

“No one knows”

WHENEVER SOMEONE comes up with a new theory about when the Rapture might happen, it's not uncommon for someone to say “Well, the Bible says no one knows when the Lord will return so we shouldn't be speculating about it.” I'd like to take a moment to address that criticism.

The verses that the critics quote can be found in two places in the Bible. Let's take a look at them:

Matthew 24:36: “But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only.

37 But as the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

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

39 And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.

40 Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

41 Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

42 Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.

43 But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up.

44 Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.”

This passage states that no one knows the day or hour of the Lord's return. However, it is critical to understand that the Lord is *not* talking about the Rapture here, but instead is talking about His return *at the end of the Tribulation*.

There are a couple details that make this clear. First, this entire passage is a response to three questions that the disciples asked Christ. These questions can be found earlier in the chapter:

Matthew 24:1: “And Jesus went out, and departed from the temple: and his disciples came to him for to show him the buildings of the temple.

2 And Jesus said unto them, See ye not all these things? Verily I say unto you, There shall not be left here one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.

3 And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us, when shall these things be? And what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?”

As can be seen, the disciples asked three questions: when would the Temple be destroyed, what sign would happen just before the Lord returned, and what would be the sign that the world was about to end? The disciples asked these questions because they believed the destruction of their Temple would be a part of the end of the world. As it turned out, they were wrong.

In response to these questions, Christ started talking about the Tribulation. We know that Matthew 24 is not talking about the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD (which is when the Temple was

actually destroyed) because of what He told the disciples to be expecting. Many of the signs He mentioned *still* have not happened to this very day. For example:

1. The Abomination of Desolation

Jesus told His disciples that before He returned the “abomination of desolation” would be set up in the Holy Place of the Temple:

Matthew 24:14: “When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, stand in the holy place, (whoso readeth, let him understand:)

15 Then let them which be in Judea flee into the mountains:”

This is a reference to Daniel 9:26, which says:

Daniel 9:27: “And he shall confirm the covenant with many for one week: and in the midst of the week he shall cause the sacrifice and the oblation to cease, and for the overspreading of abominations he shall make it desolate, even until the consummation, and that determined shall be poured upon the desolate.”

In this passage Daniel is talking about the Tribulation – the last 7 years of the 490-year period that had been set aside to finish Israel's sins and bring the Jewish nation back to God. The Antichrist will sign a seven-year peace treaty with Israel (the phrase “one week” is symbolic for seven years), and in the middle of those seven years he will break the treaty and stop the sacrifices in the Temple. In fact, he will go even further and install himself in the Temple, declaring himself to be God:

2 Thessalonians 2:3: “Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;

4 Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshiped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.”

None of these things happened in 70 AD. Israel did not sign a seven-year peace treaty with the Antichrist. Although the Temple was destroyed, the Antichrist did not install himself in the temple and declare to the world that he was Almighty God. That has yet to happen.

2. The Great Tribulation

Jesus said that before He returned there would be a time of “great tribulation”:

Matthew 24:21: “For then shall be great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.

22 And except those days should be shortened, there should no flesh be saved; but for the elect's sake those days shall be shortened.”

This time of trouble will be the worst thing the world has *ever* seen. Nothing worse ever happened before it and nothing worse will ever happen after it. In fact, it is so bad that if it was not shortened *no flesh* would be saved – in other words, if God did not cut it short *every living thing on Earth would die*.

Needless to say, that has not happened yet either. When Jerusalem was destroyed in 70 AD it was a time of great trouble, and approximately a million Jews were slaughtered. However, it was *not* the worst thing that ever happened in all of history. In fact, it was not even the worst event to ever happen to the Jews – during the Holocaust 6 million Jews were killed, or nearly 2/3rds of the world's Jewish population.

As you can see, this sign has not happened either.

3. The Sign of the Son of Man

Immediately before Jesus returns a special sign will appear in the sky:

Matthew 24:30: “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, ...”

This has also not happened yet. No one even knows what the “sign of the Son of man” is. It certainly has not appeared in the sky and caused all of the nations to mourn.

4. The Return of Christ

After all these things have happened, the Lord would return with power and great glory:

Matthew 24:30: “And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory.”

This has not happened yet either. Jesus has not yet returned to Earth.

5. The Gathering of the Elect

After Jesus returns He will send his angels to gather up the elect. This is *not* the Rapture (which

happens before the Tribulation and which does not involve the angels) but is a separate event, where the nations are gathered together for judgment:

Matthew 24:21: “And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the one end of heaven to the other.”

This has not happened either. The elect are still on Earth. This trumpet has not sounded.

The point of all this is that when the disciples asked Christ what the sign of His coming would be, He basically told them this:

- There would be wars and rumors of wars (v6)
- There would be famines and earthquakes (v7)
- Christians would be persecuted (v9)
- There would be the abomination of desolation (v15)
- There would be the worst time of trouble the world has ever seen and will ever see (v21)
- The sign of the Son of man would appear in heaven, causing all the nations to mourn (v30)
- And *then* Christ would return.

In other words, Christ spent the whole chapter talking about His return *after the end of the seven-year Tribulation*. When Christ said in verse 36 that “of that day and hour knoweth no man”, He was talking about His coming *after* the Tribulation. At the end of the Tribulation the sign of the Son of man will appear in the sky, and at some point after that Christ will return. The exact timing of His return is unknown – it could be hours, days, or weeks. There's no way to know.

The key point here is that *Christ is not talking about the Rapture of the Church*. The Church is never mentioned in the entire chapter. We already know that the Church will not be on Earth during the Tribulation – they will be raptured out first. Jesus is telling those who are left behind what to expect during the Tribulation and how they will know that their Lord is about to return.

Therefore, people who use the “no one knows” verse to attack those who theorize about the Rapture are mistaken because *this verse is not talking about the Rapture*. This can also be seen in the other place where this is discussed – Mark 13:32-37. Mark 13 is almost a copy of Matthew 24 (you can read it for yourself and see what I mean). Once again, the focus of the “no man knows” statement is Christ's return at the end of the Tribulation. These passages don't even mention the Rapture.

In fact, when the Bible does talk about the Rapture it goes so far as to say that it should *not catch us off-guard*. For example, look at this passage:

I Thessalonians 4:13: “But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be **caught up** together with them in

the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so we shall ever be with the Lord.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

5:1: But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you.

2 For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

3 For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child, and they shall not escape.

4 But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief.

5 Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

6 Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober."

(As a side-note, there are people who claim that the word "rapture" is not found anywhere in the Bible. However, the word rapture comes from the Latin word *rapturo*. If you take the phrase "caught up" from verse 17 and translate it into Latin, do you know what word you get? That's right, *rapturo*! So saying that the word "rapture" does not appear in the Bible is wrong for two reasons: (a) it's a Latin word, so of course it won't be found in an English Bible, and (b) if you translate these verses into Latin it actually *does* appear.)

In this passage it is clear that Paul is talking about the Rapture. Verses 16 and 17 talk about the Lord returning, the resurrection of the dead, the transformation of the living, and our going to always be with the Lord. With that context in mind, Paul says in verse 3 that this event will take the world by surprise. However, in verse 4 he says that it will *not* take the Church by surprise. Look at that verse again:

I Thessalonians 5:4: "But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief."

Paul actually comes right out and says that the Church *should be expecting the Rapture*. It should not catch us by surprise. In fact, in verse 6 Paul commands the Church to be sober and *watch for it*.

So, then, the idea that "no one knows when Christ will return, so therefore we shouldn't speculate about the Rapture" is wrong for several reasons. First, when Christ said that He was talking about His return at the end of the Tribulation, not the Rapture of the Church. Second, Paul *commanded* the Church to be watching for the Rapture so that it doesn't catch us off-guard. The world will be caught off-guard, but the Church should see it coming.

Sadly, I think that many people in the Church are not looking for the Rapture. If they even think about it they see it as something that will happen a very long time from now, if it ever happens at all. There is no expectation that it could happen soon. When it happens I believe that it will take many people completely by surprise – even though it shouldn't.