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Characters in this novel sometimes speak words that are adapted from various versions of the Bible, including the King James Version and the New King James Version.

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What's Gone On Before

JUDD Thompson Jr. and his friends in the Young Tribulation Force are living the adventure of a lifetime. Nearing the six-year mark of the Tribulation, a heat wave devastates the world. Believers are able to move around freely during the day, so Judd and Lionel drive to Wisconsin to join their friends.

After a tearful reunion and a welcome-home party, Judd and Vicki decide to help move people and supplies around the country. When they discover a member of an Ohio group missing, Judd and Vicki help their new friend Howard escape.

As the heat wave continues, Judd and Vicki grow closer. On an isolated road in Wisconsin, Judd proposes marriage and Vicki accepts. They ask Dr. Tsion Ben-Judah if he will perform the ceremony, and Tsion suggests they relocate to Petra.

Judd accompanies pilot Westin Jakes on a supply run to New Babylon. There, they stay

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overnight with a group of believers living right under Nicolae Carpathia's nose.

The next morning, Judd calls Chang Wong at the palace in New Babylon. Chang says the heat wave is over, and Judd's heart sinks. He's thousands of miles from Vicki in the most hostile location on the planet.

Join the Young Tribulation Force as they struggle to survive during the last year of the Great Tribulation.



ONE

Trapped in New Babylon

JUDD Thompson Jr. fell into a chair and gasped for breath. It felt like the air had been sucked out of his lungs. He couldn't believe he was trapped in New Babylon, the headquarters of the Global Community.

Judd spoke with Chang Wong for a few more minutes, and Chang said he would call with any information that might help Judd and pilot Westin Jakes escape.

Then Judd joined the others gathered around several computers. Some monitored cameras set up near their safe house, while others watched the latest from the Global Community News Network.

Rainer Kurtzmann, the German leader of this small group, took Judd aside. "I'm sorry you're trapped. I feel responsible for not getting you back to your plane last night."

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Judd frowned. "It's not your fault. Westin and I made a bad choice."

"Whatever we can do to help, we will do."

A woman pointed to a tiny laptop computer. "Take a look at this."

Judd watched as a temperature gauge on the right side showed things were back to normal. The woman moved a remote camera slightly to the left, and several people crawled out of an underground bunker. Their skin was pale, and they looked like they hadn't eaten in weeks.

The woman zoomed in on a smiling group. A young man ran to a burned-out area and lay down, scissor-kicking as if making a snow angel. The others with him laughed.

The mood inside the safe house wasn't cheerful. They would no longer be able to move around during the day. Westin grumbled about his plane, wondering if the GC would find it.

"We have to prepare for possible inspections by Peacekeepers," Rainer said. "They'll be going from building to building soon."

A live shot of Carpathia's palace showed open windows and people streaming out of the building. Judd wondered if the GC would ever estimate how many had died from the heat.

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Leon Fortunato appeared at a press conference, and Judd was shocked at the way the reporters looked. The normal crowd of men and women covering international news was down to only a few people in ragged clothes. Even makeup couldn't hide their gaunt faces.

Fortunato was dressed in his usual gaudy clothing, but Judd could tell the past few weeks had taken their toll. There were dark circles under Leon's eyes, and his clothes seemed to sag.

"I'm pleased to say that your potentate will speak just before noon today to give an update on the world situation," Fortunato said. "But I am happy to report that it appears this quirk of nature is over. We have reports from everywhere the sun is up that the heat is gone. Let us give thanks to the giver of all good things, Nicolae Carpathia."



Vicki awoke with a gasp and sat up in bed. The rhythmic breathing of the others in the cabin calmed her, but something didn't feel right. She listened for any noise outside but heard nothing. The heat wave had done many things to help believers, even zapping insects. Rivers and lakes had boiled for so long that frogs were nonexistent. Crickets, cicadas, and

other bugs had either gone into hiding or had been burned to a crisp. Vicki was glad she could go out during the day because walking at night was so quiet it was eerie.

Vicki had awakened at other times and sensed a need to pray for friends. Perhaps this was such a time. Could someone be in trouble? Judd?

She closed her eyes and lay back on the pillow, whispering a prayer. Vicki found it better to pray aloud because when she prayed silently, she got distracted and sometimes simply fell asleep.

When Vicki had first become a believer, prayer had seemed like a duty. She ticked off a list of things she needed God to do, made sure she confessed her sins, got in the right amount of praise and worship, and went on with her life. But it had been six years now, and her view of prayer had changed. Just like she looked forward to talking with Judd and spending time with him, she looked forward to her times alone with God. In fact, speaking with her heavenly Father didn't feel stiff and formal—it felt natural.

Vicki discovered what had been missing from her prayer life a few years earlier: listening. She had always thought that prayer meant *saying* things to God. Now she

remained silent for a few minutes, letting God bring back passages she had memorized or bits of verses.

At first, she had been unsure of how to address God. Should she talk to Jesus, call out to God, Father, heavenly Father, or say something else? She finally realized that God was more concerned with her simply coming to him, but she had found calling him "Father" a comforting way to begin.

"Father," Vicki prayed, "I don't know if something is wrong or if I'm up because of something I ate, but I want to listen now. I pray for Judd and the plans he has for the wedding and where we'll live once I get to Petra. Keep him safe, Father. . . ."

Vicki paused, suddenly thinking of a verse Marshall had quoted a few days before. The words she recalled were *perfect peace*, but she couldn't think of the rest. She flipped on a flashlight and grabbed her Bible from the floor. Shelly said something in her sleep and rolled over in the bed next to Vicki's.

Vicki remembered the passage was from Isaiah and turned to chapter 26, the one Marshall had been speaking about. She found her answer in the third verse.

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*You will keep in perfect peace all
who trust in you,
whose thoughts are fixed on you!*

*Is God telling me something? Vicki thought.
Is something about to happen?
She continued reading the passage.*

*Trust in the Lord always, for the Lord God
is the eternal Rock.*

*He humbles the proud and brings the
arrogant city to the dust.*

Its walls come crashing down!

*The poor and oppressed trample it under-
foot.*

*But for those who are righteous, the path
is not steep and rough. You are a God of
justice, and you smooth out the road ahead
of them.*

*Lord, we love to obey your laws; our
heart's desire is to glorify your name.*

*All night long I search for you; earnestly
I seek for God. For only when you come to
judge the earth will people turn from wick-
edness and do what is right.*

*Your kindness to the wicked does not
make them do good. They keep doing wrong
and take no notice of the Lord's majesty.*

*O Lord, they do not listen when you
threaten. They do not see your upraised fist.*

Trapped in New Babylon

Show them your eagerness to defend your people. Perhaps then they will be ashamed. Let your fire consume your enemies.

Lord, you will grant us peace, for all we have accomplished is really from you.

Vicki shook her head at the timeless words. She couldn't wait to meet the writers of the Bible and hear what they had been going through when they penned words like these. She smiled as she read the end of the twelfth verse again: ". . . for all we have accomplished is really from you."

Footsteps sounded on the path outside. Vicki switched off the flashlight and sat up in bed. The door creaked open, and Vicki's heart pounded as she squinted to see who was coming.

"Vicki?" Mark whispered. "You awake?"

"Yeah," Vicki said, leaning back on her pillow. She knew Mark had been on duty in the main cabin keeping watch for the night.

"Better come with me," Mark said.

Vicki was dressed in seconds and ran up the path, catching up to Mark just before he entered the main cabin.

"What is it?" Vicki said.

"Phone call. Bad news."



Judd waited for Vicki to come to the phone, visualizing the cabins she would pass. He cringed when she answered, sounding out of breath and worried.

"I'm sorry to call so late," Judd said.

"I wanted you to hear this from me instead of something over GCNN."

"What's wrong?"

Judd told her the heat wave had lifted in New Babylon and that it was expected to do the same throughout the world. Vicki gasped when Judd told her where he was.

"What are you going to do?" Vicki said.

"We're keeping a watch on the place until sundown. Westin and I are hoping to make it back to the plane and head for Petra."

Vicki paused, and Judd thought she was crying. Instead, Vicki shared a verse she had just looked up and told Judd to read it as well.

"You're not mad at me?" Judd said.

"I'm terrified the GC will find you and I'll see you on some newscast. But we've been through this before."

"I'll let you know as soon as anything changes," Judd said.

The two prayed and this time Vicki did cry.

When he hung up, he went to the computer and composed an e-mail, telling

Vicki all the things he couldn't say over the phone. He marked the message "private" and sent it.

As promised, Nicolae Carpathia addressed the world from the rooftop of the palace. For some reason God had spared the building. Judd noticed someone had set up fake plants and trees behind Nicolae to make it look like things were back to normal. A well-placed group of smiling GC workers stood behind him, as if the deaths of millions around the world meant nothing.

Nicolae beamed as he strutted toward the microphone. His hair fluffed in the wind. "As we prepare to partake of our noonday meal here in New Babylon, it is a festive atmosphere. We are all celebrating the end of the curious heat wave that enveloped the planet, and we look forward to the days ahead where we expect peace to rain down on us like a waterfall.

"For those who are in time zones where the sun has not yet risen, rest assured that I have taken care of this problem, with the help of my scientists, who have been working around the clock."

"Right," Rainer said. "Nicolae has been able to stop the heat wave with his injured little mind."

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"The heating of the earth has actually caused the waterways to heal themselves, but there is more work to do," Carpathia said.

"Those who are without homes will see them constructed in the quickest manner possible.

"In the past when we have faced hardships, we have pulled together as a Global Community, and that is what will happen now. Let us use this trouble to unite our hearts and minds for one common goal of peace. And let the enemies of peace beware, for we are more committed than ever to reaching our goal."

With his eyes flashing, Nicolae spoke in several different languages, telling people of the world that he was in control and that he had plans for the good of every person alive.

Hours later, Chang Wong phoned Judd and played part of a conversation Chang had recorded. "This is Nicolae behind closed doors with all of his top people. They spent most of the day just trying to settle people in their offices, but once the directors were there . . . well, listen."

Judd heard Nicolae rub his hands together as he said, "For the first time in a long time, we play on an even field. The waterways are healing themselves, and we have rebuilding to do in the infrastructure. Let us work at getting all our loyal citizens back onto the

same page with us. Director Akbar and I have some special surprises in store for dissidents on various levels. We are back in business, people. It is time to recoup our losses and start delivering a few."

"What does that mean?" Judd said.

"I'm not sure, but I'd bet the GC knows something about what we've been doing the last few weeks, moving supplies and people. They want to hurt us."

"Anything new from the Trib Force?" Judd said.

"Everybody's back in hiding. Captain Steele says we have to pick our spots and strategize for the new night schedule. Which brings me to my other news."

"What's that?"

"Westin's plane."

Judd took a breath. "You think it's safe for us to make a run for it after dark?"

"I wish I had better news. I tapped into one of the local security channels a little earlier. The GC spotted the plane and somehow pulled it near one of the burned-out hangars at the airfield."

"So we might have to fight them to get it back?"

"No. All the fighting in the world won't

help. They planted a bomb on board thinking it was a Judah-ite aircraft."

Judd clenched his teeth. "So we'll have to disarm—"

"Judd, listen—"

"No, Chang. If Westin and I can get to the plane tonight and get in the air, won't God protect us like he has protected all the other planes?"

"Judd, something went wrong with the detonator. The bomb exploded. There is no plane left to fly."