

Luke 12:39

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through.

Analysis

And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched (τοῦτο δὲ γινώσκετε ὅτι εἰ ἤδει ὁ οἰκοδεσπότης ποίᾳ ὥρᾳ ὁ κλέπτης ἔρχεται, ἐγρηγόρησεν ἄν, touto de ginōskete hoti ei ēdei ho oikodespotēs poia hōra ho kleptēs erchetai, egrēgorēsen an)—Jesus shifts metaphors from returning master to invading thief to emphasize suddenness and surprise. The imperative *ginōskete* (γινώσκετε, know, understand) commands attention to this crucial truth. The *oikodespotēs* (οἰκοδεσπότης, householder, master of the house) represents believers; the *kleptēs* (κλέπτης, thief) represents Christ's unexpected coming.

The contrary-to-fact conditional (εἰ ἤδει... ἐγρηγόρησεν ἄν, ei ēdei... egrēgorēsen an) indicates: if he had known (but he didn't), he would have watched (but he didn't). **And not have suffered his house to be broken through** (καὶ οὐκ ἄν ἀφῆκεν διορυχθῆναι τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ, kai ouk an aphēken diorychthēnai ton oikon autou)—The verb *dioryssō* (διορύσσω) means to dig through; ancient Palestinian houses had mud-brick or stone walls that thieves literally dug through. The point: ignorance of timing demands constant readiness. Since we don't know the hour, we must always watch.

Historical Context

This thief metaphor appears multiple times in NT eschatology (Matthew 24:43, 1 Thessalonians 5:2, 2 Peter 3:10, Revelation 3:3, 16:15), emphasizing Christ's return will be sudden and unexpected for the unprepared. Palestinian homes typically had walls made of sun-dried mud brick, easily penetrated by determined thieves who would literally dig through (hence "break through"). Homeowners maintained vigilance or hired watchmen, but without knowing when thieves might strike, constant alertness was required. The metaphor doesn't imply Christ is unwelcome (like a thief) but that His coming will be unexpected.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How does the thief metaphor communicate the unexpectedness and potential unwelcome shock of Christ's return for the unprepared?
2. What does not knowing the hour teach about the necessity of perpetual readiness rather than last-minute preparation?
3. In what ways might Christians today be vulnerable to spiritual 'break-in' due to complacency about Christ's return?

Interlinear Text

τοῦτο δὲ γινώσκετε ὅτι εἰ ἤδει ὁ
this And know that if had known G3588
G5124 G1161 G1097 G3754 G1487 G1492

οἰκοδεσπότης ποίᾳ ὥρᾳ ὁ κλέπτης ἔρχεται
the goodman of the house what hour G3588 the thief would come
G3617 G4169 G5610 G2812 G2064

ἐγρηγόρησεν ἀν καὶ οὐκ ἄν, ἀφῆκεν διορυγῆναι
he would have watched and not G302 have suffered to be broken through
G1127 G2532 G3756 G863 G1358

τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ
G3588 house G846
G3624

Additional Cross-References

2 Peter 3:10 (Parallel theme): But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

Revelation 3:3 (Parallel theme): Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

Revelation 16:15 (Parallel theme): Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.