

The Imminence of Christ's Return

The Hitchhiker

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A friend of mine recently shared with me a powerful spiritual experience of his that alerted him to just how imminent Christ's return really is. It's very important that I share this story with you.

My friend and several of his friends were driving down a highway one evening when they saw a hitch-hiker. They remembered all the warnings against picking up hitch-hikers, but they figured that God, as well as safety in numbers, would protect them, so they stopped and gave the hitch-hiker a ride. The hitch-hiker took a seat in the back of the van.

As they drove on, the hitch-hiker asked them, "Do you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?"

They replied that they did.

He then asked them, "Do you believe that Jesus will return in the manner that He said He would?"

They replied, "Of course, we do."

"Do you think he will return in the next fifty years?" asked the hitch-hiker.

"Absolutely!" they said.

"How about in twenty-five years?"

"Sure."

"How about in ten years?" said the hitch-hiker. "Do you think Jesus will come back in the next ten years?"

After pondering the question for a moment, most of them replied, "Yes, He will probably return within the next ten years."

The hitch-hiker then said, “You’re right. Jesus will return within the next ten years.”

Shocked to hear such certainty in the hitch-hiker’s claim, everyone remained silent for a few moments. They then turned to ask him for details, only to see the unbelievable appear before them: an empty back seat. The hitch-hiker had vanished without a sound, even though the van had never ceased traveling down the highway at 60 mph.

While still in disbelief, they saw numerous vehicles along the side of the road ahead. Some were police cars with their lights flashing. The guys in the van stopped to report what they had just witnessed to the police. Their report was nothing new to the police at this point, however, because nineteen other people had just reported the exact same thing.

Wow! That’s a powerful story!

Any questions?

Perhaps you’d like to know when this happened, so that you may calculate when the ten year period specified by the hitch-hiker will come to an end.

I’ll tell you when it happened.

It happened the summer of 1990. My friend told me about it in September or October of that same year (when I said a friend “recently shared” this experience, I meant that with regard to the whole of human history). I would go on to live on the same dormitory floor with this guy for two more years, and I never heard another spectacular story from him, nor did I ever know him to lie. I really believe he experienced this event.

Yet, here we are in 2009, still awaiting Jesus’ return. The promise of the vanishing hitch-hiker was a lie. This prompts us to ask, “Who was this hitch-hiker?”

He certainly wasn’t human if he vanished from a speeding automobile without even opening a door. He couldn’t have been an angel, either, as the men in the van

believed, since his revelation was a lie. So that only leaves us one choice: the hitch-hiker was an evil spirit—a demon.

Why would a demon try to convince Christians that Jesus would return within a ten year period? Wouldn't his doing so merely make the Christians better-prepared and, thus, more obedient to Jesus' command to be prepared for His return?

Let's look ahead to October of 2000. I was going for a walk and had just passed the intersection of Fry Road and Weinstein Road when I realized that the ten years had come and gone. My first thought: maybe Jesus isn't coming back. My second thought: maybe the book of Revelation is wrong. My third thought: maybe the whole Bible is wrong!

Suddenly, Christianity didn't seem so important. Yes, I still believed in God and in Jesus, and I continued to pray daily. But I soon stopped attending church and cut back on my Bible studying. I would spend the next couple years somewhat out of touch with God, doing little to accomplish His will in the world, just living for myself. Who knows what I would have accomplished had my faith not been shaken by the false prophecy of Christ's return by the year 2000.

How many others have had their faiths shaken in a similar manner, some of them falling away from the faith completely? How many people, as they reach middle age, look back on experiences they had decades earlier with eschatology-obsessed Christians and think to themselves, "What a bunch of morons! They were so certain that Jesus would come back in the next few years, but it didn't happen. My time spent with them was a total waste."

The demon hitch-hiker knew he could accomplish Satan's will by appealing to the misguided focus of so many Christians. He knew Christians would think that only a messenger of God would warn of Christ's imminent return. Most of all, he knew that the faith of many Christians would be challenged when Jesus failed to return within the specified period of time.

Most Christians today concede that we can never know the "day nor the hour," as Jesus says in Matthew 24:36, so they think they are free to overhype the imminence of Christ's return, as long as they don't set a date or timeframe. But even without a specific

timeframe, we still imply one when we speak as though His return is just around the corner and requires a sense of urgency.

With regard to the biblical signs of Christ's return, some Christians say that more of them are fulfilled today than ever before. That's common sense, because it's impossible for fewer and fewer signs to be fulfilled as history moves forward, to do so would require undoing events of the past. For example, Jesus predicted that Jerusalem would someday return to the Jews when He said in Luke 21:24, "...Jerusalem will be trampled under foot by the Gentiles until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled [NASB]." This prophecy came true when Israel became a nation in 1948. Even if it were to cease being a nation in the future, Jesus' prophecy can never be unfulfilled, because He predicted that Jerusalem would return to the Jews; He didn't say that they would control it forever.

Some Christians overhype Jesus' imminent return by saying that all the tragedies in the world are a sign that the end is near. However, if we examine history, we find that tragedies have occurred just as frequently in the past, if not more frequently, than they have in recent times.

For example, let's take a look at the 50 year period of 1870-1920:

- In 1871, a fire destroyed most of Chicago.
- In 1875 and 1876, the American mid-west suffered a terrible locust plague. It was the first time that federal disaster assistance was ever granted.
- In 1883, the Indonesian volcanic island of Krakatoa exploded, creating a tsunami every bit as powerful as the one in 2004. The world population was less than one-fourth of what it is today, yet over 36,000 people died from the eruption and ensuing tsunami.
- In 1896, a tornado outbreak destroyed much of St. Louis.
- In 1900, a hurricane killed 6,000-8,000 people in Galveston, TX—the deadliest natural disaster the U.S. has ever experienced.
- In 1906, a 7.9 magnitude earthquake destroyed San Francisco.
- In 1914, Europe plunged into World War I.

•And worst of all, the Spanish Flu of 1918-1920 infected 25% of the U.S. population and killed approximately one out of every twenty Americans and Europeans. It killed more people in one year than the Bubonic Plague did during its four-year peak in the 1300's. And, unlike other influenza, most of its victims were young adults.

Could you imagine if these events occurred today? Even non-Christians would think the world was ending.

We shouldn't use the promotion of Christ's imminent return to lead people to Him, because doing so can weaken faith if He fails to return when expected. If we want people to consider what might happen when they meet their Maker, we should direct their attention to the inescapable: that all of us will leave this world one day. Most have left by means of death, and many of them died sooner than they expected (just check the obituaries and watch the news if you need proof). Those who will leave by means of Christ's return will constitute a small percentage of the humans who have ever lived.

Regardless of how we leave, we must be prepared as Jesus commanded in **Matthew 24:42**, when He warned us, "Therefore be on the alert, for you do not know which day your Lord is coming." Preparing to meet Christ must be a priority. But for all people who have ever lived and died, being prepared for Jesus' return and the end of the world proved pointless. However, being prepared for meeting Jesus at the end of their lives proved invaluable, because all of their lives came to an end. And so will ours.

(To learn more, visit www.biblicalfreedom.com and pick up a copy of *Biblical Freedom from Religious Oppression* by K. Scott Schaeffer)