of our own."

"What?"

"School is back in session starting tomorrow," Lionel said.

Vicki thought a minute.

"That might not be a problem," she said.

Judd and Ryan took turns napping in the lobby of the hotel so they wouldn't miss Buck. Near sundown, Buck briskly walked to a cabstand. Judd and Ryan followed.

Judd paid the cabbie when they reached the Wailing Wall.

They saw Buck walk toward a wrought-iron fence, where the two witnesses prophesied.

The two men called themselves Moishe and Eli, and truly they seemed to have come from another time and another place.

They wore ragged, burlap-like robes. They were barefoot with leathery, dark skin. Both had long, dark gray hair and unkempt beards. They looked strong and had bony joints and long muscled arms and legs. Anyone who dared get close to them smelled smoke. Those who dared attack them had been killed. Several had rushed them with automatic weapons, only to seem to hit an invisible wall and drop dead on the spot.

Others had been overcome by fire that had come from the witnesses' mouths.

They preached almost constantly in the language of the Bible, and what they said angered the devout Jews. They preached about Jesus Christ, proclaiming him the Messiah, the Son of God.

Judd had seen the witnesses with Bruce. Hearing their voices again made a chill go down his spine. Ryan was excited at the sight and drank it in. As usual, a huge crowd had gathered, though people kept their distance.

This evening the witnesses were doing as they had done every day since the signing of the treaty between Israel and Nicolae Carpathia. They were proclaiming the terrible Day of the Lord. They acknowledged Jesus Christ as “the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace. Let no other man anywhere call himself the ruler of this world! Any man who makes such a claim is not the Christ but the Antichrist, and he shall surely die! Woe unto anyone who preaches another gospel! Jesus is the only true God, maker of heaven and earth!”

Judd pointed out all the different people of various races and cultures in the crowd.

“They’re understanding the message in their own language,” he said.

“Unbelievable,” Ryan said.

Judd saw Buck edge farther into the crowd of about three hundred.

Suddenly, both preachers stopped and moved forward toward the fence.

The crowd seemed to step back in fear.

“I think they see him,” Ryan said.

“They’re both staring straight at Buck.”

Without gesturing or moving, Eli began to preach.

“He, who has ears to hear, let him hear! Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here, for He is risen, as He said.”

Judd was riveted. Moishe stepped forward and looked directly toward Buck.

“Do not be afraid, for I know whom you seek. He is not here.”

Eli again: “Go quickly and tell His disciples that Christ is risen from the dead!”

Moishe, still staring at Buck: “Indeed, He is going before you into Galilee. There you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.”

The witnesses stood and stared silently for so long, unmoving, it was as if they had turned to stone. The crowd grew nervous, and some left. Some waited to hear the witnesses speak again, but they remained still.

Judd and Ryan moved farther to the back so Buck wouldn’t see them.

Soon, Buck was left standing alone, with the two witnesses still staring at him. The witnesses seemed not even to breathe. No blink, no twitch. Their faces almost glowed with the final rays of sunlight. Neither opened his mouth, and yet Judd heard, plain as day in English, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear.”

“What’s Buck saying to them?” Ryan said.

“I can’t hear,” Judd said.

“Let’s move closer.”

Buck asked the witnesses, “If I came back here later tonight, might I learn more?”

Moishe backed away from the fence and sat on the pavement, leaning against a wall. Eli gestured and spoke aloud, “Birds of the air have nests,” he said, “but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.”

“I don’t understand,” Buck said.

“Tell me more.”

“He who has ears to hear”—Judd thought Buck looked frustrated.

“I’ll come back at midnight,” Buck said, interrupting Eli.

“I’m pleading for your help.”

Eli backed away.

“Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

Judd and Ryan hid as Buck left.

“Was that something, or what?” Ryan said.

“Those were the words Jesus spoke to his followers. You think they’ll actually help him find Rabbi Ben-Judah?”

“If anyone can help him,” Judd said, “those two can.”

“You’re not thinking about reviving the Underground, are you?” Lionel said.

Vicki smiled.

“It’s a perfect chance to invite those who haven’t heard the message yet.”

“Wait,” Chaya said, “I’m not following either of you.”

Vicki told Chaya about the Underground and what they had been through with the secret newspaper. Vicki and Judd had paid a great price for their involvement. Since the graduation ceremony in the spring, the Underground hadn’t made an appearance.

“And you want to invite people to do what?” Chaya said.

“Come to Bruce’s funeral,” Vicki said.

“If we get started on the copy now, we can get it into their hands by Friday. The service is on Sunday, and you know it’s going to be evangelistic.”

“But if they catch you” Lionel said.

“I’m past worrying about that,” Vicki said.

“We’re in a war for people’s souls now. We can’t afford to be careful.”

Judd and Ryan didn’t want to go back to the hotel. They would let Graham sleep and wait until Buck returned. They wandered the old city, visiting the sights of the ancient world. The newly rebuilt temple was lit up to look like something in a three-dimensional picture show. It seemed to hover on the horizon.

“You know what Bruce said about that place,” Ryan said.

“One day Nicolae Carpathia will sit in that new temple and proclaim himself God.”

Judd shivered.

“I wouldn’t want to be near that guy for a million bucks,” he said.

Judd showed Ryan the Garden of Gethsemane, the Garden Tomb, and the Mount of Olives, where Jesus would return in triumph.

“It won’t be too long,” Ryan said.

“One day we’re going to be able to sit down with Bruce and get answers to all the questions we’ve ever had.”

Judd and Ryan ate dinner, then returned to the Wailing Wall before midnight. They came upon a small group of sailors strolling past the fence.

“Where are the two weirdos?” one sailor said.

“Over that way,” another said.

Buck drove up in a cab and hurried toward them. Ryan and Judd stepped out of sight. Buck was carrying his overnight bag.

“Looks like he’s on the move,” Ryan said.

Buck hung back and waited for the sailors to leave. When he moved forward, Eli and Moishe raised their heads and looked directly at him. Buck walked to the fence. He whispered something to the witnesses, and Eli said, “He who has ears to hear”—Judd inched closer and listened as Buck said, “I know that, but I”—“You would dare interrupt the servants of the Most High God?” Eli said.

“Forgive me,” Buck said.

Moishe spoke. “You must first communicate with the one who loves you.”

Judd gave Ryan a puzzled look.

“What does he mean?” Ryan said.

Before Judd could answer. Buck’s cell phone rang. Judd heard Buck say “Chloe,” and understood. These witnesses knew so much.

Buck got off the phone. Moishe and Eli huddled and seemed to be whispering. They approached the fence.

Suddenly the two began shouting at the top of their lungs.

Judd and Ryan stepped back, startled, then listened as Eli and Moishe traded off quoting verses.

“And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,” they shouted, “that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your young men shall see visions, your old men shall dream dreams.”

The men looked at Buck.

“What’s that all about?” Ryan whispered.

“Shh, listen,” Judd said.

The witnesses continued: “And on My menservants and on My maidservants I will pour out My Spirit in those days; and they shall prophesy. I will show wonders in heaven above and signs in the earth beneath: blood and fire and vapor of smoke. The sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord. And it shall come to pass that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved. “

Buck picked up his bag and moved closer. Judd heard others in the crowd warn him.

“Better not do that, you’ll regret it!” someone said.

Buck whispered something, and Eli spoke softly. Buck retreated to the crowd.

“Did they hurt you, son?” a man said. Buck shook his head.

Moishe began to preach in a loud voice:

“Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel. “

“And as He walked by the Sea of Galilee, He saw Simon and Andrew his brother casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then Jesus said to them, “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men. “

“They immediately left their nets and followed Him.”

Ryan tugged on Judd’s arm.

“It’s like they’re speaking in a biblical code,” he said.

“They’re telling Buck where to look for the rabbi, but nobody knows it but Buck.”

Buck drifted from the crowd, lugged his bag to a short taxi line, and climbed into the back of a small cab.

“Can a fella get a boat ride up the Jordan River into Lake Tiberius at this time of night?” Judd heard Buck ask the driver.

“Well, sir, to tell you the truth,” the cabbie said, “it’s a lot easier coming the other way. But, yes, there are motorized boats heading north. And some do run in the night.”

Judd and Ryan watched as the driver sped off.

“Looks like we’re not gonna follow this time,” Judd said.

“Why not?”

“I’m almost out of cash,” Judd said.

“Besides, I think Buck’s right. We need to get back home.”

Judd headed for a cab and noticed Ryan wasn’t budging.

“It’d be different if Bruce were here,” Ryan said.

“How?” Judd said.

“He wouldn’t give up this easy,” Ryan said.

“God brought us here for a reason. I don’t know what it is, but if those two guys can help Buck find somebody, they might be able to help us figure it out.”

Judd looked at the witnesses. His first reaction was to tell Ryan to cut the guilt trip. But he knew being in Israel was a dream come true for Ryan.

“All right,” Judd said.

“Let’s see what they say.”

Ryan was glad Judd had changed his mind. The crowd was much smaller as they approached. The witnesses were silent. Ryan boldly made his way to the front, and Judd followed.

“This is the chance of a lifetime,” Ryan whispered.

“I never thought I’d see them this close.”

“Be careful, boys,” an older man said.

“They can breathe fire.”

Ryan turned and looked at the man. He had graying hair and wore the doming of a religious man.

“Thank you, sir,” Ryan said, “but we don’t have anything to fear from these men. They’re preaching the truth about Jesus. I believe what they say. He died, was buried, and rose again on the third day. He’s alive right now. Those who believe in him don’t have to worry about these witnesses....”

A murmur went up in the crowd. People around Ryan stepped back as if they had seen a ghost. When Ryan turned, he saw both witnesses at the fence, looking straight at him.

Ryan didn’t know what to say. The two witnesses stared at him.

Judd stood at Ryan’s side.

Eli was the first to speak.

“Blessed are those who mourn,” he said.

Ryan’s eyes widened.

“You’re talking about my friend, Bruce, right?” he said.

A single tear fell onto the leathery face of the man at the fence.

“Blessed are those who mourn,” He said again, “for they shall be comforted.”

Moishe spoke.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, which indeed is the least of all the seeds....” When Moishe said the word least, he paused, looked at Ryan, then continued.

“But when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches. “

Eli again: “Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.”

Ryan was awe struck. Judd stood with his mouth open. The crowd had retreated, and the boys were alone with the witnesses.

Eli and Moishe looked at Judd with their piercing eyes.

Their lips did not move, but Judd heard them distinctly.

“The Lord is slow to anger and great in power, and will not at all acquit the wicked.”

Will not acquit the wicked, Judd thought. God was telling them that he would never let guilty people go unpunished.

Judd and Ryan were quiet on the trip back to the hotel.

Their experience had left them speechless. A note from Taylor Graham lay on Judd's pillow.

"You two obviously don't need me hanging around. I found an air strip close to Jerusalem. Call me on my cell phone when you're ready to leave."

"Should we have told him where we went?" Ryan said.

"I'd rather have it this way," Judd said.

"I just hope he doesn't take off and leave us."

Judd and Ryan both slept hard through the morning and into the afternoon. When Judd awoke, he found Ryan watching the news. Ryan turned it off and asked to talk.

"The first thing the witnesses said to me was clear," Ryan said.

"They knew I was mourning Bruce. It's the part about the mustard seed I don't understand."

"I don't think they were trying to tell you something as much as report it," Judd said.

"You've got a lot of faith for a young person. God can use you or anybody who puts their trust in him."

"That makes sense," Ryan said.

"What about that stuff about God being slow to get angry?"

"At first I was scared that I'd done something bad," Judd said.

"But I can't help but think it has something to do with the tape."

"I don't get it."

"Maybe God is going to judge the people who killed the rabbi's family."

"And he's going to use us to help do it?" Ryan said.

"Exactly," Judd said.

"You're not thinking of going to the authorities with the tape?" Ryan said.

"I know it sounds dumb, but"—"It's worse than dumb," Ryan said.

"It's suicide. If the murderers are just religious zealots, you're fine. But if they're connected with the Global Community, they'll want that tape.

And then they'll want to do away with anyone who's seen it. "

"The Ben-Judahs were my friends," Judd said.

"They didn't deserve to be killed."

“You want revenge,” Ryan said.

“I don’t!” Judd said.

“I want to do what God wants me to.”

Judd called Vicki to check in. He was aghast that Mrs.

Stahley and Darrion were gone. He promised to get in touch with Taylor Graham to see if he had any ideas where they might have gone.

“I wanted to call you earlier,” Vicki said.

“Something really strange happened to Loretta.”

“Fill me in,” Judd said.

“I was at Loretta’s house with Chloe and Amanda. Loretta called and said she was working alone at the church, and she had an urge to pray for Buck. She said she was so overcome with emotion that she stood up, then got dizzy and fell to her knees. Once she was kneeling, she realized she wasn’t dizzy but was just praying for Buck.”

“Weird,” Judd said.

“Have you heard anything from him?”

“Just that he’s still looking for the rabbi,” Vicki said.

Judd told Vicki about seeing Buck the previous night.

“Some strange things are happening over here,” he said.

“It might just be me, but God seems to be working in more direct and dramatic ways all the time.”

“He’s about to work in more dramatic ways here,” Vicki said.

She explained their plan with the Underground.

“Don’t take any unnecessary risks,” Judd said.

Vicki laughed.

“I could say the same to you.”

Ryan fought with Judd about the tape, while Judd tried to call Taylor Graham.

“I don’t see how God could be saying two totally different things to two people,” Ryan said.

“I’ve got a feeling that we should head over to the rabbi’s office and have a look around. Maybe Buck hasn’t found him yet and we can help.”

“This is what I’ve decided,” Judd said.

“If you don’t want to help, you don’t have to.”

Ryan rolled his eyes.

“Pulling seniority again,” he said.

“It’s late,” Judd said.

“First thing in the morning we’ll head to the police station.”

Vicki looked over the Underground and smiled. It had been a long time since she had been involved in writing and producing the paper.

The front page dealt with the bombings and what was predicted in the Bible. The story continued inside with specific prophecies that had already been fulfilled. On the back was an invitation to Bruce’s funeral Sunday morning.

The kids scanned in a picture of Bruce.

Vicki wrote, He was the only pastor on the church staff to be left behind. But the disappearances of most of his congregation changed his life. The prophecies that appear in this edition were taught by Bruce Barnes, but he left many more. Hear his story and what he believes is coming after World War III Sunday morning at New Hope Village Church.

“You think they’ll come?” Lionel said.

“Wouldn’t you want to know what’s coming next from somebody who had nailed the future so accurately?” Vicki said.

Lionel nodded.

“How are we going to get the paper inside the school? You know how tight security is.”

“We have one day to figure it out,” Vicki said.

Ryan didn’t want to hold Judd’s passport or wait outside the police station, but Judd was set on the idea. Ryan was glad Judd had compromised with him and left the tape in the vault at the hotel.

“You wait here and if anything happens, call Taylor Graham right away,” Judd said.

“As if that’s going to help,” Ryan said.

“He was probably out of range when I called,” Judd said.

“On a satellite phone?” Ryan scoffed.

“He didn’t answer last night or this morning. He’s probably on his way back home without us.”

Ryan stood by the door and watched as Judd strode through the door to the police headquarters.

Judd got nowhere being polite. He was an American in a foreign country. He stood in one line, then was told to wait in another. Finally he grabbed the arm of an officer going by. The man looked at him sternly.

“I have information about the murders of the rabbi’s family,” Judd said.

The man immediately took Judd into a corner office. Judd waited until a police captain arrived.

“Why did you come to our country?” the man said.

“Friends,” Judd said.

“The Ben-Judah family. I wanted to be sure the reports were right.”

“Their bodies are in the morgue now,” the man said.

“Would you like to see them?”

“No,” Judd said.

“I know they’re dead. But I saw something.

The face of one of the murderers. “

“And how could you have seen that?”

“First, I need to know that you’re serious about finding the murderers,” Judd said.

The man stood and picked up a phone.

“We are serious,” he said. He spoke softly into the phone, then put it down.

“I am so serious about this matter that I want you to talk to the people heading up the investigation.”

“Who’s that?” Judd said.

“The Global Community,” the man said.

“They have asked us to give them any leads we might find.”

Ryan saw a Global Community van pull up to the police station. If I don’t try now, I might never see Judd again, Ryan thought. He walked confidently into the station and spotted Judd sitting in a holding area. Ryan finally got Judd’s attention but didn’t dare go close to him.

Judd’s eyes darted to the GC officials, then back to Ryan.

Judd pointed to his chair.

“What?” Ryan said.

Judd didn’t have time to explain. Two men led him outside.

He was careful not to look at Ryan.

Ryan waited a moment, then rushed to the chair. It was empty. He moved the cushion. Underneath was the key to the lockbox at the hotel. He grabbed it and ran outside. The van had already pulled away and was lost in traffic.

Please, God, Ryan prayed, show me what w do.

Vicki and Lionel packed the Underground the night before and were ready the next morning. Vicki called her friend Shelly, and the two stayed up late sewing a special pouch into the lining of Lionel's and Vicki's jackets. They hoped that the GC monitors who checked every backpack and duffel bag wouldn't notice.

At school, Vicki and Lionel walked through different entrances. When she reached her locker, Vicki took off her jacket and unzipped the pouch. She took the stack of pages and quickly placed it in the bin where school newspapers were distributed.

At lunch she met with Lionel.

"I had a close call at the door," Lionel said.

"The metal detector went off when I went through, and they made me take off my backpack and jacket and walk through again. "

"They didn't find anything?" Vicki said.

"I thought for sure they'd feel how heavy the jacket was, but they gave it back and didn't say a thing. A bunch of kids in my third-period class had copies."

"Same here," Vicki said.

"I wonder what the principal will do this time?"

In Vicki's next class, Mrs. Jenness, the principal, made an announcement condemning the illegal paper. The school secretary then interrupted Vicki's class.

"Would you please send Vicki Byrne to Mrs. Jenness's office?" the secretary said.

Ryan made his way back to theKingDavidHoteland gave the key to the man at the front desk.

"One moment," the man said.

He returned with the tape. As Ryan walked out, another man called after him. The man had a phone to his ear.

"Yes, we just gave him something," the man said into a phone.

Ryan briskly walked toward the revolving door.

"All right, we'll keep him here until you arrive," the man said.

Ryan ran.

“Stop him!” the man yelled. Then Ryan heard on the loudspeaker, “Security to the front lobby!”

A doorman stepped in front of him. Ryan faked left, then ran through the automatic handicapped exit. The doorman gave chase, but Ryan was too fast.

He kept running, not knowing where he was or where he was going. He knew Judd’s life was at stake if the tape wound up in the hands of the Global Community.

Ryan ran through crowded streets. Once he thought he saw a security patrol nearby, but he ducked inside a building and hid in the bathroom. When he came out he realized he was in the university where Tsion Ben-Judah taught.

He looked in the directory and found the rabbi’s office number. He ran to the third floor and saw the door covered with police investigation tape. A guard sat in an adjacent office.

“May I help you?” the guard said.

“Just looking around,” Ryan said.

“Whoever had this office must have done something really bad.”

“He murdered his family,” the guard said.

“We’re keeping watch in case he tries to come back.”

Ryan wandered down the hall, feeling something strange. Maybe it wasn’t an accident that he had stumbled into the university. Maybe there was something in here he needed. He found an empty classroom and camped in the corner. He would wait until nightfall. He had to get inside the rabbi’s office.

Judd was placed in a holding cell. He knew the Global Community officials wanted to scare him. When they finally brought Judd upstairs he gave them his name and where he was from.

“Where is your passport?” the GC officer said.

“It’s probably back at the hotel,” Judd said.

“And where is the item you had locked in the hotel safe?”

“What item?” Judd said.

The man tilted his head and looked over his glasses.

“Mr. Thompson, we can make this as easy or as difficult as you wish. “

“I don’t know where it is,” Judd said.

“That’s the truth.”

“Who is in possession of it?”

“A friend.”

“Would this be your young friend?” The man described Ryan.

“I don’t understand,” Judd said.

“I come here to tell you about a murder you’re investigating, and now I’m the bad guy. What’s up with that?”

The man nodded to the guard, and Judd was taken back to his cell.

Another guard came with some dinner a few hours later.

Judd wondered about Ryan. Maybe Buck had been right. Maybe he had endangered both of them needlessly.

After midnight the guards brought a bearded man into the next cell and threw him on the cot. The man was bleeding and had dark bruises on his face.

Ryan waited until it was dark, then slipped into the wing where the rabbi’s office was located. He heard the guard snoring at the end of the hall. He placed a stack of books on the railing of the stairwell and attached a spool of thread he had found in a utility closet. He backed into the bathroom and pulled hard on the thread. The books clattered down the stairs, echoing through the massive building. A moment later he heard the guard’s keys jangling.

“Who’s there?” the guard shouted. Ryan slipped past the secretary’s desk and into the rabbi’s office. Ryan gasped.

Books lay on the floor. Maps and artifacts had been shredded. Old parchment with funny writing had been stomped on.

The drawers of the rabbi’s desk had been ripped out, the contents strewn on the floor. The lock on the middle drawer had been shot through. Framed awards and citations lay broken on top of the desk.

“It would kill Dr. Ben-Judah to see this,” Ryan muttered.

He spotted something in the rubble. A small, round picture frame had escaped the thugs. In the picture was the rabbi’s wife and their two children. Ryan smiled and put the picture in his pocket.

Ryan heard the jangling of keys outside. He hid under what was left of the rabbi’s desk.

Mrs. Jenness looked sternly at Vicki.

“I had hoped this foolishness would stop with what happened to your friend last year.”

“I saw the newspaper in the bin,” Vicki said.

“Why do you think I had anything to do with it?”

Mrs. Jenness shook her head.

“Don’t play innocent this time,” she said.

“We know about your father, or at least your adoptive father.”

Vicki fumed.

“We received a call from an anonymous parent who told us about his death,” Mrs. Jenness continued.

“I’m sorry for your loss. But no matter what emotions you’re going through, you must abide by the rules.”

Vicki remained silent.

“I don’t think you want us to go further up the ladder with this,” Mrs. Jenness said.

“You know what happened last year.

If you’ll confess, we’ll figure out something, taking into account your state of mind. “

Vicki knew if she confessed, Mrs. Jenness would have grounds to send her back to Northside Detention Center.

“I won’t confess,” Vicki said.

“You’ll have to call whoever you need to call.”

The next morning Judd was again interrogated.

“I suppose you’ve had time to think about your situation,” the man said.

“I’m an American citizen,” Judd said.

“I came here to find out about my friends.

I wanted to give information to the authorities, but I don’t think I can trust you. “

“You are a citizen of the Global Community,” the man corrected.

“You only have the rights granted by such. We know who killed the woman and the children. We do not need your help to solve this crime. As a matter of fact, there is the man now. “

The officer pointed a remote-control device to a television in the corner. A picture of Rabbi Tsion Ben-Judah flashed on the screen. The Global Community Network News reported that a Michael Shorosh had been arrested in connection with the harboring of a fugitive from justice.

“Global Community spokesmen say that Ben-Judah, formerly a respected scholar and clergyman, apparently became a radical fundamentalist.

They point to this sermon he delivered just a week ago as evidence that he overreacted to a New

Testament passage and was later seen by several neighbors slaughtering his own family. “

Judd watched in horror as the news ran a tape of Tsion speaking at a huge rally in a filled stadium in Larnaca, on the island of Cyprus.

“You’ll note,” the newsman said, as the tape was stopped, “the man on the platform behind Dr.

Ben-Judah has been identified as Michael Shorosh. In a raid on his Jericho home shortly after midnight, peacekeeping forces found personal photos of Ben-Judah’s family and identification papers from both Ben-Judah and an American journalist, Cameron Williams. Williams’s connection to the case has not been determined. “

Judd recognized the man named Michael as the person in the cell next to him. In the photo on television he had no cuts or bruises.

The tape showed Dr. Ben-Judah reading from Matthew. The verses, of course, had been taken out of context.

“Whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

“Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to ‘set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law’; and ‘a man’s enemies will be those of his own household. “ He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.

And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. “

The news reporter said solemnly, “This was recorded just a few days before the rabbi murdered his own wife and children in broad daylight.”

Mrs. Jenness set up an appointment to meet with Vicki and a social worker that evening.

“I may need to have someone from the Global Community present as well,” Mrs. Jenness said.

“I’ll be there,” Vicki said.

Vicki was unable to reach Mrs. Goodwin before the meeting.

She wasn’t surprised to see her walk in with a representative of Global Community Social Services later that evening.

“Mrs. Jenness,” Mrs. Goodwin said, “as I told you on the phone, we’ve been working on Vicki’s case for a few days.

The evidence you’ve submitted doesn’t implicate her, except that Bruce Barnes was her adoptive father. “

“Well, I’

The social worker spoke up.

“Have you made a list of students who attend that particular church?” the man said.

“Well, no, but”—“I don’t mean to tell you how to do your job,” the man continued, “but I think I speak for the office on this. We can’t waste our time on frivolous accusations such as this.”

Mrs. Jenness looked stunned. Vicki thought Mrs. Goodwin would stick up for her, but she didn’t count on this much support.

Mrs. Goodwin and the man stood to leave. Mrs. Jenness apologized, then glared at Vicki.

“This is the last time you’ll embarrass me like that,” she seethed.

When Judd wouldn’t talk, he was taken to his cell. The man named Michael was gone, but was roughly returned a few minutes later. Judd pulled close to the bars and whispered.

The man looked at Judd, then lay back again.

Michael looked awful. One eye was swollen shut.

“I’m a friend of Buck Williams,” Judd said.

Michael’s voice was low and gravelly.

“The Global Community can do better than this. I told you already, I do not know where the rabbi is.”

“I’m not one of them,” Judd said. He tried to explain who he was and why he was in Israel, but Michael wouldn’t listen.

“I was there when the witnesses talked with Buck,” Judd said in desperation.

Michael sat up.

“What did the witnesses say?”

“They quoted verses about going into Egypt,” Judd said.

“Buck got in a cab and was looking for someone who had a boat who could take him up the Jordan River.”

Michael slid close to the bars and looked at Judd with his good eye.

“You are not a plant by the Global Community?” he said.

“I’m a friend of Buck’s from America,” Judd said.

“And you are looking for the rabbi as well?” Michael said.

“I came here to find out about his family,” Judd said. Judd briefly told Michael about his trip and discovering the truth about the Ben-Judah family.

“You must be very careful what you say,” Michael said.

“You are a believer?”

“I am,” Judd said. , Michael sat back against the bars. Judd saw a trace of a smile.

“We are like Paul and Silas now, except I do not sing very well,” Michael said.

“Moishe and Eli are my mentors.

I became a believer under their preaching and that of Tsion.”

“Are you an evangelist?” Judd said.

“In the manner of Paul the apostle, according to Dr. Ben-Judah. He says there are 144,000 of us around the world, all with the same assignment that Moishe and Eli have to preach Christ as the only everlasting Son of the Father. “

“Tell me about Dr. Ben-Judah,” Judd said.

“An escape plan has been in place for some time. For months we thought the guarding of his family was unnecessary. The zealots wanted him. At the first sign of a threat or an attack, we sent to Tsion’s office a car so small it appeared only the driver could fit in it. Tsion lay on the floor of the backseat, curled into a ball, and covered himself with a blanket. He was raced to my boat, and I took him upriver.”

“He knows about his family, right?”

“Yes, and you can imagine how awful that is for him. When we loaded him into the boat I could hear his loud sobbing over the sound of the engine throughout the entire voyage. I can still hear it in this prison cell.”

“What about Buck?” Judd said.

“Are they together?”

“They are,” Michael said. Michael described his meeting with Buck. “I had killed two enemies of God who were searching for the rabbi.

I was prepared to kill your friend. He was more than a little surprised when I pointed a high-powered weapon at his head. He answered my questions, and I showed him where we had hidden Tsion. “

“How did you know he was for real and not just a journalist looking for a great story?” Judd said.

“I had my doubts,” Michael said, “but when I asked him to describe the fulfilled prophecies of the Messiah, I knew it was more than just a story for him. He was the deliverer.”

“Buck?” Judd said.

“God spoke through the two witnesses and assured us a deliverer would come. He would know the rabbi. He would know the witnesses. He would know the messianic prophecies. And most of all, he would know the Lord’s Christ. Buck fit the description perfectly.”

“What’s Buck gonna do with the rabbi?” Judd said.

“He has to get him out of the country,” Michael said.

“But the rabbi has to be one of the most recognizable people in Israel,” Judd said.

“How in the world will Buck get him through customs?”

Michael smiled.

“How else? Supernaturally.”

Ryan picked up the phone that was still on the floor and dialed the secretary’s desk. He heard the guard jump when it rang, then the deep, “Hello?”

Ryan spoke in a whisper.

“There’s somebody in the stairwell,” he said.

“A guy with a gun!”

“Who is this?” the guard said.

Ryan hung up. The guard’s chair scraped the floor. The man unsnapped his holster. Ryan crept to the hall and saw the guard peeking over the railing. Ryan went down the other stairwell.

“Stop!” the guard called after him, but Ryan was already into the street.

Judd and Michael talked like old friends. They were fellow prisoners, united in their belief in Christ.

“I do not want to tell you too much,” Michael said.

“If the Global Community thinks you know something about Tsion, they will get you to talk.”

“Are Buck and Tsion safe?”

“When you are in the will of God, there is no weapon formed against you that can prosper,” Michael said.

“God rides with Tsion and Buck. I believe they will be saved.”

Judd sat back against the cell bars. Just talking with Michael was worth the trip. But how did God want to use him?

Why did he have him here?

“I have been thinking about the verses Tsion said were comforting to him,” Michael said.

“The joy of the Lord is my strength.”

Michael repeated the phrase again and again. Judd thought about joy. Behind bars it took on a different

meaning. It wasn't just being happy and smiling all the time. It was deeper. Joy came from believing God is in control and knows what he is doing.

"Our God is working his will through Tsion and Buck," Michael said.

"Buck told me of a dream. That he would leave through Egypt rather than through Israel. And as we were praying together, God made his will clear to us."

Michael bent forward, inches from Judd's face, and said, "I believe my life is destined to be short. My assignment is to preach in Israel, where the real Messiah is hated. But if God is for us, who can be against us?"

Judd shivered. He was face-to-face with one of the most courageous Christians on the planet. It made him want to exhibit courage as well.

"My only concern now is for my loved ones," Michael said.

"I have a wife and family. A small child. I pray they do not suffer the same fate as Dr. Ben-Judah's family."

Ryan found a pay phone and called Taylor Graham. This time the pilot answered.

"They probably took Judd to the main headquarters in Jerusalem," Graham said.

"Where are you?"

Ryan told him, and the pilot gave him directions.

"You'll go past the Wailing Wall on the way," Graham said.

"Stay as far away from there as you can. I'll meet you in a half hour right across the street from GC headquarters."

Ryan walked briskly through the moonlit streets. He heard dogs barking. He stayed as close to the buildings as he could, clutching the picture and the tape in his pocket.

When he passed the Wailing Wall he saw a small crowd gathered near the fence where the preachers sat. He wanted to go closer but knew he should get to Judd as quickly as possible.

Then he heard it. Was it inside his head? A whisper? A voice? A thought? Whatever it was, it stopped Ryan in his tracks. He turned and faced the witnesses.

The tape, Ryan thought. They'll be after the tape. Where can I keep it safe?

Then the plan was clear to him. He could see it. God's justice. The purpose of their trip. He took the tape from his pocket and ran toward the crowd.

Vicki, Chaya, and Lionel met at Bruce's house late that evening. Vicki described her ordeal with Mrs. Jenness.

"Mrs. Goodwin called before you got home and suggested you stay with an adult in the area," Chaya

said.

“I told her about Loretta’s house, and she said that would be fine.”

“I was thinking of going over there anyway,” Vicki said, “in case Mrs. Stahley and Darrion show up again.”

The phone rang. Lionel answered and put Ryan on the speaker.

“What’s happening?” Lionel said.

“I need you guys to pray, and pray hard,” Ryan said.

“I can’t go into it all, but Judd’s in big trouble. I have to go into the Global Community headquarters and see if I can” “Global Community?” Lionel shouted.

“He was arrested,” Ryan said.

“Look, just pray that I’ll be able to get him out of there and back to the plane. If I can do that, we’ll be back for the memorial service.”

“And if you don’t get him out?” Vicki said.

“We may have a memorial service of our own over here,” Ryan said.

The guard came for Judd, led him upstairs to another office, and told Judd to wait. The same interrogator stepped in the room and left the door ajar. He told Judd to go through his story again and Judd reluctantly did. Another man stepped inside and closed the door. He looked familiar, but Judd couldn’t place him.

“We understand you paid a visit to a neighbor of the Ben-Judah family,” the officer said.

Judd studied the face of the other man.

“A concerned father called and said his son had talked with an American who knew the rabbi’s children,” the officer continued.

“Would that have been you?”

“I went to the Ben-Judah house to see for myself,” Judd said.

“There was a kid next door in a garden.”

“You took something with you when you left,” the officer said.

“What was it?”

The video! Judd thought. That’s the man in the mask!

“What did you take with you?” the officer said sternly.

The man by the door was looking directly at Judd now. His eyes were dark and piercing.

There was a knock at the door. An officer handed the interrogator a note. The man held it out to read it, then glanced at Judd.

“You were expecting a visitor?” he said.

“No, I don’t think so,” Judd said.

“Stay where you are,” the man said.

He left and to Judd’s surprise came back with Ryan. Ryan smiled as he sat. The other men left the room. Judd held his finger to his lips.

“You know they can hear us,” Judd whispered.

“It’s OK,” Ryan said.

“I had to see you about the tape.”

Judd’s eyes widened.

“Don’t do this!”

“I went exactly where you told me to go, but the tape wasn’t there,” Ryan said.

“You have to get out and help me find it.”

“I told you it was”—“I won’t listen,” Ryan said, sticking his fingers in his ears.

“You said the tape would be where we were the other night. With our two friends. Remember?”

Judd stared at Ryan. Finally he understood.

“Where should I meet you if I can get out of here?” he said.

Ryan smiled.

“I’ll be waiting where we last saw the journalist,” Ryan whispered.

“Meet me there.”

“They’ll follow you when you leave,” Judd whispered.

“I have that figured out, too,” Ryan said. He leaned closer.

“Vicki, Chaya, and Lionel are praying up a storm. I’ll see you outside.”

Ryan left and Judd was returned to his cell. Judd told Michael the news.

“I am praying for you,” Michael said.

“I believe you will see Tsion. I may not see him until we are in heaven together. Tell him I am praying for him. I have told him I would risk everything to protect him. He is my spiritual father. Now may God give you the same. Do not lean on your own strength. Go with God.”

Ryan walked out of the Global Community building and hopped straight into a cab parked outside.

“Hit it,” Ryan said.

“Yes sir,” Taylor Graham said. Ryan glanced back to see two Global Community guards rush outside. The cab was around the first corner by the time the men made it to their vehicle.

“Where’d you get it?” Ryan said.

“Friend of mine owns a cab company,” Graham said.

“This is the fastest one they have.”

Ryan slid from one side of the backseat to the other as the pilot drove the car through the narrow streets of Jerusalem.

With the speed of the cab and the ability of the driver, Ryan knew those following them didn’t stand a chance. Now if Judd could convince them to let him go, his plan could work.

“I want to speak with the other man alone,” Judd said when the officer came into the interrogation room. The officer looked startled, turned, and said something in another language to the man with the beard.

“It’s out of the question,” the officer said.

“I have some information I only want to give to him,” Judd said.

“I believe it will clear up the questions you have.”

The other man nodded, and the officer reluctantly left the room. The man who had taken the life of Judd’s friends now sat before Judd. Judd’s palms were sweaty.

“What do you have to tell me?” the man said with a thick accent.

“How does it feel to know you’ve killed innocent people?” Judd said.

“I do not know what you’re talking about,” the man said.

“I know it was you,” Judd said.

“We are trying to apprehend the real murderer right now”—Judd interrupted.

“I saw you take off your mask before you killed Clan, Dr. Ben-Judah’s son.”

The man kept his steely gaze on Judd.

“Then you are a liar,” he said.

“You told the officer you arrived from America after the killings.”

“I saw a videotape,” Judd said.

The man was silent. He scratched his chin. Finally he spoke.

“Where would you come upon such a tape?” the man said.

“Where I found it isn’t the point,” Judd said.

“It proves the rabbi is innocent. And if the media gets it, you’re in big trouble.”

“There are channels the media must go through”—“And you know it would embarrass you and your superiors,” Judd said. He couldn’t believe how he was standing up to this cold-blooded killer, but he was.

“What do you want?” the man said.

“I am not admitting anything, you understand. But you must want something.”

“I want you to let me out of here with the promise that I’ll have safe passage back to the U.S.”

The man scoffed.

“If I am the man you say I am, why wouldn’t I kill you right now?” he said.

“What would prevent that?”

“Because you don’t have the tape,” Judd said.

“And that little kid who just walked out of here knows exactly where it is. And if I don’t show up within a half hour, he’ll hand it to those headline-hungry journalists.”

“We are following the young man as we speak.” The man smiled.

“And I’d be willing to bet a few minutes of video that your guys have lost him,” Judd said.

“Go ahead and check. I’ll wait.”

The man picked up a phone and dialed a number. He spoke softly, then raised his voice. He finally put the phone down gently and turned to Judd.

“Was I right?” Judd said.

“We have failed to locate him for the moment,” the man said.

“It is only a matter of time.”

“Yes, it is, isn’t it,” Judd said knowingly.

The man leaned forward.

“You will take us to the tape,” he said.

“You will hand it over and be safely on your way.”

Judd waited nervously while the men finished the paperwork for his release. As far as Judd could tell, the man who had killed the Ben Judah family wasn't an official Global Community officer, but he was working closely with them.

Judd questioned the man again before they led him to the car.

“When this is over I'm free, right?” he said.

“You have my word,” the man said.

Judd sat alone in the backseat of the car. Judd glanced behind them as they pulled out. A van followed that looked like the same one used in the Ben-Judah murders.

So the whole crew is here, Judd thought.

Taylor Graham drove Ryan through the exact streets he and Judd would need to take to get to the airstrip.

“It's pretty secluded outside of town,” Graham said.

“I'll have the plane running and ready to go.

You just keep the directions straight. “

They drove back to town and parked in a line of cabs near the Wailing Wall. It was the wee hours of the morning and there were only a handful of people looking at the witnesses.

“Are you sure Judd'll be here?” Taylor Graham said.

“As sure as I can be of anything right now,” Ryan said.

“For what it's worth,” the pilot said as he got out of the car, “you two don't act like any kids I've ever known. See you at the plane.”

Judd didn't tell them they were going to the Wailing Wall.

Instead, he gave them directions as they came to each intersection.

Finally, Judd told them to stop.

“What is this?” the man said.

“You wanted the tape, right?” Judd said.

“This is where it is.”

The driver pulled his gun.

“This is a trick,” he said.

“He has no tape.”

Judd tried to remain calm. He didn't know exactly where Ryan had put the tape, but he had an idea. He opened the door and slowly got out. The driver jumped out and held his gun on Judd.

“Put that away,” the other man said.

“I've kept my end of the bargain,” Judd said.

“You haven't given us anything,” the man said.

Judd pointed toward the witnesses.

“The tape's over there. I told you it was in a safe place.”

The van pulled up, and several men exited. They didn't have black hoods, but Judd placed each of them as the masked gunmen.

The driver started forward, but the leader stopped him.

“If he wants to be released,” the man said, “he'll have to bring the tape to us himself. Everyone wait here.”

Judd scanned the cabs and noticed one at the end with no driver. Then Ryan popped his head up and winked.

Judd made his way to the front of the small crowd, then inched further.

“Don't let their stillness fool you,” someone said.

“They'll kill you if you get too close.”

Judd spied the tape lying near the fence. Moishe and Eli appeared to be sleeping, their leathery skin rising and falling with each breath. Judd got close enough to bend down and grab the tape when he heard a voice.

“God shows his anger from heaven against all sinful, wicked people who push the truth away from themselves,” Eli said.

“Stand back.”

Judd stood and left the tape. The small crowd had retreated when they heard Eli's voice.

“What are you doing?” the leader called behind Judd.

“Bring it here.”

“I can’t,” Judd said, moving away from the fence.

“If you want it, you’ll have to get it yourself.”

The driver reached for his weapon and the other man held his arm. He stepped forward and slowly pushed his way through the crowd.

Ryan started the car when he saw Judd move away from the fence.

“Just like I thought it would be,” Ryan said to himself.

Vicki joined a nervous Chloe and Amanda at Loretta’s house.

She asked that they pray for Judd and Ryan. Then Chloe filled them in on Buck’s situation.

“I talked with him briefly, but I have no idea where or how he is,” Chloe said.

“My dad said I shouldn’t worry, but I think something’s wrong.”

Chloe punched the number of Buck’s cell phone.

“Do you know if he found the rabbi?” Vicki said.

Amanda shook her head.

“Buck! It’s Chloe!”

Chloe listened, frowned, then tried to talk.

“But Buck--,” she sighed.

“You call me when you’re safe,” she said.

“What did he say?” Vicki said.

Chloe was busy dialing more numbers.

“He said to not ask questions. He’s safe for now, but everybody needs to pray.

And he wanted me to get on the Internet and find the phone number for an airport in the Sinai desert. There’s a pilot there”-Amanda grabbed Chloe’s hand and squeezed hard. Chloe’s father, Rayford, answered, and Chloe told him the story.

Chloe asked Rayford to get the phone number and call the pilot.

Rayford agreed.

“Hurry, Dad,” Chloe said.

Judd stepped a safe distance from the fence. The leader of the group was seething.

“You will regret this,” the man said.

“What do you mean?” Judd said.

“You told me”—“You didn’t actually think I would let you out of the country, did you?” the man said.

“You and your little friend in the cab will be dealt with most severely.”

The man strode toward the fence and picked up the videotape.

He turned to leave but stopped when Moishe’s voice thundered behind him.

“We proclaim the power of God Almighty,” Moishe said, “whose majesty is over Israel, whose power is in the skies.”

“Woe to you, evildoers,” Eli said.

“Woe to those who shed the blood of the innocent.”

Judd watched the man’s face turn white with terror. He clutched the tape to his chest and turned. People behind Judd fell to the ground.

“The blood of the righteous cries out,” Moishe thundered.

The man stiffened.

“What do you want with me?” he cried. “I have done nothing to you!”

Eli and Moishe looked with piercing eyes at the man. The man gasped at their faces and turned to run.

“Behold, the Lord says vengeance is mine,” Eli and Moishe said in one, loud voice.

“I will repay, says the Lord.”

With that, the two witnesses opened their mouths, and fire gushed forth, engulfing the man. Judd was so close, his clothes were singed.

The tape in the man’s hands melted instantly. Judd stumbled backward. People behind him fled.

Judd heard a gun blast. A bullet whizzed past him. Eli and Moishe turned their gaze on the men at the van. With lightning accuracy the two opened their mouths and consumed the entire company of murderers. One man fled to the van, only to have it catch fire and explode. The driver of the car had barely pulled his handgun from its holster when the fire fell. The gun melted in the man’s hand.

Judd ran toward the last cab. He dodged several burning figures. As he got in, he looked toward the witnesses. Eli and Moishe looked straight at Judd and nodded. Without moving their lips Judd heard them say, “May the glory of the Lord be your rear guard

Ryan's hands were shaking when Judd got in. Nothing could have prepared him for that horrifying scene. Judd got behind the wheel and Ryan pointed the way. He heard sirens behind them.

Judd tried to drive like Taylor Graham, but the streets were unfamiliar and the car felt stiff. As they rounded a corner, Ryan yelled. A Global Community patrol car careened out of an alley and pulled behind Judd.

"We can't stop now," Ryan said.

"We're almost at the airport."

"But we can't lead them to the plane," Judd said.

"We'll have to lose them."

"How?" Ryan said.

Judd saw a man with a gun leaning out the window. Just as he fired, Judd swerved. The patrol car followed, nearly sending the man out the window.

"They're shooting at our tires," Judd said.

"Can't you go any faster?" Ryan said.

Judd took an alley, then another, but the patrol car stayed right behind them.

"Don't take too many of those or I won't be able to remember the way to the airport," Ryan said.

"Call Taylor and tell him we've got company," Judd said.

Ryan dialed the number.

"He says there's an access road around the back that might help," Ryan said.

"We can drive right onto the runway from there."

Judd floored it and pulled slightly away from the car. When they neared the airport, another GC vehicle with its lights flashing joined the chase. Judd saw the plane taxiing to the end of the runway.

"When I get close," Judd said, "we're both making a run for it."

Judd barreled through a sandy area and onto the runway. He screeched to a halt beside the plane. Ryan jumped out and ran up the stairs. Judd put the car in reverse and jumped out.

The plane was moving as he entered the cabin. While he and Ryan pulled the stairs up, Judd saw the two GC cars swerve and narrowly miss the taxi.

"Take a seat fast," Taylor Graham shouted as the plane picked up speed. The cars pulled to within fifty yards of them, then faded in the distance as the plane took off.

Judd and Ryan explained what happened at the Wailing Wall.

The pilot seemed impressed.

“How did you know to take the tape there?” Graham asked Ryan.

“I can’t explain it,” Ryan said.

“I knew God would take care of us.”

When they reached cruising altitude, the pilot suggested Judd and Ryan check the GC frequencies in the rear of the plane. They played with the knob, hearing static and foreign languages. Finally, Judd found a transmission from an Egyptian border guard.

“He just slammed on his brakes and sent me off the side of the road,” an officer said.

“We have backup coming, as you requested,” another man said.

“The roadblock is in place at the airport. How many are on the bus?”

“Did he say bus?” Judd said.

“Michael said Buck and Tsion are on a bus.”

The radio squawked.

“I’m not sure,” the first man said.

“I am now in front of him and”-There was a crash, and the transmission ended.

“What happened?” the other man on the radio said.

“He rammed me! I have lost my hood, but I’m giving chase.”

“You should be able to see your backup soon,” the other man said.

“What’s going on?” Taylor Graham said from the cockpit.

“The Global Community guards are chasing Buck,” Judd said.

“I’m assuming he has Tsion Ben-Judah with him. They’re headed for an airport in Egypt.”

“Probably Al Arish,” Graham said.

“It’s south of the Gaza Strip on the Mediterranean.”

“Unable to stop him, sir,” a different voice said on the radio.

“We’ll turn around and give chase.”

“How far to the airport?” a man said.

“We can see it now,” a guard said.

“Less than a kilometer.”

Judd and Ryan held their breath.

“The blockade is in place, sir,” another man said.

“There is no way he can get into the airport from here. We can see him now.”

The radio went silent. Ryan looked at Judd.

“They’re caught,” he said.

“Unit one, report,” a man said.

There was static on the man’s transmission. Judd could make out the words bus and fire, but little else. The leader was frantic, calling for information. Finally a man in a squad car broke through.

“The bus ran into the roadblock and scattered the officers,” the man said.

“It nearly tipped over, then burst into flames. Several officers are down.”

“What about the occupants?” the first man said.

“We opened fire into the bus immediately,” the second man said.

“Have you found their bodies?”

Silence. Then, “I’m sorry, sir, officers are firing again!”

“Go to a secure frequency,” the base said.

Judd and Ryan scanned the frequencies but couldn’t find more information.

“I hope they made it,” Ryan said.

“I can’t imagine losing Bruce and Buck in one week.”

Vicki answered the phone when the pilot of Buck’s plane. Ken Ritz, called a short while later. She handed the phone to Chloe, who was relieved to hear that Buck and Tsion were on their way home.

Later, Buck called Chloe and assured her that when she heard the whole story she would understand. Chloe told Vicki and Amanda that no one outside the Tribulation Force but Loretta could know about Tsion.

“Buck didn’t know Verna had moved out,” Chloe said.

“He’s really uptight about her knowing about his faith.”

“He’ll be even more surprised if he sees Verna at Bruce’s memorial service,” Amanda said.

Ryan heard Taylor Graham's satellite phone ring.

"I'm so glad to hear from you, Mrs. Stahley," he said.

"We heard you moved."

The pilot listened intently and briefly told the story of their trip to Israel. Finally, he handed the phone to Ryan.

"Ryan it's me, Darrion!"

"Are you guys OK?" Ryan said.

"We are for now," Darrion said.

"We've had some pretty close calls."

"Where are you?" Ryan said.

"I can't say," Darrion said.

"My mom told Taylor we were in Wisconsin, but that's not true. Don't tell him, though."

"Why not?" Ryan said.

"My mom was worried about you guys," Darrion said.

"She thinks she might have set you up."

"How?" Ryan said.

"It's a long story," Darrion said.

"Just make sure he doesn't land at the strip near our home. If my mom is right, Taylor is working with the Global Community."

"But that's not possible," Ryan said.

"I can't tell you any more," Darrion said.

"But when you land, we think Taylor will suggest he be taken into custody, then he'll try to help you two escape somehow. If that's what he does, it's a trap. They'll follow you to try and find us. Be very careful, OK?"

"We will," Ryan said.

"Thanks."

Ryan hung up.

“What was that all about?” Taylor Graham said.

“She said she was sorry she left our friends,” Ryan said.

“She wanted to thank me for what I did when she was kidnapped.”

“Is that all?” the pilot said.

“Yeah, that and something about a reunion she wants to have in Wisconsin someplace,” Ryan said.

“I don’t know how we’re gonna pull that one off.”

Ryan jotted a note to Judd. Darrion says the pilot is dirty. He placed it on a tray and handed it to Judd.

“Care for a cookie?” Ryan said.

It was as if Tsion Ben-Judah was in some international witness protection program. Vicki was at Loretta’s home when he was smuggled in under the cover of night. Amanda and Chloe greeted him warmly and compassionately. Vicki had talked with Judd briefly from their plane and knew the truth about his family. She stayed in the background and watched.

Loretta had a light snack waiting for all of them.

“I’m old and not too up on things,” she said, “but I’m quickly getting the picture here. The less I know about your friend, the better, am I right?”

Before anyone could answer, Tsion said, “I am deeply grateful for your hospitality.”

Loretta soon trundled off to bed, expressing her delight in offering her home in service to the Lord.

Buck and Tsion had been injured. Chloe hobbled with them into the living room, followed by a chuckling Amanda.

“I wish Rayford were here,” she said.

“I feel like the only one who can walk without a limp. I’m going to have to do every chore that requires two good legs around here. “

Chloe leaned forward and reached for Tsion’s hand with both of hers.

“Dr. Ben- Judah, we have heard so much about you.

We feel blessed of God to have you with us. We can’t imagine your pain. “

The rabbi took a deep breath and exhaled slowly, his lips quivering.

“I cannot tell you how deeply grateful I am that God has brought me here. I confess my heart is broken. I cannot deny God’s presence, yet there are times I wonder how I will go on. I must pray for relief from bitterness and hatred. Most of all, I feel terrible guilt that I brought this upon my wife and children. I don’t know what else I could have done, short of trying to make them more secure. I could not have avoided serving God in the way he has called me.”

Amanda and Buck each put a hand on Tsion's shoulders. They all wept and prayed. They talked well into the night, Buck explaining that Tsion would be the object of an international manhunt, which would no doubt be approved by Nicolae Carpathia himself.

Ryan was dying to tell Judd more of what Darrion said, but he couldn't risk it. If Taylor Graham saw them whispering or passing notes, he'd know something was up. Ryan went to the front and asked if he could watch.

"I just put it on auto," Graham said.

"The thing will fly itself."

Ryan climbed into the tiny cockpit and put on the headset.

The pilot showed him what not to touch. The sun was sneaking up behind them, and it put a purplish glow on the horizon ahead. I have to tell Judd, Ryan thought. But how?

Vicki went back to Loretta's apartment to get some sleep.

She couldn't believe she had just met the rabbi. She had trouble sleeping and turned on the television. The reports of the war around the world continued. Already, Nicolae Carpathia was putting his spin on it.

"World health care experts predict the death toll will rise to more than 20 percent internationally," the reporter said.

"Global Community Potentate Nicolae Carpathia has announced a new health care plan. He and his ten global ambassadors have outlined the new regulations. Here is renowned heart surgeon Samuel Kline of Norway."

"The current agencies cannot handle disease and death on this scale," Dr. Kline said.

"Potentate Carpathia's plan is not only our only hope for survival, but also a blueprint for the best health care agenda ever."

Vicki was distressed over the reports of the war, but for some reason, this doctor scared her.

"Should the death toll reach as high as 25 percent," the doctor continued, "we will need these new directives to govern life from the womb to the tomb. Our planet can be brought from the brink of death to a shining new state never before imagined."

Right, Vicki thought. Carpathia kills 25 percent of the world's population and we're all healthier for it.

Ryan stayed at the controls, loving the feeling. The pilot tapped him on the shoulder.

"I'm gonna catch a little nap," Graham said.

"Wake me in twenty minutes, OK?"

Ryan said he would. When he could hear the pilot snoring he motioned for Judd to join him. Ryan

whispered what Darrion had told him, making sure the pilot was really asleep.

“Why would he rescue us in Israel if he’s with the GC?” Judd said.

“They must think we know where the Stahleys are,” Ryan said.

“Darrion and her mom are priority one.”

“If Graham is working with the GC,” Judd said, “he knows almost everything about us.”

“And he also knows about Buck getting Dr. Ben-Judah.”

“It just doesn’t seem right,” Judd said.

“He seemed genuine, like he was really trying to help.”

“How about when he took off from the hotel?” Ryan said.

“You think he was really mad at us, or was he using that chance to communicate with the Global Community?”

Judd grimaced.

“How did you know where to find me after the GC took me from the police station?”

“I tried to follow you, but they went too fast,” Ryan said.

“I called Graham and he told me.”

“That’s what I thought,” Judd said.

“We could use a couple parachutes right now.”

“What can they do to us when we get back?” Ryan whispered.

“I can cover for you,” Judd said, “but they’re gonna have my record on file. They could slap me on the wrist and say I can never go outside the country again....”

“Or what else?”

“Remember what happened to Coach Handlesman?” Judd said.

“They could send me to one of their re-education camps. And I’d probably be there a long time.”

“So what are we gonna do if he wants to land at the Stahley place?” Ryan said.

“How good are you at acting?” Judd said.

Judd woke Taylor Graham.

“It hasn’t been twenty minutes, but I need your help,” Judd said frantically.

“Something’s wrong with Ryan.”

Graham shook himself awake and followed Judd to the bathroom. Ryan was leaning against the sink, beads of sweat on his forehead.

“I didn’t feel well when I got on,” Ryan said, “but I thought it was just all the excitement.”

Graham felt his head.

“You’re burning up,” he said. Graham retrieved a first-aid kit with a thermometer. Ryan passed out on the floor.

Judd and the pilot moved Ryan to a seat and made it recline. Judd asked what Graham thought it could be.

“It might be food poisoning,” the pilot said.

“I’ve also seen guys with a bad appendix act this way. Could be a hundred things.”

“We’d better get him to a hospital right away, don’t you think?” Judd said.

“I wanted to make it back to Chicagoso we’d be safe,” Graham said.

“I’d like to touch down at the Stanleys’ landing strip.”

Ryan writhed in pain and moaned loudly.

“Let me check where we are,” Graham said.

Vicki saw Buck embrace Rayford Steele at the house later that day. Amanda had picked Rayford up in Milwaukee after his exhausting flight from New Babylon.

“I’m really fighting the jet lag,” Rayford said.

“I’m going to try and stay up until tonight so I can go over what you’ve put together for Bruce’s funeral.”

Rayford looked awe struck when Buck took him to Tsion Ben-Judah.

“It’s truly an honor to meet you,” Rayford said.

“I have heard much about you as well,” the rabbi said.

Rayford, Buck, and Tsion moved downstairs while Vicki talked with Amanda.

“We might need to use the apartment for another visitor,” Amanda said.

“I don’t want to kick you out or anything”—“That’s fine,” Vicki said.

“Who’s coming?”

“We hope a woman named Hattie Durham will be here in a few days,” Amanda said. Amanda explained that Hattie had been Rayford’s senior flight attendant on the night of the Rapture. Since then she had taken a job with the Global Community.

“She’s romantically involved with Carpathia,” Amanda said gravely.

“And from what Rayford tells me about their talks on the plane coming over here, she’s struggling with a lot of decisions she has to make.”

Judd was relieved to see Ryan’s pains pick up as they entered North American airspace. They seemed to become unbearable the closer they got to Chicago.

“I’ll divert to Indianapolis,” the pilot said.

“I thought we might make it to Chicago, but he’s in too much pain. Did you get a read on his temperature?”

“It’s really high,” Judd said.

Graham declared an emergency, and an ambulance met them at the gate of the airport.

“They’ll take you straight to the hospital,” the pilot said.

“I’ll need to stay with the plane.”

“You’ve been a lot of help,” Judd said.

“We’ll call you when we get back.”

“No, I feel I should stay until I make sure he’s OK,” the pilot said.

“Mrs. Stahley would want it that way.”

“OK,” Judd said.

“We’ll meet you over at the hospital.”

“I’ll be there as fast as I can,” Graham said.

The paramedics put an oxygen mask on Ryan and checked his vital signs as they sped to the hospital. Judd stayed in the back with Ryan.

“Your heart rate and blood pressure look normal,” the man said.

“Are you feeling better?”

“A little,” Ryan managed to say.

“I’m going to start an IV,” the man said.

“No, don’t,” Ryan said.

“I’m feeling a lot better.”

“It’ll help”—“No, I don’t want you to stick me if you don’t have to,” Ryan said.

Judd was watching the roadway for car rental dealerships.

“Stop!” Judd shouted to the driver.

“You have to stop!”

The startled driver pulled over, his lights still going, and Judd quickly had Ryan off the gurney and out of the ambulance.

“We’re really sorry about this,” Judd said as he shut the door. Judd glanced back as they ran through the parking lot and saw the paramedics watching them with opened mouths. One was talking on the radio.

Judd and Ryan darted into the car rental office.

“We’re in a really big hurry,” Judd said. He quickly filled out the forms, paid for the car, and left.

Three hours later they were nearing Chicago and trying to make sense of their trip.

“That was a pretty convincing job of acting,” Judd said.

“I always wanted to be a movie star,” Ryan said.

“I noticed your acting ability ended when that paramedic was going to stick a needle in your arm.”

“What are we gonna do?” Ryan said.

Judd shook his head.

“We have to take it a step at a time,” he said.

“We’ll check in at Loretta’s house first. I have to know about Buck.”

“The memorial service is tomorrow,” Ryan said.

“Will it be too risky, since Graham heard us talking about it?”

“I don’t know,” Judd said.

“We’ll have to get everybody together and go over our options.”

Back home, Judd went to Loretta’s house and found Vicki and Amanda in the front living room. Judd and Ryan were relieved to know Buck was alive and were thrilled to hear that he, Rayford, and TSION Ben-Judah were downstairs preparing for Bruce’s memorial service.

“Let me take you to return the car,” Amanda said.

“You can meet him a little later.”

After returning the car, Amanda dropped the three kids off at Bruce’s house. Lionel and Chaya were overjoyed to see Judd and Ryan and listened to their story.

“I hope Buck has time to tell us what happened to him,” Ryan said.

“We heard about his chase from the border guards.”

Judd and Ryan listened as Vicki explained what had happened to them while the two were gone. Judd paced as she talked.

“We’re under suspicion of hiding Mrs. Stahley and Darrion,” he said, “which is true.”

“But they didn’t do anything,” Vicki said.

“Which is also true,” Judd said, “but the truth doesn’t make any difference to the Global Community. Also, the pilot who took us to Israel knows a lot more than we want him to. It’s pretty clear he’s mixed up with the GC, and he might have had something to do with Darrion’s kidnapping and Mr. Stahley’s death.”

“Which makes Mrs. Stahley look pretty smart for getting away from us,” Vicki said.

“After she made those calls to her pilot, somebody started following us.”

Judd sighed.

“We might have to do some thing drastic,” he said.

“Relocate. Maybe all of us move back together.”

“I don’t care how much trouble we’re in,” Lionel said, “I’m not missing the service tomorrow for Bruce.”

Judd agreed.

“We need to be there,” he said.

“But now I want to hear Buck’s story and meet Dr. Ben-Judah.”

Ryan wanted to hear Buck’s story too, but he was more excited about meeting the rabbi.

When they arrived at Loretta’s house, Rayford Steele met them.

“We need to go over a few things,” he said.

“Tsion is an international fugitive. I can’t tell you everything I know, or how I know it, but the Global Community wants Tsion dead. One slip could cost him his life.”

The kids said they understood.

“Buck can’t speak in public,” Rayford continued.

“And with all the suspicion surrounding you kids with the Stahley situation, I’m wondering if it would be smart to have you guys go underground.”

“You mean like, disappear?” Lionel said.

“Not forever,” Rayford said, “but until things cool down, it’s best to be safe.”

Judd glanced around the room.

“I don’t mean to be disrespectful,” he said, “but are you going underground?”

“I know what you’re thinking,” Rayford said, “but the fact is”—“We had this same conversation with Bruce,” Judd said.

“He finally understood that God can use us just like he can use grownups.”

“I’m not saying God can’t use you,” Rayford said.

“We want to live for Christ,” Judd said.

“We don’t want to be foolish or careless, but we want to be bold and believe in God with all our hearts.”

Rayford nodded.

“I know you do. But you have to be careful not to think everything you feel is straight from God. The trip to Israel turned out OK for the moment, but the final results aren’t in.”

“I understand,” Judd said.

“Knowing God is more than a feeling.”

Rayford nodded.

“I believe in you guys. God will show you what’s best. I’ve heard you all know something about the shelter Bruce built.”

The kids nodded.

“We understand we won’t be able to go there or know how to get in,” Judd said.

“We’ll never tell anyone about it.”

“Good,” Rayford said.

“I’m tired and need to prepare for tomorrow. I know you want to see TSION, but he’s very emotional right now. “

“We won’t stay long,” Ryan said.

Rayford led the kids downstairs, where Buck and Tsion sat at a table.

Buck greeted the kids warmly and smiled at Judd and Ryan.

“Good to see you two,” Buck said.

“We’ll trade stories later.”

“It’s a deal,” Judd said.

Buck introduced Tsion to Lionel and Chaya. Chaya said something in Hebrew, and Tsion embraced her. He spoke with a thick Israeli accent.

“Praise God!” Tsion said.

“I am so happy to know God is calling the Jewish people all over the world to himself through Jesus.”

Vicki shook the rabbi’s hand, then Judd’s.

“You knew my daughter,” Tsion said.

“I did,” Judd said.

“I’m very sorry for your loss.”

Tsion wept.

“Forgive me,” he said.

“Looking at you reminds me of what I have lost. But I know that today my wife and children see God. Part of me very much wants to die so I can be with them. Only God’s grace keeps me going. Only God can take away my thoughts of revenge.”

Judd looked at Ryan.

“I feel called to serve God, even in my grief,” Tsion continued.

“I do not know why he has allowed this. God must have something new for me to do with the time I have left. I am grateful for your friendship and for your prayers. “

“What will you do now, sir?” Vicki said.

“I know my life is worthless in Israel. My message has angered all those except the believers, and with the silly murder charges against me, I had to leave. If Nicolae Carpathia wants me dead, I will be a fugitive everywhere.

But if God wants to use me to help others know him better, I will go anywhere and do whatever he calls me to do. “

Tsion craned his neck. Ryan had been standing slightly behind Judd as he listened.

“And who is this young man?” Tsion said.

“My name is Ryan, sir.” Ryan put out his hand, and the rabbi clasped it in his own.

“I have something for you,” Ryan said. He pulled out a crudely wrapped package and handed it to the man.

“A gift for me?” Tsion said.

“I didn’t do a very good job with the paper,” Ryan said, “but I think you’ll like it.”

Ryan hadn’t told Judd about the picture. Judd frowned and elbowed him.

“I think we need to get back to our meeting,” Rayford said.

“No, let me open the gift,” the rabbi said, as he gingerly tore at the package. When he could see its contents, he gasped and reached for a chair. The rabbi put his face in his hands and wept.

“What did you do now?” Judd said.

“I think that’s enough,” Rayford said.

The rabbi put up his hand.

“Please,” he said after a few moments.

“What he has given me is priceless.”

Tsion held up the picture frame and showed the others his wife and children.

“I kept this on my desk in my office at the university,” Tsion said.

“I do not know how you were able to find it, or who you bought it from, and I will not ask you. But I thank you.”

Tsion hugged Ryan hard. Then he turned the picture over and opened the back of the frame.

“I was overcome because I remembered the occasion my wife used to give me this picture,” he said.

“I was well into my research about the Messiah. The disappearances had taken place. I knew I had been left behind. And I knew my decision to follow Jesus would cost me greatly.

“My wife also knew the reality of such a decision. I explained my studies to her and the children. I also explained the dangers. If they followed me in faith, they could become outcasts.

“One by one, I prayed with them. My wife, then my son, and then Nina placed her trust in Jesus.”

Tsion stopped and bowed his head, his whole body shaking with emotion. Ryan looked at Vicki. Her

eyes filled with tears. Finally, the rabbi continued.

“The next day, my wife went to the photographer’s studio and had this portrait taken of the three of them. And on the back,” Tsion choked, “she wrote a note to me. I had thought it was lost forever.”

Ryan and the others listened as Tsion read the note in Hebrew, then translated.

To my beloved Tsion, the rabbi read, you have shown us the way of life, the path of peace. May God grant you wisdom and courage in the days ahead. May he be, to you, Jehovah Jireh.

“What does that mean?” Ryan said.

With tears in his eyes Tsion said, “Jehovah Jireh is a name that means ‘the God who provides.’” In the Old Testament God provided for his people again and again. And God will provide the strength I need at this time of despair.” Tsion looked at Ryan.

“This means so much to me. I have artifacts in my office, texts of ancient manuscripts that are priceless. But you have given me back what is most valuable.”

Tsion hugged Ryan so hard he picked him up off the floor.

Judd led the others to Loretta’s living room. He knew trouble might be ahead. How long would it take Taylor Graham to find them? And after him, the Global Community? Would the people from Nicolae High show up at the service tomorrow?

Would Buck’s co-worker, Verna Zee, be there? And what had happened to Darrion and Mrs. Stahley?

Tomorrow, Judd thought. We have to make it through tomorrow.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Jerry B. Jenkins (www.jerryjenkins.com) is the writer of the Left Behind series. He is author of more than one hundred books, of which six have reached the New York Times best-seller list. Former vice president for publishing for the Moody Bible Institute of Chicago, he also served many years as editor of Moody magazine and is now Moody’s writer-at-large.

His writing has appeared in publications as varied as Reader’s Digest, Parade, in-flight magazines, and many Christian periodicals. He has written books in four genres:

biography, marriage and family, fiction for children, and fiction for adults.

Jenkins’s biographies include books with Hank Aaron, Bill Gaither, Luis Palau, Walter Payton, Orel Hershiser, Nolan Ryan, Brett Butler, and Billy Graham, among many others.

Six of his apocalyptic novels—Left Behind, Tribulation Force, Nicolae, Soul Harvest, Apollyon, and Assassins—have appeared on the Christian Booksellers Association’s best-selling fiction list and the

Publishers Weekly religion best-seller list. Left Behind was nominated for Book of the Year by the Evangelical Christian Publishers Association in 1997, 1998, and 1999.

As a marriage and family author and speaker, Jenkins has been a frequent guest on Dr. James Dobson's Focus on the Family radio program.

Jerry is also the writer of the nationally syndicated sports story comic strip Gil Thorp, distributed to newspapers across the United States by Tribune Media Services.

Jerry and his wife, Dianna, live in Colorado.

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Dr. Tim LaHaye (www.timlahaye.com), who conceived the idea of fictionalizing an account of the Rapture and the Tribulation, is a noted author, minister, and nationally recognized speaker on Bible prophecy. He is the founder of both Tim LaHaye Ministries and The Pre-Trib Research Center.

Presently Dr. LaHaye speaks at many of the major Bible prophecy conferences in the U. S. and Canada, where his nine current prophecy books are very popular.

Dr. LaHaye holds a doctor of ministry degree from Western Theological Seminary and the doctor of literature degree from Liberty University. For twenty-five years he pastored one of the nation's outstanding churches in San Diego, which grew to three locations. It was during that time that he founded two accredited Christian high schools, a Christian school system of ten schools, and Christian Heritage College.

Dr. LaHaye has written over forty books, with over 22 million copies in print in thirty-three languages. He has written books on a wide variety of subjects, such as family life, temperaments, and Bible prophecy. His current fiction works, written with Jerry Jenkins—Left Behind, Tribulation Force, Nicolae, Soul Harvest, Apollyon, and Assassins—have all reached number one on the Christian best-seller charts.

Other works by Dr. LaHaye are Spirit-Controlled Temperament;

How to Be Happy Though Married; Revelation Unveiled;

Understanding the Last Days;

Rapture under Attack; Are We Living in the End Times? ; and the youth fiction series Left Behind: The Kids.

He is the father of four grown children and grandfather of nine. Snow skiing, waterskiing, motorcycling, golfing, vacationing with family, and jogging are among his leisure activities.

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