

“NO ONE KNOWS THE DAY OR HOUR OF CHRIST’S RETURN”

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Greetings in the Name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ!

“No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father . . . Therefore, keep watch, for you do not know on what day your Lord will come” (Matt. 24:36, 42).

It never fails! Every time there is a conflict in the Middle East involving Israel, the self-proclaimed “prophecy experts” come out in full force preaching the imminent return of Christ. These are the “Christian” leaders and preachers you see on television and hear on the radio quoting Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and other prophets, exhorting people to believe that their prophecies are being fulfilled before our eyes in the events unfolding in the world, and especially in modern day Israel. These events (or “prophetic fulfillments”), they say, are setting the stage for the return of Jesus Christ.

It is not that these so-called “prophecy experts” are silent when Israel is not involved in a major conflict. On the contrary, they are always busy watching headlines and equating current events in the world with the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. Most of them devote their entire ministry to this task. And, most of them, by the way, are very “successful” in their “prophetic” ministries. Their books are best-sellers and their television and radio programs attract hundreds of thousands of unknowing and unsuspecting Christians who tune in to get the latest scoop on when Jesus is going to return.

What amazes this pastor is not that people are attracted to the sensational, tantalizing, and urgent messages preached by these modern “prophets.” After all, nearly all of them adhere to a false system of theology known as *Dispensationalism*, which presents a picture of the return of Christ and the end of the world as we know it that would make Steven Spielberg and George Lucas envious. The science-fiction-like scenario of the end put forth by these false prophets, complete with a secret rapture of the Church, a seven-year tribulation period (for those *Left Behind*), and a literal, thousand-year reign of Christ on earth is sure to attract people. The fact that these teachings originated in the mid-nineteenth century and have absolutely no basis in biblical truth provides little competition for a people who have fallen in love with Hollywood and its special effects. So, it does not amaze, or even surprise, me that people are attracted to the message preached by these false prophets.

What does amaze this pastor is that people continue to cling to these “prophecy experts” even when they have proven themselves, time and time again, to be wrong. Many of them have set specific dates and many others have provided general timeframes for the return of Christ which have come and gone. And yet, their ministries go unscathed and continue to grow. I do not have the space here to provide numerous examples (I wish I did!), but here is one:

In the first week of the war in Iraq, which began March 20, 2003, I was flipping through the channels and came across Benny Hinn and John Hagee appearing together on TBN. Reluctantly, I watched and listened to them as they made it clear that the Holy Spirit had told them that the return of Christ to “rapture” His Church was very near. They could not give a precise date, but both said that it would occur sometime in the next few months and definitely before six months had passed. Well, here we are, nearly two and a half years later and, unless we have all been “left behind,” they

were wrong. And yet, the “ministries” of Benny and John go unscathed. They continue to pack stadiums full of people. Amazing!

My friends, here is the sober and simple truth. Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, will return someday in great glory to judge the living and the dead. This belief is a fundamental article of the Christian faith. But, the “when” of our Lord’s return is completely unknown. Furthermore, the events unfolding in the world today, even in Israel, are not the fulfillment of biblical prophecy. They are not specific signs pointing us to the imminent return of Christ. The signs we are given in the Bible are purposely generic (wars and rumors of war, famines, earthquakes, etc.) so that every generation of believers will ready themselves in constant expectation of our Lord’s return. The enduring message of our Lord to all believers concerning His return in glory is this: Keep watch and be ready at all times, for you do not know on what day your Lord will come.

Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word, that we may always be ready for, and look forward to, Your glorious return. In Your Holy and Precious Name. Amen.

In Christ,

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