

## The Rapture - No One Knows The Day Or The Hour



### A Bible Study by Jack Kelley

There are two popular phrases people use in connection with the End Times to discourage speculation about just when the Rapture might take place. One is "like a thief in the night", and the other is "no one knows the day or the hour". But is that what these phrases really mean?

Let me say from the outset that I don't believe the day or hour of the Rapture can be known in advance by anyone on Earth because I don't believe it's set to happen on any specific day or at any specific hour. I believe it's set to happen when a specific number of born again believers is reached, and I base that conclusion on my understanding of **Romans 11:25**.

I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of the Gentiles has come in.

There are two Greek words in this verse that lend critical support to a proper understanding. The first is translated "full number". In Paul's time it was a nautical term that stood for the predetermined number of sailors necessary to operate a ship. Until the ship had its full number of crew members, it could not legally set sail. Sometimes ship captains who found themselves a man or two short when it came time to leave the harbor went through the water front bars late at night looking for drunken sailors they could kidnap. When they had the number they needed they set sail immediately.

And the second, translated "come in" is also a nautical term that described the ship's arrival at its intended destination. We've all heard people say how much better life will be "when my ship comes in."

By using these terms, Paul was saying that the hardening of Israel's heart will not be fully removed until the Church reaches its predetermined number and arrives at its intended destination, which the Lord called "my Father's House" in **John 14:2-3**. It was a reference to the rapture. There's nothing arbitrary about God's action here. He has already determined the number and will take the Church to its intended destination as soon as it's reached. But as far as I can tell no one on Earth knows either the full number or the current number. All we can know is that we'll be raptured when the full number of Gentiles has come in and it could literally happen on any given day. Then we'll disappear, the blinders will come off Israel and the 70th Week will commence.

Now, back to the topic at hand. What do these two phrases mean and are they intended to discourage speculation about the timing of the Rapture?

## Like A Thief In The Night

When you take out the duplications, this phrase appears 4 times in the New Testament. Let's look at each one and see what it's telling us.

Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, 'Peace and safety,' destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. **(1 Thes. 5:1-4)**

This is Paul's only use of the phrase. It's clear He was speaking of the End Times judgments that will bring total destruction upon the unsuspecting world. While this time will come as a surprise to unbelievers, events leading up to it should not surprise us. He made no mention of the Rapture here.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. **(2 Peter 3:10)**

Here's Peter's only use of the phrase, and again the reference is to the End Time Judgments, not to the Rapture.

Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. **(Rev. 3:3)**

John used the phrase twice, both times quoting the Lord. In **Rev. 3:3** He was criticizing the church in Sardis, which in my opinion represents the mainline Protestants of today. He was reminding them that they've gotten away from His word and had better wake up and get back into it. Otherwise they won't know when He will come to them. Notice the phrase 'come to you?' at the end of **Rev. 3:3**. In the Rapture He comes for us, not to us, and we meet Him in the air. The people He's talking to in **Rev. 3:3** will not go in the Rapture, and if they don't wake up, even the 2nd Coming will take them by surprise. (In verse 4 we see that not everyone in Sardis is asleep. There are a few among them who will be ready for the Rapture and will walk with Him in robes of white.)

'Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed.' **(Rev. 16:15)**

In **Rev. 16:15** the world is well into the Great Tribulation, so the Lord's warning is for Tribulation believers who will be responsible for keeping themselves saved during the most terrifying and dangerous time the world has ever known. When used symbolically, as it is here, clothing always stands for righteousness, and tribulation believers will be responsible for maintaining theirs.

## No One Knows The Day Or The Hour

Now we'll look at that other popular phrase, 'No one knows the day or the hour?.'

'No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man?' **(Matt. 24:36-37)**.

Let's back up a few verses to make sure we have the proper context here. After the Great Tribulation ends (**Matt. 24:29**) there will be various signs in the heavens. The sun and moon will go dark and the stars will fall from the sky. Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear and all the nations will mourn. After that they'll see Him coming in the clouds with power and great glory (**Matt. 24:30**). From both the context and the passage itself it's clear that the day and hour the Lord was referring to in **Matt. 24:36-37** is the 2nd Coming.

A few verses later, the Lord repeated the same thought, again in the context of the 2nd Coming.

?Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.? (**Matt. 24:42-44**)

The Lord does not come to break into Satan's domain at the rapture. He calls us out of it. And another few verses later.

The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (**Matt. 24:50-51**)

There's no way this can refer to the rapture because the things He described will not be done to unbelievers at the rapture. He's speaking of the judgments that follow the 2nd Coming.

Then, for the fourth time in 28 verses the Lord said that believers on Earth at the time of the 2nd Coming will not know the day or hour of His return.

?Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.? (**Matt. 25:13**)

This one is in the context of the parable of the 10 bridesmaids.

In previous studies I've shown that this parable can't be about the church. The Church is the Bride, not a bridesmaid, there's only one bride, not 10, and the banquet follows the wedding, it doesn't precede it. There's no way a newly married bride could be excluded from her own wedding banquet by a husband who claims he doesn't know her. The parable is about tribulation survivors, 5 of whom are saved and enter the Kingdom and 5 who are not and don't.

## What's The Point?

Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing?. (**2 Tim. 4:8**)

I've searched the Scriptures in vain trying to find either of the above phrases used in connection with the Rapture. But I can't find a single verse that does so. As I've shown they all point to the Second Coming and they are all directed toward Tribulation survivors, not the Church.

What I did find is that the Lord rebuked the religious leaders of His time for not expecting Him. He criticized the Pharisees for not being able to read the signs of the times (**Matt. 16:2-4**). We're admonished to be aware as well. For example, the Lord commanded us to understand Daniel's 70 weeks prophecy (**Matt. 24:15**). Paul warned us not to let events leading up to the Day of the Lord take us by surprise (**1 Thes. 5:4**), and as we see above He promised that the Lord would award a crown to those who longed for His appearing. And why shouldn't we long for His appearing? After all, the rapture of the Church is one of the most exciting things our Creator has ever done for His followers. It's not for nothing that we call it our blessed hope. Therefore, encourage each other with these words. Selah 09-05-09