

The Meaning of Being Taken and Left at the Return of Christ

By Robert I. Adams

In Matthew 24:40 & 41, we read about people who are "taken" and "left" when Jesus returns: "Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left."

To discern rightly the meaning of these two words we have to be aware of the context of what Jesus is saying. Earlier in the chapter, He told about the "great tribulation" (v.21). Then He told about His return "with power and great glory" in verse 30. When we read about being "taken" and "left" in verses 40 and 41, this tells us Jesus is referring to what will take place at His return, which He has just said will happen after the great tribulation.

We find the meaning of the words "taken" and "left" in Luke 17:33 & 34, where Jesus used these phrases with an introductory explanation. He said, "Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it. I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left." From this, it is apparent that one of these phrases means to lose one's life, and the other means to preserve one's life in the sense of staying alive. Here in Luke 17 as well as in Matthew 24, Jesus connects the phrases He uses to the account of the flood in Genesis when most people lost their lives and only a few remained alive. In the verse just prior to the passage in Matthew 24 we are looking at, Jesus spoke of those who "did not know until the flood came and took them all away," and continued by saying, "So also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (Matt. 24:39; cf. Luke 17:26, 27). Jesus is comparing what happened at the flood at the time of Noah with what will happen when He comes after the great tribulation. It is in this context Jesus spoke of being "taken" and "left." This means those who were present at the time of the flood illustrate those who are "taken" and "left" at the return of Christ after the great tribulation. On the one side were the ungodly who lost their lives, and on the other, Noah and his family who remained alive.

The question is, which term denotes which group. The answer can be derived from the continuation of Luke 17. In verses 34–36, Jesus said, "I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one will be taken and the other will be left. Two women will be grinding together: the one will be taken and the other left. Two men will be in the field: the one will be taken and the other left." At this, the disciples asked Jesus a question. Verse 37 reads, "And they answered and said to Him, 'Where, Lord?'" The disciples evidently asked Jesus about those who are "taken" because they were obviously not asking about the ones who were "left" in the bed, at the grinding mill, and in the field. Notice the answer Jesus gave: "Wherever the body is, there the eagles will be gathered together." This is the same as what Jesus says in Matthew 24:28: "For wherever the carcass is, there the eagles will be gathered together." (The Greek word translated "eagles" is rendered "vultures" in many translations since it includes vultures in the animal class of eagles.) Here, Jesus may very well be referring to Proverbs 30:17, which speaks of birds of prey that eat the corpses of the ungodly. Thus, we see that being "taken" is directly related to the mention of a dead body attracting birds of prey. In other words, it speaks of losing one's life.

The word "taken" is *paralambano* in Greek. Let's look at some examples of how this word is used in the book of Matthew: "When he [Joseph] arose, he *took* the young Child and His mother by night and departed for Egypt" (2:14); "Then the devil *took* Him [Jesus] up into the holy city" (4:5); "Then he [the unclean spirit] goes and *takes* with him seven other spirits more wicked than himself, and they enter and dwell there" (12:45); "Now Jesus, going up to Jerusalem, *took* the twelve disciples aside on the road" (20:17); "Then the soldiers of the governor *took* Jesus into the Praetorium" (27:27). These examples tell us the word *paralambano* is used in the sense of escorting, whether it be Jesus, Joseph, an unclean spirit, the devil, or soldiers who do it. Since the use of the word *paralambano* includes unpleasant circumstances, Jesus seems to be comparing those who will be "taken" in Matthew 24:40 with those whom "the flood came and *took*" (v.39). Apparently, the ungodly in the end time will be escorted away and perish at the return of Christ. The taking of the ungodly at this time appears to be the subject of what Jesus says in Matthew 13, where He states concerning "the end of this age" (v.40): "The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness" (v.41). Thus, at the return of Christ, the ungodly will be "taken" by Christ's angels, and they will lose their lives.

Since the word "taken" has a negative connotation, then the word "left" would denote something positive. When Jesus in Matthew 24 uses Noah and his family to illustrate those who will remain alive when judgment comes at His return, it is worth noticing that in the flood account in Genesis 7, it says in verse 23, "Only Noah was *left*, together with those that were with him in the ark." Noah and his family were those who remained alive at the time of the flood, and this shows that the word "left" as used in this setting is a positive term. We should also note that Jesus did not say 'left behind,' which conjures up a different meaning altogether.

That being "taken" means to lose one's life, and being "left" means to preserve one's life, is also apparent when we look at the sentence structure in Luke 17:33 & 34: "Whoever seeks to save his life *will lose it* [A], and whoever loses his life *will preserve it* [B]. I tell you, in that night there will be two men in one bed: the one *will be taken* [A] and the other *will be left* [B]."

Based on the above, we see that the terms "taken" and "left" that Jesus used refer to those who lose their lives and those who remain alive when He comes after the great tribulation. Among those who remain alive will be the believers who will then be caught up to meet the Lord in the air as He is descending to earth (cf. 1 Thess. 4:17). Apparently, also many non-believers who have not received the mark of the beast (cf. Rev. 14:9, 10) will remain alive when Jesus comes back. At this time when Jesus sets up His kingdom on earth, the resurrected and glorified believers will reign over these mortals (cf. Rev. 2:26-27).

What you have just read is the answer to one of many questions about the Bible's teaching on the return of Jesus that are in my book/e-book "The Approaching Apocalypse". You are welcome to look at it at [Amazon](#). You are also welcome to view my book/e-book "The Unveiling", which is all about the book of Revelation - also available at [Amazon](#).

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