

# ESCHATOLOGY: DOCTRINE OF LAST THINGS

## PART 49

### THE RAPTURE, PART 4

In Matthew 24:32-34, Jesus is referring to the fact that those of the Jewish generation who see the events of the Tribulation unfolding must understand that He is near, at the door (v. 34). This is obviously a reference to the Second Coming.

Matthew 24:36 begins with the Greek *περὶ δὲ* translated “but of” in the NASB but it could be “but concerning” or “now concerning” (HCSB). Hart and Fruchtenbaum claim these Greek words signal a change in subject, but in this case, that is simply not correct. It can mean that and it can do that as it does in 1 Corinthians (in six times out of six times used it changes the subject), but it doesn't have to signify a change of subject; it is not a technical term. Context has to determine whether or not it signals a change in subject. The term is used four times in Matthew (20:6, 22:31, 24:36, 27:46) and not one of them, including 24:36, represents a change of subject. It is admitted by Fruchtenbaum and Hart that verses 32-35 are referring to the Second Coming. They want verse 36 to signify a change of subject to the Rapture, but it does not; it is a continuation of the discussion of the Second Coming. The Lord just said He is right at the door, but concerning the exact time no one knows.

Verses 37-38 are an important key to understanding this Scripture. During the days of Noah, life was going on and then the Flood came taking people away in judgment and leaving behind in safety those who were believers. Those who see the Rapture in these Matthew verses reverse that scenario and claim the Lord is talking about believers being taken to safety and unbelievers being left for judgment. But the Lord said His coming would be like the days of Noah; therefore, there is no warrant for changing what He said to depart from the example of Noah's time. Putting the Rapture in these verses, means changing them to mean the opposite of the words the Lord spoke and that does not represent the example the Lord used to make His point. It is simply not exegetically defensible to take the words of the Lord and change them to mean the exact opposite in the example He used to make His point.

Part of the argument for placing the Rapture in these verses is the use of two different words for “taking.” The word used by the Lord for the taking of people in judgment during the Flood is *αἶρω* (v. 39) meaning to lift, carry, take away, remove, or do away with [*New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*]. The word used for taken in verses 40-41, *παραλαμβάνω*, means to take into close association, take (to oneself), or take with/along [BDAG]. There is a personal connotation to this word, *παραλαμβάνω*, that is absent in *αἶρω*. Both of these words have *λαμβάνω* as a synonym which means to take in whatever manner [Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary: New Testament*, pp. 99, 907-909, 1108-1109]. These words are similar in

meaning; not exactly the same but similar. Παραλαμβάνω is used in a positive Rapture sense in John 14:3 when Jesus said He was going to receive the disciples to Himself, but that does not mean it must be used the same way in the sense of the Rapture in Matthew 24:40-41. That's an illegitimate totality transfer and shouldn't be done; the word doesn't refer to the same thing every time it is used; context matters. This word is not a technical term. The word may be used in a negative sense such as in Matthew 27:27 when the Roman soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium to mock Him and scourge Him. Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude the word may be used in a positive sense and it may be used in a negative sense. When the example of Noah is compared with these Scriptures, then understanding the Lord to be referring to taking in judgment makes sense. Matthew 24:40-41 uses παραλαμβάνω in a negative sense where the taking refers to judgment. It does not have to refer to taking in a positive sense as it would be if the Rapture was the subject.

While the words used by the Lord in referring to the taking in judgment at the Flood and taking people in judgment at the end of the Tribulation are different but related, there is a good grammatical reason for the words chosen and used as the Lord used them. In the description of the taking at the flood, αἴρω is used to denote the impersonal agency of the floodwaters taking people away in judgment. At the end of the Tribulation, it is personal agents, angels, taking people away for judgment; therefore, παραλαμβάνω is used because the word has a personal connotation of taking to oneself. At some point in the future, they will face the Lord Himself for final judgment.

Fruchtenbaum's next argument for the Rapture in Matthew 24 I'm going to discuss is, on the surface, very persuasive, but when the context of the entire book of Matthew and the Olivet Discourse are considered, it cannot be upheld. This argument is the most powerful argument for putting the Rapture in Matthew; it's wrong, but it is powerful and it has persuaded many people to believe the Rapture is in that book. His argument revolves around the eating and drinking and marriage as though times are normal as we know them. Dr. Hart explains this thinking better than Fruchtenbaum explained it so we will examine what both men said about this issue. In this quote by Dr. Hart, note how much he injected human reasoning into his argument.

Dr. Hart noted that Luke also added a verse concerning Lot and the normal life going on in Sodom and Gomorrah right before they were destroyed (Luke 17:28). "Matthew's and Luke's description seem too casual to take place during the second half of the tribulation. During the second half of the tribulation, no buying or selling will be done without the mark of the Beast (Rev. 13:17). The life-styles depicted in the days of Noah and Lot are those that have existed in every generation since the earliest days of human history. This implies an emphasis on the normalcy and indifference that take place prior to the day of the Lord. The illustrations that follow verses 37-39 about two men working in the field and two women grinding at the mill (vv. 41-42), also argue for the focus on normalcy. Many commentators simply believe that the ordinary life patterns described in the Noah illustration can coexist with the colossal distresses that

run their course prior to Christ's second coming. But this seems unreasonable. How can a 'business-as-usual' attitude toward life exist at the precise time when the twenty-one tribulation judgments of Revelation are being poured out in all their intensity? Instead, the most transparent meaning of the 'days of Noah' illustration (vv. 37-39) is that, just as normal but unsuspecting lifestyles existed prior to the great judgment of the flood, so too normal but unsuspecting lifestyles will exist to the sudden onslaught of the day-of-the-Lord judgments and the rapture of the church. In the Noah parallel, the people 'knew nothing' (v. 39 NIV, NET) about what was soon to happen until the flood came and took them all away. If the flood judgment illustrates a judgment that takes place at the return of Christ 'immediately after the tribulation of those days' (v. 29), can it be said that the world will understand *nothing* of the devastating judgments that have been inflicting them? At the sixth seal judgment of Revelation, people know fully that the wrath of God has come. They cry out to the rocks, 'Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come and who is able stand?' (Rev. 6:16-17). The calamities that precede the second coming of Christ will be so severe that the human race will be close to extinction apart from the Lord's intervention (Matt. 24:22). Would Jesus use a description of casual lifestyles in Matthew 24:37-39 to communicate what the world would be like when 'there will be great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will' (Matt. 24:21)? This seems most unlikely. The flood of Noah's day corresponds to the time leading up to the sudden arrival of the day of the Lord, the Seventieth Week of Daniel and the pretribulation rapture." [John F. Hart, "Jesus and the Rapture: Matthew 24" in *Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism*, pp. 56-57).

To be fair to Dr. Hart, he does address the issue of the context of Matthew in other publications and he placed this footnote with the above quote. "Most pretribulationists have insisted that the group being addressed in the Discourse is Israel, not the church. It is true that the gospel of Matthew is addressed primarily to the Jews. However, it is also the only gospel to mention the 'church' (*ekklesia*, Matt. 16:18; 18:17). The Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-20 is given to the church, not Israel. So, it is not impossible that Matthew and Jesus address the church as well as the Jews in different portions of the Discourse." [John F. Hart, "Jesus and the Rapture: Matthew 24" in *Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism*, p. 66, n 5]. He is, of course, correct that these things are mentioned in Matthew, but mentioning the church doesn't change the overall context of the book and particularly the Olivet Discourse. [NOTE: Dr. Hart wrote a three-part series entitled "Should Pretribulationists Reconsider the Rapture in Matthew 24:36-44?" in *Journal of the Grace Evangelical Society*, part 1: 20, no. 39 (Autumn 2007):47-70; part 2: 21, no. 40 (Spring 2008): 45-63; and part 3: 21, no. 41 (Autumn 2008): 43-64].

Fruchtenbaum agrees that the Lord is speaking about a normal period of time on the earth because people will be marrying and eating and drinking which are all normal activities, and, at first glance, this seems to be reasonable thought, but he seems to

neglect the fact that "normal" is a relative term. What is normal for us as American citizens today would not have been normal in the 1950s when I was a child. His contention is the Rapture will happen during normal times before the Tribulation which is completely correct, but that is not the time period under discussion in the Olivet Discourse. Fruchtenbaum claims that in terms of time, the Lord is moving around and going back and forth which is true. The point I'm making is, by the end of the Tribulation, there will be a new normal whatever form that takes. Normal doesn't have to imply good. People always adjust to life's problems even in the midst of terrible calamities and there are always survivors which there will be at the end of the Tribulation. Whether it was Israel going into the Babylonian captivity, or the Roman destruction of Jerusalem, or wars, or famines, or the holocaust, or whatever it is, people adjust even in the midst of the most abnormal of times. Certainly, we can agree that life will not be normal—far, far from it—at the end of the Tribulation in the sense we think of normal right now, but people will still be carrying on trying to survive the disasters to which they have been subjected and especially the unbelievers since by that time they will have taken the mark of the Beast required for anyone to conduct life's daily activities. In other words, they will still be trying to live life no matter the circumstances. We can also agree that this time will exceed in scope anything that has ever happened on earth since the Flood. In the context of the Discourse, the people being taken are the unbelievers who think the Antichrist is going to make things right in the end. Just as the people were surprised when the Flood came, the world's people will be surprised when the end comes and they are taken in judgment. It also seems likely that right up until the end unbelievers will still be holding out hope that Antichrist is going to emerge from all this victorious so why shouldn't they be trying to act normal in terms of looking forward to his victory? The believing Jews are going to think Antichrist is going to be victorious and they are going to be killed which prompts them to cry out for the return of the Messiah (Mt. 23:39). If they think they are going to lose and Antichrist just might win, why wouldn't unbelievers think that? They will believe the armies of the world are just about to annihilate what's left of the Jews and their problems will all be solved and a new world order will be installed. We cannot discount the delusions about God to which unbelievers tenaciously cling even though they are fainting with fear about what is coming as Jesus said they would be in Luke 21:26. Even to the end, terrified as they will be, they will still reject the idea that Christ is triumphantly coming back to judge them. Noah, through his building of the ark, had been preaching the judgment to come to people and they didn't pay any attention to his warning (Heb. 11:7). That time period didn't involve any catastrophic events beforehand, but unbelievers didn't listen then and they won't listen at the end of the Tribulation either despite all the warning given them through wrath and judgment. At the end of history, even with all the warnings being given by God to the world through the Tribulation judgments and even though they know they are being subjected to the wrath of God (Rev. 6:15-16), they will still reject Him and attempt to live life on their own terms; that's what unbelievers do; they live life on their own terms in defiance of God even in the face of extreme judgment.

One of the arguments used to justify the Rapture in Matthew is the fact that the Lord moved back and forth in terms of time; therefore, it is conceivable that He went back in time to identify the Rapture. While it is true He went back and forth concerning timing, the Discourse involves the Seventieth Week of Daniel from the beginning, with the exception of the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, and the Rapture has to occur before that week of years. The context and the timing of the Tribulation and the Second Coming do not allow for any insertion of the Rapture into it.

The primary point isn't really about all this anyway; the point is the judgment will come suddenly and the unbelieving world will be unprepared when it comes regardless of the events that have transpired beforehand and are still taking place at the time. Conversely, the Lord is warning Jewish believers to be ready for His return. When Noah's Flood came upon the earth, only believers were left to repopulate the planet; when the Lord returns at the Second Coming only believers will be left to enter the Messianic Kingdom. That's why the Lord used the specific example of Noah and the Flood to picture the Second Coming and the judgment of unbelievers. It is critical to understand the Lord to be referring not to a pre-Tribulation period of time, but to the Tribulation period itself which concerns only the Jews and unsaved Gentiles; it does not concern the church at all. Those who come to faith during the Tribulation are not part of the church; the church is gone and present with the Lord before this time. The contrast between one taken and one left concerns the Tribulation believer who is watching and waiting for the Lord's return and the unbeliever who sees life continuing on without acknowledging or caring about the coming of the Lord.

The Lord's words in Luke 17:34-37 also shed light on this issue concerning who will be taken. The disciples were asking where the taken ones went. The answer is they were taken to judgment; they were dead, hence the reference to the vultures. This is the opposite of the Rapture. Believers are very much alive and will enter the Kingdom.

Luke 17:34–37 <sup>34</sup>“I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other will be left. <sup>35</sup>“There will be two women grinding at the same place; one will be taken and the other will be left. <sup>36</sup>“Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other will be left.” <sup>37</sup>And answering they said to Him, “Where, Lord?” And He said to them, “Where the body is, there also the vultures will be gathered.”

Revelation 19:17-18, 21 records the fulfillment of this prophecy. Unbelievers are taken in judgment and none of them will enter the Kingdom. In fact, they will die in judgment. The contrast with the Rapture is very apparent. At the Rapture, believers obtain glorified bodies, eternal, and fit to be in the presence of God where they are immediately taken. They are not vulture food!

Revelation 19:17–18, 21 <sup>17</sup>Then I saw an angel standing in the sun, and he cried out with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which fly in midheaven, “Come, assemble for the great supper of God, <sup>18</sup>so that you may eat the flesh of kings and the flesh of

commanders and the flesh of mighty men and the flesh of horses and of those who sit on them and the flesh of all men, both free men and slaves, and small and great.”...<sup>21</sup>And the rest were killed with the sword which came from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse, and all the birds were filled with their flesh.

The same scenario, taking unbelievers for judgment and leaving believers for life in the Kingdom, is presented in the parable of the wheat and tares. In this parable (Mt. 13:24-30, 36-43), the angels are gathering up the tares to be burned. The command was to gather the tares first and then harvest the wheat to be brought in. The tares, of course, represent unbelievers, the seed sown by Satan. This leaves the righteous behind to shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom. Keep in mind the Jewish context of this parable.

Matthew 13:30, 36-43<sup>30</sup>“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.””...<sup>36</sup>Then He left the crowds and went into the house. And His disciples came to Him and said, “Explain to us the parable of the tares of the field.”<sup>37</sup>And He said, “The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man,<sup>38</sup> 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;<sup>39</sup> and the enemy who sowed them is the devil, and the harvest is the end of the age; and the reapers are angels.<sup>40</sup>“So just as the tares are gathered up and burned with fire, so shall it be at the end of the age.<sup>41</sup>“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,<sup>42</sup> and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.<sup>43</sup>“Then THE RIGHTEOUS WILL SHINE FORTH AS THE SUN in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.

That same kind of separating out the good from the bad was presented in the parable of the dragnet. Once again, the wicked are separated out from the righteous at the end of the age and killed.

Matthew 13:47–50<sup>47</sup>“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet cast into the sea, and gathering fish of every kind;<sup>48</sup> and when it was filled, they drew it up on the beach; and they sat down and gathered the good fish into containers, but the bad they threw away.<sup>49</sup>“So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous,<sup>50</sup> and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

For this concept and this order of separation by means of taking and leaving to be in the Olivet Discourse is not unusual in the book of Matthew and, in fact, represents a continuation of the Lord’s teaching earlier in the book. In terms of presentation, they are entirely compatible Scriptures and the Rapture is not the subject in any of them; the subject is judgment at the Second Coming.

Dr. Hart thinks the similarities between Scriptures in 1 Thessalonians 4-5 and Matthew 24:40-41 prove that Paul's doctrine of the Rapture came from the Lord's words in the Olivet Discourse. "The similarities of thought are convincing evidence that the source of Paul's prophetic teaching was the Olivet Discourse." [John F. Hart, "Jesus and the Rapture: Matthew 24" in *Evidence for the Rapture: A Biblical Case for Pretribulationism*, p. 58]. He seems to be overstating his case here; similarity does not mean they came from the same source. Matthew was recording the very words the Lord proclaimed during the Discourse. To say that Paul must have used the Lord's words is to discount the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in dealing with Paul concerning the Rapture.

Dr. Hart uses 1 Thessalonians 4:2 to say Paul received the commands of Jesus from Matthew and passed them on to the Thessalonians. He bases this on the use of the words "by [or through] the Lord Jesus."

1 Thessalonians 4:2<sup>2</sup>For [γάρ] you know what commandments we gave you by [διὰ] [~~the authority of~~] the Lord Jesus.

The word translated by or through, διὰ, is a marker of a participant constituting the cause or reason for an event or state; it is a marker which shows instrument. Paul said in the previous verse that he had been providing instruction to the Thessalonians concerning sanctification. The use of the word for, γάρ, means verse two is connected to verse 1; it is a marker of cause or reason between events and the subject is sanctification in verses 1-8. When he gets to 4:13, he changes the subject to the Rapture. Connecting this verse about sanctification with the Rapture is a stretch beyond living a faithful, obedient life in the expectant hope of the Lord's coming for believers, dead and alive which was more fully revealed by Paul later in his ministry. In this chapter, Paul is giving them instructions in three areas of Christian life. Even if these Scriptures, verses 1-8 and 13-18, are connected, and there isn't a strong connection, the revelation Paul received could have come directly from the Lord without Paul ever having read Matthew and the Lord's words recorded there. In fact, there is nothing in 1 Thessalonians 4:2 to suggest Paul was preaching and writing anything other than what he had personally received from the Lord. Simply because he is teaching something only remotely connected to the Rapture, if at all, and the two sections are separated by five verses on love (vv. 9-12), and then use that to say that he received it from Matthew is a faulty and illogical use of the Bible.

We know that Paul received some instruction directly from the Lord after he was saved. At the very least, the Lord revealed the gospel to him; he learned that directly from Christ Jesus and nowhere else. Concerning 1 Thessalonians, Constable said that Paul, "wrote in the Spirit and with the authority of Jesus Christ. Paul claimed to speak for Christ in this matter." [Thomas L. Constable, "1 Thessalonians" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 700]. He must have received some biblical/theological instruction from the Lord (Gal. 1:16-17) because it would be three more years before he went to Jerusalem to meet the apostles and there is no record

that he received any instruction from them while he was there. Most theologians recognize this and believe he received his education directly from the Lord in Arabia. "The point of Paul's declaration is clear. He formed his theology not by consulting with others, but independently as he sought God's guidance." [Donald K. Campbell, "Galatians" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, p. 592]. Wiersbe wrote, "Paul gave himself to study, prayer, and meditation, and met with the Lord alone." [Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary: New Testament*, vol. 1, p. 688].

Whether Paul even read Matthew's book at the time he wrote 1 Thessalonians is highly questionable and seriously doubtful. *The Scofield Study Bible* gives the date for the writing of Matthew at c. 50 A.D. and the writing of 1 Thessalonians as 51 A.D. Ryrie records the dates of the 50s or 60s A.D. for Matthew and 51 A.D. for 1 Thessalonians. Harrison even claims Matthew may have been written between 70 and 80 A.D. [Everrett F. Harrison, *Introduction to the New Testament*, pp. 175-176]. Therefore, there is a very real possibility that Matthew was yet to be written and/or Paul hadn't read Matthew's gospel at the time he wrote to the Thessalonians. To dogmatically state, as Dr. Hart did, the source of Paul's thought on the Rapture must have been the Olivet Discourse has no basis in fact. Actually, it may have been impossible. Certainly, the Olivet Discourse was proclaimed by the Lord nearly twenty years before Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians, but that doesn't mean he read it. It is possible the Lord educated Paul on the subject of the Olivet Discourse, but we don't know that. Even if He did, similarity of words doesn't mean the same topic was the subject.

Dr. Hart also used 1 Thessalonians 4:15, which is a Rapture passage, to claim that Paul used the Olivet Discourse as a source. He simply uses the context, the Rapture, and the fact that Paul is declaring his authority to speak, "by the word of the Lord," which does not mean Paul is repeating something the Lord said in Matthew 24, to prove his case. Again, this seems to ignore the doctrine of inspiration. Paul indicates in this verse that he received this word from the Lord; he doesn't say he read it in Matthew.

1 Thessalonians 4:15 <sup>15</sup>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.

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