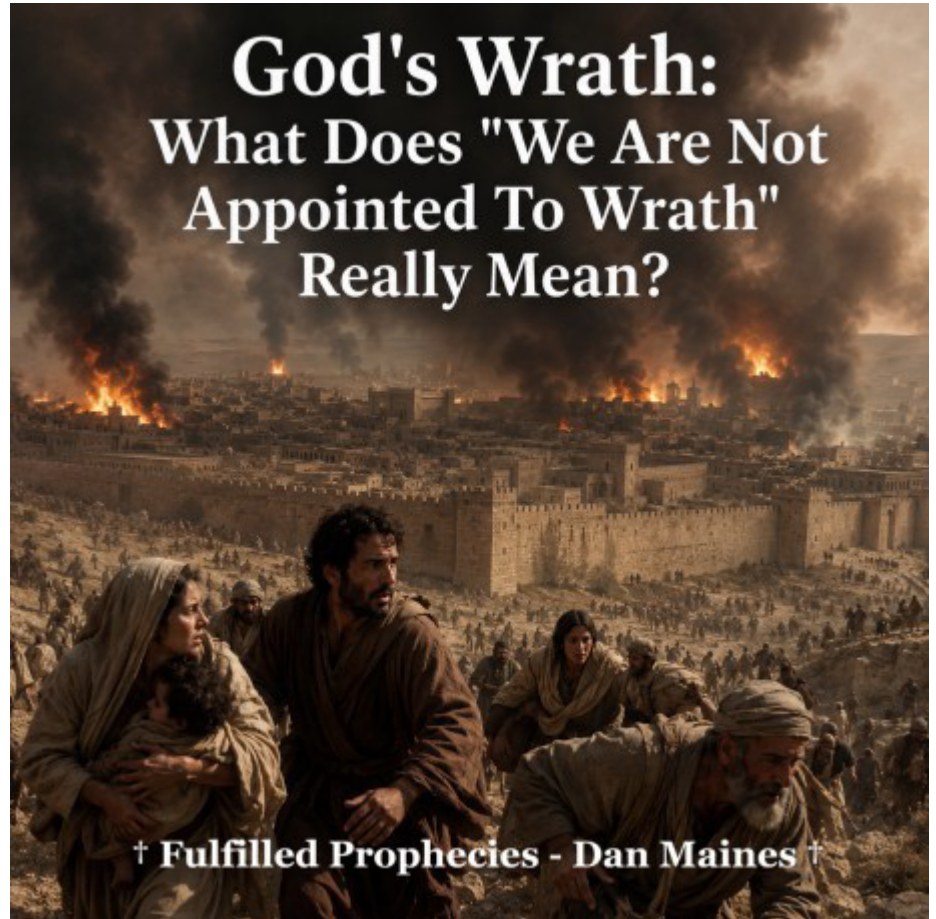


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God's Wrath: What Does "We Are Not Appointed To Wrath" Really Mean?



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† One of the most common arguments used to defend a pre-tribulation rapture is the statement, "We are not appointed to God's wrath." The conclusion is then made that believers must be removed from the earth before a future seven-year tribulation because that period is supposedly God's wrath.

† But is that what the Bible actually teaches? Or is that conclusion being read into the text? Scripture always defines Scripture. When we examine every passage in its covenant and historical context, we discover that God's wrath was directed against the Old Covenant nation that rejected its Messiah, exactly as Jesus and His apostles repeatedly warned would happen within their generation. (Matthew 23:35-38; Matthew 24:34; Luke 21:20-22)

† Let's allow the Bible to explain what God's wrath was, who it was directed toward, and what believers were actually delivered from.

Romans 5:9

Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him.

† Paul says believers would be saved from God's wrath through Christ. He does not mention escaping the earth, but escaping the judgment that was coming upon unbelieving Israel. (Luke 21:22-23; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16)

† The same generation that rejected Christ was warned repeatedly that wrath was approaching. The gospel provided salvation from that coming covenant judgment. (Matthew 3:7; Luke 3:7)

† Justification by Christ placed believers into the New Covenant where there is no condemnation. (Romans 8:1; John 5:24)

1 Thessalonians 1:10

and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is, Jesus who rescues us from the wrath to come.

† Paul wrote to first-century believers who were personally waiting for Christ's promised coming. The audience matters. He was writing to them, not to people living thousands of years later. (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17; Hebrews 10:37)

† The wrath to come was already approaching during their lifetime, just as John the Baptist had warned decades earlier. (Matthew 3:7; Luke 3:7)

† Jesus delivered His faithful followers by warning them to flee Jerusalem when they saw the signs He gave. They escaped exactly as He promised. (Luke 21:20-22; Matthew 24:15-22)

1 Thessalonians 5:9

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

† This verse never says believers would disappear before tribulation. It simply says they were not appointed to receive God's wrath.

† Throughout Scripture God's people have often lived through persecution while being preserved from God's judgments. Noah lived through the flood. Israel remained in Goshen during the plagues. The early Christians fled Jerusalem before its destruction. (Genesis 7:23; Exodus 8:22; Luke 21:20-22)

† God's wrath and man's persecution are not the same thing. Christians have always experienced persecution, but they are never the objects of God's condemnation. (John 16:33; Romans 8:1)

1 Thessalonians 2:14-16

For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea, for you also endured

the same sufferings at the hands of your own countrymen, even as they did from the Jews, who both killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out. They are not pleasing to God, but hostile to all people, hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved; with the result that they always reach the limit of their sins. But wrath has come upon them fully.

† Paul removes all doubt about who God's wrath was directed toward. He says the wrath came upon them, referring to those Jews who rejected Christ and persecuted both the Lord and His apostles. (Matthew 23:29-36; Luke 21:20-24)

† This isn't describing a worldwide judgment on all mankind. It is describing covenant judgment against the nation that rejected its Messiah. (Matthew 21:43; Romans 9:30-33)

† This passage perfectly agrees with Jesus' warnings that judgment would come upon that generation, culminating in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. (Matthew 23:36-38; Matthew 24:34)

Luke 21:22-23

because these are days of punishment, so that all things which have been written will be fulfilled. Woe to those women who are pregnant, and to those who are nursing babies in those days; for there will be great distress upon the land, and wrath to this people;

† Jesus identified exactly where God's wrath would fall, upon this people, referring to first-century Israel that had rejected Him. (Matthew 23:35-36)

† He called these the days of vengeance when all things written would be fulfilled. That leaves no room for another future fulfillment of the same covenant judgments. (Daniel 9:24; Luke

24:44)

† The wrath Jesus described culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, exactly within the generation He addressed. (Matthew 24:34; Luke 17:25)

Matthew 23:35-36

so that upon you will fall the guilt of all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, the son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Truly I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

† Jesus identified the very generation that would receive God's covenant wrath. He didn't place this judgment thousands of years into the future. (Matthew 24:34; Luke 11:49-51)

† The phrase upon you leaves no doubt that His warning was directed to the religious leaders standing before Him. (Matthew 23:13-33; Luke 21:22-23)

† This passage explains exactly why Paul could later speak of wrath coming upon them. Both Jesus and Paul were speaking of the same covenant judgment. (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16; Romans 5:9)

Matthew 3:7

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, You offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?

† John the Baptist announced the coming wrath decades before Jerusalem fell.

† His warning was directed at the religious leaders of Israel, not at future generations thousands of years later. (Matthew 23:29-36)

† Jesus continued that same warning throughout His ministry until its complete fulfillment. (Matthew 23:37-38; Luke 19:41-44)

Matthew 24:21-22

For then there will be a great tribulation, such as has not occurred since the beginning of the world until now, nor ever will again. And if those days had not been cut short, no life would have been saved; but for the sake of the elect those days will be cut short.

† The great tribulation was part of the same judgment Jesus had been describing against Jerusalem. It was not separated from His discussion by thousands of years. (Matthew 24:15-20; Luke 21:20-24)

† Jesus instructed His disciples to flee when they saw Jerusalem surrounded by armies, proving this tribulation belonged to the first century. (Luke 21:20-22; Matthew 24:16)

† God's wrath and the great tribulation belong to the same historical period that ended with the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70. (Luke 21:22-24; 1 Thessalonians 2:16)

Historical References

† Josephus, an eyewitness to the Jewish War, describes the famine, civil war, false prophets, desecration of the temple, and complete destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. His account closely parallels Jesus' warnings in Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, providing historical confirmation that those prophecies were fulfilled exactly as spoken.

† Josephus records that over one million Jews perished during the siege and that the temple was completely destroyed by the Romans, bringing the Old Covenant sacrificial system to its permanent end, just as Jesus foretold. (Matthew 24:1-2; Luke 21:5-6)

† Eusebius records that the Christians in Jerusalem remembered Jesus' command to flee when they saw Jerusalem surrounded by armies. They departed to Pella before the siege began, demonstrating that Christ preserved His followers while God's covenant wrath fell upon apostate Jerusalem. (Luke 21:20-22)

† Tacitus, the Roman historian, also records the devastation of the Jewish War and the destruction of Jerusalem, providing an independent non-Christian witness that these catastrophic events occurred in the first century.

† These historical writers do not establish doctrine, Scripture alone does that. They simply confirm that the events Jesus and His apostles predicted actually happened in history exactly when and where they said they would.

How It Applies To Us Today

† We don't live in fear of God's wrath because we are in Christ. (Romans 8:1; John 5:24)

† We should never build doctrine from isolated verses while ignoring their audience and historical setting. (2 Timothy 2:15; Acts 17:11)

† Our confidence isn't in escaping a future tribulation but in the finished work of Christ, who fulfilled every promise He made concerning His coming in judgment against the Old Covenant system. (John 19:30; Matthew 24:34)

Q & A Appendix

Q: Does "we are not appointed to wrath" teach a pre-tribulation rapture?

A: No. The verse simply states that believers were not appointed to receive God's wrath. It never says they would be removed from the earth before tribulation. God's people are repeatedly preserved through judgment, not necessarily removed before it. (1 Thessalonians 5:9; Luke 21:20-22; Romans 8:1)

Q: What was the wrath Paul referred to?

A: The coming covenant judgment against unbelieving Israel that culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, exactly as Jesus foretold. (Luke 21:22-23; Matthew 23:35-38; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16)

Q: Are Christians promised a life free from persecution?

A: No. Jesus promised persecution, but never condemnation. Believers may suffer at the hands of men, but they are never objects of God's wrath. (John 16:33; Romans 8:1; 2 Timothy 3:12)

Q: Does God's wrath always refer to the end of the world?

A: No. The Bible never teaches the end of the world. Throughout Scripture God's wrath refers to God's historical judgments upon nations such as Egypt, Babylon, Edom, Israel, and Judah. The wrath Jesus and the apostles warned about was the covenant judgment that came upon first-century Jerusalem, exactly as they foretold. (Isaiah 13:9-13; Jeremiah 25:15-18; Luke 21:22-23; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16)

Q: What does Paul mean when he says, "We are not appointed to God's wrath"?

A: Paul is assuring believers that they were not appointed to receive the covenant wrath God was about to pour out upon those who rejected Christ. Throughout his letters, Paul consistently points to a judgment that was near for his first-century audience. That wrath came upon unbelieving Israel, just as Jesus had foretold. Those who were in Christ were delivered from that judgment. (1 Thessalonians 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16; Luke 21:22-23; Matthew 23:35-36)

Q: If believers are not appointed to God's wrath, then who was God's wrath directed toward?

A: Jesus and the apostles repeatedly identified the object of God's wrath as the generation that rejected the Messiah. Jesus said, "wrath unto this people," and Paul said, "the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost." Both were speaking of the covenant judgment that culminated in the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70. (Luke 21:22-23; Matthew 23:35-38; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16)

This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies. †

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Source Index

† Romans 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 1 Thessalonians 5:9; 1 Thessalonians 2:14-16; Luke 21:22-23; Matthew 3:7; Matthew 23:35-36; Matthew 24:21-22

† Josephus, Wars of the Jews, Books 5-6; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History, Book 3, Chapter 5; Tacitus, Histories,

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