

WHO IS TAKEN AND WHO IS LEFT?

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“Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.” Matthew 24:40, 41

Early this year the Christian blockbuster movie *Left Behind* was released. Though we are not explicitly told where the title came from, there can be little doubt that its origin can be traced to Matthew 24:40, 41. Here Jesus announces that when He comes, two people will be working side by side in the field, one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding together at the mill, one will be taken and the other left. Those who believe in a two stage coming of Jesus—one secret before the tribulation and the other visible and glorious seven years later—entertain no doubts that this text is referring to a secret coming of Jesus when believers will be taken to heaven and unbelievers will be left behind on earth. On the other hand, Seventh-day Adventists who do not believe in the secret rapture, have generally agreed that the righteous will be taken to heaven and the unrighteous will be left on earth, but they disagree on just **when** this will happen. Seventh-day Adventists believe that when Jesus comes in His glorious appearing, he will take the righteous to heaven for a thousand years while the wicked will be left behind on earth. Thus, though these two interpretations differ as to **when** the righteous will be taken to heaven and the unrighteous left behind, they agree that the ones who are **taken** are the **righteous** while those who are **left behind** are the **wicked**. This normative and traditional view is found, for example, in The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary,¹ the writings of Joe Crews,² and more recently in a response paper by Jon

¹The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary categorically states: “What Jesus meant by being ‘taken’ and by being ‘left’ is made clear by the context. Those who are left are the evil servants. . . . The Greek precludes the idea that it is the righteous who are ‘left.’” This commentary, on the basis of the context and the usage of terms, closes the door on any alternative interpretation. However, as we will see in this paper, a careful study of both the context and the terminology allow an alternative explanation. [F . D. Nichol, editor. The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary (Washington, D. C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1980), volume 5, p. 504.]

² Joe Crews, the late director and speaker of Amazing Facts, is no less categorical. He states: “One will be taken to heaven with Jesus and the other will be left for destruction.” [Joe Crews, What the Bible Says About the Secret Rapture (Baltimore, Maryland: Amazing Facts, undated), p. 4.]

Paulien.³ Is it just perhaps possible that both interpretations are inaccurate? In this paper I would like to suggest that there is a third interpretation which better fits the immediate and broader contexts of the passage as well as the usage of terms.

We will seek to answer two main questions in this paper: 1) Can these verses be construed to mean that there will be a two stage coming of Jesus? 2) Just exactly what do the words **taken** and **left** mean within their original Biblical context? Before we proceed, I must warn the readers that they are in for a shocking surprise. The initial reaction of most pastors and church members when I have shared this material has been one of disbelief.⁴

³Though more tentative, New Testament scholar Jon Paulien leans toward the traditional view. In a response to a recent article by Louis Torres, Paulien states: “It may be that in my brief review of the biblical material I have missed crucial evidence that might yet carry the day for the **controversial points** of Torres’s thesis, but the article as it stands falls short of proof for these points.” Paulien is critical of Torres for depending on English translations rather than on the original text. The present paper attempts to overcome this weakness in Torres’s presentation by going back to the original flood context of Matthew 24:40, 41 and by analyzing the lexical meaning of the biblical terms. In the same article, Old Testament scholar, William H. Shea agrees with Torres’s view as does Adventist Review editor William Johnsson. Pastor Jerry Lutz, on the other hand upholds the traditional view. It is noteworthy that Paulien, a respected New Testament scholar, considers Torres’s view controversial. This shows that Torres’s understanding is not the normative, traditional view. [For the full article, see, Roland R. Hegstad, Editor, Perspective Digest, “Taken by the Rapture,” “Responses,” (volume 1, number 3, 1996), pp. 47-59. Bold is mine.

⁴This clearly indicates that in the run of the mill Seventh-day Adventist understanding, the ones “left” are lost while the ones “taken” are saved.

But once cool theological heads prevail and they have had the opportunity to carefully examine the line of evidence, most have been willing to admit that the concept makes sense and is more biblically accurate than the traditional view. However, old traditions die hard and some have been unwilling to change their point of view in spite of the weight of evidence.

WHAT THE TEXT DOES NOT SAY

As we begin our study it might be well to clarify what the text actually **says** and what many **assume** it says. The text does not say that **Jesus** will take **believers** to **heaven** when He comes while **unbelievers** will be **left behind** on **earth**. This view is an assumption which is read into the text based on other verses of Scripture such as I Thessalonians 4:13-17 (though we will see that this passage also supports the perspective presented in this paper). It is Biblically accurate to say that believers in Christ will be caught up to heaven when Jesus comes and unbelievers will be left behind on earth for a thousand years, but this teaching cannot be derived from the text we are studying here. Our text simply states that when Jesus comes, one individual will be taken while another will be left. What is meant by “left” and “taken” remains to be seen.

THE WHEN FACTOR

In order to determine **when** one is taken and the other is left, it is necessary to examine the immediate context. In the immediately preceding verses (37-39) Jesus has been comparing the devastation that will take place at His coming [*parousia*] with the destruction of the world by the flood in Noah’s day. In Matthew 24:3, 27, 37, 39 this coming is described with the word *parousia*. Verses 29-31 describe this event as anything but secret. The flood in Noah’s day was far from secret– it destroyed all people on planet earth except for Noah and his family. Significantly, the normal word for “flood” in the New Testament is *potamos*⁵ but this is not the word used here. Instead, Jesus twice employs the word *kataklysmos* (verses 38, 39) from which we derive our English word, “cataclysm.” This was no ordinary local flood, it was a universal cataclysm or catastrophe.

⁵This word is used by Jesus in Matthew 7:25, 27 to describe the flood which swept away the foolish man’s house. It is also used by John in Revelation 12:15, 16 to describe the river which the dragon spewed from his mouth to drown the woman.

The parallel passage in Luke 17:26-30 not only compares this glorious coming of Jesus with the flood story but goes a step further comparing it with the total destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire in the days of Lot. There is simply no way this event can be construed as a secret rapture before the glorious coming of Jesus! Someone might ask, yes, but how do you know that verses 40 and 41 are referring to the same event as verses 37-39? The answer is actually quite simple. Verse 40 begins with the Greek word *tote* which is translated in the KJV as “then” but could also be translated “at that time.” In Matthew 24 this word is used repeatedly to describe a sequence of events each following the other in chronological order.⁶ This must mean that the “taking” and “leaving” of individuals in verses 40 and 41 will occur as the *parousia* comes to a close and not before. So, irrespective of what “taken” and “left” means, it is clear that it happens at the glorious appearing of Jesus. So much for the idea of a pre-tribulation rapture!

THE BROADER CONTEXT

But we must now turn to a more pressing issue: What is meant by “taken” and “left?” In order to answer this question we must examine the broader context of Matthew 24:37-41. It is clear that the broader context is found in the flood story of Genesis 6-8. A thorough study of the flood catastrophe is beyond the scope of this paper so we will focus on a key verse which relates directly to the passage in Matthew 24. I am referring to Genesis 7:23. The verse reads:

“And every living substance was **destroyed** which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were **destroyed** from the earth: and Noah only **remained** alive, and they that were with him in the ark.”

⁶This word is used in Matthew 24:9, 10, 14, 16, 21, 23, 30 [twice], 40, 45.

Even a cursory reading of this verse reveals that when the flood came there were only two groups: those who were **destroyed**⁷ and those who **remained alive**.⁸ This closely parallels Matthew 24:37-39 where those outside the ark were “taken away” or destroyed⁹ while those inside the ark were saved.

THE WORD “LEFT” (*SHAWAR*) IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

It is remarkable that according to Genesis 7:23 the righteous were left or remained, while the wicked were taken away or destroyed. The word “remained” (*shawar*)¹⁰ in Genesis 7:23 is one of the many remnant words in the Old Testament. It is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the meaning of each of these remnant words. However, it behooves us to analyze the meaning of *shawar* because it is used in connection with the flood which is the very subject of Matthew 24:37-41. This word is frequently employed to describe that which is **left alive** after

⁷The word translated “destroyed” in Genesis 7:23 is *machah*. It is not the common word for “destruction” in the Old Testament. It means “to blot out, to utterly eradicate, to erase.” It is used to describe the blotting out of sins by God (Psalm 51:1, 9; Isaiah 43:25; 44:22) and also the blotting out of names from God’s book of life (Exodus 32:32, 33; Psalm 69:28; 109:13; Deuteronomy 9:14; 25:19, 20; II Kings 14:27). The word is also used in the flood story in Genesis 6:7 and 7:4.

⁸The New International Version translates: “Every living thing on the face of the earth was **wiped out**. . . . Only Noah was **left** and those with him in the ark.” The New American Standard Bible reads: “Thus He **blotted out** every living thing that was upon the face of the land. And only Noah was **left** together with those that were with him in the ark.” The Revised Standard Version reads much like the NASB. The Jerusalem Bible informs us that all was “**destroyed**” and only Noah was “**left**”. The New English Bible tells us that all was “**wiped out**” and only “Noah and his company in the ark **survived**.”

⁹Matthew’s account tells us that the wicked were “taken away” by the flood (24:39). Although the Greek word here for “taken away” (*airo*) is different than in verses 40 and 41, it is still interesting that the ones “taken away” are not the righteous but the wicked. In the parallel Lucan passage we see that the expression “took them all away” means that they were destroyed (Luke 17:27, 29). Though lexical links are vitally important in the comparison of biblical passages, it must be recognized that frequently parallel passages employ different terminology to describe the same event. For example, the coming of Jesus is described in various New Testament passages with the words *apocalypsis*, *epiphaneia*, *parousia*, and *erxomai*. Would anyone contend that because the identical words are not used in each context they are referring to different events?

¹⁰In the vast majority of the cases where the Hebrew word *shawar* is used, the LXX translates with the Greek word *kataleipo* which means “that which is left, that which remains.” (See, for example, Genesis 7:23; Exodus 14:28; Numbers 21:35; Deuteronomy 4:27; Joshua 10:33; 11:8, 11, 14; Judges 4:16; I Kings 19:18; II Kings 10:11, 14; Nehemiah 1:2-3; Haggai 2:3; Isaiah 4:3; 11:11, 16; 24:6.)

a great calamity, military invasion or natural disaster. The Old Testament scholar, Gary G. Cohen, has the following to say about the meaning of *shawar*:

“*Shawar* seems to be used almost exclusively to indicate the static action of surviving after an elimination process. This process of elimination may have been natural (Ruth 1:3, ‘Nahomi’s husband died; and she was left’). It may have been humanly caused (I Sam 9:24, ‘Behold that which is left!’ Here Samuel is speaking of meat which was intentionally left for Saul to eat). Or the elimination may have been the direct result of a divine intervention (Ex 10:19, ‘There remained not one locust in all the coasts of Egypt,’ when God blew them away). No matter what the cause, however, *shawar* points to that which remains or has survived.”¹¹

Let’s take a look at some examples. Exodus 14:28 informs us that after the Red Sea swallowed up Pharaoh’s armies, not one Egyptian **remained** or was left. Judges 7:3 tells us that after Gideon tested the Israelite armies the first time, only 10,000 of the original 22,000 were **left**. In Numbers 21:35 we are told that Moses slew Og, his sons, his people and none were **left** remaining. Deuteronomy 4:27 describes how God promised to scatter Israel after which few in number would be **left**. In the book of Joshua we have several instances where Joshua smote cities in Canaan until he **left** not one person alive. This is true of Gezer (Joshua 10:33), Hebron (Joshua 10:37), Debir where Joshua “utterly destroyed all souls and **left** none remaining (Joshua 10:39), those by the waters of Merom (Joshua 11:8), and the inhabitants of Hazor and the surrounding cities (Joshua 11:11, 14). In Judges 4:16 we are told that Sisera and his armies were destroyed and not one man was **left**.

¹¹Gary G. Cohen, Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1980), volume 2, p. 894. Ironically, one definition Cohen provides is “be left behind.”

When Elijah complains to God that only he is left, he is informed that God has 7,000 **left** who have not bent the knee to Baal (II Kings 19:18). In II Kings 10:11 we are told that Jehu slew all the house of Ahab “until he **left** him none remaining” and the same is said of the brethren of Ahaziah (II Kings 10:14). When Assyria came against Israel we are told that “there was none **left** but the tribe of Judah only.” Nehemiah I, verses 2 and 3 speaks of the Jews who were **left** of the captivity and verse three refers to “the remnant who are **left**”. Upon the completion of the second temple, the questions was asked: “Who is **left** among you that saw this house in her first glory?” (Haggai 2:3). We will conclude with three references from the book of Isaiah. Isaiah 4:3 describes the remnant which remains after Jerusalem has been punished with a devastating destruction¹². The verse is so important to our study that we will quote it *in toto*: “And it shall come to pass, that he that is **left** in Zion, and he that **remaineth** in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem.” What is remarkable about this verse is that the ones who are **left** after the devastating destruction of Jerusalem, are not the wicked but the holy ones who are written among the living!! What the text means to say is that while the wicked were destroyed when the city was taken (more on this when we study what the word “taken” means), the righteous were **left alive** or spared!! Isaiah 11:11, 16 refers to a remnant which are **left** from the Assyrian invasion. Finally, we are told in Isaiah 24:6 that at the second coming the earth will be devastated and few men will be **left**.

THE WORD “LEFT” (*APHIEMI*) IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The word *aphiemi* has a broad range of meanings in the New Testament two of which seem to predominate. First, it is most commonly used to describe movement from one place to another. In this sense Jesus is said to have **left** His disciples to go and pray (Matthew 26:64). It is also used to describe a fever **leaving** Peter’s mother-in-law (Matthew 8:15), the moment the Herodians **left** Jesus after asking him about the tribute money (Matthew 22:22), the sons of thunder **leaving** their father to follow Jesus (Mark 1:20), and the disciples **leaving** all to follow Jesus (Mark 10:28). In this sense, the word could be translated “depart.” Dispensationalists and Seventh-day Adventists would be the first to admit that this is not the nuance of the word in Matthew 24:40, 41. If the word *aphiemi* in Matthew 24:40, 41 means “to depart” then the ones taken (in the traditional view) would

¹²Lamentably, because of space limitations, we will not be able to show that Isaiah 4 is not merely describing events in the history of ancient Israel. It is really a prophecy regarding what will take place in the end-time with the 144,000.

be departing and the ones left would be departing as well! In the New Testament the word *aphiemi* can also mean **left** in the sense of “that which remains.”¹³ Notice the following examples.

¹³In English the word “left” can also have the same two connotations as in Greek. When someone departs we say they “left.” But we also use the word “left” in the sense of “what remains, or what is left, as in the following example: “Was anyone left in the room?”

Mark 12:20, 22 makes reference to a woman who had seven husbands but **left** no descendants. If she had borne children we could say that descendants were left. In Matthew 23:38 we are informed that upon the departure of Jesus, the temple was **left** desolate. In Matthew 24:2 Jesus announces to His disciples that not one stone will be **left** upon another in the Jerusalem temple. Here the word “left” could very readily be translated “remain”, that is, not one stone would remain upon another. In John 8:29 Jesus tells the Jewish leaders that His Father has not **left** Him alone. Most scholars would agree that the word *aphiemi* in Matthew 24:40,41 is used in this second sense. We have already seen that the Hebrew word “left” or “remained” in Genesis 7:23 refers to the righteous who were left alive when the world was destroyed at the time of the flood. Would it not be consistent to say that those who are left in Matthew 24:40, 41 are also the righteous who are left alive when Jesus comes and destroys the world? After all, both Genesis 7:23 and Matthew 24:40, 41 are speaking of the same flood!¹⁴

THE MEANING OF THE WORD “TAKEN” (*LAKAD*) IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

What is the meaning of the word “taken?” We will first examine the Old Testament meaning of this word and then we will take a look at the New Testament testimony. In the Old Testament the word “taken” is frequently used to describe **cities** or empires which are overcome, defeated or destroyed in a military invasion. It is also employed to denote **individuals** who are overcome or ensnared by an enemy.¹⁵ The Old Testament scholar, Walter C. Kaiser has the following to say about the meaning of *lakad*:

“Most of the 121 uses of *lakad* deal with men capturing or seizing towns, men, spoils, and even a kingdom (I Samuel 14:47). It is used figuratively of the entrapment of men who are caught in snares of all sorts laid by their enemies (Jer 5:26; 18:22; Ps 35:8). . . . This word also serves as a figure of divine judgment. The Stone of Stumbling will cause many to stumble, fall, be broken, be ensnared, and be captured (Isa 8:15). When God shakes the foundations of the earth, just prior to the Millennium (‘many days’ of Isa 24:22), the ungodly shall be seized in the trap (Isa 24:18) as were those who drunkenly mocked the prophet’s message (Isa 28:13).”¹⁶

¹⁴Incidentally, though a different word is used (*perileipo*), I Thessalonians 4:15, 17 makes it clear that those who are **left** and **remain** at the *parousia* of Jesus are the righteous living, not the wicked! A little later on in this study we will see that though different words are used for “left” in Matthew and in I Thessalonians both passages are describing the same event and therefore the words should be understood as synonymous. In other words, the key to linking Matthew and I Thessalonians is not in whether both contexts employ the identical words but rather whether different words are used to describe the same events!

¹⁵In English we use the word “take” in a literal manner such as, “Please **take** mother home.” But we also use it in an idiomatic or figurative sense: “The tornado **took** him by surprise,” “The embezzler **took** him to the cleaners.”

¹⁶Walter C. Kaiser, Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament (Chicago: Moody Bible

Institute, 1980), volume 1, p. 480. Kaiser suggests that *lakad* means, “to capture, seize, take.”

Let's look at several examples of the first usage. Joshua 8:8, 21, 22 describes how Ai was ambushed and **taken** by Joshua. It is noteworthy that **not one escaped or remained** because they were all slain with the sword. In these verses, it becomes obvious that "taken" is the antonym of "left." In other words, the city was taken and not one was left. Perhaps it would be helpful to state it this way: The city was taken or defeated and no one was **spared**. If when the city was taken some had been spared, we could say that a remnant was **left**. Thus "left" would be synonymous with "spared." Several other references reveal the same meaning. In Judges 1:8 we are told that Jerusalem was **taken** by the tribe of Judah and the inhabitants thereof were smitten with the sword. Jeremiah prophesied that Jerusalem would be **taken** by Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 32:3; 38:28; 48:44). The prophet left no doubt as to what he meant when he used the word "taken." Jerusalem would be destroyed with fire (37:8), and both husband and wife would be **taken** together (6:11). Obviously the word "taken" here does not mean that the city or the persons would be removed to some other location. It simply means that the city and its dwellers would be overcome or defeated. Jeremiah described the demise of Babylon with the same word (Jeremiah 50:2, 9), saying that the mighty men of Babylon would be "taken" (51:56).¹⁷

Now let's take a look at how the word "taken" is used in the case of individuals. In Psalm 59:12 we are told that when the wicked are **taken** in their pride, they will be consumed by the wrath of God. Proverbs 3:26 assures us that God will protect His people's feet from being **taken** by the wicked. Obviously this does not mean that the wicked will literally want to take the feet of God's people. It is an idiom which means that God will not allow the wicked to overcome His people. In Proverbs 11:6 we are told that transgressors are **taken** in their own naughtiness. This simply means that the wicked are overcome. Ecclesiastes 7:26 assures us that the sinner is **taken** by a wicked woman but the person who pleases God will escape from her. The sense of this verse is clear. The sinner will be overcome or "done in" by a wicked woman. In contrast are those who escape from her power because they please God. In Proverbs 5:22 we are told regarding the wicked: "His own iniquities shall **take** the wicked himself, and he shall be holden with the cords of his sins." The New English Bible renders this verse: "The wicked man is **caught** in his own iniquities, and held fast in the toils of his own sin."

¹⁷Interestingly, when Babylon is taken, Jeremiah 50:20 speaks of Israel in the following terms: "In those days, and in that time, saith the LORD, the iniquity of Israel shall be sought for, and there shall be none; and the sins of Judah, and they shall not be found: for I will pardon them whom I **preserve**." The word "preserve" (Heb., *shawar*; Gr., *upoloipos*) is usually translated "left". Notice, once again, that the ones who are left are the righteous.

In closing, let's examine three references from the prophet Isaiah. The first two are Messianic prophecies. Speaking about Israel's response to the first coming of Jesus we are told: "And he shall be for a sanctuary; but for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offense to both the houses of Israel, for a gin and for a **snare** to the inhabitants of Jerusalem. And many among them shall stumble, and fall, and be broken, and be **snared**, and be **taken**." (Isaiah 8:14, 15). This list of synonyms makes the meaning of "taken" crystal clear. Other versions use "caught" instead of "taken". Don't forget the word "snare" as we will come back to it later. Isaiah 28:13 presents another prophecy regarding the destiny of Ephraim: "But the Word of the Lord was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and **taken**." Once again, "taken" is used in a negative sense to refer to those who are taken or caught in a snare. Isaiah 24:17, 18 describes the terror of the wicked when Jesus comes: "Fear, and the pit, and the snare, are upon thee, O inhabitant of the earth. And it shall come to pass, that he who fleeth from the noise of the fear shall fall into the pit; and he that cometh up out of the midst of the pit shall be **taken** in the snare: for the windows from on high are open, and the foundations of the earth do shake." In all the references above, the Hebrew word for "taken" is the same.¹⁸

THE MEANING OF THE WORD "TAKEN" IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

¹⁸The LXX usually translates *lakad* with *lambano* (Joshua 8:21; Jeremiah 32:3), *sunlambano* (Joshua 8:22; Jeremiah 38:28; 48:44; 37:8; 6:11; Psalm 59:12), and *katalambano* (Judges 1:8)

The word “taken” in Matthew 24:40, 41 comes from the Greek root verb *lambano*. This word is used frequently and with great versatility in the New Testament. Its basic meaning seems to be “to take, to receive.” However, lexicographers suggest that the word can also mean “To take away, to remove, to lay hands on, to seize.” In this second sense the meaning of the word is very similar to the Hebrew word “taken” which we have previously examined.¹⁹ We will not seek to document the many references where the word is translated “taken” or “receive.” However it would be well to present a few examples of the second meaning referred to above. In Acts 2:23 Peter tells his Jewish hearers that they have **taken** (*lambano*) Jesus and crucified Him. The word here could very well be translated “seized.” In I Corinthians 10:13 the Apostle Paul assures us that no temptation has **taken** (*lambano*) **us** which cannot be overcome. The sense here seems to be “to overtake, overcome. In II Corinthians 12:16 the Apostle Paul tells the Corinthians that he **caught** (*lambano*) them with guile. This seems to indicate a meaning of “catching by surprise.” In Matthew 21:39 we are told that Jesus was **caught** (*lambano*) and cast out of the vineyard (see also, Mark 12:3, 8). Here the meaning once again seems to be that Jesus was “seized” and then killed. Luke 9:39 refers to an evil spirit “taking” a person and tearing him apart and bruising him. The meaning of *lambano* here is obviously “to seize, to overwhelm, to overcome.” II Corinthians 11:20 refers to deceitful workers who bring the faithful into bondage, devouring them, smiting them and taking them. Here the word *lambano* is used in conjunction with the idea of “smiting,” “devouring,” and “leading into bondage.”

Now that we have examined the basic meaning of the word *lambano*, it would be well to take a look at the specific derivative of this word which is used in Matthew 24:40, 41. But first a word about prefix uses of prepositions in Greek. As in English,²⁰ Greek prepositions can be added as prefixes to verbs, nouns, etc. The end

¹⁹See for example, William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 464-465.

²⁰Notice the following examples: **epicenter** (the central place from which the waves of an earthquake radiate), **perimeter** (the outer boundary of an area), **hypoglycemia** (low blood sugar), **hypertension** (high blood pressure), **paralegal** (one who works alongside a lawyer), **catastrophe** (literally, to turn upside down. overturn), **anachronism** (to go back in time), **antitype** (that which takes the place of the type), **antichrist** (against or in place of Christ).

result of adding these prepositional prefixes to words is to denote the location or direction of movement of that which the word describes.

The word *lambano* is employed in the New Testament with many prepositional prefixes. For example, we have *paralambano* (to take or receive alongside), *analambano* (to take or receive upward), *katalambano* (to overtake, take away, overcome), *sunlambano* (to take with, to seize or to apprehend). Though each of these words has its own particular nuance, it is important also to realize that these words do not always have exclusive meanings. They frequently overlap and sometimes are used interchangeably. When we compare Jesus and Paul we will see that this is the case with *katalambano* and *paralambano*. The specific word used for “taken” in Matthew 24:40, 41 is *paralambano*. As previously noted, this word is used to describe the idea of being taken “alongside” or “next to” someone else.²¹ The question immediately suggests itself: Why was *paralambano* used instead of one of the others? The answer is not hard to find. Matthew 24:40, 41 describes two persons who are **beside** or **alongside** each other when the door of probation closes. The wicked are with the righteous—they are together, side by side. To paraphrase: “There will be two **together** in the field, one of these who is alongside the other will be taken, while the other who is alongside will be left.” The fact that the righteous and the wicked are

²¹As examples we can cite John 14:3 where Jesus promises to “receive” His followers unto Himself; Matthew 18:16 where a church member is instructed to “take” one or two witnesses with himself; Matthew 1:20 where Joseph is ordered to “take” Mary to himself to be his wife; Matthew 12:45 where an evil spirit “takes” with himself seven other spirits; Matthew 4:5, 8 where the devil “takes” Jesus with himself to a high mountain; Matthew 17:1 where Jesus “takes” with Himself Peter, James and John; Mark 5:40 where Jesus “takes” with himself the parents of a dead child.

alongside each other makes it necessary to use *paralambano*.²² It is imperative to realize that if Jesus had wanted to express the idea that these people were going to be taken to heaven, He could have used other Greek words which more appropriately describe the act of taking away.²³

²²This idea of two people being **together or alongside each other** is brought out even more clearly in the parallel Lucan passage. There we are explicitly told that "two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left." (Luke 17:35)

²³For example, He could have used *harpazo* which is employed in I Thessalonians 4:17; Revelation 12:5; II Corinthians 12:2, 4; Acts 8:39 to describe a snatching away heavenward, or He could have used *analambano* which is employed in Acts 10:16; Acts 1:11; I Timothy 3:16 to describe a receiving up into heaven. Jesus could also have used *airo* or *apairo* which are frequently translated "to take away" (Matthew 13:12; 21:43; 24:37; 25:29; Mark 4:25; Matthew 24:39; Mark 2:20).

This study of Matthew 24:37-44 would not be complete if we did not take into account a parallel passage from the writings of the Apostle Paul. Really, this passage clinches the argument we have been pursuing. Even a cursory comparison of Matthew 24:37-44 with I Thessalonians 5:1-6 immediately reveals that Paul and Jesus are dealing with the same events—the close of probation and the second coming of Jesus. Let's begin with Matthew 24:37-44. Here Jesus is speaking about the close of probation and the **second coming** (24:37-39, 44). There are **two groups**: the taken and the left (24:40, 41). He commands His followers to **watch** (24:42). He describes his coming as a **thief in the night** (24:43). He warns His followers to be **ready** lest that day catch them **unawares** or unexpectedly (24:44; Luke 21:34 uses the word "suddenly"). He warns against being **drunk** (24:49) He also explains that when He comes, the majority of the world will be **destroyed or taken away** (Luke 17:29; Matthew 24:37) The parallel passage in Luke has Jesus saying that His people should **pray** that that day should not catch them as a **snare** so that they will be accounted worthy to **escape** all these things (Luke 21:36).²⁴

The Apostle Paul echoes these concepts of Jesus. He refers to the same events—the close of probation and the **second coming** of Jesus (I Thessalonians 4:14-17; 5:2; see also, II Peter 3 on the meaning of the "Day of the Lord").²⁵ Paul refers to **two groups**: 1) Those who are alive and **remain**—the children of the day (that is to say,

²⁴It is of more than passing interest that the combination of words "taken," "left," "snare," and "escape" is used in several Old Testament passages which we have referred to before. One prime example is Joshua 8 where the conquest of Ai is described. There we are informed that the city was "taken," (8:8) that not a man was "left" (8:17), that is, none were allowed to "escape" (8:22). Isaiah 24:6, 17-18 describes the second coming of Christ and explains that the wicked will be "taken" in the "snare" and few men will be "left." Similarly, Ecclesiastes 7:26 speaks of a woman whose heart is as "snares." But the righteous shall "escape" from her and not be "taken." Isaiah 8:14-15 speaks of the inhabitants of Jerusalem being "taken" in a "snare" by the coming of the Messiah.

²⁵Both Jesus and Paul speak of the second coming first and then admonish the faithful to watch, to pray, to be sober, to be ready. We must remember that Paul is not beginning a new

those who are **left**), and 2) Those who are destroyed, the children of the night (4:15; 5:3-4). Paul warns Christians to **watch** (5:6). He explains that the close of probation will come as a **thief in the night** (5:2, 4). He encourages Christians to be **sober** and ready lest that day catch them **unawares** and by surprise (5:3, 6, 8). He warns against being **drunk** (5:7) and explains that sudden **destruction** will come upon the wicked (5:3) He also warns that the children of the night will not **escape** (5:3).

theme in I Thessalonians 5. He is continuing his argument from chapter 4.

A very important fact which has escaped many commentators is that in Matthew 24:40, 41 Jesus uses the word *paralambano* to describe those who are “taken” while Paul, on the other hand, uses the related word *katalambano* to describe those who are **overtaken**²⁶ as a thief. Thus, a comparison of the statements by Jesus and Paul reveals that those who are left (Matthew 24:40, 41) or remain (I Thessalonians 4:14) are contrasted with those who are “taken” (Matthew 24:40, 41) or “overtaken” (I Thessalonians 5:4). Those who are left or remain are saved while those who are taken or overtaken are lost!!²⁷

²⁶ The word *katalambano* is used in the New Testament to describe one who is seized with hostile intentions. It is also translated, “overtake”, and “come upon”. For example, it is used to describe the woman who was “taken” in adultery. This obviously means that she was caught by surprise or seized in the very act (see John 8:3, 4). For a full definition of the word *katalambano*, see, William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), pp. 412-413. Significantly, the LXX occasionally uses the word *katalambano* to describe the “taking” of cities or persons.

²⁷ Significantly, Matthew uses “taken,” Paul uses “overtake,” and Luke uses “come upon” (Luke 21:34-35). Would anyone sustain that because Matthew, Paul and Luke employ different words they are not describing the same event? Of course not!! All three expressions in their context emphasize that the close of probation and the second coming will come upon the wicked as an “overwhelming surprise.”

Let's now put everything we have studied in context. I believe that Matthew 24:37-39 holds the key which unlocks the meaning of verses 40 and 41. Virtually all Seventh-day Adventist commentators²⁸ assume that the expression, "the coming of the Son of man" refers exclusively to the second coming of Jesus. But, is this entirely accurate? A careful examination of verses 37-39 indicates that this expression is related to two sequential events which are separate in time and yet are closely linked. Let's quote the entire passage and highlight two key words:

"But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, **until** (*axr*) the day that Noah **entered** into the ark, and knew not **until** (*heos*) the flood **came**, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be."

²⁸The lone exceptions I have found are Ellen G. White and Louis F. Were who obviously borrows from Mrs. White..

The careful reader will notice that the word “until” is used twice in these verses—the first time to mark off the moment that Noah entered the ark and the second to mark off the moment when it began to rain. Genesis makes it clear that a period of seven days elapsed between these two points of time. During these seven days the wicked and the righteous were **alongside** each other. As Matthew makes clear, the wicked during this period “did not know” that their fate was sealed, that is, that they were lost. They continued business as usual—they ate, they drank, they built, they bought and sold, they planted, they married--planning for years of peace and prosperity. They were **taken by surprise, caught off guard, caught totally unawares** when the door closed. Yet only when the flood swept them all away did they realize that they were lost. Jesus compared this plight of the wicked with the coming of a thief in the night (Matthew 24:42, 43).²⁹ Let's imagine a family who is home sleeping at 12 midnight. They have gone to bed and forgotten to lock the door. The thief comes and finds the door open. He steals the jewelry (obviously not an SDA household!!), the video camera, the VCR, the television set and other odds and ends. He has caught the family off-guard.

They have been taken by surprise and are unaware that the thief has visited them. It is only in the morning when they wake up that they realize that they have been robbed. In a sense, they are surprised twice—the first time they are caught by surprise or caught off guard and they are unaware of it, yet the second time they wake up and are very much aware. The same will happen in conjunction with the second coming. The close of probation will catch the world by surprise, off guard. However, at this point, the inhabitants thereof will be unaware that the door of mercy has closed. The wicked will only realize that they are lost when they see Jesus coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. But then it will be too late. Too late they realize that the thief has come, so to speak, and they have been found wanting. They are then taken away by a flood of fire (see II Peter 3:10-14). So, the ones who are left are the saved and the ones who are taken are the lost.

The fact that Matthew, Luke and Paul use different terms to describe the same event need not surprise us. Paul can speak of those who are “alive and remain” while Jesus can refer to those who are “left.” Matthew can quote Jesus as saying that at the flood the wicked were “taken,” Luke can quote Jesus as saying that they were “destroyed” and Paul can say that the wicked will be “overtaken.” Even today, when a devastating flood sweeps

²⁹For more on the coming of Jesus as a thief in the night, study carefully Revelation 3:3; 16:15 in the light of 3:18; Mark 13:34-37; Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, volume 2, pp. 190-192. See also, Revelation 22:10-12 and pastor Bohr's audio-tape message, “Revelation's Life or Death Message,” available from the office of Prophetic Ministries, P. O. Box 8057, Fresno, California 93747.

away a town people ask: “Did the flood **take** them all away? Wasn’t anyone **left**?” “Did the flood **drown** everyone? Didn’t anyone **remain**?” “Was everyone **swept away**, wasn’t anyone **preserved**? Or even this way: “Did the flood **destroy** them all? Wasn’t anyone **spared**?” Who would say that take away, swept away, drown and destroy are not different ways of describing the same reality? And who would say that left, remain, preserved and spared are not different ways of saying the same thing?

In closing, a couple of statements from the little old lady who wrote over ninety years ago:

“The righteous and the wicked will still be living upon the earth in their mortal state—men will be planting and building, eating and drinking, all unconscious that the final, irrevocable decision has been pronounced in the sanctuary above. Before the Flood, after Noah entered the ark, God shut him in and shut the ungodly out; but for seven days the people, **knowing not that their doom was fixed**, continued their careless, pleasure-loving life and mocked the warnings of impending judgment. ‘So,’ says the Saviour, ‘shall also the coming of the Son of man be.’ Matthew 24:39. Silently, **unnoticed as the midnight thief**, will come the decisive hour which marks the fixing of every man’s destiny, the final withdrawal of mercy’s offer to guilty men.

‘Watch ye therefore: . . . lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping.’ Mark 13:35, 36. Perilous is the condition of those who, growing **weary** of their watch, turn to the attractions of the world. While the man of business is absorbed in the pursuit of gain, while the pleasure lover is seeking indulgence, while the daughter of fashion is arranging her adornments—it may be in that hour the Judge of all the earth will pronounce the sentence: ‘Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting.’ Daniel 5:27.”³⁰

“Jesus has left us word: ‘Watch ye therefore: for ye know not when the Master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: lest coming suddenly He find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.’ We are waiting and watching for the return of the Master, who is to bring the morning, lest coming suddenly He find us sleeping. What time is here referred to? **Not to the revelation of Christ in the clouds of heaven to find a people asleep. No**; but to His return from His ministration in the most holy place of the heavenly sanctuary, when He lays off His priestly attire and clothes Himself with garments of vengeance, and when the mandate goes forth: ‘He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still: and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still: and he that is holy, let him be holy still.’

³⁰Ellen G. White, The Great Controversy, p. 491.

When Jesus ceases to plead for man, the cases of all are forever decided. This is the time of reckoning with His servants. To those who have **neglected** the preparation of purity and holiness, which fits them to be waiting ones to welcome their Lord, the sun sets in gloom and darkness, and rises not again. Probation closes; Christ's intercessions cease in heaven. This time finally comes upon all, and those who have **neglected** to purify their souls by obeying the truth are found sleeping. They became **weary** of waiting and watching; they became **indifferent** in regard to the coming of their Master. They **longed not** for His appearing, and thought there was not need of such continued, persevering watching. They concluded that there was time yet to arouse. They would be sure not to lose the opportunity of securing an earthly treasure. It would be safe to get all of this world they could. And in securing this object, they **lost all anxiety and interest** in the appearing of the Master. They became **indifferent** and **careless**, as though His coming were yet in the distance."³¹

³¹Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, volume 2, pp. 190-192.