

The Dilemma of Date-Setting

Well - it's just two days until Rosh Hashanah - which is also known as the Jewish New Year - according to Israel's civil calendar.

Rosh Hashanah also corresponds with the feast of trumpets - which is the first fall feast on the Jewish religious calendar.

And seeing how many Christians believe that the rapture of the church will take place during this two day feast...

...you won't be surprised to learn that - the rapture date-setters are once again assuring us...

...that church will be raptured from the Earth - in a couple of days.

In order to understand the bases for this prediction - it'll help you to know that...

...the feast of Trumpets is actually the fifth feast of the year - on Israel's religious calendar.

Just to be clear - the first four spring feasts include passover - unleavened bread - first fruits - and Pentecost.

The feast of Trumpets is the first fall feast - which is followed by the day of atonement - and the feast of tabernacles.

With all of this in mind - you might also be interested to know that - the Lord Jesus has already fulfilled the first four spring feasts.

As a matter of fact - Jesus fulfilled the passover - when He offered Himself as our passover Lamb - on the day of His crucifixion.

Jesus also fulfilled the feast of unleavened bread - as He offered Himself a sinless sacrifice - free from the leaven of sin.

Jesus fulfilled the feast of first fruits - as He become the first to rise up from the grave.

And He fulfilled Pentecost - by sending the Holy Spirit of God - to empower the church.

In light of these things - we can rejoice in knowing that...

...the Lord Jesus has already fulfilled the Prophetic purpose of the Spring Feasts.

At the same time - we should also expect that He will fulfill the prophetic purpose of the fall feasts - - beginning with the feast of trumpets.

That's right - we should fully expect the Lord Jesus to fulfill the feast of trumpets...

...followed by the 10 days of awe - which gives way to the day of atonement...

...and finally - the feast of tabernacles - which is a week long festival...

...that commemorates the days during the Exodus - when the people of God wandered in the wilderness.

It's for this reason that the feast of trumpets is always a high watch day...

...for those who believe that the rapture of the church will take place on one of the two days of this feast.

And while it's true that there are many who are insisting that the church will be raptured - either this Tuesday or Wednesday...

...it's also true that the date-setters have been wrong since the late first century.

And it's for this reason that I've decided to spend our time today...

...addressing the dilemma of date-setting.

For example - a Roman priest living in the second century predicted Christ would return in 500 AD.

He based his calculations on the dimensions of Noah's ark.

And as you may've guessed - he was wrong.

Later - in 999AD - there was a heightened level of hysteria...

...because - many people believed that Jesus would return with the coming of the new Millennium.

And - while some people went ahead and partied - like it was 9-99...

...others expected Jesus to arrive - at the beginning of the new Millennium.

And they were wrong.

John Wesley believed that Christ would return in 1836...

...because of an interpretive calculation of Revelation 12:14 - where John wrote about "the time, times and half a time"

And by 1837 - Wesley realized that - he was wrong.

There were many who believed that the return of Halley's comet in 1910 - was evidence of the Lord's return.

However - the comet was just a comet - and nothing more.

In 1988 - Edgar Whisenant's book - 88 reasons Why The Rapture Will Be in 1988 - was released.

And according to this author - there were 88 reasons to believe that...

...the rapture of the church would happen on the Feast of Trumpets - in September of 1988.

Needless to say - He was wrong.

That didn't stop him from writing a new book in 1989 - titled - you guessed it...

"89 Reasons Why the Rapture is in 1989."

To put it in baseball terms - strike two.

In 1998 - a Taiwanese cult operating out of Garland, Texas predicted Christ would return on March 31 of 1998.

The group's leader announced that God would return and then invite the cult members aboard a UFO.

And who can forget the Millennial craze that occurred in 1999.

As if God is basing His prophetic plans - on the Gregorian calendar.

More recently - Harold Camping became famous - for his prediction - that May 21, 2011 would be the day of judgment.

And when May 21st - 2011 came and went - Camping then realized that he forgot to carry the 1 - - and so...

...he crunched the numbers again - and discovered that the day of judgment would occur on October 21, 2011.

Sadly - all of Campings followers woke up on October 22nd 2011...

...only to discover that - Harold Camping was a false teacher.

Back in 2014 - and 15 - many believe that the rapture of the church would correspond with the 4 blood moons...

...and when that failed to line up - - others shifted their hopes to September 23, 2017...

...which was an alignment of stars - and planets - that appeared to be the fulfillment of the Revelation 12 sign.

And then - in 2018 - there were those who were certain that the rapture of the church...

...would occur in 2018 - as Israel celebrated the 70th Anniversary of their rebirth.

Then there are those who were certain that - the rapture of the church was going to occur back in 2022.

One reason why was because - they started listening to a teacher named Stephen Dexter...

...who has produced several youtube videos - that contain a series of scriptural speculations...

...which led him to conclude - incorrectly - that the rapture of the church would occur on June 1st.

Another video produced by Mike at Repoman 64 - included a prediction that...

...the rapture was supposed to take place on April 2nd - 2022.

And while his videos provided compelling reasons to believe in his calculations...

...we are now completely certain that - Mike at Repoman 64 - and Stephen Dexter...

...have both joined the ranks of those - who have falsely predicted the rapture of the church.

More recently - more and more date setters insist that the rapture of the church is going to take place - during the feast of tabernacles.

And there are those who use a prophecy from Hosea chapter 6 - as evidence that...

...we find ourselves in the middle of a three year window of time...

...during which the rapture of the church will probably take place.

And when we factor in the social media platforms that make it easy for anyone to publish anything...

...we shouldn't be surprised to see more and more date-setters - setting dates.

Without debate - church history has seen it's fare share of teachers...

...who have attempted to figure out the day of the rapture - and-or the return of Jesus Christ.

And one reason why I'm raising this issue tonight - is based on the fact that...

...it's not uncommon - for Christians to get caught up in the calculations...

...only to then fall away from the faith - after the date setter that they were following...

...was found to be wrong.

Now - I truly believe that we should all live our lives - as if the rapture of the church could happen at any minute.

At the same time - I also believe that we should be quick to question the calculations...

...of anyone tries to tell us that they've somehow solved the mystery.

And those who assure us that - they **know** when the rapture of the church is going to occur...

...should be reminded of the promise that the Lord Jesus made - during the Olivet discourse.

With this as our focus -- let's open our Bibles - to Matthew chapter 24...

...and as you make your way to 24th chapter of Matthew's gospel account - I should take a moment to present you with some context.

This chapter begins with the apostles - presenting Jesus with a question about the end of the age - and the sign of His return.

And that's when Jesus began to describe the events which will unfold - prior to the day of judgment.

Then - after describing the troubled times - which will fill the Earth during those dark days...

...Jesus then presented them with the parable of the fig tree.

With this as our focus - look with me - there at Matthew 24 - beginning at vs 32 - where Jesus declared...

Mat 24:32 "Now learn this parable from the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender and puts forth leaves, you know that summer is near.

Mat 24:33 "So you also, when you see all these things, know that it is near—at the doors!

Mat 24:34 "Assuredly, I say to you, this generation will by no means pass away till all these things take place.

Mat 24:35 "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.

Mat 24:36 "But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only."

Here in these verses - we find the Lord Jesus - pointing to the budding of the fig tree - as evidence that summer is near.

And more often than not - the teachers who try to tell us that they know the date of the rapture...

...will often times build their theory - from speculations that they draw from this passage.

And as they do - they overlook the fact that - Jesus literally concluded this lesson...

...with the explicit statement that - no one knows the day or hour when these things will happen...

...not even the angels in heaven - nor the Son himself - but Only the Father.

It's interesting to note that - the word - know - found there in verse 36 - was translated from a Greek word...

...which was used when referring to the knowledge which is gained through the discernment of discovery.

Therefore - verse 36 can also be rendered like this...

"...But of that day and hour no one will discover, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only."

Christian - listen - if the angels can't discover the day of the rapture...

...then - listen - we don't stand a chance.

And while it's possible for a date setter to guess the correct day...

...it's still just a guess — and not a doctrinal discovery based on Biblical knowledge.

Now - there are those who will dismiss this verse - by insisting that Jesus was talking about the second coming - and not the rapture.

Other date-setters dismiss this verse — by insisting that - this statement was made - prior to the day of Pentecost.

And with that being the case - we should take some time to consider the question...

...is there any reason for us to think that - the day of the rapture is actually discoverable?

With this question in mind - let's turn in our Bibles - to Acts chapter 1 - because - it's here in the 1st chapter of Acts...

...where we find the disciples of Christ - asking the Lord Jesus - once again about the day when He would restore the kingdom to Israel.

With this question in mind - let's consider the Lord response - which is found there in verse 7 - where Jesus declared...

Act 1:7 "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.

I like the way that the scholars of the New Living Translation rendered this verse - they put it like this...

"The Father alone has the authority to set those dates and times, and they are not for you to know."

In other words - there are certain details about the last days...

...that God the Father has predetermined - to keep confidential.

And listen - this was not only true - for the 1st century Saints - - this is also true for the entire church age.

To prove my point - let's take another look at our Savior's response found here in Acts chapter 1 - where Jesus declared...

Act 1:7 And He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has put in His own authority.

Act 1:8 "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth."

From this - we can see that our primary purpose is to become witness for the Lord Jesus - throughout the entire church age.

And while I so believe that we should all live as if the rapture of the church could happen at any minute...

...I also believe that we should be quick to reject anyone who attempts to tell us...

...that they **know** when the rapture of the church is going to occur.

And one reason why is due to the fact that - date-setters are guilty of deception.

With this as our focus - let's turn in our Bibles to 2nd Thessalonians chapter 2

You see - it's in 2nd Thessalonians chapter 2 - where we find Paul - dealing with a group of date-setters...

...who had somehow convinced the Christians at the church in Thessalonica - that the day of the Lord had already passed.

And knowing that these deceivers had caused those Christians to have hearts which were filled with anxiety...

...Paul took the time to set the record straight - - by helping them to understand that...

...they had been duped - by date setting deceivers.

With this as our focus - look with me - there at 2 Thessalonians 2 - beginning at verse 1 - where Paul writes...

2Th 2:1 Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, we ask you,

2Th 2:2 not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come.

2Th 2:3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,

2Th 2:4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

2Th 2:5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?

Here in these verses - we find Paul - reminding the Christians there in Thessalonica...

...about the events which would transpire - prior to the 2nd coming of Jesus Christ.

And since those things hadn't yet happened - then - they really had nothing to worry about.

That being the case - we should take a closer look at the details that Paul described.

Look with me again - there at verse 3 - where Paul declared...

"Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first"

Now - the Day that Paul was referring to - is the Day of Judgment - when Christ returns to judge the nations.

Therefore - Paul was assuring his audience - that the day of judgment wouldn't happen...

...until after the falling away.

It's interesting to note that - the phrase - falling away - was translated from the Greek word - apostasia...

...which was used in reference to a defection - or forsaking of something.

And so - before the day of judgment - there's going to be a defection - which is rooted in apostasy.

And while Paul doesn't explicitly explain what sort've apostasy this would be...

...I'll remind you that - he was writing to Christians - about those who had deceived them.

Therefore - it only stands to reason that - this apostasy would happen...

...within the church - as believers begin to defect from their faith.

Then - after the apostasy occurs - Paul tells us that - the man of sin will be revealed - who is also called - the son of perdition.

This of course is a reference to the Anti-Christ.

And we know this - because - Paul tells us - there in verse 4 - that...

2Th 2:4 ..(he) opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

This of course is a reference to the abomination of desolation...

...which was spoken of - by the prophet Daniel - in Daniel chapter 9.

Then - after pointing to the day when the Anti-Christ is revealed - Paul went on to remind his readers...

...that the identity of this nefarious character is currently being restrained - so that he may be revealed in his own time.

And there at the end of verse 7 - Paul let's us know that "He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way."

Now - there are different ideas - about the identity of this entity known as the restrainer.

Some believe that the restrainer is a human government.

Some believe that the restrainer is Michael the archangel.

And some - including myself - believe that the Restrainer is the Holy Spirit of God.

Now - I have several reasons for why I believe that the restrainer is the Holy Spirit of God.

And one reason is found right here in the context of this verse.

With this as our focus - I'd like you to notice again - there in the beginning of verse 7 - where Paul tells us that...

"...the mystery of lawlessness is already at work"

Then - in verse 8 - he tells us that "the lawless one will be revealed."

In this way - Paul seemed to be poetically connecting...

"..the Mystery of Lawlessness and the Man of lawlessness.

Not only that - but look with me again at verse 7 - where Paul referred to "He Who now restrains."

Then - in the 2nd half of vs 8 - Paul tells us that the Lord will consume the lawless one with the **breath** of His mouth

That word - breath - is the Greek word - Pneuma - which can also be translated - Spirit.

In this way - Paul seems to've been poetically connecting the restrainer of verse 7...

...to the Spirit of God - in verse 8.

Therefore - there's good reason to believe that the restrainer...

...is the Holy Spirit.

That being the case - it seems to me that - the removal of the restrainer - coincides with the rapture of the church.

In order to prove my point - hold your place here in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 - and turn with me to John chapter 14.

You see - it's in John 14 - where we find Jesus - helping His disciples to understand that...

...He was about to leave them - so that He could prepare a place for those who trust in Him.

And knowing that this promise of His soon departure would cause them to become anxious...

...the Lord comforted their hearts - by pointing them to the arrival of the Holy Spirit.

With this as our focus - look with me - there at John 14 - beginning at verse 15 where Jesus declared...

Jhn 14:15 “If you love Me, keep My commandments.

Jhn 14:16 “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—

Jhn 14:17 “the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.

Jhn 14:18 “I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you

Here in these verses - we find the Lord Jesus - pointing to the day of Pentecost...

...when the Holy Spirit would be given to every born-again believer - as we are spiritually adopted into the family of God.

And listen - the indwelling Spirit not only seals us into the family of God...

...but He is also the guarantee of our eternal inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession.

Therefore - when Jesus said that He would never leave us - nor forsake us...

...He was also letting us know that the Holy Spirit would keep us...

...until the day of redemption - when we find ourselves - face to face with Jesus.

That being the case - I should also point out that - it seems likely to me that - the removal of the restrainer - is also the removal of the church.

In other words - when the Holy Spirit is removed - the day of Pentecost is reversed - and the church age is over.

And since the Holy Spirit is the guarantee - given to every believer...

...then - it only stands to reason that - the removal of the Holy Spirit...

...is also the removal of the church.

Now - in light of this interpretation - let's turn back to 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 - where we find Paul - presenting the play by play.

Look with me again - beginning there at verse 3 - where Paul declared...

2Th 2:3 Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition,

2Th 2:4 who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

2Th 2:5 Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?

2Th 2:6 And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time.

2Th 2:7 For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.

2Th 2:8 And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming

Now - as we put these verses in chronological order - we discover that...

...there's going to be apostasy in the church - - which will coincide with increasing lawlessness in the world.

Then - the restrainer is removed - - whom I strongly believe is the Holy Spirit.

If I'm correct - then the church will also be removed at that same point in time.

Then - the anti-Christ will be revealed - followed by 7 years of tribulation.

And at the end of those 7 years - the Lord Jesus will return to save Israel...

...and that's when the Holy Spirit will destroy the anti-christ.

So - if you were to ask me when the rapture of the church occur? - my answer is simple...

The rapture of the church will occur - when the restrainer is removed from His restraining work.

And while I would love to tell you the day and the hour - - I cannot.

And neither can any other Bible teacher - because - it's not for us to know times or seasons...

...which the Father has put in His own authority.

So - don't be deceived by the date-setters who attempt to convince us with their corrupt calculations.

At the same time - I would also encourage you to not loose heart - like the those Christians who are no longer looking for the return of the Lord.

In order to explain what I mean - let's turn in our Bibles - to 2 Peter chapter 3...

...where we find the apostle Peter - writing about those who will scoff at the idea of Christ's second coming.

And as you make your way to 2 Peter chapter 3 - I should point out that...

...there were many Christians - who were disappointed when they realized that - Jesus wasn't coming in 1988

And I remember watching believers - falling away from the Lord - at the turn of the Millennium - (because)

And if the Lord tarries through the night - - then I'm certain that...

...there will be some who wake up tomorrow - and begin to question Christ's second coming.

That being the case - I want to encourage you to consider what Peter wrote - here in 2 Peter chapter 3.

Look with me - beginning there at verse 1 - where he declared...

2Pe 3:1 Beloved, I now write to you this second epistle (in both of which I stir up your pure minds by way of reminder),

2Pe 3:2 that you may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us, the apostles of the Lord and Savior,

2Pe 3:3 knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts,

2Pe 3:4 and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation."

Here in these verses - we find Peter - helping his audience to understand that...

...the last days would be filled with those who will scoff at the idea of Christ's second coming.

And just as Peter revealed - we certainly do see these scoffers - out there in the secular world.

Unfortunately - the scoffers are also found within the walls of the church.

For example - those who embrace the heresy of Full Preterism...

...scoff at the idea that Jesus is going to return in the future.

Other so-called Christians have **spiritualized** the prophecies that point to Christ's 2nd coming.

As a result - they scoff at the belief - that Jesus is literally going to return in a Physical body.

And it's sad to say that - there are those who were duped by date-setters.

And now - they scoff at those who are eagerly waiting for the rapture of the church.

Then there are those believers - who have come to the conclusion that...

...the Lord isn't coming back any time soon.

As a result - these believers are no longer looking for the Lord.

No - instead - their busy building their own kingdom - here on Earth.

Now - if you find yourself - relating to one of these categories - then I encourage you to embrace what Peter wrote - here in this chapter.

Look with me - beginning there at verse 8 - where Peter declared...

2Pe 3:8 ...beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

2Pe 3:9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Here in these verse - we find Peter - reminding his readers about the reason why the Lord continues to tarry.

And while part of me prays that the rapture will happen today...

...another part of me is hoping that the Lord would continue to tarry...

...so that more unbelievers might be saved.

And while it's true that the Lord is currently being patient - so that some might be saved...

...it's also true that there's coming a day when He will physically return.

And when He does - He's going to judge the world in righteousness.

That being the case - Peter encouraged his audience - to live in a way that is pleasing to the Lord.

As a matter of fact - look with me - beginning there at verse 10 - where Peter assured us that...

2Pe 3:10 ...the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up.
2Pe 3:11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness,
2Pe 3:12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat?

Here in these verses - we find Paul - encouraging every believer - to live in a way - which is pleasing to the Lord.

Rather than living for the lusts of this world - we should be conducting ourselves in holiness - and godliness.

And not only that - but Peter also instructed us to look for and hasten the coming of the day of God

Now - I should point out that - there's a huge difference between looking forward to the rapture of the church...

...and setting dates - based on corrupt calculations.

That being the case - let's become those
believers who are looking up...

...without engaging in the heresy of date
setting.

This was precisely the point that Peter was making - here in his second epistle.

As a matter of fact - look with me - beginning there at verse 13 - where Peter
declared...

2Pe 3:13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new
heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

2Pe 3:14 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent
to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless;

Or in other words - we should be Christians who look forward to the day
when we're caught up into the clouds - to meet the Lord in the air.

And this hope that we have in the rapture - ought to lead us to walk
in the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit...

...so that we can continue to be transformed into the image of
our Lord and Savior - Jesus.

No - I can't tell you when the rapture is going to happen...

...but - I can assure you that - the Lord is going to call for His bride.

And on that day - we'll find ourselves in the presence of the
One...

...who laid down His life - so that we could enjoy His
perfect love - forever

Until that day - let's avoid the deception of the
date-setters...

...by always remembering that - nobody
knows the day - nor the hour...

...except God - and God alone.