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*To those readers of Left Behind
who wrote to tell us of its impact*

PROLOGUE

What Has Gone Before . . .

IN ONE CATAclysmic instant, millions of people all over the world disappeared. They simply vanished, leaving behind everything material: clothes, eyeglasses, contact lenses, hair-pieces, hearing aids, fillings, jewelry, shoes, even pacemakers and surgical pins.

Millions vanished. But millions more remained—adults, but no children, and only a few young teens. All babies, including the unborn, disappeared—some during birth.

Worldwide chaos ensued. Planes, trains, buses, and cars crashed, ships sank, homes burned, grieving survivors committed suicide. A transportation and communications gridlock, coupled with the disappearances of many service

personnel, left most to fend for themselves until some semblance of order returned.

Some said the world had been invaded by aliens from outer space. Others said the disappearances resulted from an enemy attack. And yet every country on the globe was touched by the disappearances.

Airline captain Rayford Steele and his twenty-year-old daughter Chloe were left behind. Rayford's wife and their twelve-year-old son vanished. Rayford, piloting a 747 over the Atlantic en route to London, told his senior flight attendant, Hattie Durham, that he didn't know what had happened. The terrifying truth was that he knew all too well. His wife had warned him of this very event. Christ had come to take away his own, and the rest, Rayford and Chloe included, had been left behind.

Rayford became consumed with finding the truth and making sure that he and Chloe would not miss any second chance. He felt responsible for her skepticism, for her believe-only-what-you-can-see-and-feel attitude.

His search took him to his wife's church, where a handful of people, including even one on the pastoral staff, had been left behind. Visitation Pastor Bruce Barnes had lost his wife and children, and he, above all others, knew immediately that his weak, phony faith had failed him at the most critical instant of his life. In a single moment, he became the most convinced skeptic on earth—an enthusiastic, unapologetic evangelist.

Under Bruce's tutelage and the influence of a DVD the senior pastor had left for just such a time, first Rayford and

then Chloe came to believe in Christ. With their new pastor they formed what they call the Tribulation Force, a core group determined to challenge the forces of evil during the Tribulation period predicted in the Bible.

Meanwhile, Cameron—"Buck"—Williams, a senior staff writer for the prestigious newsmagazine *Global Weekly*, was on a quest of his own. Buck had been aboard Rayford Steele's plane when the Rapture occurred, and he was assigned to make some sense of the worldwide disappearances. His interviewing brought him into contact with one of the most powerful and charismatic personalities ever, the mysterious Romanian leader, Nicolae Carpathia. Within two weeks of the vanishings, Carpathia was swept to international power as head of the United Nations, promising to unite the devastated globe as one peaceful village.

Buck introduced flight attendant Hattie Durham to Carpathia, who quickly made her his personal assistant. After coming to faith in Christ under the influence of Rayford, Chloe, and Bruce, Buck felt responsible for Hattie and became desperate to get her away from Carpathia.

Demoted for allegedly blowing a major assignment, Buck relocated from New York to Chicago, where he joined Rayford, Chloe, and Bruce as the fourth member of the Tribulation Force. Together these four have determined to stand and fight against all odds, to never give in. Representing millions who missed the opportunity to meet Christ in the air, they have resolved not to lose hold of their newfound faith, no matter what the future might bring.

Buck Williams has witnessed the murderous evil power of Nicolae Carpathia, and Bruce Barnes knows from his study of Scripture that dark days lie ahead. The odds are, only one of the four members of the Tribulation Force will survive the next seven years.

But only Bruce has more than a hint of the terror to come. If the others knew, they might not venture so bravely into the future.



“For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.

“Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.

“Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.”

MATTHEW 24:38-42

CHAPTER 1

IT WAS RAYFORD STEELE'S turn for a break. He pulled the headphones down onto his neck and dug into his flight bag for his wife's Bible, marveling at how quickly his life had changed. How many hours had he wasted during idle moments like this, poring over newspapers and magazines that had nothing to say? After all that had happened, only one book could hold his interest.

The Boeing 747 was on auto from Baltimore to a four o'clock Friday afternoon landing at Chicago O'Hare, but Rayford's new first officer, Nick, sat staring ahead anyway, as if piloting the plane. *Doesn't want to talk to me anymore,* Rayford thought. *Knew what was coming and shut me down before I opened my mouth.*

“Is it going to offend you if I sit reading this for a while?” Rayford asked.

The younger man turned and pulled the left phone away from his own ear. “Say again?”

Rayford repeated himself, pointing to the Bible. It had belonged to the wife he hadn’t seen for more than two weeks and probably would not see for another seven years.

“As long as you don’t expect me to listen.”

“I got that loud and clear, Nick. You understand I don’t care what you think of me, don’t you?”

“Sir?”

Rayford leaned close and spoke louder. “What you think of me would have been hugely important a few weeks ago,” he said. “But—”

“Yeah, I know, OK? I got it, Steele, all right? You and lots of other people think the whole thing was Jesus. Not buying. Delude yourself, but leave me out of it.”

Rayford raised his brows and shrugged. “You wouldn’t respect me if I hadn’t tried.”

“Don’t be too sure.”

But when Rayford turned back to his reading, it was the *Chicago Tribune* sticking out of his bag that grabbed his attention.

The *Tribune*, like every other paper in the world, carried the front-page story: During a private meeting at the United Nations, just before a Nicolae Carpathia press conference, a horrifying murder/suicide had occurred. New U.N. Secretary-General Nicolae Carpathia had just installed the

ten new members of the expanded Security Council, seeming to err by inaugurating two men to the same position of U.N. ambassador from the Great States of Britain.

According to the witnesses, billionaire Jonathan Stonagal, Carpathia's friend and financial backer, suddenly overpowered a guard, stole his handgun, and shot himself in the head, the bullet passing through and killing one of the new ambassadors from Britain.

The United Nations had been closed for the day, and Carpathia was despondent over the tragic loss of his two dear friends and trusted advisers.

Bizarre as it might seem, Rayford Steele was one of only four people on the planet who knew the truth about Nicolae Carpathia—that he was a liar, a hypnotic brainwasher, the Antichrist himself. Others might suspect Carpathia of being other than he seemed, but only Rayford, his daughter, his pastor, and his new friend, journalist Buck Williams, knew for sure.

Buck had been one of the seventeen in that United Nations meeting room. And he had witnessed something entirely different—not a murder/suicide, but a double murder. Carpathia himself, according to Buck, had methodically borrowed the guard's gun, forced his old friend Jonathan Stonagal to kneel, then killed Stonagal and the British ambassador with one shot.

Carpathia had choreographed the murders, and then, while the witnesses sat in horror, Carpathia quietly told them what they had seen—the same story the newspapers

now carried. Every witness in that room but one corroborated it. Most chilling, they believed it. Even Steve Plank, Buck's former boss, now Carpathia's press agent. Even Hattie Durham, Rayford's onetime flight attendant, who had become Carpathia's personal assistant. Everyone except Buck Williams.

Rayford had been dubious when Buck told his version in Bruce Barnes's office two nights ago. "You're the only person in the room who saw it your way?" he had challenged the writer.

"Captain Steele," Buck had said, "we all saw it the same way. But then Carpathia calmly described what he wanted us to think we had seen, and everybody but me immediately accepted it as truth. I want to know how he explains that he had the dead man's successor already there and sworn in when the murder took place. But now there's no evidence I was even there. It's as if Carpathia washed me from their memories. People I know now swear I wasn't there, and they aren't joking."

Chloe and Bruce Barnes had looked at each other and then back at Buck. Buck had finally become a believer, just before entering the meeting at the U.N. "I'm absolutely convinced that if I had gone into that room without God," Buck said, "I would have been reprogrammed too."

"But now if you just tell the world the truth—"

"Sir, I've been reassigned to Chicago because my boss believes I missed that meeting. Steve Plank asked why I had not accepted his invitation. I haven't talked to Hattie yet, but you know she won't remember I was there."

“The biggest question,” Bruce Barnes said, “is what Carpathia thinks is in your head. Does he think he’s erased the truth from *your* mind? If he knows you know, you’re in grave danger.”

Now, as Rayford read the bizarre story in the paper, he noticed Nick switching from autopilot to manual. “Initial descent,” Nick said. “You want to bring her in?”

“Of course,” Rayford said. Nick could have landed the plane, but Rayford felt responsible. He was the captain. He would answer for these people. And even though the plane could land itself, he had not lost the thrill of handling it. Few things reminded him of life as it had been just weeks before, but landing a 747 was one of them.



Buck Williams had spent the day buying a car—something he hadn’t needed in Manhattan—and hunting for an apartment. He found a beautiful condo, at a place that advertised already-installed wireless, midway between the *Global Weekly* Chicago bureau office and New Hope Village Church in Mount Prospect. He tried to convince himself it was the church that would keep drawing him west of the city, not Rayford Steele’s daughter, Chloe. She was ten years his junior, and whatever attraction he might feel for her, he was certain she saw him as some sort of a wizened mentor.

Buck had put off going to the office. He wasn’t expected there until the following Monday anyway, and he didn’t

relish facing Verna Zee. When it had been his assignment to find a replacement for veteran Lucinda Washington, the Chicago bureau chief who had disappeared, he had told the militant Verna she had jumped the gun by moving into her former boss's office. Now Buck had been demoted and Verna elevated. Suddenly, she was *his* boss.

But he didn't want to spend all weekend dreading the meeting, and neither did he want to appear too eager to see Chloe Steele again right away, so Buck drove to the office just before closing. Would Verna make him pay for his years of celebrity as an award-winning cover-story writer? Or would she make it even worse by killing him with kindness?

Buck felt the stares and smiles of the underlings as he moved through the outer office. By now, of course, everyone knew what had happened. They felt sorry for him, were stunned by his lapse of judgment. How could Buck Williams miss a meeting that would certainly be one of the most momentous in news history, even if it hadn't resulted in the double death? But they were also aware of Buck's credentials. Many, no doubt, would still consider it a privilege to work with him.

No surprise, Verna had already moved back into the big office. Buck winked at Alice, Verna's spike-haired young secretary, and peered in. It looked as if Verna had been there for years. She had already rearranged the furniture and hung her own pictures and plaques. Clearly, she was ensconced and loving every minute of it.

A pile of papers littered Verna's desk, and her computer screen was lit, but she seemed to be idly gazing out the

window. Buck poked his head in and cleared his throat. He noticed a flash of recognition and then a quick recomposing. "Cameron," she said flatly, still seated. "I didn't expect you till Monday."

"Just checking in," he said. "You can call me Buck."

"I'll call you Cameron, if you don't mind, and—"

"I do mind. Please call—"

"Then I'll call you Cameron even if you *do* mind. Did you let anyone know you were coming?"

"I'm sorry?"

"Do you have an appointment?"

"An appointment?"

"With me. I have a schedule, you know."

"And there's no room for me on it?"

"You're asking for an appointment then?"

"If it's not inconvenient. I'd like to know where I'm going to land and what kind of assignments you have in mind for me, that kind of—"

"Those sound like things we can talk about when we meet," Verna said. "Alice! See if I have a slot in twenty minutes, please!"

"You do," Alice called out. "And I would be happy to show Mr. Williams his cubicle while he's waiting, if you—"

"I prefer to do that myself, Alice. Thank you. And could you shut my door?"

Alice looked apologetic as she rose and moved past Buck to shut the door. He thought she even rolled her eyes. "*You* can call me Buck," he whispered.

"Thanks," she said shyly, pointing to a chair beside her desk.

"I have to wait here, like seeing the principal?"

She nodded. "Someone called here for you earlier. Didn't leave her name. I told her you weren't expected till Monday."

"No message?"

"Sorry."

"So, where *is* my cubicle?"

Alice glanced at the closed door, as if fearing Verna could see her. She stood and pointed over the tops of several partitions toward a windowless corner in the back.

"That's where the coffeepot was last time I was here," Buck said.

"It still is," Alice said with a giggle. Her intercom buzzed. "Yes, ma'am?"

"Would you two mind whispering if you must talk while I'm working?"

"Sorry!" This time Alice did roll her eyes.

"I'm gonna go take a peek," Buck whispered, rising.

"Please don't," she said. "You'll get me in trouble with you-know-who."

Buck shook his head and sat back down. He thought of where he had been, whom he had met, the dangers he had faced in his career. And now he was whispering with a secretary he had to keep out of trouble from a wannabe boss who had never been able to write her way out of a paper bag.

Buck sighed. At least he was in Chicago with the only people he knew who really cared about him.



Despite his and Chloe's new faith, Rayford Steele found himself subject to deep mood swings. As he strode through O'Hare, passed brusquely and silently by Nick, he suddenly felt sad. How he missed Irene and Raymie! He knew beyond doubt they were in heaven, and that, if anything, they should be feeling sorry for him. But the world had changed so dramatically since the disappearances that hardly anyone he knew had recaptured any sense of equilibrium. He was grateful to have Bruce to teach him and Chloe and now Buck to stand with him in their mission, but sometimes the prospect of facing the future was overwhelming.

That's why it was such sweet relief to see Chloe's smiling face waiting at the end of the corridor. In two decades of flying, he had gotten used to passing passengers who were being greeted at the terminal. Most pilots were accustomed to simply disembarking and driving home alone.

Chloe and Rayford understood each other better than ever. They were fast becoming friends and confidants, and while they didn't agree on everything, they were knit in their grief and loss, tied in their new faith, and teammates on what they called the Tribulation Force.

Rayford embraced his daughter. "Anything wrong?"

"No, but Bruce has been trying to get you. He's called an emergency meeting of the core group for early this evening. He's swamped till then, but he'd like us to try to get hold of Buck."

"How'd you get here?"

“Cab. I knew your car was here.”

“Where would Buck be?”

“He was going to look for a car and an apartment today. He could be anywhere.”

“Did you call the *Weekly* office?”

“I talked to Alice, the secretary there, early this afternoon. He wasn’t expected until Monday, but we can try again from the car. I mean, you can. You should call him, don’t you think? Rather than me?”

Rayford suppressed a smile.



Alice sat at her desk leaning forward, her head cocked, gazing at Buck and trying not to laugh aloud as he regaled her with whispered wisecracks. All the while he wondered how much of the stuff from his palatial Manhattan office would fit into the cubicle he was to share with the communal coffeepot. The phone rang, and Buck could hear both ends of the conversation from the speakerphone. From just down the hall came the voice of the receptionist. “Alice, is Buck Williams still back there?”

“Right here.”

“Call for him.”

It was Rayford Steele, calling from his car. “At seven-thirty tonight?” Buck said. “Sure, I’ll be there. What’s up? Hm? Well, tell her I said hi, too, and I’ll see you both at the church tonight.”

He was hanging up as Verna came to the door and frowned at him. "A problem?" he said.

"You'll have your own work phone soon enough," she said. "Come on in."

As soon as he was seated Verna sweetly informed him that he would no longer be the world-traveling, cover-story-writing, star headliner of *Global Weekly*. "We here in Chicago have an important but limited role in the magazine," she said. "We interpret national and international news from a local and regional perspective and submit our stories to New York."

Buck sat stiffly. "So I'm going to be assigned to the Chicago livestock markets?"

"You don't amuse me, Cameron. You never have. You will be assigned to whatever we need covered each week. Your work will pass through a senior editor and through me, and I will decide whether it is of enough significance and quality to pass along to New York."

Buck sighed. "I didn't ask the big boss what I was supposed to do with my works in progress. I don't suppose you know."

"Your contact with Stanton Bailey will now funnel through me as well. Is that understood?"

"Are you asking whether I understand, or whether I agree?"

"Neither," she said. "I'm asking whether you will comply."

"It's unlikely," Buck said, feeling his neck redden and his pulse surge. He didn't want to get into a shouting match with Verna. But neither was he going to sit for long under the

thumb of someone who didn't belong in journalism, let alone in Lucinda Washington's old chair and supervising him.

"I will discuss this with Mr. Bailey," she said. "As you might imagine, I have all sorts of recourse at my disposal for insubordinate employees."

"I can imagine. Why don't you get him on the phone right now?"

"For what?"

"To find out what I'm supposed to do. I've accepted my demotion and my relocation. You know as well as I do that relegating me to regional stuff is a waste of my contacts and my experience."

"And your talent, I assume you're implying."

"Infer what you want. But before you put me on the bowling beat, I have dozens of hours invested in my cover story on the theory of the disappearances—ah, why am I talking to you about it?"

"Because I'm your boss, and because it's not likely a Chicago bureau staff writer will land a cover story."

"Not even a writer who has already done several? I dare you to call Bailey. The last time he said anything about my piece, he said he was sure it would be a winner."

"Yeah? The last time I talked to him, he told me about the last time he talked to you."

"It was a misunderstanding."

"It was a lie. You said you were someplace and everybody who was there says you weren't. I'd have fired you."

"If you'd had the power to fire me, I'd have quit."

“You want to quit?”

“I’ll tell you what I want, Verna. I want—”

“I expect all my subordinates to call me Ms. Zee.”

“You have no subordinates in this office,” Buck said. “And aren’t you—”

“You’re dangerously close to the line, Cameron.”

“Aren’t you afraid *Ms. Zee* sounds too much like *Missy*?”

She stood. “Follow me.” She bristled past him, stomping out of her office and down the long hallway in her sensible shoes.

Buck stopped at Alice’s desk. “Thanks for everything, Alice,” he said quickly. “I’ve got a bunch of stuff that’s being shipped here that I might need to have you forward to my new place.”

Alice was nodding but her smile froze when Verna hollered down the hall. “*Now*, Cameron!”

Buck slowly turned. “I’ll get back to you, Alice.” Buck moved deliberately enough to drive Verna crazy, and he noticed people in their cubicles pretending not to notice but fighting smiles.

Verna marched to the corner that served as the coffee room and pointed to a small desk with a phone and a file cabinet. Buck snorted.

“You’ll have a computer in a week or so,” she said.

“Have it delivered to my condo.”

“I’m afraid that’s out of the question.”

“No, Verna, what’s out of the question is you trying to vent all your frustration from who knows where in one breath. You

know as well as I do that no one with an ounce of self-respect would put up with this. If I have to work out of the Chicago area, I'm going to work at home with all my wireless toys. And if you expect to see me in this office again for any reason, you'll get Stanton Bailey on the phone right now."

Verna looked prepared to stand her ground right there, so Buck headed back to her office with her trailing him. He passed Alice, who looked stricken, and waited at Verna's desk until she caught up. "Are you dialing, or am I?" he demanded.



Rayford and Chloe ate on the way home and arrived to an urgent phone message from Rayford's chief pilot. "Call me as soon as you get in."

With his cap under his arm and still wearing his uniform trench coat, Rayford punched the familiar numbers. "What's up, Earl?"

"Thanks for getting back to me right away, Ray. You and I go back a long way."

"Long enough that you should get to the point, Earl. What'd I do now?"

"This is not an official call, OK? Not a reprimand or a warning or anything. This is just friend to friend."

"So, friend to friend, Earl, should I sit down?"

"No, but let me tell you, buddy, you've got to knock off the proselytizing."

"The—?"

“Talking about God on the job, man.”

“Earl, I back off when anyone says anything, and you know I don’t let it get in the way of the job. Anyway, what do *you* think the disappearances were all about?”

“We’ve been through all that, Ray. I’m just telling you, Nicky Edwards is gonna write you up, and I want to be able to say you and I have already talked about it and you’ve agreed to back off.”

“Write me up? Did I break a rule, violate procedure, commit a crime?”

“I don’t know what he’s going to call it, but you’ve been warned, all right?”

“I thought you said this wasn’t official yet.”

“It’s not, Ray. Do you want it to be? Do I have to call you back tomorrow and drag you in here for a meeting and a memo for your file and all that, or can I just smooth everybody’s feathers, tell ’em it was a misunderstanding, you’re cool now, and it won’t happen again?”

Rayford didn’t respond at first.

“C’mon, Ray, this is a no-brainer. I don’t like you having to think about this one.”

“Well, I *will* have to think about it, Earl. I appreciate your tipping me off, but I’m not ready to concede anything just yet.”

“Don’t do this to me, Ray.”

“I’m not doing it to you, Earl. I’m doing it to myself.”

“Yeah, and I’m the one who has to find a replacement pilot certified for the ’forty-seven and the ’seventy-seven.”

“You mean it’s that serious! I could lose my job over this?”

“You bet you could.”

“I’ll still have to think about it.”

“You’ve got it bad, Ray. Listen, in case you come to your senses and we can make this go away, you need to recertify on the ’seventy-seven soon. They’re adding a half dozen more within a month or so, and they’re going to be running them out of here. You want to be on that list. More money, you know.”

“Not that big a deal to me anymore, Earl.”

“I know.”

“But the idea of flying the 777 *is* attractive. I’ll get back to you.”

“Don’t make me wait, Ray.”



“I will get Mr. Bailey on the phone if I can,” Verna said. “But you realize it’s late in New York.”

“He’s always there, you know that. Use his after-hours number or even his cell.”

“I don’t have that.”

“I’ll write it down for you. He’s probably interviewing a replacement for me.”

“I’ll call him, Cameron, and I will even let you have your say, but I am going to speak to him first, and I reserve the right to tell him how insubordinate and disrespectful you’ve been. Please wait outside.”

Alice was gathering up her stuff as if about ready to leave

when Buck emerged with a mischievous look. Others were streaming from the office to the parking lot and the train. "Did you hear all that?" Buck whispered.

"I hear everything," she mouthed. "You know those speakerphones that don't make you wait till the other person is done talking?"

He nodded.

"Well, they don't make it obvious you're listening in, either. You just shut off the transmit button, like this, and then if something happens to hit the speakerphone button, oops, then you can hear a conversation without being heard."

From the speakerphone on her desk came the sound of the phone ringing in New York.

"Stanton. Who's this?"

"Um, sir, sorry to bother you at this hour—"

"You got the number; you must have something important. Now who is this?"

"Verna Zee in Chicago."

"Yeah, Verna, what's happening?"

"I've got a situation here. Cameron Williams."

"Yeah, I was going to tell you to just stay out of his hair. He's working on a couple of big pieces for me. You got a nice spot there he can work in, or should we just let him work out of his apartment?"

"We have a place for him here, sir, but he was rude and insubordinate to me today and—"

"Listen, Verna, I don't want you to have to worry about Williams. He's been put out to pasture for something I can't

figure out, but let's face it, he's still our star here and he's going to be doing pretty much the same thing he's been doing. He gets less money and a less prestigious title, and he doesn't get to work in New York, but he's going to get his assignments from here. You just don't worry yourself about him, all right? In fact, I think it would be better for you and for him if he *didn't* work out of that office."

"But, sir—"

"Something else, Verna?"

"Well, I wish you had let me know this in advance. I need you to back me on this. He was inappropriate with me, and—"

"What do you mean? He came on to you, made a pass at you, what?"

Buck and Alice pressed their hands over their mouths to keep from bursting with laughter. "No, sir, but he made it clear he is not going to be subordinate to me."

"Well, I'm sorry about that, Verna, but he's not, OK? I'm not going to waste Cameron Williams on regional stuff, not that we don't appreciate every inch of copy that comes out of your shop, understand."

"But, sir—"

"I'm sorry, Verna, is there more? Am I not being clear, or what's the problem? Just tell him to order his equipment, charge it to the Chicago account, and work directly for us here. Got that?"

"But shouldn't he apolog—"

"Verna, do you really need me to mediate some personality

conflict from a thousand miles away? If you can't handle that job there . . .”

“I can, sir, and I will. Thank you, sir. Sorry to trouble you.”

The intercom buzzed. “Alice, send him in.”

“Yes, ma'am, and then may I—”

“Yes, you may go.”

Buck sensed Alice taking her time gathering her belongings, however, staying within earshot. He strode into the office as if he expected to talk on the phone with Stanton Bailey.

“He doesn't need to talk with you. He made it clear that I'm not expected to put up with your shenanigans. I'm assigning you to work from your apartment.”

Buck wanted to say that he was going to find it hard to pass up the digs she had prepared for him, but he was already feeling guilty about having eavesdropped on her conversation. This was something new. Guilt.

“I'll try to stay out of your way,” he said.

“I'd appreciate that.”

When he reached the parking lot, Alice was waiting. “That was great,” she said.

“You ought to be ashamed of yourself.” He smiled broadly.

“You listened too.”

“That I did. See ya.”

“I'm going to miss the six-thirty train,” she said. “But it was worth it.”

“How about if I drop you off? Show me where it is.”

Alice waited while he unlocked the car door. "Nice car."
"Brand-new," he answered. And that was just how he felt.



Rayford and Chloe arrived at New Hope early. Bruce was there, finishing a sandwich he had ordered. He looked older than his early thirties. After greeting them, he pushed his wire rims up into his curly locks and tilted back in his squeaky chair. "You get hold of Buck?" he asked.

"Said he'd be here," Rayford said. "What's the emergency?"

"You hear the news today?"

"Thought I did. Something significant?"

"I think so. Let's wait for Buck."

"Then let me tell you in the meantime how I got in trouble today," Rayford said.

When he finished, Bruce was smiling. "Bet that's never been in your personnel file before."

Rayford shook his head and changed the subject. "It seems so strange to have Buck as part of the inner core, especially when he's so new to this."

"We're all new to it, aren't we?" Chloe said.

"True enough."

Bruce looked up and smiled. Rayford and Chloe turned to see Buck in the doorway.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



JERRY B. JENKINS, former vice president for publishing at Moody Bible Institute of Chicago and currently chairman of the board of trustees, is the author of more than 175 books, including the best-selling *Left Behind* series. Twenty of his books have reached the *New York Times* Best Sellers List (seven in the number-one spot) and have also appeared on the *USA Today*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *Wall Street Journal* best-seller lists. *Desecration*, book nine in the *Left Behind* series, was the best-selling book in the world in 2001. His books have sold nearly 70 million copies.

Also the former editor of *Moody* magazine, his writing has appeared in *Time*, *Reader's Digest*, *Parade*, *Guideposts*, *Christianity Today*, and dozens of other periodicals. He was featured on the cover of *Newsweek* magazine in 2004.

His nonfiction books include as-told-to biographies with Hank Aaron, Bill Gaither, Orel Hershiser, Luis Palau, Joe Gibbs, Walter Payton, and Nolan Ryan among many others. The Hershiser and Ryan books reached the *New York Times* Best Sellers List.

Jenkins assisted Dr. Billy Graham with his autobiography, *Just As I Am*, also a *New York Times* best seller. Jerry spent 13 months working with Dr. Graham, which he considers the privilege of a lifetime.

Jerry owns Jenkins Entertainment, a filmmaking company in Los Angeles, which produced the critically acclaimed movie *Midnight Clear*, based on his book of the same name. See www.Jenkins-Entertainment.com.

Jerry Jenkins also owns the Christian Writers Guild, which aims to train tomorrow's professional Christian writers. Under Jerry's leadership, the guild has expanded to include college-credit courses, a critique service, literary registration services, and writing contests, as well as an annual conference. See www.ChristianWritersGuild.com.

As a marriage-and-family author, Jerry has been a frequent guest on Dr. James Dobson's *Focus on the Family* radio program and is a sought-after speaker and humorist. See www.AmbassadorSpeakers.com.

Jerry has been awarded four honorary doctorates.

He and his wife, Dianna, have three grown sons and six grandchildren.

Check out Jerry's blog at <http://jerryjenkins.blogspot.com>.

DR. TIM LAHAYE (www.timlahaye.com), who conceived and created 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 PreTrib Research Center.



Dr. LaHaye speaks at many of the major Bible prophecy conferences in the U.S. and Canada, where his prophecy books are very popular.

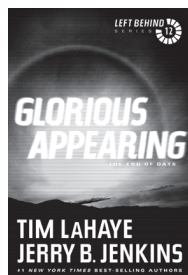
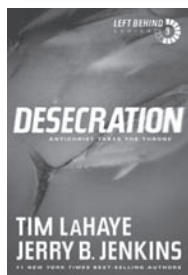
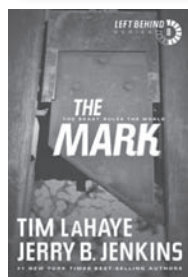
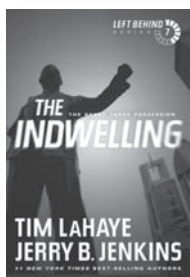
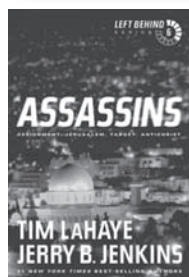
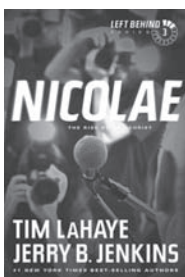
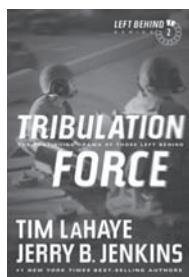
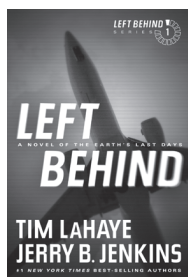
Dr. LaHaye earned a doctor of ministry degree from Western Theological Seminary and received an honorary doctor of literature degree from Liberty University. For 25 years he pastored one of the nation's outstanding churches in San Diego, which grew to three locations. During that time he founded two accredited Christian high schools, a Christian school system of ten schools, and San Diego Christian College (formerly known as Christian Heritage College).

There are over 59 million copies of Dr. LaHaye's 50 nonfiction books, some of which have been published in over 37 languages. He has written books on a wide variety of subjects, such as family life, temperaments, and Bible prophecy. His fiction works include, the Left Behind series

and the Jesus chronicles, written with Jerry B. Jenkins. LaHaye's other fiction series of prophetic novels consist of the Babylon Rising series and The End series. Dr. LaHaye is the father of four grown children, grandfather of nine, and great-grandfather of eleven.

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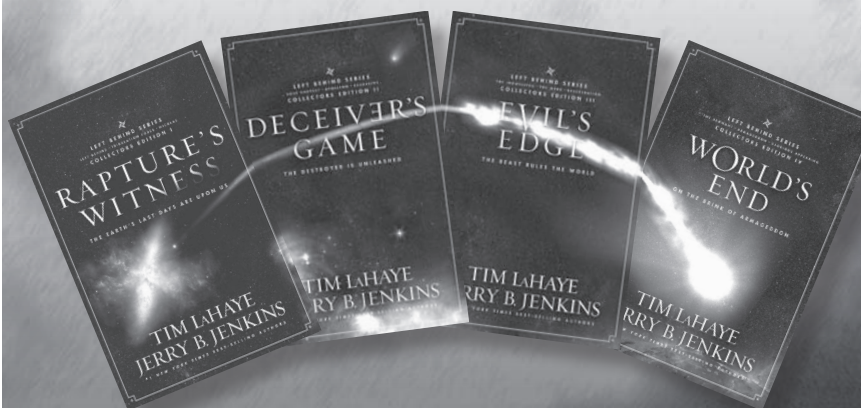
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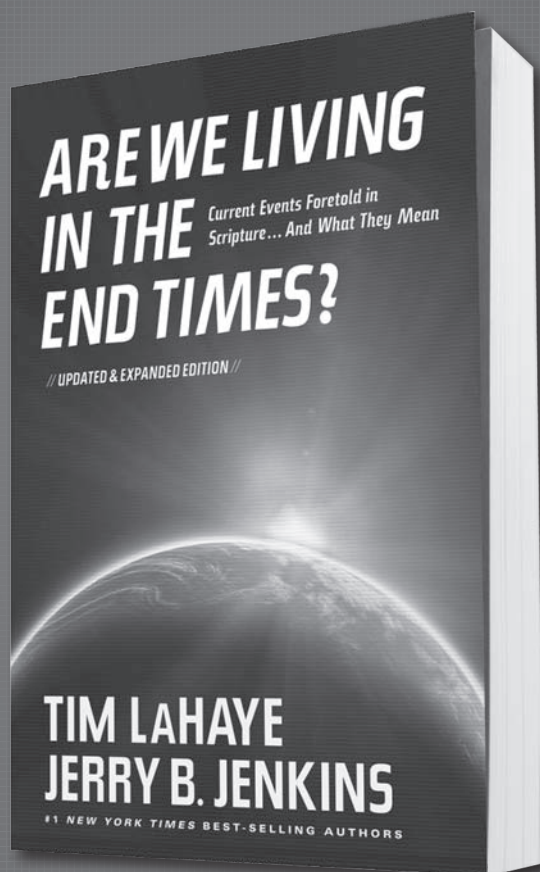
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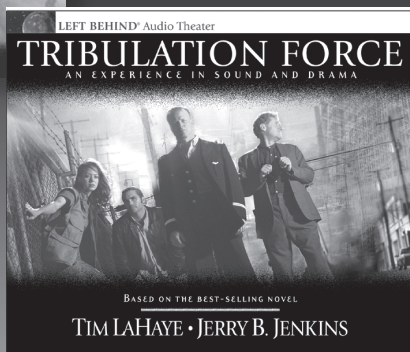
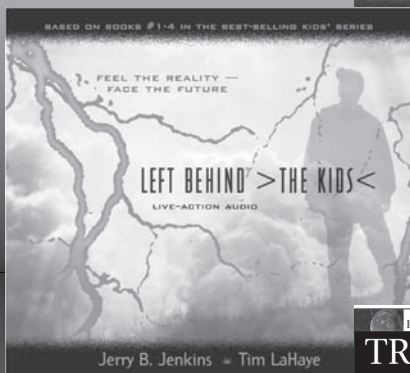
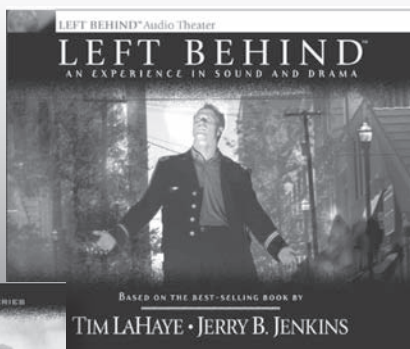
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