



LEFT AHEAD

A RADICALLY NEW VIEW OF THE RAPTURE

BY

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Edition 1

Foreword

What if traditional views of the biblical Rapture were completely backwards? Not just the controversy over WHEN the Rapture will occur. That may be a never-ending debate. But what if it were completely misunderstood about who gets raptured? What if the famous verse in Matthew 24 about two men standing in a field, was upside-down? What if it was the wicked who got "taken"? What if it was the righteous who were "left behind"?

Author Michael O'Brien makes a fascinating, hard-to-refute case for this future event.

Excerpt from C. S. Lewis' essay, "The World's Last Night"

"Sometimes this question [of the Second Coming] has been pressed upon our minds with the purpose of exciting fear. I do not think that is its right use. I am, indeed, far from agreeing with those who think all religious fear barbarous and degrading and demand that it should be banished from the spiritual life. Perfect love, we know, casteth out fear. But so do several other things—ignorance, alcohol, passion, presumption, and stupidity. It is very desirable that we should all advance to that perfection of love in which we shall fear no longer; but it is very undesirable, until we have reached that stage, that we should allow any inferior agent to cast out our fear. The objection to any attempt at perpetual trepidation about the Second Coming is, in my view, quite a different one: namely, that it will certainly not succeed. Fear is an emotion: and it is quite impossible—even physically impossible—to maintain any emotion for very long. A perpetual excitement of hope about the Second Coming is impossible for the same reason. Crisis-feeling of any sort is essentially transitory. Feelings come and go, and when they come a good use can be made of them: they cannot be our regular spiritual diet.

What is important is not that we should always fear (or hope) about the End but that we should always remember, always take it into account. "

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Several years ago I hungrily devoured the *Left Behind* series by Jenkins and LaHaye. Wow. Great books. Great series. Good job, guys. Immensely entertaining. Good plausible fiction. I suspect these books got people to re-visit the events in Revelation maybe even more than pastoral sermons in recent years. They did for me. These books are particularly intriguing because they “make me think”.

I am no theologian. But I am a believer, and was taught early on to filter everything I read through the lens of scripture. So I spent some time rethinking these novels with that in mind.

The first thing I pondered was, hey, are these stories scriptural? At first glance, I think, pretty much, yes. Sure, there was some artistic license taken on how end time events may occur. Some details were embellished or imagined. I think they did a fantastic job of presenting plausible details to the mystery of eschatology.

But ... (yeah, there's always a but), a funny thing happened on my way to re-rethinking all this end times stuff. It led me to review some basic end times assumptions. That is, I searched the scriptures for answers, and during that process my theology got dumped on the floor, and turned upside down. Well, a little of it. Oh, nothing major that affects my salvation. Nevertheless, I had to pretty much restructure some of the details and timing of end times things because of something shockingly obvious that I discovered in scripture.

Follow me along on a little quest for truth and see if you concur...

I remember my first day of eighth grade English grammar. The teacher wanted to show the importance of grammar. She knew many students thought grammar was boring or unnecessary. A quick object lesson displayed to us the

critical principles of communication. To illustrate this, she wrote seven words on the board, like this:

Johnny said the teacher is a fool.

She asked us to read it carefully in our mind. Then she proceeded to write it two more times, each with different punctuation, like this:

“Johnny”, said the teacher, “is a fool”.

Johnny said, “The teacher is a fool”.

There were oohs and ahhs as various students realized that things are not always how they seem. Her point was made well. My point, however, is not the same as hers. This isn't about punctuation or grammar.

My point is that sometimes something appears so simple and obvious that we don't realize another perspective could fit, maybe even one completely reversed.

What if there was a popular doctrine of scripture like that? A view opposite to popular interpretation? I am going to propose such a thing...

Don't think I disbelieve the infallibility of scripture. I'm a biblical literalist, and would never suggest the Bible is wrong or mis-translated, cult versions excepted. Any major recognized version of the Bible is profitable as it says in 2Timothy. But admittedly there are many difficult passages. Some we may never be sure of exactly what God intended till we ask Him someday. Others, such as in Daniel or Revelation, may be fuzzy now, but will be revealed in the end times, as scripture promises.

Let's look at one particular doctrine that is extremely popular, and talked about at length... the "Rapture". The word literally means, "to snatch up or snatch away". It is generally believed to be the raising of those who are alive into the air at the coming of Christ for His saints. The word rapture itself never appears in scripture but the event is described in several places.

There is much discussion and controversy about the Rapture. The *Left Behind* series has renewed interest in it. These books have fascinated even the secular world book with their view of the Rapture. What an amazing concept; very Sci-Fi-ish. Millions of people simply vanishing "in the twinkling of an eye" as the Bible suggests. These books may end up being the most widely selling Christian fiction of all time.

There are basically four positions on the Rapture. First, some say there is no Rapture. This is the minority in the Christian community. On the other hand, for those who acknowledge that it is truly a future event, there are three positions which only differ about when it will occur. Most say the rapture of the believers will occur pre-Tribulation, some mid-Tribulation, and others post-Tribulation - the Tribulation being the seven-year period where the Anti-Christ rises in power to dominate the world system, and persecute Christians.

That being said, I will contend here that none of the above are true. I contend that the "Rapture" will happen, but **it will not be the righteous who will be raptured. Instead it will be the wicked who will be snatched away in a moment in time** (but not to Heaven of course).

Preposterous, you say? Hmm, maybe. But what follows I believe will be a strong case that may be difficult to refute, or at least to explain.

By the way, if I'm wrong, your faith should not be affected since this subject is not core to the Gospel's salvation message.

The conclusions arrived at are based on an exhaustive word study that starts with the two words used in the discourse in Mt 24 and Luke 17, parallel passages quoted often to support the rapture. The two words are "taken" and "left". That is, "One man will be taken; the other left". In Matthew 24, God repeats this "taken/left" event twice. Then in the same story in Luke, God says it three times in succession. These two words are, of course, opposites. Also note we will find other pairs of synonyms for these words mentioned in many other places, such as vanish/remain or remove/stay. By finding all the references to these pairs of opposite words that appear together in particular verses, and noting who is taken, who is removed, who remains, who is left, etc., I contend it will be obvious how to answer the question, "Who really gets raptured?"

All quotes following are from the NASB Bible, unless otherwise noted.

The word study I did resulted in this two-column chart, which you can refer back to as we search the scriptures. It shows the "taken / left" pairs, in two

columns. The action verbs that go with “taken” are column one, and the ones that go with “left” in the other. Every verse we will look at has one or both of the action verb pairs.

So remember if some people are “raptured” (taken or snatched), then logic dictates that some are not. That is, they are "left behind".

Here are the five pairs of almost identical action pairs that can be found in various places in both Old and New Testament:

People "snatched up" verbs		People "not snatched up" verbs
-----		-----
taken	vs	left
removed	vs	remain
cut off	vs	stay
vanish (literally, "go up")	vs	dwell
gather out	vs	inherit the land

Now before we go on I will mention separately another very important "taken" verb . . . "caught up" (literally "caught up in the air") that appears in one key verse in 1 Thessalonians, and in the same verse there is no opposite action verb to indicate some people were "not caught up". I believe this one variation on the "taken" action is unique and may have extreme significance later, so remember this "caught up" verb.

As we continue, note there is a consistent pattern in scripture of these above opposite actions. They are often both mentioned in the same verse, such as “two men will be in the field. One will be *taken*, the other *left*” (Lk 17:34). In some verses only one action is mentioned. Almost always it is very apparent who the action applies to, either someone wicked or someone righteous, someone bad or someone good. However occasionally, very occasionally, it is not clear whom the action is for. Since Scripture will not contradict Scripture, a steadfast principle for our interpretation is to interpret the less clear passages in light of the passages with greater clarity. Let’s begin.

Here following are the primary passages we will work with. Especially note the underlined portions. Matthew records this:

Mt 24:37-41

³⁷ *"For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah.*

³⁸ *"For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,*

³⁹ *and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.*

⁴⁰ *"Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left.*

⁴¹ *"Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left.*

Okay here's our first and probably strongest evidence to support the rapture of the wicked. Take your pencil. Circle the word "took" in v39. Now circle each of the words "taken" in v40 and 41. I suggest you draw a line connecting "took" with "taken". They are the exact same verb, just a different tense.

It says in v37 it will be "just like the days of Noah". Not "sort of" like. Not approximately like. It says "just like". If so, in the days of Noah, who was "took"?, (pardon my grammar). Obviously the wicked were taken away in the flood.

(By the way, as a side note, if you don't think it's obvious that the wicked were taken in the days of a Noah, we will see in a moment that Luke, in his version, clarifies who exactly it was in the "took them all away" phrase).

These verses in Matthew and Luke have traditionally always been key to supporting the rapture of the believers theory. But why? There is no overt indication here who is taken and who is left. That is, it never just says outright the wicked or the righteous. But I contend it certainly seems if you correlate the took/taken actions, then the obvious implication is that the wicked are taken. Else, then it is not really "just like the days of Noah". Not convinced yet? Well hold on. We've barely started.

We're in luck because Luke records the exact same discourse in Chapter 17. It is recorded almost identically, except for one additional verse. One of the alert Apostles asks Jesus, "Where did they go?" Aha. The answer to that question may

tell us who got taken, the righteous or the wicked. Let's read Luke's version and see if that helps.

Lu 17:26-37

²⁶ *"And just as it happened in the days of Noah, so it will be also in the days of the Son of Man:*

²⁷ *they were eating, they were drinking, they were marrying, they were being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all.*

²⁸ *"It was the same as happened in the days of Lot: they were eating, they were drinking, they were buying, they were selling, they were planting, they were building;*

²⁹ *but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all.*

³⁰ *"It will be just the same on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.*

³¹ *"On that day, the one who is on the housetop and whose goods are in the house must not go down to take them out; and likewise the one who is in the field must not turn back.*

³² *" Remember Lot's wife.*

³³ *" Whoever seeks to keep his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.*

³⁴ *"I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other will be left.*

³⁵ *" There will be two women grinding at the same place; one will be taken and the other will be left.*

³⁶ *Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other will be left."*

³⁷ *And answering they said to Him, "Where, Lord?"*

Now before we examine that last verse that asks the important "Where did they go?" question, first lets get out of the way a common objection that some may point out.

Go back to Matthew in v38 and notice that it says "they were eating and drinking, they were marrying, etc". Next verse 39 says the flood took "them" all away. Some have asserted that it maybe it was Noah's family that was eating,

drinking, marrying because then when it says “took them away”, it supports their position better that the righteous are raptured. In other words, some try to get it to work by saying it might mean that God “took Noah and his family away in the ark”. Uh-uh. Luke makes that position impossible in v27. Notice the “they” he is referring to, is cleared up because in the same sentence Luke ends it by saying that God “destroyed them all”, instead of “took them all away”. Obviously no one could assert that the “they” was Noah’s family. Instead it must be concluded “they” are the wicked.

Now go back up where we left off in Luke v36, where it says, “Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other will be left.”

If Luke left it there, we wouldn’t be much better off then in Matthew.

But we are in luck. As I mentioned, in the next verse, an astute apostle asks for further clarification. He asks where “they” went. The answer to that question should further confirm or contradict who got raptured. Here’s how the question is phrased:

³⁷ *And answering they said to Him, "Where, Lord?"*

Wow. Great. The answer Jesus is about to give will surely tell us “Who got raptured?” The verse continues in v37 where Jesus responds...

And He said to them, "Where the body is, there also the vultures will be gathered."

Now Jesus answered the question, but this is not the answer one would expect. My first reaction when I read this was “Well, what does THAT mean?” Truly a mysterious answer. Let’s do a little research to see if this concept of bodies and vultures appears elsewhere. It does, both in Matthew and the Old Testament. If we go back to Matthew we find it earlier in the same chapter 24 where the taken/left dilemma started.

Mt 24:27-28

²⁷ *"For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be.*

²⁸ *"Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.*

This at first doesn't seem to help, since it simply repeats this same thought. Yet you will notice a subtle difference that does enormously help a major objection. Note that Luke said "bodies", but Matthew further clarifies by saying "corpse", that is, dead bodies. Why is this significant? Because I have had several people point out that in these verses the KJV version says eagles, instead of vultures. Apparently the translation can accept either. (Both birds are from the same family zoologically, by the way). Their objection was that maybe this event was a beautiful thing, because the eagle is often portrayed as a noble bird, at least in our Western culture. So maybe Jesus is referring to angels as majestic as eagles gathering around the believers after they were taken. Okay, possible. But think about it. The word corpse is used, as just noted. It is very unlikely that Jesus would be trying to convey a beautiful picture by using the parallel of eagles and corpses. A corpse is dead. A raptured body would be gloriously alive. Even so, let's leave that for a moment, and check one last similar reference to vultures/eagles in the O.T., to see if that helps us clarify this scripture. Here God speaks to Job about eagles and bodies.

Job 39:30

²⁷ *"Is it at your command that the eagle mounts up
And makes his nest on high?"*

²⁸ *"On the cliff he dwells and lodges,
Upon the rocky crag, an inaccessible place.*

²⁹ *"From there he spies out food;
His eyes see it from afar.*

³⁰ *"His young ones also suck up blood;
And where the slain are, there is he."*

Note the last half verse. Uncannily similar to the two verses in Luke and Matthew, *Wherever the corpse is, there the vultures will gather*", and *"where the body, is the vultures will be gathered"*. God here in Job speaks of spying out food

and sucking up blood. Does it seem likely the answer about vultures and corpses from Jesus would be referring to angels and believers? I think not. I contend the obvious, and Jesus obviously had something in mind when he answered the apostles' question. Jesus was talking about the wicked when he says bodies and corpses.

So what are the vultures alluded to? I suspect they may be demons. For what does it say about Satan's intent on this earth? Peter tells us.

1 Peter 5:8

...the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.

C.S. Lewis, one of the great Christian thinkers of the 20th century, published a sequel to his famous fictional work, *The Screwtape Letters*. It was called "Screwtape Proposes a Toast". It was a tongue-in-cheek humorous yet macabre essay about the senior devil, Screwtape, standing up at the Tempters Training College dinner and giving a pre-toast speech to the junior devils. Much of his speech discusses the "gourmet meal" they are about to eat, such as tasty corrupt politicians with vintage Pharisee wine. This essay was, of course, tongue-in-cheek, and theologically, somewhat bizarre, yet sadly it has that ring of truth if you believe scripture. For let's face it, God says the devil looks for someone to devour. If you believe that the righteous will be taken into God's presence by angels, then who knows what happens to the wicked moments after death. Maybe not a literal "devouring" by Satan, but how about a sort of "consuming" of the wicked one's soul by the demonic realm?

The vultures, gathering around the corpses just "taken", fits very well with the wicked being taken. Otherwise, your alternative is to use a crowbar on the verse to get Jesus' answer to fit the raptured believers' bodies position.

Still want more convincing? Okay. There's a lot more. Don't go away. Let's see what else we may find about that Day of the Lord. Let's go to Matthew, Chapter 13:

Mt 13:24

²⁴ *Jesus presented another parable to them, saying, "The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field.*

²⁵ *"But while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went away.*

²⁶ *"But when the wheat sprouted and bore grain, then the tares became evident also.*

²⁷ *"The slaves of the landowner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?'*

²⁸ *"And he said to them, 'An enemy has done this!' The slaves said to him, 'Do you want us, then, to go and gather them up?'*

²⁹ *"But he said, 'No; for while you are gathering up the tares, you may uproot the wheat with them.*

³⁰ *'Allow both to grow together until the harvest; and in the time of the harvest I will say to the reapers, "**First gather up the tares** and bind them in bundles to burn them up; but gather the wheat into my barn.'"*

The highlighted phrase is important, as we will see in a moment. But first note that this is a parable. Jesus did not always explain parables. But we are once again in luck, because shortly after this parable, his disciples ask for an explanation in v36. It says:

Mt 13:36

³⁶ *... And His disciples came to Him and said, "Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field."*

Here Jesus very clearly accommodates their request and explains it precisely.

Mt 13:37-42

³⁷ *And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man,*

³⁸ *and the field is the world; and as for the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil one;*

³⁹ *and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels.*

⁴⁰ *"So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age.*

⁴¹ *"The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His*

*kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness,
42 and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping
and gnashing of teeth.*

Jesus clearly shows that the tares and wheat parable is about the end of the age. Go back to verse 30. Which gets “taken” first, the tares or the wheat? It says, the tares! The wicked. Remember rapture means “to snatch away”. As a side note, I have always thought that, although the actual word rapture doesn’t appear in scripture, the word has a somewhat violent connotation. It is a quick, harsh action verb. Our word “rape” comes from the same root word as rapture. To “snatch up” weeds seems to fit with the theme better than the pretty picture of gathering the believers up to the Lord. But stay with me. As you will see, I think there will be a pretty picture of “gathering up” the believers unto the Lord. We still have the most difficult verse yet in 1 Thessalonians to figure out.

But back to the reapers, (angels as it says). Let’s look at even another verse that supports the position that it will be the wicked who will be raptured. Let’s jump ahead 7 more verses in Mt 13. This is the parable about the fish caught in the net, and separating the good fish into containers and throwing the bad fish away. It explains this parable of separating all the fish in verse 39:

Mt 13:49

49 "So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous.

God could have said, “take out the righteous from among the wicked”, but He didn’t. It says the opposite. This verse 39 is blatantly supportive of the fact that if there are, for instance, two men in the field, the wicked will be “taken out” first. Remember, Jesus is very specific that the tares will be gathered first. How much clearer could it be?

You’re still not convinced, you say? Whew, you are stubborn. Okay, let’s try the Old Testament. Remember the word chart of taken/left synonyms that I gave you several pages back?

I will quote each of them with brief comments, and let you decide. Watch for the consistent pattern of who gets taken/removed, and who stays/remains. Note

also the constant use of the action phrase “cut off” which always means taken or removed, much like weeds are cut off with a sickle. (Remember the tares?). Also note how many times the concept of “remaining” is mentioned. If one is taken, and the other one is “left”, then of course the one that is left “remains”, or you could say he still “dwells in the land”, another phrase that appears. And of course he “inherits the land” (another phrase that appears) if all the wicked are gone, mightn’t he?

Ps 37:9

*For evil men will be cut off,
but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land.*

If the wicked are taken, those left behind would “inherit the land”, would they not?

Ps 37:22

*For those blessed by Him will inherit the land,
But those cursed by Him will be cut off.*

Same concept again. The wicked taken, the righteous left behind.

Nahum 1:12

*Thus says the LORD,
Though they are at full strength and likewise many,
Even so, they will be cut off and pass away.*

Nahum 1:15

*For never again will the wicked one pass through you;
He is cut off completely.*

Ps 37:34

*Wait for the LORD and keep His way,
And He will exalt you to inherit the land;
When the wicked are cut off, you will see it.*

I think we “will see it”, because if it turns out the righteous are the ones “left behind”, we will obviously watch in wonder as the wicked disappear before our eyes.

Ps 37:28

*For the LORD loves justice
And does not forsake His godly ones;
They are preserved forever,
But the descendants of the wicked will be cut off.*

Same concept again. The wicked are the ones “cut off”.

Ps 119:119

You have removed all the wicked of the earth like dross.

It says “all” the wicked of the earth? Sounds like a mass taking doesn’t it?

Is 29:20

*For the ruthless will come to an end and the scorner will be finished,
Indeed all who are intent on doing evil will be cut off;*

Pr 2

²¹ *For the upright will live in the land
And the blameless will remain in it;*
²² *But the wicked will be cut off from the land
And the treacherous will be uprooted from it.*

What event do you suppose these last 2 verses in Proverbs are referring to? V21 says the blameless will “remain” and that the wicked are “cut off” or “uprooted”. They were “taken”. If this doesn’t refer to the rapture, what moment in history does it refer to?

I hope by this time you are convinced. The O.T. evidence also appears very consistent with the rapture of the wicked. But wait... here’s some more. How about this descriptive passage from the prophet Isaiah?

Is 41

- ¹¹ *"Behold, all those who are angered at you will be shamed and dishonored; Those who contend with you will be as nothing and will perish.*
- ¹² *"You will seek those who quarrel with you, but will not find them, Those who war with you will be as nothing and non-existent.*

Wow. These 2 verses couldn't describe a rapture-type event any clearer. Can there be any question Isaiah refers to the wicked rather than the righteous becoming "as nothing". But we're still not through. There's more.

Pr 10:30

- ³⁰ *The righteous will never be shaken,
But the wicked will not dwell in the land.*

Job 34:20

*"In a moment they die, and at midnight
People are shaken and pass away,
And the mighty are taken away without a hand.*

Hmmm. "In a moment... the mighty are taken away *without a hand*". That is, something happens suddenly and it's not the hand of man that takes them away, but God. Once again it sure does sound like a rapture event, and it's not the righteous being discussed here.

While we're in Job, let's jump ahead to Chapter 36. Here, Elihu is speaking to Job. Elihu is not one of Job's three "friends", who the Lord rebukes for their condemnation of Job. He is a fourth friend who comes along after them.

Job 36:20

- ¹⁷ *"But you were full of judgment on the wicked;
Judgment and justice take hold of you.*
- ¹⁸ *"Beware that wrath does not entice you to scoffing;*

- And do not let the greatness of the ransom turn you aside.*
- ¹⁹ *"Will your riches keep you from distress,
Or all the forces of your strength?"*
- ²⁰ *"Do not long for the night, when people vanish in their place."*

Notice first that he accuses Job of being “full of judgment on the wicked” (rightly or wrongly) in v17, then a couple verses later says, “Do not long for the night, when people **vanish in their place.**” I believe Elihu is speaking prophetically here. He supposes Job is indignant at the wicked. Now for the sake of discussion, this “vanishing” mentioned in v20 could once again mean either the good or the bad people. Which is it? Notice when Elihu tells Job “Do not long for the night when people vanish” (v20) it is likely that he is telling Job to not be so quick to want to see the wicked judged, since that’s what he just said in v17. If you assume Elihu meant the righteous, it doesn’t fit well at all with his monologue to Job.

The Old Testament is unbelievably consistent with the New Testament. As you saw, when God uses the “taken” action over and over, it seems to always be in reference to the wicked, NOT THE RIGHTEOUS.

Another affirmation that summarizes all this "taking", Jesus himself says in John 15:2 :

"Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away."

Many years ago, C. S. Lewis published an essay called "The World's Last Night". An excerpt was quoted at the beginning of this book. It is surely intriguing that life has been continuing uninterrupted for thousands of years, through thousands of generations. People die, people are born. The sun rises, the sun sets, and there appears no end in sight. Yet surely there will be an end. One of the most startling, even frightening, phrases in Scripture pops up every so often to remind us to be alert- "The Day of the Lord". It appeared in one of the verses we discussed a while back. As we begin to wrap up, let's look at that phrase in another important verse. Let's look at another event that will happen on that all important day, on that "world's last night".

1Th 5:2-3

² *For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night.*

³ *While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like labor pains upon a woman with child, and they will not escape.*

Few would disagree that the "Day of the Lord" always refers to the final day of the seven-year Tribulation, the Second Coming of Christ. (Else we would need a Third Coming if you place it earlier). So here in these two verses we must be reading about that last day. It is also very clear these two verses are talking about destroying the un-righteous. Notice especially the part about their destruction coming "suddenly". Again this is in line with a quick "snatching away". Also the comings of a thief. What does he do? He quickly "snatches up" things. The target of the thief here in this verse is the wicked, and the timing is sudden, both issues supportive of the "rapture" (quick snatching) of the un-righteous. And remember we discussed the parable of the tares and the wheat? The tares get taken first. It also interestingly says they are saying to themselves "Peace and safety". How odd. Would it be likely they would be saying that if they had witnessed millions of people vanishing previously? Whether you believe the righteous are taken first or not, you still would probably agree that if many had been taken suddenly, whomever was still here sure witnessed a terrifying, mysterious thing. The Left Behind book (and movie) at least portrayed that concept of panic accurately. That is, fear would surely be heightened. It is unlikely people would all be thinking "Peace and Safety". So in these verses it seems like on this "last day" the wicked are complacent. It is unlikely they have previously witnessed the mysterious vanishing of millions on earth. (Sorry again, Tim LaHaye).

So to summarize what we learned in 1 Th 5:2-3 . . . suddenly the wicked are taken (and destroyed). None escape. But if there has been no previous rapture of the saints, and the wicked are now taken and destroyed (probably physically), then we must conclude that at the moment verse 3 ends, we have a world full of the righteous only, probably standing (or kneeling), and staring to the heavens, where they observe the return of the king.

After reading the myriad of references to being taken and being left (remaining), you now might want to go back to Matthew 24 and read the event of the two men in the field, and the two women at the mill, one more time:

Mt 24:37-41

³⁷ *"For the coming of the Son of Man will be just like the days of Noah.*

³⁸ *"For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark,*

³⁹ *and they did not understand until the flood came and took them all away; so will the coming of the Son of Man be.*

⁴⁰ *"Then there will be two men in the field; one will be taken and one will be left.*

⁴¹ *"Two women will be grinding at the mill; one will be taken and one will be left.*

Your heart may be quickened as you re-read it, as it now should fit this new premise. All the puzzle pieces seem to fall perfectly into line to support the “rapture” of the wicked.

Well, ...almost all. If you are a student of eschatology, you have noticed I have not mentioned probably the number one scripture quoted to support today’s’ popular position of the rapture of the believers - 1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

I did this on purpose because I think this entire discussion works better if you consider this passage last.

Let’s read the passage:

1Th 4:15-17

¹⁵ *For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we, who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.*

¹⁶ *For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.*

¹⁷ *Then we who are alive and remain will be **caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air**, and so we shall always be with the Lord.*

Verse 17 is the key one but I began at verse 15 to get a running start so you will notice that once again the “remain” verb is there. And once again it supports the contention that it is the righteous who remain. Also, do you realize that if in v15 Paul says “we who are alive and remain”, then the word “remain” implies something important. That is, it implies that previous to this moment somebody has already left the scene. I once again think the wicked are gone by this point.

That is, the Rapture of the Wicked has already occurred, possibly just a moment ago.

Okay so far, but now jump to verse 17. Read the key phrase in bold type ***“caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.”***

Here in this verse we have the core of the popular believers-will-be-raptured doctrine. At first glance it seems to clearly contradict the plethora of scriptures so far that we have just explored to support the rapture of the wicked. But not so, as you will see.

There’s no denying this phrase means exactly what it says. Believers will rise to meet Jesus in the air. It’s clear. I love it. I don’t deny it. I would hope to be one of them. But I don’t think we should call it Rapture ... yet. Notice this is a new action phrase we haven’t seen before... “caught up”. Maybe vaguely akin to “taken” or “removed” or “cut off”, but notice how it’s a gentler kind of verb. It doesn’t suggest the rapacious, quick, snatching of someone.

So how do we reconcile all this?

It may be simpler than you may think. I contend there are two events, the taking of the wicked, followed by the “catching up in the air” of the believers. They happen just as explained, and likely very close to the same time. Much like the two events of the harvest . . . removing the tares followed by immediately removing the wheat. If you haven’t guessed it, yes, I am saying I believe in “two” raptures, so to speak, though I cringe at using the same word for both events for the wicked and then believers.

Everything seems to point to the fact that on the Day of the Lord, the wicked will be snatched up first, violently and quickly- taken away for judgment ... a “rapture”, if you will. (Probably at a time when persecution of believers is at a high.) That leaves the righteous “left behind”. (Sorry, Tim LaHaye). They are suddenly rescued from their persecution. The trumpet sounds, the Lord appears in the sky just as he departed, and calls to the (probably bewildered) righteous who are caught up with Him in the air.

After examining all the scriptures, this conjecture seems to fit perfectly with ALL passages. I, as yet, can find few anomalies. There is startlingly few verses anywhere about any righteous person being “taken”. Although the very unique departure of Enoch in a chariot of fire offers an enticing investigation that could be a whole book in itself. But besides that one unusual event withstanding, I can come to no other conclusion. Can you?

This concludes our quest to know “Who got raptured?”. Or does it?

If you agree with these conclusions, then stick around just a few more moments here because you may have guessed we now have a new theological detail to consider. If it's truly the wicked who are “raptured”, (well at least raptured first), then the only possible place for that event is at the end of the seven-year tribulation. Why? Because if it happened before that, then who would be left to persecute believers? There would be no such thing as a tribulation. And if you agree that the end of the seven years is the only logical place for the rapture then ... Yep, you guessed it. That makes you and I “post-trib-ers”. (Don't you love labels?) I would like to confess to you that this makes me squirm. I have been harboring the pre-trib hope in my heart since I became a Christian 25 years ago. I was taught pretty much the same pre-trib doctrine from all teachers who I studied under, or was pastored by. I was never hard and fast on this, yet still I liked being pre-trib. Mainly because it means that we miss the seven-year tribulation. A very comforting thought. Or at least we miss the worse three and a half years if one wanders in to mid-trib rapture belief. But now I am forced to accept post-trib rapture. Whoa. I'm not sure I like the sound of that, yet the scripture seems to virtually shout the reality of a rapture of the wicked, so here I am sitting in the post-trib camp.

So I will admit to you, I suspect the world will have a post-trib ending, but I don't like it. I feel like saying "Someone please tell me I'm wrong". I really, really “want” to be pre-trib. Believe me. Because it's a (potentially) nicer alternative. But my mind and spirit tell me it just ain't gonna be so. I have to believe what scripture says, even if it seems hard. However as C. S. Lewis says in his essay "The World's Last Night", my conclusions are "submitted to the correction of wiser heads".

A comfort to this conclusion is that I know for sure if believers must go through the seven-year tribulation, they will not be touched by the wrath of the curses. Just as the children of Israel had the angel of death pass over their homes, and just as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego were in the fire but not harmed, I also must conclude that God's curses are not meant for us, and that we will be unharmed by them. Scripture says in 1 Thessalonians 5: 9

“For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

It is clear we won't be punished by the terrible end-times curses. Of course, it does not say we will be protected from the problems caused by the anti-Christ system in place at that time, but I contend that is preferable to the wrath of God.

All this being said, I repeat, I am open to criticism. If there are convincing arguments to negate what I have shared, someone *please* share them with me. I pray that your response is not based on any "feeling" or bias, but that you use Scripture to correct anything you consider error. In lieu of rational critique, you should also refrain from throwing tomatoes at me.

Ain't Scripture fun? As the Bereans did, keep reading and searching.
And keep celebrating the empty tomb...

THE END

All scriptural references are from the New American Standard Bible.

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