

# One taken and the other left

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## Bible Version

Scripture quotations are taken from the Berean Standard Bible.

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(Note: All underlining of Scripture quotations for emphasis has been added by the author.)

## Introduction

Matthew 24:39-41:

<sup>39</sup> *And they were oblivious, until the flood came and swept them all away. So will it be at the coming of the Son of Man.*

<sup>40</sup> *Two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left.*

<sup>41</sup> *Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left.*

The famous *Left Behind* book series has misled many Christians, and many non-Christians too.

Their ludicrous plots are based on the premillennialist interpretation of Bible prophecy involving the Rapture, the rise of the Antichrist and the Tribulation, Christ's return, his millennial kingdom, and so forth.

In this article we will examine what is foundational to the series: the notion that most people will be "left behind" when the Rapture occurs.

Paul's teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4:17 is arbitrarily co-joined by premillennialists to what Jesus says in the gospel of Matthew (cited above), where one person is taken and the other left.

Supposedly, millions of Christians will suddenly disappear from planet Earth, leaving behind others to face the Tribulation under the Antichrist.

## Who are taken?

The major error promoted by the *Left Behind* series is that it is Christians who are taken away.

But Jesus has it the other way around: the wicked are the ones removed.

Matthew 24:39 clearly states that in the Flood it was the wicked who were swept or taken away and removed.

Yes, the Greek verb used in 24:39 differs from that in 24:40-41, but the concept is the same: the wicked are the ones removed, leaving the righteous behind.<sup>1</sup>

A couple of kingdom-themed parables, both found in [Matthew 13](#), support this interpretation:

The Parable of the Weeds (in 13:24-30, 36-43), and the Parable of the Net (in 13:47-50).

In both parables, the bad are the ones who are removed and incinerated.

And the righteous are the ones who remain to inhabit God's kingdom (13:43):

*"Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father."*

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<sup>1</sup> The Greek verb in 24:39 is *ēren*, from *airō* (Strong's G142), meaning "to lift, take up, raise, remove, carry away". Literally: "until came the flood and took away (*ēren*) all."

With all of this to transpire “at the end of the age” (Mt 13:40, 49; cf. 24:3).<sup>2</sup>

The separation and expunging of the wicked can be related to other judgment scenes as well:

- the wicked servant who wasn't expecting his master's return (Mt 24:45-51).
- the foolish virgins who didn't take sufficient oil (Mt 25:1-13).
- the lazy servant who buried his master's talent (Mt 25:14-30).
- the “goats” that are separated from the sheep (Mt 25:32-33).

## Taken where?

Where are the wicked taken to?

The parallel account in Luke 17:34-37 shows the disciples asking this very question.

And Jesus replies (17:37): “Wherever there is a carcass, there the vultures will gather.”

Here are what three commentators understand Jesus to be saying here:

John Gill (1697-1771):

... the words are an answer to a question, where such persons would be, who would be taken and destroyed, when others would be left, or preserved; and manifestly refer to the body, or carcass of the Jewish people at Jerusalem, ... the Roman armies gathering about them, and seizing them as their prey.<sup>3</sup>

Johann Bengel (1687-1752):

τὸ σῶμα, *the body*: The whole Jewish nation, assembled at Jerusalem on the feast of Passover.  
οἱ ἄετοι, *the eagles*: The Romans.<sup>4</sup>

Albert Barnes (1798-1870):

Eagles flock where there is prey. ... [to] Jerusalem, the place of eminent wickedness.<sup>5</sup>

Jerusalem is the place where the wicked would be gathered for judgment.

Jesus is of course anticipating the Jewish War of 66-70 AD, with its culmination in the Roman siege and destruction of Jerusalem itself.

As the Roman army advanced and took one town and village after another, many Jews (including the Zealot rebels) sought refuge in Jerusalem.

Indeed, even as the Roman army was surrounding Jerusalem (14 April, 70 AD), many thousands of Jews from foreign lands who had come to celebrate the Passover were permitted to enter, but not to leave the city.

They were trapped!

Josephus reports that 1,100,000 people perished during the five-month siege.

In contrast, believing Jews (having been divinely forewarned) had earlier fled to the safety of the Transjordan mountains near Pella. So far as is known, not a single Christian perished in that judgment.

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<sup>2</sup> The Jews divided history into two eras: *this age* (= the pre-messianic age), and *the age to come* (= the messianic or kingdom age).

<sup>3</sup> From Gill's *Exposition of the Bible*, notes for Luke 17. Via the Bible Hub website:  
<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/gill/luke/17.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> From Bengel's *Gnomon of the New Testament*, notes for Luke 17. Via the Bible Hub website:  
<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/bengel/luke/17.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> From Barnes' *Notes on the Whole Bible*, notes for Luke 17. Via the Bible Hub website:  
<https://biblehub.com/commentaries/barnes/luke/17.htm>.