

What It Means That Jesus Comes as a Thief

By Robert I. Adams

In the book of Revelation, Jesus mentions that He is going to come "as a thief". But what did He mean? First, let's see what He actually said:

"Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches..." (Rev. 16:15)

Here, Jesus is making an announcement. It is evident from what Jesus says that He is announcing to His own whom He expects to be watching that He is about to come. And when Jesus says He will come "as a thief", He is saying that He will come suddenly and unexpectedly, which implies that this is the way those *not* watching for His return will experience His coming.

That the coming of Jesus will be a surprise (an unpleasant one), not only concerns the world, but also those who confess Him, but who are not spiritually awake. This is apparent from Revelation 3:3, where Jesus says, "Therefore if you will not watch, I will come upon you *as a thief*." In contrast, Jesus says in Revelation 16:15 that those who watch, i.e. stay alert, are blessed (cf. "Blessed is he who watches"). It follows that the watchful believers will not experience His coming "as a thief", i.e. an unpleasant surprise.

Let's take note of the context of the utterance of Jesus in Revelation 16:15 that we are looking at. It comes just after the outpouring of the sixth vial in verse 12, and just before the outpouring of the seventh vial that we read about in verse 17. When looking at the wider context in the book of Revelation, we see that Jesus utters these words at the close of the time of great tribulation not long before His return, a description of which appears in Revelation 19. This means the words of Jesus about Him coming "as a thief" cannot be used to show that He will come *before* the time of great tribulation.

We learn more of what it means that Jesus is coming "as a thief" from John 10:10. Here, Jesus said, "The *thief* does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy." This tells us that when Jesus says He will come "as a thief", it means His coming will result in destruction - people will lose things, and even their lives. We do well to take note that when Jesus spoke about His return after the great tribulation in Matthew 24 (cf. v.29-30), He used the imagery of "the thief" (v.43), and He likened His coming to Noah's flood. He said, "The flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be" (v.39). As the ungodly were drowned at the time of Noah, so will many ungodly lose their lives when Jesus returns.

Jesus' words about coming as a "thief" can be compared with Jeremiah 49:9, where we are told of the coming of "thieves by night" who "destroy until they have enough". The context shows that this imagery is used of the sudden destruction of Edom by the Babylonians. This is how the coming of Christ "as a thief" will be for His enemies; they will be suddenly destroyed as stated in Revelation 19:19-21, which describes the return of Jesus:

"And I saw the beast [Antichrist], the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him [Jesus] who sat on the horse and against His army. Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet.... These two were cast alive into the lake of

fire burning with brimstone. And the rest were killed with the sword which proceeded from the mouth of Him who sat on the horse. And all the birds were filled with their flesh.”

Concerning the coming of Christ, the apostle Paul employed the imagery of a thief and the destruction that is associated with it. He wrote:

“The day of the Lord so comes *as a thief* in the night. . . . then *sudden destruction* comes upon them But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you *as a thief*.” (1 Thess. 5:2–4)

From what Paul says here about “a thief in the night”, we see that when Jesus comes, He will come with “sudden destruction” upon the ungodly who are in spiritual darkness. However, His coming will mean deliverance for the righteous who are in the light. Paul brings this out in another passage:

“God [will] give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting *destruction* from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe...” (2 Thess. 1:7-10)

Let us watch and stay alert so can be blessed and rejoice at the coming of the Lord.

In case you have some queries about this, I have compiled answers to the most frequently asked questions about the Bible’s teaching on the return of Jesus in my book/e-book “The Approaching Apocalypse”. You are welcome to look at it at [Amazon](#). You are also welcome to view my book/e-book “The Unveiling”, which is all about the book of Revelation - also available at [Amazon](#).

[Last Days Detective](#) - with an eye on the end time!