

# “DAY AND HOUR” – TIME RESTRICTION?

## Introduction

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

This is one of the Bible verses that gets nearly universal “reactive interpretation”: “We won’t know the time.” Consequently, there is an “instinctive” reaction against studying the numerous apocalyptic time prophecies in Daniel and Revelation. They must have occurred in the past because “we aren’t to know.” Yet the “believer” is perpetually convinced that the “end” is “near.” A favorite excuse as to why it is not discussed: “There have been so many failures of ‘timing predictions’ in the past, we don’t want to be disappointed again.” Against many confirmatory, signature texts the spirit remains that it is difficult to know how close the “time of the Son of man’s coming and the end of the age is.”<sup>1</sup>

This “barrier view,” “secret view,” creates tension with Matthew 24:32-33, where the parable of the fig tree informs us of the approaching harvest “season” and that **one might know** when the *parousia* (Second Coming) is “even at the doors.” Jesus actually gave anticipatory details in verses 37-44, revealing that Noah’s day carries additional clues for observing the approaching end. More on that shortly.

What has the result been – the natural outcome of this “secret view”? “Any prophecy related to ‘time’ approaches saintly taboo.” It is the purpose of this document to soften those restraints on God’s Word.

The verse in the NIV:

*“But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, **nor the Son**, but only the Father”* (Matthew 24:36 – NIV).

- This assumed hiatus of knowledge noted for Jesus is not the subject of this article. A good resume narrative addressing this phrase, however, is available.<sup>2</sup>
- Some manuscripts do not include “nor the Son.”

“No one knows” (“knows” – *oida* – G) or is able to discern, understand or even come to know<sup>3</sup> the precise time of Christ’s coming (day or hour).

A companion text that appears to seal this undisclosed time from understanding:

- *“When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, **It is not for you to know the times or the seasons**, which the Father hath put in his own power”* (Acts 1:6-7).

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<sup>1</sup> Hagner, Donald A.; *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nelson Reference & Electronic, Division of Thomas Nelson Publishers), vol. 33B, p. 716

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.mbu.edu/seminary/journal/mark-1332-problem-or-paradigm-2/>

<sup>3</sup> *Gingrich Lexicon*.

- Collectively, it appears that “God knows when Jesus will return, but it is classified.” It is “His” secret – similar to when the kingdom will be restored.
- This assumption suggests that there is a “disconnect” between the imminent signs given throughout prophecy and the concept that you cannot know.

Might these verses apply only to those receiving them? Could their meaning be disclosed or unsealed to God’s end-time people? Do the two texts noted establish a “no one will ever know interpretation”? Might the “no one” apply to those unprepared as that day approaches? Or – is the “secret view” a misinterpretation of Christ’s intent?

Recall the apocalyptic drama of Daniel’s “time of the end” discourse (Daniel 8–12). At the narrative conclusion:

- *“Close up and seal the words of the scroll **until the time of the end**”* (Daniel 12:4 – NIV) – **spoken by Gabriel.**
- *“And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are **closed up and sealed till the time of the end**”* (Daniel 12:9 – NIV) – **spoken by Jesus.**

As the end approaches, a very different view of those prophecies is to be expected. Those Danielic projections actually have been recently unsealed. Not until the last few decades could their meaning be comprehended. Those mysteries remained sealed until God’s predetermined time. Approaching end-time prophecy can now be more comprehensive and reality oriented.

There is something else about “time” – at the end of time – that appears to move from the obscure to amazing disclosure.

- Though having a broad spiritual application, Christ’s words, recorded by Luke, have a resonating cognitive appeal:
- *“For nothing is secret, that shall not be made manifest; neither any thing hid, that shall not be known and come abroad”* (Luke 8:17).

A time is set for understanding those eschatological secrets that Daniel recorded. It even says:

- *“Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and **none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand**”* (Daniel 12:10).
- Interesting!
- Until that point in time arrived, interpretive views remained in the realm of assumptions.

### **Matthew’s Olivet Discourse in Unique Context**

*“But about that day or hour **no one knows**, 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. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and **they knew nothing** about what would happen **until the flood came and took them all away.** That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left. ‘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**" (Matthew 24:36-44 – NIV).

No one knows. You do not know. They knew nothing. But had they known, had they watched, what could have happened?

Notice the change in venue to a different time reference.

- **The disciples did not know. The Day nor the hour no one knew (vs 36).**
- **As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man (vs 37).**
- **The wicked did not understand until the flood came – until their end arrived (vs 39).** (It was the wicked who didn't know "when.")
- **You don't know which day your Lord is coming (vs 42)** (back to the disciples).

Warning – break – "understand this":

- **If the head of house had known at what time it was, he would not have been surprised (vs 43).** (There must be the ability to watch "something.")
- **Coming at an hour which you do not think (vs 44) – thus, be ready** (back to the disciples).

Why was the parable of the "good man of the house" given? To orient His listeners to the fact that at the very end special insights would be available.

You don't know the hour of Christ's coming (vs 42)

But – know this (vs 43)

If the good man had known what period (watch) the thief would come (vs 43)

He would have prevented a disastrous break-in (vs 43)

Therefore, be ready always (vs 44)

For in such an hour as you now don't know – He comes (vs 44)

*Who then is a faithful and wise servant?* (vs 45) One who knows when to watch (the day) symbolically and what to watch for.

Is God playing "hide and seek" with truth in these prophecies? No – but what He is revealing is profound:

The days of Noah are given with a timing template to understand the "coming" motif.

### Life Focus

Eating  
Drinking  
Marrying  
Giving in marriage  
(i.e., life as usual)

### Known prophetic pre-flood time – rejected by the lost

Man's days limited – 120 years (Gen. 5:3) – **long period**  
Approximately one generation **for them**  
THEN  
7 days of rain until it comes (Gen. 7:4, 10) – **short period**

**“Generation” refers to the “group” who will see those signs begin and will experience its end** (Matthew 24:34, Mark 13:30, Luke 21:32).<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, all the things that Jesus presented will occur in a defined generation.

- There is a segment of events related to the fall of Jerusalem that end in Matthew 24:14.
- The whole picture that applies to the eschatological end terminates in Matthew 24:31.
- Each segment has its own “generational period,” when everything occurs (Matthew 24:34).
- Matthew 24:15-22 is a special commentary for both times.

Applying the Noaic template and linking it with other prophecies to the *parousia*, we note:<sup>5</sup>

<u>Life Focus</u>	<u>Known prophetic, eschatological time – rejected by most</u>
Eating	All completed in one generation (40 years) – <b>long period</b>
Drinking	(Matt. 24:34, Luke 21:32; Heb. 3:9-10)
Marrying	Appointed time (3½ years) (Dan. 8:17, 19; 11:35; Dan. 12) – <b>short</b>
Giving in marriage (i.e., life as usual)	<b>period</b>

### Searching Elsewhere

In II Kings 2:1-5 a unique timing message is given regarding Elijah.

- Through prophetic revelations conveyed to many individuals, the miraculous translation of Elijah was predicted.
- This was first revealed to Elisha at Gilgal, then sequentially to two groups of disciples of prophets – in Bethel, then Jericho.
- So convincing was this timing prophecy that:
  1. Elisha wouldn’t leave the side of Elijah.
  2. Fifty of those prophets went near the Jordan to witness Elijah’s ascent.
- Those prophets finally knew the ascension was going to be “today.”

The anticipatory end of the world in Noah’s day and the translation of Elijah were tied to very precise timing prophecies.

- Such was the case with Israel’s generational wilderness punishment (Numbers 14:33, Deuteronomy 29:5).
- And – Israel’s final probation of 490 years (Daniel 9:24).

Did God’s purpose of using predictive time, setting an aura of preparation urgency, cease with the prophecies related to the Second Coming? Did God’s level of communication change for the era when redemptive history would culminate? Are the many numeric periods associated

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<sup>4</sup> *NET Bible* annotation and Bock, Bock, Darrell L.; *Luke 9:51–24:53*, vol. B, (Baker Academic, Grand Rapids, MI; 1996), pp. 1691-1692.

<sup>5</sup> Fowler, Franklin S., Jr., M.D.; *End-Time Secrets of Daniel 8–12, Scripture’s Most Important “Time” Prophecies and The Coming Battle Between Two Apostate Powers – Again!*

with apocalyptic prophecy really historical? Might a Christian majority miss a “time of the end” application?

A provocative verse is found in John’s Revelation:

- “Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; hold it fast, 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.” (Revelation 3:3 – NIV).
- A lethargic condition, even being asleep, will characterize the end-time church, as His Second Coming approaches.
  - “If the church doesn’t watch”<sup>6</sup>
  - “If they should fail to maintain watchfulness, the same fate will happen to them as happened to Sardis, with attacks from both Cyrus and Antiochus III: a ‘thief’ will come and destroy them.”<sup>7</sup>
  - “If you don’t wake up, the coming of the Lord will be a surprise – like a thief.”<sup>8</sup>

**This** imagery/narrative reveals that by waking up and maintaining alert watchfulness, the advent would not be as a thief.

1. This might apply to the horrors of the Roman invasion in 70 A.D.
2. This would apply to the apocalyptic end of the world.

Notice that the focus in the parable and Noaic illustrations is on the “end” of an opportunity; life, or when desolation occurs. In Revelation there are two kinds of comings:

1. In judgment
2. The Second Coming

The distinction is not always clear. Both reveal, however, **an irrevocable destiny**. Revelation 3:3 refers to the Second Coming because that was the setting just presented in 2:25 within the phrase of “I come quickly” and the “thief” imagery. (cf. Matthew 24:43, Luke 12:39, I Thessalonians 5:2, II Peter 3:10).

- Jesus later builds on this surprise imagery under the seventh plague: “Behold I come as a thief” (Revelation 16:15).
- He then notes: “Blessed is the one who stays awake” (NIV).
- They will not be taken by surprise.<sup>9</sup>

Combining that verse with “*But if you do not wake up*” (3:3) and what we’ve covered to this point, one must conclude that:

1. If one is awake, the coming of Christ won’t be as a thief.

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<sup>6</sup> Stefanovic, Ranko; *Revelation of Jesus Christ*, p. 136.

<sup>7</sup> Osborne, Grant R.; *Revelation* (Baker Book House; Grand Rapids, MI), p, 177.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas, Robert L.; *Revelation 1–7 – An Exegetical Commentary*, vol. I (Moody Press, Chicago – 1992), p. 253.

<sup>9</sup> Mounce, Robert H.; *The Book of Revelation* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1977), p. 129.

2. That thief imagery describes those unprepared, used often “to refer to Christ’s Second Advent.”<sup>10</sup> The urgent call for repentance in Revelation 3:3 is based on the sensitivity that the end is imminent.
3. Knowing very closely “when” ***is*** a prophetic disclosure.
4. The illustration of the “fig tree” and the “at the door” comments (Matthew 24:32-33) have timing merit related to the *Parousia* and inform us as to when the final preparation arrives – it is urgent imagery!

Within the apocalyptic messages there is noted a difference between those who “know” and those who “don’t know.”

- Jesus said: As spoken through the prophet Daniel – “let the ***reader*** understand” (Matthew 24:15).
- “I will explain to ***you*** the mystery” (Revelation 17:7).
- “This calls for wisdom. If ***anyone*** has insight, let him ...” (Revelation 13:18).
- “***Understand, O son of man: for at the time of the end shall be the vision***” (Daniel 8:17).

Who will then know?

*“Many will be purified, made spotless and refined, but the wicked will continue to be wicked. None of the wicked will understand, but those who are **wise will understand.**”* (Daniel 12:10 – NIV).

The word for “come” in Revelation 3:3 is in the future indictive mood. It is a statement of fact that Jesus will come as a thief if they don’t stay awake.

- The wording in this verse represents a double negative.<sup>11</sup>
- Thus, in emphatic terms, the Lord is saying that the churches will basically be ignorant of the timing of His return. But the wise (those who know those prophecies) will be fully aware.

### **Expositor White and the Advent Knowledge**

This was partially seen by expositor White when in 1888, 1896 and 1906, alluding to Matthew 24:34, she noted by affirming:

“To those who urged from the scripture, ‘Of that day and hour knoweth no man,’ that men are to know nothing concerning the nearness of the advent, Wolff replied: ‘Did our Lord say that that day and hour should *never* be known? Did He not give us signs of the times, in order that we may know at least the *approach* of His coming, as one knows the approach of the summer by the fig tree putting forth its leaves? Matthew 24:32. Are we never to know that period, whilst He Himself exhorteth us not only to read Daniel the prophet, but to understand it? and in that very Daniel, where it is said that the words were shut up to the time of the end (which was the case in his time), and that “many shall run to and fro” (a Hebrew expression for observing and thinking upon the time), “and *knowledge*” (regarding that time) “shall be increased.” Daniel 12:4. Besides this, our Lord does not intend to say by this, that the approach of the time shall not be known, but that the *exact* “day and hour knoweth no man.” Enough, He does say, shall

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> Robertson’s Word Pictures, 6:314.

be known by the signs of the times, to induce us to prepare for His coming, as Noah prepared the ark.”<sup>12</sup>

“The **exact** day and hour of Christ’s coming have not been revealed.”<sup>13</sup>

### **A Special Pauline Insight**

A veil is now gradually being lifted. The anticipated nearness for eschatological understanding is now objectively available to the prophetic-wise. Daniel relates that the “time of the end” is a definable period.

- It is significant to note that in the parables Christ gave in the Olivet discourse, “time” is the central issue.
- Reflect:
  1. The unprepared – “*ye know not what hour*” (Matthew 24:42)
  2. Unfaithful servant – “*my Lord delays his coming*” (Matthew 24:48)
  3. Ten sleeping virgins – “at midnight there was a cry” (Matthew 25:6) (someone knew)
  4. Talents – “after a long time” (Matthew 25:19)

Why did Christ have concern that the spiritual themes within these illustrations be embedded in a framework of time? Because the anticipatory excitement of tomorrow is to be understood today! Preparation must move into the realm of animated elation when it is truly approaching!

- There is a saying attributed to Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (book eleven – Confessions) that unravels the thinking of the unwise<sup>14</sup>:
- Paraphrased:
  - “*If we aren’t asked to tell why Jesus is coming soon, we know.*”
  - “*If we are asked to explain why – we can’t.*”
- Interesting! That “reality” has reverberated for centuries – until recently.

Paul desperately sought to modify even the timing ignorance of the Thessalonians. What he advised is eschatologically informative and apropos for us today.

- “*But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you*” (I Thessalonians 5:1).
- The timing of the resurrection was discussed in I Thessalonians 4:13-18 as it related to the “coming of the Lord.”
- They were in an anticipatory mood of those times.

The syntax of what follows could be confusing. But note the information flow towards these believers:

- “*But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you*” (I Thessalonians 5:1).

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<sup>12</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Great Controversy*, pp. 359-360.

<sup>13</sup> White, Ellen G.; *The Review and Herald*, November 22, 1906.

<sup>14</sup> Jackelén, Antje; *Time & Eternity* (Templton Foundation Press, Philadelphia; 2005), p. 1.

- *“But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief”* (I Thessalonians 5:4).

The Thessalonian believers were oriented enough about the Second Coming – the Day of the Lord – that they weren’t in darkness, that He would not arrive as a “night surprise.” They had on the “armor of light” (Romans 13:12-13).

*“Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness”* (I Thessalonians 5:5).

Paul then becomes pastoral through the rest of the chapter to counsel them to always be expectantly ready.

What does one do with verses 2 and 3?

- *“For you know quite well that the day of the Lord will come in the same way as a thief in the night. Now when they are saying, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction comes on them, like labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will surely not escape”* (I Thessalonians 5:2-3 – NIV).
- These allude to those who are in darkness. They are not children of light. Life is going forward without concern. They assume all is *“peace and safety.”*

What knowledge did the Thessalonians have to bring such affirmation from Paul?

1. They were not deceptively oriented that everything was “peace and safety.”
2. They knew of some “times and seasons” – though those details are **not** characterized.

Paul’s later words contain some clues, however, that are provocative. Times and seasons (*chronon kai ton karion*) are well known words describing the end times to those people.<sup>15,16,17</sup>

Since they assumed that Christ’s return was presently anticipated, Paul began a very important journey of counsel to these people. In his next letter he shared with them an important eschatological “sign” – the antichrist must come first (II Thessalonians 2) – **then** they would know for sure! Incredible information!

All these clues reveal that from Noah’s experience through Israel’s probation to Paul’s prophetic messages, embedded applications for the people of the “last end” are found!

- From Noah: Repent – timing predictions were known
- From Daniel: Repent – God’s mercy is limited and “in mercy” given within timing periods now unsealed.
- From Paul: Stay the course – your clue will be the antichrist. Remain with your timing urgency.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas, Robert L.; *Expositor’s Bible*, editor Frank E. Gaebelin (Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI; 1981) vol. 11, p. 280.

<sup>16</sup> *Bible Works 7, NET Bible Notes on I Thessalonians 5:1.*

<sup>17</sup> Thomas, *op. cit.*, pp. 280-281.

Paul is telling us that one needs to focus on the emergence of the antichrist. And Christ urged a deeper focus in that Olivet discourse on that person!

- He told His hearers where to go to know more about that apostate.
- “Go to Daniel” where it talks about the **abomination** that leads to desolation (Matthew 24:15; cf. Mark 13:14). There, the details will unfold.

Why didn’t Paul say the same thing to the Thessalonians? The relevant prophecies in Daniel would be sealed until the time of the end! Crucial information!

### **The Danelic Factor**

There are four places in Daniel that allude to the word “abomination” and/or “desolation,” all associated with the antichrist. It is most interesting that in the last one there is a timing prophecy.

- *“And from the time that the daily [sacrifice] shall be taken away, and the abomination that maketh desolate set up, there shall be a thousand two hundred and ninety days”* (Daniel 12:11).
- **From** the “abominations” means that that event begins the 1290 days.

Lest there is a negative deflection away from Christ’s end-time advice, when the word for “days” (*yom* – H) is used with a number (ordinal or cardinal), it refers to literal time – a 24-hour time.<sup>18</sup>

At the end there will be a 1290-day period that commences with the taking away of the daily and setting up (a legal issue), an abomination that God says will lead to desolation.

- A particular sin will arise that God hates so much He calls it an “abomination.”
- Daniel 8:12-13 states that **it** is a “transgression” that leads to desolation.
- The Hebrew word for that “sin” is *be•pesha* – rebellion against God’s **authority, law** and **covenant**.

Might that refer to the Sabbath?

### **Evidence Mounts!**

- The day and hour message (Matthew 24:36) was meant mainly for the time it was given.
- The times and seasons (Acts 1:7) time restriction was meant mainly for the era it was given.
- The more detailed information in Daniel would be opened to those within the final generation. That is why there is an open book in Revelation 10!

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<sup>18</sup> Cassuto, Umberto; *Genesis I* (1961), p. 29, as quoted by Harris, R. Laird, et al. in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. II, p. 694. Hasel, Gerard F.; *The “Days” of Creation in Genesis 1: Literal “Days” or Figurative “Periods/epochs” of Time?* (Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI), p. 17. Kohler, L.; *Old Testament Theology* (Philadelphia, 1957), p. 170. Stambaugh, James; *The days of Creation: A semantic approach* (Evangelical Theological Society papers, ETS-0152, 1996), pp. 3-4, 10, 12. Gentry, Kenneth L, Jr.; *Ordained Servant, “In the Space of Six Days”* (extract), vol. 9, no. 1 (January 2000), pp. 12-16.

But – **that** would remain elusive to those unprepared for the Second Coming. For the saints, fully anticipating the advent, many wonderful messages of **the urgency of time** awaits their penetrating study. The timing periods of probationary warning of the past in Old Testament history are not exceptions to God’s mode of communication – they are the rule – they are for us today.

The day and the hour will not be specifically known – but a very special timing message is nestled within the “time of the end” narratives for God’s last-day people. We will not only see it approaching and knocking on the door, and see that the harvest “fig season” is about to arrive, but the arrival of an “appointed time” will be embedded in our understanding (Daniel 8:19, 11:29; cf. Habakkuk 2:2-3)!

Franklin S. Fowler, Jr., M.D.  
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