

SECTION ONE

A FRESH LOOK AT END-TIME PROPHECY

A Christian Lawyer and Pastor Examines the End-Time Prophecies of the Bible "De Novo" from the Hebrew Cultural Perspective of the First Century Church

CHAPTER ONE:

WHAT JESUS TAUGHT THE APOSTLES ABOUT THE LAST DAYS

“And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, “Who is worthy to open the book and to break its seals?” And no one in heaven or on the earth or under the earth was able to open the book or to look into it. Then I began to weep greatly because no one was found worthy to open the book or to look into it; and one of the elders said to me, “Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals” (Revelation 5:2-5).

Prophecy of the end-times is a complex topic that is interwoven throughout the entire Bible. Where should we begin the process of unraveling its mysteries?

Not the Old Testament. Why? Because we are disciples of Christ, following in the footsteps of His Apostles. While it is impossible in my view to understand prophecy at anything more than a superficial level without also studying the Old Testament, a Christian’s first and primary guide must be Jesus, not Moses, Daniel, Ezekiel or any other Old Testament figure.

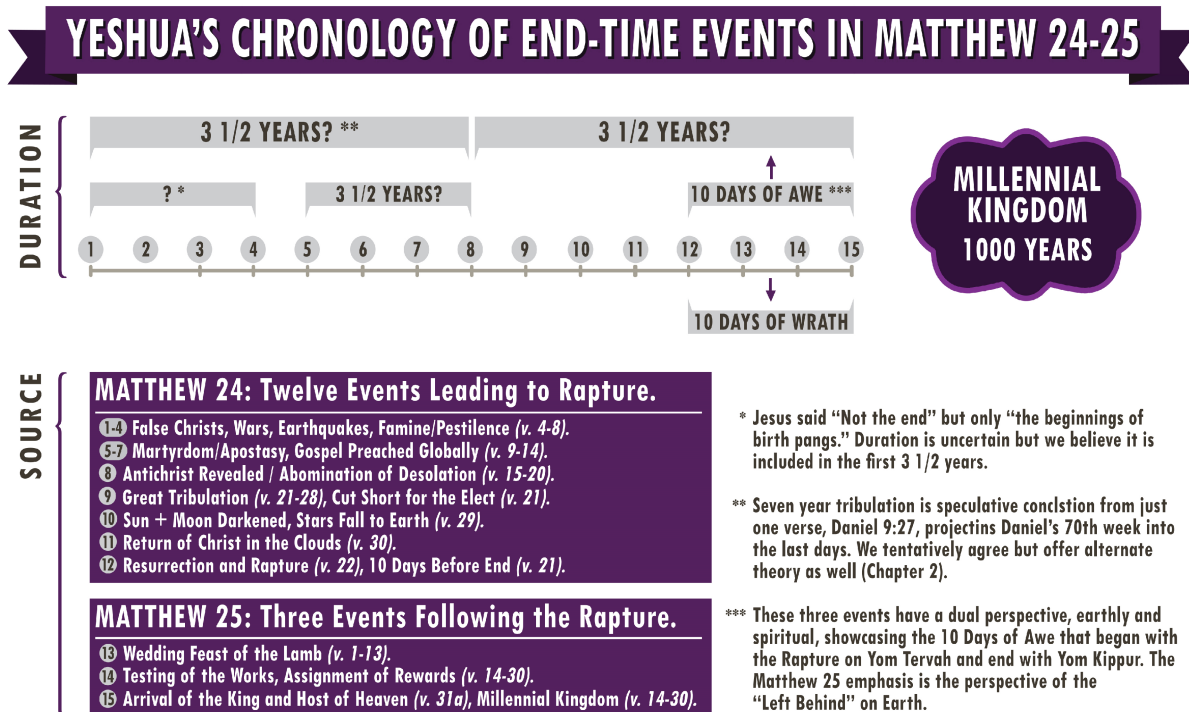
Not the Book of Revelation. Why? Because Revelation was delivered to and written by the Apostle John in about 95AD, long after the rest of the Apostles had passed on the teachings of Jesus to their disciples (including His teaching on the end-times) and most of them had passed on to Glory. Importantly, as we will see, the Book of Revelation is in large part a supplement to and best interpreted in light of what Jesus had already taught.

We Should Begin with “The Olivet Discourse.”

The most logical starting point for the study of the end-times is the instruction given by Jesus (whose Hebrew name is Yeshua) to the disciples in response to their direct question, *“When will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?”* (Matthew 24:3)

His answer, called the Olivet Discourse, or “The Lecture on the Mount of Olives,” is (in a natural reading of the text), a point by point chronological summary of end-time events which is repeated with only slight variation in the Gospels of Matthew (Chapter 24), Mark (Chapter 13) and Luke (Chapter 21), and reiterated in an expanded and annotated fashion in the Book of Revelation by the

Apostle John, who also authored the 4th Gospel. Matthew, Mark and Luke are known as the “synoptic” (meaning “summary form”) Gospels, as opposed to John’s which is more topical. Interestingly, the Gospel of John is very closely aligned with the Biblical feast days and their symbolic significance (a little-recognized fact which we will explore later in this book).



YESHUA’S CHRONOLOGY OF END-TIME EVENTS IN MATTHEW 24-25

For the purpose our analysis, Matthew’s account is most helpful, because the chronological nature of Jesus’ teaching continues through Chapter 25, ending with a glimpse at the Millennial Kingdom.

Importantly, Chapters 24-25 are clearly identified by Matthew as a single package, opening with the disciples’ query about the end-times (24:3) and closing with Matthew’s segue of 26:1: “...when Jesus had finished all these sayings...”

“All of these sayings” that we read between the bookends of Matthew 24:2 and 26:1 should thus be viewed as a set of lessons delivered together, explaining the events of the last days in a manner most relevant to His disciples. He is in essence saying, “This is what my followers will see with their own eyes and what they must watch for during the last days.”

In order of occurrence, Jesus listed 12 events or landmarks leading to and including the rapture that are recorded in the three synoptic Gospels, followed by 3 post-rapture events leading to the Millennial Kingdom that are found in Matthew 25.

The Matthew 24 events are all seen from the physical, earthly perspective as would be visible to humans in the material world.

In contrast, the Matthew 25 events have a dual nature, being experienced in the spiritual realm by the redeemed and glorified Bride of Christ, but with an earthly parallel experienced by those who are “left behind” at the rapture. The descriptions in Matthew 25 emphasize the earthly perspective while merely acknowledging the spiritual one.

Following is a list of all 15 events, divided by chapter:

From Matthew 24:

1. False Christs.
2. Wars and Rumors of Wars.
3. Earthquakes (natural disasters).
4. Famines/Pestilence.
5. Martyrdom.
6. Apostasy.
7. Gospel Preached to the Whole world.
8. Antichrist Revealed/Abomination of Desolation.
9. Great Tribulation.
10. Sun and Moon Darkened (*after* the tribulation).
11. Return of Christ (in the clouds).
12. Resurrection/Rapture.

From Matthew 25:

13. Wedding Feast of the Lamb.
14. Testing of the Works.
15. The King’s Return and Final Preparations for His Millennial Kingdom.

THE RAPTURE AND THE RETURN OF THE KING

Having now touched the “third rail” of eschatology, the timing of the resurrection and rapture, we must pause to explain our position. This necessitates a discussion of the “Ten Days of Awe” which we will address below.

First, the word “rapture” does not appear in Scripture, but it is a convenient and biblically accurate term to describe the “calling up” and concurrent glorification of the members of the Bride of Christ, both living and dead, at the second coming of Christ. We prefer the phrase “resurrection and rapture” to emphasize the dual nature of the event, but sometimes use “rapture” as shorthand for both. [For our answer to the post-millennial view see generally our discussions on Daniel’s seventy weeks and the phenomenon of repeating patterns in Chapter 2.]

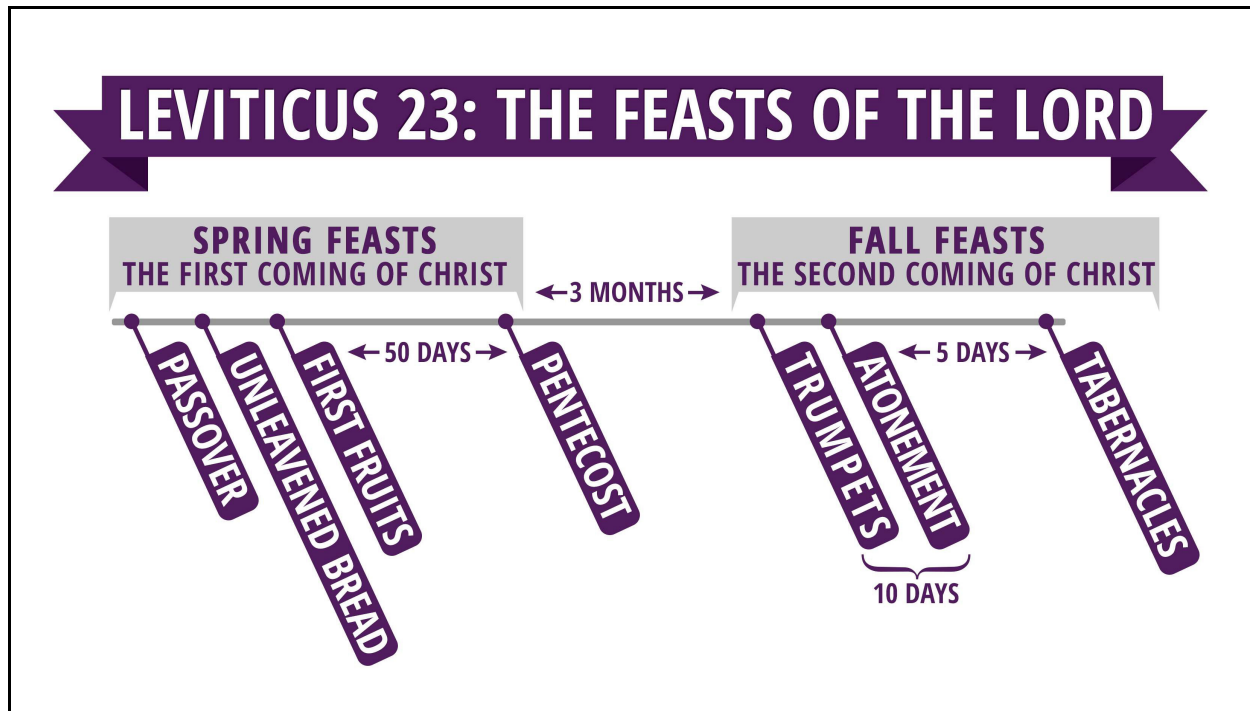
Regarding the timing of the rapture in prophecy, a natural reading of the Olivet Discourse does not support the majority “pre-tribulation” view. Although numerous passages can be made to fit the external theological framework of its proponents, the passages themselves don’t naturally lead the diligent researcher to the same conclusions absent that framework. The shortcomings of pre-tribulation doctrine (rooted in Hellenic assumptions) and the intensity of internecine conflict they frequently engender with believers of other viewpoints are among the reasons we chose to approach this prophecy study “de Novo” (from scratch).

In contrast, consider the natural reading of the text.

Jesus said “*Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: 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. 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 one end of heaven to the other*” (Matthew 24:29-31).

This passage lends greater weight to the classic post-tribulation view, but that view has its own shortcomings because it shares some misleading Hellenistic presuppositions and resulting flaws with its pre-tribulation counterpart. Tellingly, both camps rely on selective use of proof texts and intellectual gymnastics to harmonize passages that clearly conflict when viewed through their common “Greek” lens.

Starting with a clean slate from a first century Hebrew cultural perspective, the key to unraveling the timing of end-time events lies in Leviticus 23 and 25, the instructions on God’s timekeeping system and His seven annual feasts.¹ This approach harmonizes all passages quite naturally.



Same Holy Day, Different Names:

The first three holidays are collectively known as The Feast of Unleavened Bread, Pentecost is also known as The Feast of Weeks and Shavuot, The Feast of Trumpets is also known as Yom Teruah, and Rosh Hashana. The Day of Atonement is also known as Yom Kippur. The Feast of Tabernacles is also known as Sukkot. We use these names interchangeably in this book.

THE FEASTS OF THE LORD

“And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, Concerning the feasts of the LORD [Moedim] which ye shall proclaim to be holy convocations [Miqra], even these are my feasts [Moedim]” (Leviticus 23:1-2).

The Hebrew word *moed* (plural *moedim*) means an appointed day or time. The word *Miqra* means rehearsal. The Feasts of the Lord are therefore not simply ritual holidays but times established by God for rehearsing and preparing for a prophetic calendar of events, specifically the first and second coming of Christ. The emergence of Messianic Judaism has made this teaching increasingly more familiar in the American church over the past decade, but it is still not well known, so we will address it in detail here.

Each of the feasts has its own role and symbolic significance related both to Hebrew culture and to Christianity. The Passover lamb is the symbol of substitutionary atonement. Unleavened Bread is a symbol of sinlessness. First Fruits is symbolized by the Spring barley harvest. (What is “waved before the Lord” in that ritual is the harvest of the first barley plant to have emerged from the soil,

having been marked upon its appearance with a scarlet thread by the farmer). The Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost, celebrates the giving of the Torah when God appeared in the form of fire on the head of Mt. Sinai and thus symbolized by fire, but also by wheat, since it celebrates the Spring wheat harvest.

The Feast of Trumpets is represented by the ram's horn (shofar), symbolic both of the metaphorical "resurrection" of Isaac (Hebrews 11:17-19) and the celebration of the birthday of Creation (Job 38:4-7), but is also symbolized by wheat, since it celebrates the fall wheat harvest. The Day of Atonement is symbolized by both goats and grapes – symbols of rebellion and the sins that must be atoned for by the High Priest. It also celebrates the grape harvest, and the crushing of the grapes (the wicked) in the winepress of God. Finally, the Feast of Tabernacles is symbolized by "booths" or tents, representing the time of God dwelling among men.

These seven feasts were times of the year when the Hebrews were expected to make pilgrimage to Jerusalem (Exodus 23:14-17; 34:18-23), and for that purpose were divided into three groups. Importantly, the Hebrew calendar begins in the fall with Rosh Hashana (New Year's Day) much like the Hebrew "day" begins in the evening rather than the morning. The Biblical name of Rosh Hashana is Yom Teruah, or The Feast of Trumpets.

- Pilgrimage 1: The fall Feast of Tabernacles Pilgrimage includes the Feast of Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and the Feast of Tabernacles.
- Pilgrimage 2: The spring Feast of Unleavened Bread Pilgrimage includes Passover, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and the Feast of First Fruits.
- Pilgrimage 3: The one-day late spring/early summer Feast of Pentecost Pilgrimage includes just Pentecost itself, which literally means "fiftieth day" and falls fifty days after the conclusion of Passover. That first day after Passover is also the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Importantly, the Feast of Unleavened Bread it is also known as the Feast of Weeks – seven weeks of seven literal days each followed by a feast day, which is the same pattern as the Jubilee Calendar of seven "weeks" of years, followed by the Jubilee year (the fiftieth year).

More importantly to the prophetic calendar is the separation of the seven feasts into the spring and fall seasons representing events aligned with the first and second coming of the Messiah.

The four Spring Feasts of Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits and Pentecost and are deemed to have been fulfilled at His first coming. Jesus was the "Lamb of God" who died on Passover (John 1:29), whom the grave could not hold because He was sinless (without leaven) (Acts 2:24), and who rose from the dead on First Fruits, the first fruits from the grave (1 Corinthians 15:20). He, being the triune God, appeared in the form of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, as "tongues of fire" on the

heads of the disciples (John 14:26). Each prophetic event was literally fulfilled by Christ on the actual day it fell on the holiday calendar.

The clear logical deduction is that the remaining three Fall Feasts -- Trumpets, the Day of Atonement and Tabernacles -- will be fulfilled by Christ at His second coming.

Recognizing the role of the feasts as signposts we can conclude with confidence that the resurrection and rapture will occur on a Feast of Trumpets when “...***the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God: And the dead in Christ will rise first [resurrection]. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds [rapture] to meet the Lord in the air***” (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, amplifying Matthew 24:30-31).

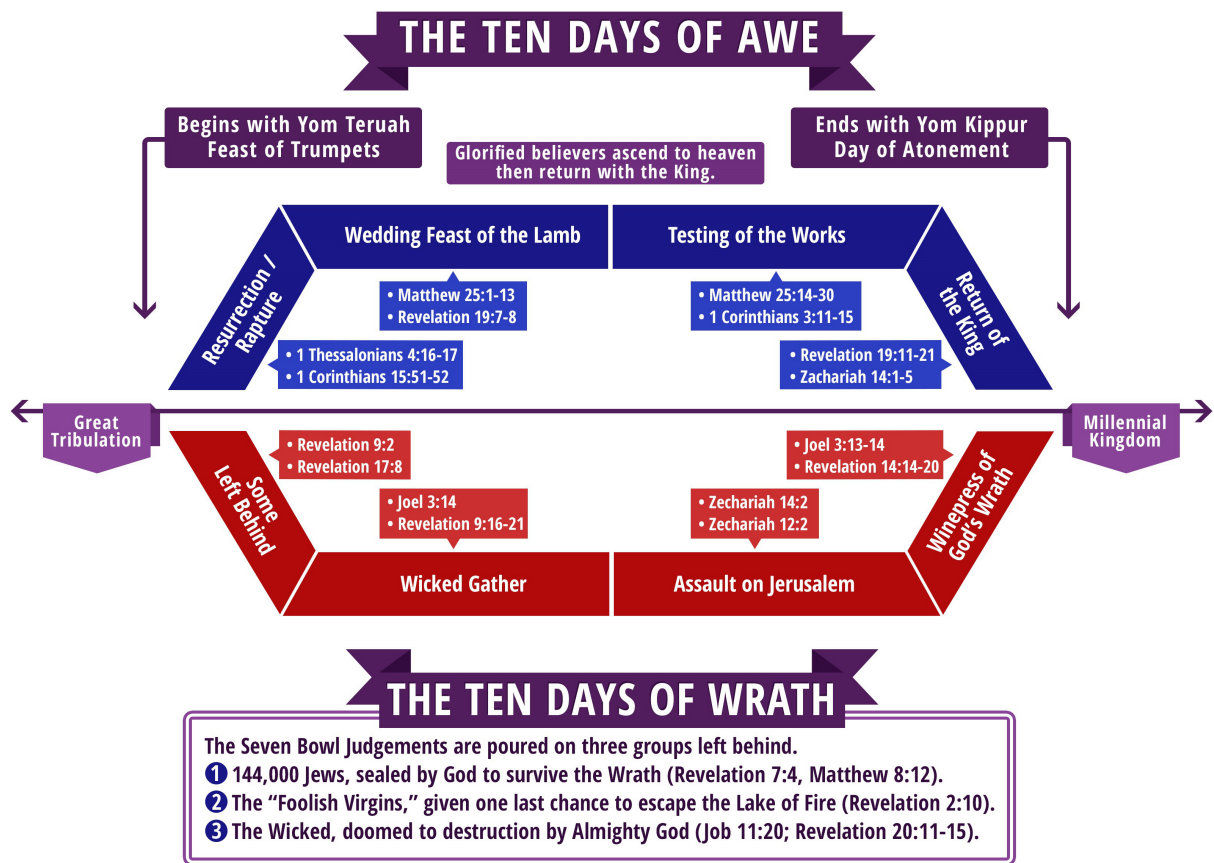
The resurrection and rapture event is further amplified in 1 Corinthians 15:20-57, especially verses 51-52: “Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at ***the last trumpet***; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.”

Both of these passages echo Matthew 24:31 “And He will send His angels ***with a great sound of a trumpet***, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

The Feast of Trumpets is identified in Leviticus 23 as Zicharon Truah, or Yom Teruah, meaning literally “a remembrance of blowing.” This commemorates the anniversary of the creation of the world by God as described in Job 38:7 when “all the sons of God shouted for joy.” To this day, on the Feast of Trumpets Jews read the story of Abraham and Isaac in which God provided the ram as a sacrificial substitute for Isaac -- the theme of resurrection. That is why the trumpet blown on the Feast of Trumpets is a ram’s horn (the shofar).

The resurrection and rapture on the Feast of Trumpets marks the end of the Great Tribulation (the trial) and beginning of the Wrath of God (the sentence on the guilty).

The “touchdown” of Christ to earth will occur ten days later on the Day of Atonement.



THE TEN DAYS OF AWE

"Now in the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall also have a holy convocation; you shall do no laborious work. It will be to you a day for blowing trumpets.... Then on the tenth day of this seventh month you shall have a holy convocation, and you shall humble yourselves; you shall not do any work" (Numbers 29:1-7).

"Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Look, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison to test you, and you will suffer tribulation for ten days. Be faithful even unto death, and I will give you the crown of life" (Revelation 2:10).

In the Bible, a period of ten days is frequently a time of waiting and/or testing while God's decision about a matter hangs in the balance. A good example is Jeremiah 42:6-7:

"Whether it is pleasant or unpleasant, we will listen to the voice of the LORD our God to whom we are sending you, so that it may go well with us when we listen to the voice of the LORD our God." Now at the end of ten days the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah."

Daniel's test of faithfulness in refusing to be defiled by King Nebuchadnezzar's "delicacies" was of ten days (Daniel 1:1-16).

And the waiting period of the disciples in the upper room, from the ascension of Christ to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost was ten days as well (Luke 24:49-51, Acts 1:3).

Thus, the ten day period beginning with the Feast of Trumpets and ending with the Day of Atonement is of special significance: it is the time in which God decides who among those "left behind" at the rapture will be redeemed or thrown into the lake of fire, and He puts on a grand show to contrast the fate of those who choose Yeshua Ha'Maschiach (Jesus the Christ) with those who reject Him.

These are the **Ten Days of Awe** for the redeemed (those who accepted Christ before the resurrection and rapture), and concurrently the **Ten Days of Wrath** for the wicked. During this time the Bride of Christ (having passed the tribulation test by "enduring to the end" per Matthew 24:13) are now in newly glorified bodies in the spiritual realm, where we will celebrate the Wedding Feast of the Lamb (Matthew 22:1-2, 25:1-13; Revelation 19:7-8) and have our works tested (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; Matthew 25:14-30) to determine our role in the Millennial Kingdom (Matthew 19:28-29).

Meanwhile, three groups of people who were "left behind" on earth at the rapture -- the 144,000 Jews sealed against death (Revelation 7:4-8), the "foolish virgins" and "lazy servants" of Matthew 25, and the wicked, -- must endure the Wrath of God, including the seven bowl judgments, where there is much "*weeping and gnashing of teeth*." Our conclusion that this place is earth during the 10 Days of Wrath is explained in Chapter 3.

On the Day of Atonement, Christ will lead the Host of Heaven (including the Bride-become-Wife of God) in a dramatic rescue of Jerusalem and slaughter of His enemies as He returns to claim His throne (Revelation 19:11-21; Zechariah 14:1-5). This is followed by His Millennial Kingdom.

Can we know the day?

"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone" (Matthew 24:36)

What at first glance appears to be a warning against "date-setting" in Matthew 24:36 is actually a clue as to the date of the resurrection and rapture.

Importantly, the Feast of Trumpets was known by the Jews of antiquity as "the feast of which no man could know the day or hour"² because the official start of the feast required a ruling by the Jewish religious court, the Sanhedrin, upon the testimony of two witnesses assigned to watch for the night

sky for the first appearance of the new moon. There was enough ambiguity about the official start, therefore, that no one could predict in advance what date the feast would begin. In other words, the phrase “no man knows the day or hour” was a Jewish idiom meaning The Feast of Trumpets.

The requirement of “two witnesses” in this context has special significance relative to the two witnesses of Revelation 11:1-12. These are the witnesses against the Antichrist who are eventually struck dead by the “beast that come up from the abyss” and lie dead in the streets of Jerusalem for three days. Then, in a scene directly parallel to the resurrection and rapture passage of 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 (in which the dead rise first and then the living are caught up into the air with them) “*the breath of life from God entered the two witnesses, and they stood on their feet, and great fear fell upon those who saw them. And the witnesses heard a loud voice from heaven saying, ‘Come up here.’ And they went up to heaven in a cloud as their enemies watched them*” (Revelation 11:11-12). Thus, Revelation 11 would seem to strongly support our contention.

That believers can and should know the day is made clear in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-6

“But of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night. 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. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.”

The context-setting metaphor of the birth process alone makes clear that the timing of the blessed event can be calculated within a very small window of time long before it occurs. But more importantly, the phrase “times and seasons” is a direct reference to the seven feasts of the Lord in Leviticus 23:4 “*These are the appointed times of the LORD, holy convocations which you shall proclaim at the times [seasons] appointed for them.*”

The phrase “...but My father only” in Matthew 24:36 is a separate Jewish idiom related to the timing of the arrival of the Bridegroom for the wedding feast since the father of the groom had exclusive authority over it. The resurrection and rapture marks the start of the wedding feast -- or perhaps more accurately the start of the final preparation for the wedding feast. The Bride of Christ, the church, in glorified bodies, ascends into the clouds where the Bridegroom has arrived for the ceremony.

In a further blow to the doctrine of “imminency” (the idea that the rapture could occur at any time without warning or the necessity of prerequisite events), Jesus analogized the rapture to the time of Noah’s Flood in Matthew 24:37-41, saying the wicked would be caught by surprise. But obviously Noah’s righteous family was Not taken by surprise since they were following God’s timetable in building the ark, whose necessary completion God awaited patiently (1 Peter 3:20).