

Other Views: Harold Camping

Update 2005



Harold Camping has again proclaimed the probable end of the world. This time the end of the world is set for 2011 A.D. He has written a new book entitled *Time Has An End: A Biblical History of the World 11,013 BC - 2011 AD* (Vantage Press: 2005). In this book he proclaims like a modern day prophet that the Church Age ended in 1988, 40 years after the beginning of the nation of Israel in 1948. This is also the beginning of the Great Tribulation in 1988. 1994 marks the beginning of the 2nd Jubilee (Later Rain). Previously, he said 1994 was to be the end of the world. The probable end of the world is now set at 2011 A.D. [See Chart](#). Usually millennialist say there are seven years of tribulation followed directly by the return of Christ. I may not be good at math, but there seems to be a lot more than 7 years between 1988 and 2011.

According to Camping there is now a two-part program to the Great Tribulation (page 421). The main reason Camping sites for the end of the world in 2011 AD is that it is 7,000 years from the Noachian Flood which he claims was in 4990 BC. It is also 23 years from the beginning of the Great Tribulation which is the magic number of judgment (page 425).

Christians are now to leave their (spiritual) homeland (the church) just like Jacob and Judah did (page 426). The most likely time of Christ's coming is at the Feast of Ingathering (the 15-22 of the seventh month of the Jewish calendar) which would be in the fall of 2011 (September-October, page 433). According to Camping, when the Tribulation ends, the sun will be darkened, the moon will not shine, and the stars shall fall from heaven (page 433). It sounds like a spectacular astronomical show for 2011, but since Camping has been repeatedly wrong in the past, I have little hope that we will see the promised spectacular show in 2011.

Update 2002

Harold Camping 2002: [Trading churches for the airwaves](#)

Like many other Bible-believing Christians, the Rev. Dean Harner for years has tuned in to Harold Camping's Bible studies on the Family Radio Network, but Camping wants Christians to stop going to church. "The church age has come to an end," according to the Oakland, Calif.-based Camping, a fixture on national Christian radio for 43 years who is not ordained. The end times are imminent, and churches are not merely irrelevant but "altogether apostate" because they soft-pedal the gospel, Camping, 81, has been telling his national audience since about June of last year. Instead of using Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist and other "corporate" denominations to evangelize the world, he says, God has turned instead to... radio. See the complete story at <http://www.philly.com/mld/inquirer/news/local/4170944.htm>

I am concerned about a book entitled 1994? by Harold Camping and published by Vantage Press. Camping states that the end of the world may occur somewhere between September 5th and the 27th of 1994 (p. 531). He does not know the exact day because scripture says "no man knows the day nor the hour" (Matt.24:36) but

according to Camping we can certainly know the month and the year that Christ will return. According to Camping, he knew over 20 years ago when the world should end. He is just now coming out of the closet and telling all. Many people listen to Harold Camping over Family Radio stations across the country.

I am worried about those people who are easily swayed by his rhetoric. After one man heard Camping he wanted me to change our church project because the world was going to end and all our buildings would be melted with fervent heat. Many listeners of Camping will believe anything he says without studying it for themselves. Gematria is the main glue that holds Camping's book together. Gematria is that part of ancient mysticism that endeavors to find hidden truths locked in literal terminology through numbers. Mystical numbers are the keys that unlock the hidden truths concealed in literal language. The basic theory that this system operates on is that God created a perfect world and a perfect word (the Bible) which exhibits precise numerical and symmetrical design. The Greek philosopher, Pythagoras is accredited with the development of the first system of mystical numbers by which one could understand the nature of the universe. (1) The Cabala of the middle ages is an excellent example of Jewish gematria.

Camping's interpretation of John 21:1-14 displays his use of gematria. Jesus tells the disciples who were about 200 cubits out in the Sea of Galilee to throw their net on the right side of the boat and the result was a catch of 153 fish. According to Camping the scriptures are teaching that the 200 cubits is about 2,000 years between the first and second coming of Christ (p. 503).

Since Camping states that the most likely date for the birth of Christ is on October 4th, 7 BC when the Jubilee Trumpet allegedly sounded (p.418), one needs only to add 2,000 years minus one year for the year 0 and presto, 1994. The number 153 equals 3 times 3 times 17. Camping says, "the number three signifies the purpose of God whereas the number seventeen signifies heaven. Thus we can learn that purpose of God is to bring all believers that are 'caught' by the Gospel into heaven." (p.504) Would it not be hermeneutically better to go to Matthew 24 where Jesus clearly teaches about the end of the age instead of trying to mystically find hidden secrets behind clear narrative prose?

Camping's numerology has amazingly pinpointed the exact day of the creation of man to 11,013 BC (p. 295). The genealogies in the Bible have gaps and additions in them so we can not assume there is a direct link back to creation. For example, Luke chapter three verse thirty six adds the name Cainan while Genesis chapter eleven verse twelve omits this name. Which is right, Genesis or Luke? They both are. One is more complete than the other one. The word "begat" can mean descendant not just a direct father-son relationship as Camping points out (p. 274), yet by ignoring Jewish customs he assumes that the genealogies are dynastic and sequential.

The major purposes of the genealogies in the Bible as well as the ancient world were not chronological, but domestic, legal-political, or religious. (2) Omission of names is common as seen in Matthew one where several names are left out so there can be exactly three groups of fourteen names. Jews would arrange genealogies to be symmetrical and not chronological. So one can not assume a direct chronology back to Creation.

Allegory is another hallmark of Camping's book 1994? Allegory seeks the deeper spiritual truths from the literal text. For Camping the time of the great tribulation started in 1988 and has nothing to do with tribulation, troubles, or God's wrath (p. 218). Christians will not be martyred. What this really means is that Christians will be kicked out of the churches that preach a false gospel (p. 198). If one follows this logically then Paul's beatings were mere spiritual temptations and Christ's death was really excommunication. For if the word "martyred" really does not mean death then the language of New Testament has no meaning.

Allegorical interpretation allows Camping to twist scripture to say whatever he thinks it should mean. This is great news to know that the tribulation does not really mean tribulation but temptation, killing does not mean killing but kicking, and the abomination of desolation is merely the different denominations being overrun by

satanically inspired gospels like the charismatic movement (p. 438).

If one looks back at the years since 1988 one does not find the terrible events of the book of Revelation happening. It seems that Camping has out done even Philo, the father of allegory.

Inconsistency is another characteristic of Camping's book. According to Camping the seventy sevens of Daniel 9 are literal years, except for the last three in a half. He calculates the years precisely to the death of Christ which he says occurred 33 AD He then turns around and says the last three in a half years equal 2,000 years.

Camping takes a page to explain the subtitle "The Prerogative of God to Use Numbers as He Desires" (p. 403). This should be amended to say that it is the prerogative of Harold Camping to use numbers as he desires. Ignorance in the eschatological views of the New Testament era is yet another characteristic of Camping's book.

Camping conjures up a mythical man that he calls Nathanael who represents the typical student who should have easily recognized the precise dates of the messiah's coming (p. 335). When one studies the Dead Sea Scrolls, the pseudepigrapha, and early church fathers, one sees that Nathanael's views are atypical. The Epistle of Barnabas states that the world would end 6,000 years after creation when Christ would destroy the lawless one, because the world was created in 6 days, and a day is as a thousand years unto the Lord(3). This is very different from Camping's view of eschatology who sees the world ending over 13,000 years after the creation of man. This leaves a difference of 7,000 years.

Ignorance in ecclesiology also plagues Camping's book. He sees the church as being overrun by Satan and some of evidence for this is Christians using birth control, divorce, Armenianism, the social gospel with its concern for feeding the hungry, not observing Sunday as God's Holy Day, and lack of preaching on hell. When one reads the signs of the end of the age in Matthew 24 none of these things are mentioned. Camping devotes chapter five of his book to how God will destroy the external church by Satan mainly through the charismatic movement. Does the New Testament teach that the church will be destroyed by Satan? Matthew chapter sixteen and verse eighteen states "I will build my church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

In Camping's computations he does not take into account the different changes in calendars. Before the Julian calendar was established in 45 BC Rome had a lunar calendar which was often shortened or lengthened to manipulate elections. Because the Julian calendar was 11 minutes and 14 seconds longer than the actual solar year Pope Gregory XIII decreed in 1582 that ten days be dropped from that year and that leap year be omitted every one hundred years except when the number of years was divisible by 400.(4) The Gregorian calendar is what we use today. What did the Jews use to reckon time? Recently published fragments from the Dead Sea Scrolls in cave four indicate that the scribes of Qumran started reckoning time from the fourth day of creation. Their year consisted of 364 days with lunar months alternating between 29 and 30 with a full moon every third year on the first day of creation week(5). The Mishna has a different way of reckoning time. This makes it very difficult to pinpoint exact dates as Camping has done.

I am afraid Harold Camping is another name that we need to add to our long list of date setters. If there is a sign that is being fulfilled, it is the one about many false Christs that will come saying he is here. Harold Camping's book 1994? is a great book if one is interested in mystical and allegorical interpretations of scripture.

- Stephen C. Meyers

Endnotes

(1) Davis, John. *Biblical Numerology*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), pp. 125-126. This is an excellent little book on biblical numerology.

(2) The NIV Study Bible. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), p. 581.

(3) Lightfoot, and Harmer, eds. *The Apostolic Fathers*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1984), pp. 283-84.

What Camp Is Camping In?

Where is Harold Camping coming from theologically? I see Harold Camping as coming from a reformed, five point Calvinistic, amillennial, covenantal theological point of view. In Covenant theology the Church grafted into the blessings of Israel. So Camping wrongly concludes that all the old Testament passages about Israel are referring to the church. Thus Camping sees that the history about Israel is symbolic and prophetic of the church. This is where he goes off the deep end and gets his allegorical interpretations and numerology. (It should be noted that covenant theologians do not go to the extremes that Camping does.)

Camping sees the literal numbers of scripture as having hidden symbolic meanings that predicts when the world will end. Thus 200 cubits off shore in John 21 means 2,000 years until Christ comes again. The Literal meaning of scripture is ignored for a higher hidden symbolic meaning. 2 Peter 1:21 declares that scripture is not of any private interpretation of man (Harold Camping).

I am afraid that Harold Camping as gone off the deep end theologically. Let us try to follow and teach the clear simple message of the Bible without trying to fish for hidden eschatological meanings 200 cubits off shore.

A Plea of Concern!

I am very concerned about the many loyal followers of Harold Camping. Many have come to trust in Christ because of his ministry on the radio. Many have learned marvelous truths of scripture from Harold Camping. He has many good things to say. The difficulty comes when we accept everything he says as absolute gospel truth. We assume that he is right in every thing he says, because of all the marvelous truths that we already have learned from him.

The only perfect teacher is Christ. But somehow we become emotionally attached to the teacher that gave us spiritual birth as a new born baby is totally dependent on it's mother. The time has come for maturity to cut the umbilical cord and to decide what is right and wrong from scripture with out having to call up his radio program for the answer.

A number of my spiritual teachers when I was a young Christian have fallen, but that does not mean I throw out everything they taught. It is like eating watermelon. You eat the good parts and spit out the seeds. Some want to throw out the whole water melon, others choke on the seeds. All teachers have good and bad theological teaching. It takes a mature Christian to decide from scripture what are seeds that need to be spit out while enjoying the melon. The setting of the date September 1994 as the end of the world is a seed that needs to be spit out.

I pray that the followers of Harold Camping can break their emotional bonds of attachment so they can make clear mature decisions about the teachings of scripture.

-Stephen Meyers

Interview with Harold Camping

June 8, 1994 at Sandy Cove

By Stephen C. Meyers

Harold Camping, the founder and President of Family Stations Inc., was born July 19, 1921 in Denver, Colorado. At the age of 6 his family moved to Southern California. His father was in and out of a number of businesses, dairy farmer, bakery, and cattle, to help support his family during the great depression. Harold Camping is the second oldest of five sons. His mother dearly loved the Lord, but his father did not become saved until the age of 60. This sometimes created difficulties between his parents. Camping states that his father died at age 62 at peace with God. Camping was raised in the Christian Reformed Church. He was married and baptized in this church. Camping says he has been a Christian all of his life. He just grew up trusting the Lord.

Camping describes his father as a good church man with whom he got along fine. Discipline was very strict and legalistic. He had a strict Dutch upbringing. When Camping was asked if his father ever told him "I love You" he responded by saying his family did not readily show their emotions, was completely aware of his parent's love for their children. He describes his childhood as happy. Harold Camping started the first grade when he was 5 years old. He graduated from High School at age 16 and finished college at age 20. Because of his young age in high school he felt awkward. He did not mature as fast as the others in his grade. He was a late bloomer. He never got in trouble at school.

Camping attended two years at Long Beach college then he went two more years at the University of California at Berkeley where he graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in civil engineering in 1942. That same year after graduation he married a girl named Shirley VandeSchoor that he had met at the Alameda Reformed church that he was attending while in college. Camping says that he was poor and he had to work his way through college.

After college Harold Camping worked for awhile with other companies before he started his own construction business. After about 25 years in the construction business he sold it and is now living off the money from that sale. He does not receive a salary from Family Stations. Because of the need for civil engineers, Camping was delayed three years from being drafted. When he received his A-1 to serve he was rejected because of a physical problem, a hernia.

In 1956 at age 35 there was a turning point in Harold Camping's life. Because his construction business did not require his full attention, he turned to an in-depth study of the Bible. He studied the Bible like he was studying for finals in college. Today Camping continues to study the Bible two to six hours a day. Very frequently he studies for an hour or more after Open Forum.

Because Harold Camping wanted to share his views from his study of the Bible, he together with two other men incorporated Family Stations in 1958. The first radio station was bought in 1959 KEAR in San Francisco. Family Stations now has 39 radio stations and 14 short-wave transmitters.

Camping is the President and General Manager and serves on the board of directors with only two other board members, Scott Smith who is vice president, and Richard VanDyk who is the treasurer/secretary. Camping

takes care of personnel problems, decision making, and sets policy.

Harold Camping is the father of one son, six daughters, twenty four grandchildren, and two great grandchildren. He likes to keep a low profile and "treasures times to be alone."

Over twenty years ago Camping says he saw the end of the world, but he did not talk about it. Because he had a compulsion to share what he had learned, it was a great relief to him when he published his book 1994? Camping sees every true Christian as having a prophetic office and must share the "true" gospel with others. He sees Family Stations as "a voice crying in the wilderness" against the apostasy of the church. When asked what if the world does not end in September, he said that sometimes he wishes it does not end so they would have time to do more evangelism.

In 1974 Camping published the book Adam When? after five years of research. He tested the results of his calendar system with secular history at the Pacific School of Religion in their Palestinian Library. He also claims that he is trained in reading carbon 14 in which he disputes the reliability of the results. Camping claims the earth was created in 11,013 BC When he discovered this date he had a strange feeling about himself, he thought, "who am I to work out the exact age of the earth?"

Harold Camping has had no formal training in the Bible. He does not know Greek or Hebrew. He uses a concordance to find out the original language. If he does have a question about the Greek or Hebrew he goes to Dr. Ortero, who he says has a Ph.D. in Greek and Hebrew. Dr. Ortero has a Ph.D. in Psychology from Argentina.

Camping admits that Dr. Ortero does not agree with him about the world ending in September 1994. Camping thinks that if Dr. Ortero really studied his math in-depth that he would then agree with his book that the world will end in September 1994. In fact, if everyone did their homework, Camping believes everyone would agree with him.

In 1988 Camping published the book The Final Tribulation where he states that no one can be saved once the Tribulation has started which according to him was May 21, 1988 (p.137-8 and 158). He has since corrected this to say that once the tribulation has ended no one can be saved, which according to him is September 6, 1994.

Camping also has stated that the nation of Israel may be destroyed before the end of the tribulation, but he now no longer believes this will happen. Camping continually has to change his story. More and more of the book of Revelation is being spiritualized like great earthquakes, the heavens being shaken, the sun and moon being darkened, until even the coming of Christ is spiritualized away in September just as the Jehovah Witnesses did to 1914. For example, the sun represents Christ, the moon represents the church, and the stars also represent the church. If the moon can change into the church, then anything can happen in Camping's interpretation of scripture, or should I say his mutilation of scripture.

If Camping keeps changing his story, why should we believe his September date? On June 5, 1988 Camping with about 60 people broke away from the Christian Reform Church to form their own independent Reformed Church. Today the attendance is now about 300-350 people. They have visiting pastors each Sunday since they have not been able to find a pastor since 1988.

Camping claims that the pastor of his church was jealous of him and the elders made rules about teaching that would exclude him from teaching so he decided to leave because he must teach (or must be in control).

When asked why Family Stations, Inc. does not join an organization like the Evangelical Counsel for Financial Accountability (ECFA), he said that the board of directors are not supposed to work at the

organization. They do have an outside audit, but when I asked for one I did not receive it. The ECFA states in 7.11, "An organization must make every effort to avoid accepting a gift from or entering into a contract with a prospective donor which would knowingly place a hardship on the donor, or place the donor's future well-being in jeopardy." Camping says he does not know of anyone selling their house, or business, or quitting their job, but other sources confirm that these things have happen.

Camping still denies that a reporter from the Christian Research Journal, who wrote an article about him, in the Summer of 1993 issue ever talked to him although the reporter has a tape recording of his conversation with Camping and phone bills to prove it. Camping believes that the reporter must have sliced together a tape recording of him. A small portion of this tape was played on the "Bible Answer Man Show" to prove that the reporter did indeed talk to Camping. A copy of this show may be purchased from the Christian Research Institute (P.O.Box 500, San Juan Capistrano, CA., 92693. Ask for tape #BC-011394. The cost is \$6). You can judge for yourself who is telling the truth. Inside sources also confirm the accuracy of the article.

In the article Camping shared about a radio station in Russia, where He says he did not want to be unequally yoked with unbelievers so Family Stations built the Radio Station and then gave it to the Russians in exchange for free broadcast time. The article also mentions his wife wanting a new floor, but he wants to delay this until after September. Camping replied that this was just an illustration that he used. It never really happened as he says.

Conclusions

After personally interviewing Camping, listening to his teachings, and reading his books, I have come to the following conclusions.

Camping's very strict and legalistic Dutch upbringing has had a profound affect on his life. This strictness, which lacked outward loving affection, has produced a vacuum of love that was filled with legalism where love is based on works, and on how well one performs. Perfection is the goal that is set forth, and Camping has worked hard to achieve it. A proof of one's election is his successful godly works. Being the second born there was a great need to prove himself to his father and mother and to out do his older brother. At age five he was in the first grade. At age 16 he graduated from High School. At age 20 he graduated with a Bachelor of Science from the University of California at Berkeley

This driving compulsion to achieve was carried over into his construction business that he started, which later became very successful. Finally, at age 35 this compulsion was applied to the study of the Bible which led to a very successful religious broadcasting network, Family Stations Inc. with over 39 stations, and 14 short wave stations.

There are a number of things that characterize a legalistic family (Miller, p.19). First of all, there is an authority figure who has the answer for everything who must be in control. Any loss of control is seen as a threat. The Bible is used as a tool to forge the unbreakable chain of command of God's divine order. Camping's father was very legalistic, and like father like son, Camping is also very legalistic. Camping claims to be the authority on the Bible who has the right answer for anyone who calls in on his Open Forum program.

In childhood, Camping's base of authority depended upon his father. One's view of God and others depends upon one's relationship with their father. Camping's authoritarian father has passed this power structure down to his son. The way he tightly controls Family Stations is an example of this. Another example of this is in 1988 when Camping broke away from his own Christian Reformed Church and took 60 people with him to start his own independent Reformed Church. He has a problem of being under the authority of someone that does not agree with him. In the past six years they have not found a pastor and probably will not because

Camping needs to be in control.

Another component of legalism is the misconception that there is a correct and precise answer to every question. Everything is right or wrong, black or white with no in-between gray area. Camping always seems to have an exact answer with a proof text from the Bible which many are taken out of context. He has pinpointed creation to 11,013 BC The tribulation started May 21, 1988 and will end September 1994. Camping's whole bases of his calendar system is on the false premise that everything must add up exactly right in the Bible. It truly amazes me that Camping, with no formal training in the Bible, no training in Hebrew, Greek, or Aramaic, no training in the cultural milieu of the Bible can make authoritative pronouncements on the interpretation of the Bible as if he were the Protestant pope.

Another important part of legalism is the me vs. them mentality, or the separation from the world. It is easier to avoid the world than to face the world. Rather than go out into the world one must come out from it. According to Camping most churches and pastors have gone apostate, therefore one must separate from apostate churches. Apostasy according to Camping is anyone who does not agree with his interpretation of the Bible. This super sensitivity to the slightest challenge to authority by crying apostasy is just another ploy of legalism.

Legalism also leads to keeping one's emotions completely under control, and perhaps even feared and avoided, but always evaluated before expressed. Camping's somber, stone face reflects this control of emotions and lack of unconditional love.

These legalistic tendencies has led Camping to a theology of judgment. The judgment of God is emphasized with the destruction of the whole world. Camping says very little about the love of God, because God hates the sinner. Millions of "Does God Love You?" tracts have been handed out, but the answer to the question is a resounding NO! God does not love you. God only loves the elect according to Camping. Not only does God hate sin, but also hates the sinner as well.

What Camping needs to understand is the unconditional love of God and his acceptance of him just as he is, which he probably lacked so much of when he was growing up. I feel sorry for Camping. He needs to experience the unconditional love of God like D.L. Moody did when Henry Morehouse came to speak for a whole week just on the love of God.

What about Camping's loyal followers? Most of the tell tale signs of legalism are the same signs of a cult leader. Many cult leaders were victims themselves with an inferiority complex, and who must be in control. There is the true believers vs. the apostate world. There is the right or wrong mentality. There is performance based happiness. There is the strict obedience to the leader who has all the right answers. Anyone who does not agree with the leader is apostate. Many people are followers who are drawn to authority figures who have all the right answers.

What will happen to the followers of Camping after September 1994? There is an example from history that may help out. In 1956 a book was written by Leon Festinger entitled When Prophecy Fails. It tells of a Wisconsin flying saucer cult whose leader predicted the end of the world. Followers sold their homes and then waited on a mountain side for the flying saucers to pick them up before the world was to be destroyed. When no flying saucers came most members became more convinced than ever that their leader was right rather than face public humiliation (Hassan, pp. 59-60).

When September 1994 passes it is best not to make fun of Camping's followers. This may only drive them closer to following Camping. I hope and pray that Camping will publicly step down from the control of Family Stations in October to avoid turning it into a cult, and allow qualified trained Christians answer questions on Open Forum in their area of expertise.

-Stephen Meyers

Endnotes

Hassan, Steven. *Combating Cult Mind Control*. (Rochester, Vermont: Park Street Press, 1988). This is an excellent book about cult mind control.

Miller, David. *Breaking Free: Rescuing Families from the Clutches of Legalism*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992). This is an excellent book on legalism and its affects on the family.